2010

For the Love of God?! Is there a place for Gay Christians between Faith and Fundamentalism?

Apryl D. Prentiss
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

© The Author

Downloaded from
https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/88

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.
For the Love of God?! Is there a place for Gay Christians between Faith and Fundamentalism?

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English (Writing and Rhetoric) at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

Apryl D. Prentiss
B.A. English Campbell University 2000

Director: Dr. Laura Browder, Professor of English, College of Humanities and Sciences

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May, 2010
Acknowledgments

To my director, Laura Browder: For your vision, support, and vigilance against melodrama,
Thank you!

To my committee, Elizabeth Hodges, Lynda Weaver-Williams and David Coogan: For your time
and participation

To those who allowed me to use their stories and words: Thank you!

To my Family and Friends: For your unconditional support and love. Especially Dad and Robyn,
Dana and Beth, Robbie and Amy, Libby and Will, Theresa H., Jenny H., Antionette and (those
formerly known as) the Hangar Crew

To K.B.: For forgiving this ex-ex-gay junkie’s judgment and having the strength to begin the
single most important conversation of my life

To Ashley: For forgiving this ex-ex-gay leader a long season of misguided advice and loving me
anyway

To Adrian, my wife:

For your unbelievable self-sacrifice and support

For your strength and confidence in me

For your commitment to always challenging me to grow

For your love that has changed my world

Thank you.

iii
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ......................................................................................................................................... viii

Introduction “Resume of a Gay Christian” .................................................................................. 1

Chapter 1: Surveying the Landscape ......................................................................................... 8
  A National Example ..................................................................................................................... 12
  Biblical Basis ............................................................................................................................... 13
  The “Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin” Syndrome ......................................................................... 21

Chapter 2: Rhetoric Challenged. Rhetoric Changed. ................................................................. 27
  We Didn’t Start the Fire ............................................................................................................. 31
  Profile of a Christian Soldier .................................................................................................... 33
  Weapon of Choice ....................................................................................................................... 36
  Battles in History: Slavery ......................................................................................................... 44
  Battles in History: Civil Rights Movement ............................................................................... 48
  Battles in History: Interracial Marriage ................................................................................... 54
  Battles in History: Women’s Rights .......................................................................................... 58

Chapter 3: “Perfect Enemies” ...................................................................................................... 67
  God’s Enforcers: The Religious Right ....................................................................................... 68
  A Co-Mingled History ............................................................................................................... 73
  New Weapon. New Warriors. ...................................................................................................... 76
Abstract

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD?! IS THERE A PLACE FOR GAY CHRISTIANS BETWEEN FAITH AND FUNDAMENTALISM?

By Apryl D. Prentiss, M.A

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English (Writing and Rhetoric) at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010.

Major Director: Dr. Laura Browder, Professor of English, College of Humanities and Sciences

Drawing from observation, autoethnography, ethnographic research and audio-taped interviews, this thesis explores the complicated and emotionally charged relationship between homosexuality and Christianity. The current culture war being waged in the media between the Religious Right and members of the LGBT community often results in the isolation and rejection of those who would define themselves as gay Christians. This thesis explores the role of the Bible as it informs and catalyzes this war and other foundational beliefs used as weapons in this rhetorical conflict. Additionally, this thesis analyzes the current battle between the church and the social movement for change in light of the historical battles fought over similar movements. The rhetoric of Christianity, specifically Fundamentalist rhetoric, has been emphatically
defended and then dramatically changed in every such battle. Is this a possible resolution for today’s current battle? The thesis explores the historical basis and current application of rhetorical effects on this conflict through the author’s insight as a veteran of both worlds, interviews with major players in the battle such as Randy Thomas and Kristin Tremba of Exodus International and interviews with people who step on the battlefield everyday as pastors, congregants or observers in the fight. With each interview or rhetorical analysis, the viability of dialogue between these two groups is questioned and investigated.

