



Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality

Jack Rogers

Chapter 1: Studying Homosexuality for the First Time

Much of the material in this presentation was taken verbatim or almost verbatim from Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality by Jack Rogers

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The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms the distinctive beliefs of the Reformed Tradition, which date back to principles articulated by John Calvin in the 16th century. Central to the Reformed tradition is affirmation of the sovereignty of God. That assurance provides a basis for other traits of the Reformed way: that God calls us to service in the world, that our life together is to be ordered in ways that enable all members to flourish, that God calls us to generous stewardship of what we have, and that we are to stay alert to the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny and respond to God's call to work for a society that seeks justice.

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- Rogers was raised Methodist.
- He became a Presbyterian by geography
- He grew up in that church until he left home for seminary
- United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNA) was a small denomination (about 250,000 members).
- It was conservative but not fundamentalist.
- He understood that he was lost in sin and that Christ had paid the penalty for our sins and that by trust in Christ you received your salvation.
- Counselling with the pastor led him to believe he was called to the ministry

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- He never lost the call to the ministry
- He went to Pittsburgh-Xenia Seminary when he graduated from the University of Nebraska. He knew he was a conservative Christian. At seminary, he learned that the larger group was evangelical. He learned of Orthodoxy represented by the Westminster Confession of Faith
- For him, orthodoxy was defined as the most adequate understanding of life and reality. Our task was to defend it reasonably and to preach it using interesting illustrations and practical applications.
- He always felt that the key to the Christian life and a better world was understanding and interpreting Scripture.

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After seminary, he completed a doctorate in theology. One option was Harvard (liberal) which didn't appeal to him. He wanted a deeper understanding of the Reformed tradition. He settled on studying with G. C. Berkouwer at the Free University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. His seminary advisor felt that Professor Berkouwer was deeply Reformed and also fair in his assessments of others. Berkouwer was engaged in writing a series of volumes on the main topics of theology. That sounded like just what I wanted. I identified with Abraham! One of my favorite verses in Scripture is, "And he set out, not knowing where he was going" (Heb. 11:8).

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The Presbyterian church ordained him as a traveling evangelist! Four years in the Netherlands were transformative in our lives. Completed his degree, had children, and became the organizing pastor of an English-speaking congregation for the Dutch Reformed Church. A few years later he was hired to teach philosophy of religion at Fuller Theological Seminary. He was immersed in the culture of the evangelical world. The struggle to develop an evangelicalism distinct from its formation in fundamentalism was played out at Fuller Seminary.

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He define an evangelical theologically as someone who accepts three propositions: (1) People can and should have a personal relationship with God through trust in Jesus Christ. (2) The Bible is the final authority for salvation and living the Christian life. (3) God's grace in Jesus Christ is such good news that everyone should hear about it.

If you add something to these affirmations, you are becoming denominational or fundamentalist. If you take away one of these affirmations, you could still be a Christian, but you would not be an evangelical. Sociologically, evangelicalism was a movement, not a church. It was a loose coalition of people within the mainstream churches, independent associations of Christians, and parachurch organizations. Fuller Seminary was founded as its intellectual center. Christianity Today was its magazine.

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Fuller Seminary was founded as its intellectual center. Christianity Today was its magazine. Billy Graham's revivals were a source of its members. Rogers is an evangelical theologically and has always been so. He is not, and never has been, completely comfortable in the evangelical subculture. He needs to be in a congregation that is related to other congregations in a denomination with publicly known processes for handling problems.

Within evangelicalism there are a right, left, and middle regarding political and cultural issues. Fundamentalism is more politically monolithic and more theologically conservative than evangelicalism.

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The doctrine of inerrancy was and is a hallmark of fundamentalism. For some of its proponents, inerrancy is a symbol for the authority of the Bible and simply affirms that the Bible is true. For others, inerrancy is a particular theory about the interpretation of the Bible. Inerrancy holds that the Bible gives accurate information on all things that the Bible addresses, including science and history. It encourages a literal reading of Scripture.

The Fuller faculty preferred to use the word “infallible,” which had historically been used in the church to mean that the Bible accomplishes its purpose of bringing people to a saving knowledge of God and guiding them in living the Christian life.

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In 1976, the issue of the ordination of people who are homosexual was first broached at the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA) General Assembly in Baltimore. The Presbytery of New York City asked the assembly for what is called “definitive guidance,” an official counsel on whether a candidate for the ministry, who was in all other respects well prepared for ministry, could be ordained if that person was a “self-affirming, practicing homosexual.”

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The report provided four argument models A, B, C, and D. Model A was the scholastic theology of the Old Princeton School which dominated the northern Presbyterian Church from 1812 to 1927. Model B could be likened to the Neo-orthodoxy of the 1930s through the 1960s. Model C was a form of liberation theology, supported by Gordon Kaufman, Dorothee Soelle, Paul Lehmann, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, among others. Model D continued the liberation motif but added emphases of process theology.

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Model A proposed that ordination of people who are homosexual be forbidden on grounds of the law of God. Model B came to the same conclusion but attributed it to the Spirit of Christ. Model C argued that ordination of people who are homosexual should be permitted on the basis of justice. Model D supported that view and added love as a further reason. The Task Force majority of fourteen people found the arguments in Models C and D adequate to advocate for the ordination of qualified gay and lesbian people. A five-person minority reported that homosexual behavior was sinful and that ordination should be denied on grounds given in Models A and B.

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How Rogers Changed His Mind

Rogers had never really studied the issue of the status in the church of people who are homosexual. I opposed homosexuality reflexively—it was just what I thought Christians were supposed to do.

He has studied how the church changed its mind on other moral issues. He worked through how the church, guided by the Holy Spirit in understanding the Scriptures, reversed our prohibitions against ordination to leadership for African Americans, women, and divorced and remarried people. He saw a clear picture of a shift from a literalistic method of biblical interpretation to one that looks at Scripture through the lens of the redeeming life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

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“I studied the principles of biblical interpretation found in our Reformed confessions and discovered a continuity through history to our best practices today. I have wrestled with the biblical texts usually cited in this discussion and come to a new understanding of them. I came to know many gay and lesbian people and have had my Christian life enriched by their profound witness to the gospel. I now know many people across all theological and ideological lines who are convinced that the Spirit of Christ is leading us, based on our best understanding of the Bible, to be consistent in allowing all of our baptized members eligibility for positions of leadership.”

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