These are just a few entries on my resume, jewels in my crown that I accumulated as a member of the Christian community at large -- a poster child for 16 years of Christian education, service, and membership in the Christian Right. A virtuous history marred by a few years of rebellion in college, but overall, the key to my seat at the table of Christian fellowship, programming and proselytizing. And I loved it. I loved Jesus and I loved to serve him. I would sit down in a restaurant, coffee shop, in the line at the grocery stores and passionately tell you how much Christianity had done for me and that you need it too! However, lurking underneath the well groomed veneer this “sold out” Christian woman had a secret. A sin above all sins tied to shame, guilt, self-hatred and lack of faith, so my programming had informed me. It had always been there coloring experiences in my Christian journey and marring everything I did for Christ. I knew that reaching out for help threatened to negate the life I had lived and cancel my membership in a community that I loved. But I took the risk and in doing so, I added a few more entries:

Prayer counselee. Exorcised. Exodus International, “the largest information and referral ministry in the world addressing homosexual issues.” Proud graduate of an Exodus

Each of these put me on the outside of the inside. Once I admitted to a few that I was struggling with such a deep and taboo issue, I received support, prayer, and love from those around me. Yet, even with my closest friends, discomfort or awkwardness characterized any honest conversation about my struggle. In many Christian circles, especially the more conservative ones, this sin was the worst of the worst—the one which the Christian Right railed against with all of its fervor. Still, I had the love and acceptance of my mentors, my close friends, and my ex-gay group compatriots. Most of them pushed through the awkwardness and still loved me. They encouraged me to fight against the evil desires of my flesh which sought to separate me from God. They prayed over me, cried with me as I tried to beat the homosexual desires from my body. They heard my confessions and stood beside me when I laid prostrate begging God for deliverance.

I claimed victory little by little through faith but my attraction for women never waned. I went through Christian counseling and realized after a few years that my choices would be to (a) practice celibacy and long for human companionship for the rest of my life or, (b) marry a man and make the best of an awkward situation to glorify God. The entries that followed this realization would never be included on any resume:

**Depressed**

**Hopeless**

**Conflicted**

---

1 “Ex-gay programs” are religiously based groups aimed at helping to heal those people who relate to other people in broken and unhealthy ways—emotionally, spiritually and sexually. These programs encourage those who believe they are homosexual to walk out of that “lifestyle” with the help of God and a supportive community. These programs will be discussed in depth later in this text.
I heard over and over again at spiritual retreats and Bible studies that God would enter in and be my husband, the church would be my community and my life would still be full. I could never quite grasp that concept. To me, it made no sense that God would create humans with a need for a helper or human interaction and then deny them the joy of fulfillment. Those were the actions of a cruel illusionist, not the actions of the God I knew. I was torn between the realization that I couldn’t be celibate for life or deny my feelings for women and what I thought was a direct commandment from the God I loved. The internal conflict manifested itself physically—bags under my eyes and weight on my hips. I regularly engaged in self-destructive behavior to try and escape from my inner turmoil. From the moment I realized with full consciousness that I was gay to the moment I wrote the final entry in my resume, I would try to do it God’s way and fail. Then I’d punish myself by abusing my body. Too much pain. Too many substances. Too close to death many times.

I desperately sought advice. Family, friends, mentors all came back with the same answer punctuated with various degrees of love. Their basic message was, “Stop trying to figure it out. It’s God’s will, not yours. It may be hard but in the end you will be rewarded for the righteousness you show by obeying God’s commandments.” It still didn’t add up to me. So I called out to the God and asked Him why He would create me as a relational being, only to deny me the relationships that were natural and most fulfilling to me. I begged for clarity, for deliverance, for acceptance. On multiple occasions, I begged Him to either heal me or kill me, because I could no longer bear the battle inside of me. God answered.

The last entry in my Christian resume reads as follows:
struggling with accepting my homosexuality.”

With one strike of the pen, a noted act of acceptance rather than denunciation, my membership status within the fundamentalist Christian church was changed. The paradigm shifted drastically and I found myself completely on the outside looking in.

As much as I would like to say that this experience is unique to me, it isn’t. In fact, it’s a commonplace experience among gay Christians. Though many in the Christian Right would say the term “gay Christian” is an oxymoron or that the terms are mutually exclusive, people like me exist everywhere. Many with similar stories of cancelled memberships and rejection in the name of God. Many tell a story similar to mine of struggling to find a place to practice their still functioning faith in the religious world which no longer welcomed them. It should be noted here that not everyone in the Christian world automatically rejects those that are gay among them. Though the stories are many and spread across all denominations and faiths, there are gay friendly and gay affirming churches all across America. My personal experience and that of many of those who I’ve researched for this thesis relate rejection at the hands of the fundamentalist, evangelical community. This community will be defined, in detail, later in this text, but for now, unless otherwise specified, when I refer to those fighting against and rejecting I am referring specifically to the evangelical/fundamentalist community in general.

As I began my journey as a gay Christian reject into the always welcoming LGBT community, I soon realized that I had stepped into a raging war—fully in motion. I stood in the middle. On one side the army consisted of the “walking wounded,” men and women who had once served God faithfully but whose treatment by the church had caused them to shy away from everything Christian. They weren’t all on the frontlines though. Most of them were in
supporting positions in the community, trying to discern what their role should be in fighting the fight. Those battling on the front lines represented the many members of the LGBT community that hadn’t been exposed or raised in the Christian tradition. They had observed or experienced the negative treatment by Christians claiming to be doing God’s work with no reference point. Instantly, they transformed into vicious warriors ready to fight the forces of religious bigotry, hypocrisy and hate mongering. Their lack of history with the church meant that they were unencumbered by religious guilt. So they fought with conviction not confliction.

On the other side of the battle were the Christians. Armed with the Bible as their support, some of them stood in cocky assurance always battle ready; always prepared to launch accusations of perversity, deviance, and cultural subversion. This type of Christian proudly waves the banner of condemnation and stands strong to defend America’s morals against the onslaught of pedophiles, children recruiters, and those who would seek to take over the country. These are the most aggressive warriors of the Christian army. Behind their shield of Bible verses condemning homosexuality, they stand confidently because they are assured by the church that God, himself, ordained their fight. You might even find a book in their back pocket titled “How to wage a holy war against unholy homosexuals” coauthored by Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Dobson. Yet, they do not occupy the Christian side alone. Just like on the LGBT side, there is a second installment of Christian soldiers. Remanded to the back of the battlefield for their stance of love and tolerance, these Christians advocate ending the conflict peaceably and with respect. These soldiers are war-weary and feel torn between religion and faith. They shirk the loud proclamations and condemnations of their brethren, while seeking resolution quietly and genuinely. These Christians, those who could be defined as moderate, are the ones who want to
relate to the LGBT community yet they stand conflicted by what the Bible and Western Christian tradition have said about the subject.

That’s where I stand today. In the middle of two groups of people that I love, saddened over the widespread dismissal of gay Christians. We are the casualties of this war, along with the moderate Christians seeking a better way. The longer I walk in between the more I become convinced that there has to be a solution. A dialogue has to be started between these groups, based on common humanity and cross-education, which could bring relations up from the verbally violent and demeaning to a place of productive interaction.

With this is in mind, I set out on a quest in the winter of 2009 to educate and be educated about the causes and nuances of this heated battle. Over the past year and a half, I talked to pastors from various denominations and belief systems to hear their church’s view of homosexuality, but more importantly to probe the path that led them to that belief. I challenged them to think about their relationship and perception of the LGBT community and asked what they could do to help bring a humane aspect to this war. I asked the same questions of the gay-friendly and gay-affirming pastors that I interviewed.

Next I set out to explore the ex-gay world. I talked to multiple leaders in the movement, attended their huge annual conference and talked to people who had sought help from them. Some had emerged from their ex-gay experience determined to choose heterosexuality. Some emerged even more convicted of their homosexuality. I also wrote and distributed an online survey. The survey reached places as far away as France and included responses from people in all stages of development and identity between the gay and Christian worlds.
Finally, I spoke to others like me, who had come from the church and bore the scars of their expulsion. I wanted to know how they perceived the battleground and what they thought about the rhetoric being launched from both sides.

I conducted face to face and phone interviews ranging in duration from 45 to 120 minutes. The responses have been edited according to content and context with a real intent to retain the spirit of the words. The text of this thesis is an interwoven dialogue of their responses and the outline of the battlefield on which they all play a part. My hope is that at the end, once you’ve been introduced to the genuine people behind the armor and listened to their convictions that you too will be motivated to see. Beyond the battle. Beyond the rhetoric. Beyond the politically fueled actions. I hope that you will be able to see the real hearts of warriors and casualties of war. These are their stories and mine as well.
CHAPTER ONE:  
SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE

“This is where I come from, and for me it’s very simple – People who have predilection for others of the same sex are contravening God’s Word. People who habitually lie are contravening God’s Word. People who have extramarital sex are contravening God’s Word. People who prey on children are contravening God’s Word. People who are prone to take things that aren’t theirs are contravening God’s Word. These are the only kind of people I meet. I think those are the only kind of people there are. And so, for me, the objective is the same: get them in touch with God’s Word. Put their hand in the hand of God. That’s it. I mean, that’s it. Now, the thing that makes the whole homosexual issue that much of a higher profile is that of those groups I just mentioned, at least right now, they’re the only ones that have declared their issue a lifestyle and have demanded that society ratify it, accept it and promote it.”

~Darren, an orthodox Christian, fundamentalist pastor

Many know that the Christian faith teaches that homosexuality is an “abomination.” What most people don’t know is how much further this mentality goes and how deeply ingrained it is into the children of the faith. Having sex before marriage, doing drugs, smoking cigarettes or watching porn all count as forgivable offenses. Offenses that can be pawned off to human weaknesses of the flesh are easily forgiven and most of the time forgotten. Yet homosexual behavior seems to exist on a completely different sin level as evidenced by the inclusion of other sinners within the church and the widespread exclusion of those who identify as homosexual.

Darren is the pastor of a non-denominational, evangelical church in the South. His church is part of a network of churches whose common beliefs include the inerrancy of the Bible and the verse by verse teaching of its principles. I met with him in a small eclectic coffee house adjacent to his church in a shopping center. He is a confident man whose passion for his beliefs and obvious intellect are tempered with a quiet determination and confidence. Darren definitely
qualities as a fundamentalist, and proudly so. Yet, I must note that though his words and ideas may seem harsh, as a man he was open, kind, and willing to listen.

“For the church to tell people in the homosexual lifestyle, we have nothing to say to you – just burn in Hell, turn or burn – I mean, certainly we want them to turn. But we want them to do that through the power of the word of God being worked into their hearts through the Spirit of God. And the place where you get that is the church. But it depends on the mentality. “If someone came to our church and said, “I’m homosexual. I like it that way. This is who I am. I want to worship here. I want to celebrate who I am.” Then, I’m going to say, “I’m sorry. This is not the place for you, because there are churches that want to embrace the homosexual lifestyle and leave it just there, just like that.”

For many churches, the doors remain open to gay people as long as they concede that they “struggle” with homosexuality and that they are not “homosexual.” In many churches it’s considered perverse, disgusting, and reprehensible. Though many churches preach forgiveness for this sin, the actuality of human forgiveness is a different story. To them, homosexuality digs deep down into your soul and changes you. It is a sin to be hated and feared. It is, in some ways, the ultimate sin. If you sit in a pew at your local Baptist church, you may hear someone say that “all sins are equal in the eyes of God.” That may be true. But the reactions to each sin differ drastically. If you go to your youth pastor or small group leader and confess that you lied or stole, he would reach out with a sure and steady hand and ask you to pray with him. If you confess that you slept with your same sex best friend, his hand might not be so steady. Not because all church leadership assume that a member confessing same sex attraction should be ousted right away, but because many (or most) churches have no effective plan of dealing with a gay person rather than saying “Don’t be gay. You have a choice!”
“I hear out of Christians’ mouths all the time, “those gays.” You can go to any church and you can get help with pornography or gambling—-you know, just like the “acceptable sins” in the church. There are always resources on those things. I think the church is just still so far behind in being the resource that the gay people need. The people in the church themselves are behind in knowing how to deal and how to counsel and how to accept gay people or struggling people in a loving way. The church just doubly stabs itself in the back by the way it reacts because all people want to be loved no matter what they are struggling with.”

~”Deena,” an ex-gay Christian

Homosexuality within the church causes huge rifts. It brings out the worst in those that would see themselves as the best at loving and living; the best at forgiving, at thinking openly, at interpreting scripture and living by it, but suspiciously the worst at dealing with what they do not understand. Those within the church that believe gay people should be loved and accepted often face isolation themselves.

The truth is that the church is a microcosm within itself. Within it exists a sampling of all kinds of people and yes, that means gay people as well. The real phenomenon here is that churchgoers are often aware of gay congregants. Whether it’s a fleeting thought, or an observable fact, the girl that likes to dress in her dad’s shirts and shirks the whole skirt-tights-uncomfortable shoes ensemble; or the boy who likes to help pick out the flowers for Sunday’s service and lead the every- other- Sunday- interpretive- dance troupe silently scream “homo” though most members won’t allow themselves to dwell on that thought.

Growing up, there was a boy in my independent fundamental Baptist church, who was the embodiment of effeminate. He swung his hips when he walked, lisped, and even had a penchant for carrying his mother’s purse around. I remember seeing his dad grab the purse away from him and reprimand him harshly. I also remember the whispers and the short furtive glances aimed at a boy who didn’t act or talk like a boy. He was safe, however, from confrontation from the congregation at large.
Members only take action when something happens to confirm their thoughts like a confession or being caught in a homosexual relationship. Within the fundamentalist church, accountability encourages those around members to hold them to a moral standard dictated by their interpretation of the Bible. This means that any homosexual act runs the risk of exposure if the person you are acting out with feels any twinge of guilt or conviction. Sadly, I know this from personal experience.

In one of the few episodes from my journey to understanding my sexuality that I truly regret, I betrayed the trust of someone I truly cared about because I thought I felt convicted about our “immoral relationship.” I went to one of the officials at my Christian college and spilled every detail convinced that I was doing God’s will. Realistically, I was just trying to deal with the guilt and uncertainty I felt by being in my first serious homosexual relationship. I took the advice of other Christians and put an end to the deceit and darkness that a homosexual relationship entails. The result? My ex-girlfriend lost her job, her home, and (I think) custody of her daughter from a previous marriage. I watched it happen and felt pain about it, but my pain was soothed by the knowledge that I had made God proud. Others at the college, even her boss, knew that she was gay, but it was not until I stepped forward and acknowledged that we had violated the “no homosexual activity” section of the honor code that they took action against her.

Adrian, a homosexual person of faith, has a similar story. She grew up in the fundamentalist Assemblies of God denomination and in a devoutly religious home. She has experienced same sex attraction her entire life. By the time she learned what homosexuality was and what God thought about it, Adrian had already experienced a serious same sex relationship in high school. She stayed in the church and fought against her sexuality for years before embracing it, but was never “out” in the church setting. A gifted musician and singer, she was a
member and leader of praise bands for years in the fundamentalist church. Though there had been speculation about her sexuality, she had never confessed her gay identity. At age 39, when she came out officially, everything changed.

“I’d been leading praise bands with a guy who was my closest male friend. We played and sang for churches and ministries for fifteen years together. During that time, there were unconfirmed allusions to my sexuality which made me know that most members of the band picked up on the fact that I was gay. My partner of 10 years even sang in the band with us most Sundays! When I finally decided to come out to my co-leader, he told me I couldn’t be in the band anymore because it would bring a “bad spirit” into a place of praise and worship. I reminded him of the many times in the past fifteen years, he told me about how godly my spirit was or how my presence in the band ushered in the Holy Spirit for powerful worship. I said “I’m the same person today as I’ve always been. The only difference is that now you know I’m gay.” None of that made any difference. We went our separate ways.” ~Adrian, a lesbian person of faith

In other words, “Don’t Ask. Don’t Tell” isn’t just a military mantra. A person accused of homosexuality faces public confession, mandated counseling, all too often banishment, and in some cases attempted exorcism. To say that they are ostracized is an understatement. Though they may have led the youth on multiple missions trips or ushered whole congregations into the presence of the Lord as a worship leader, once they admit that they have homosexual tendencies or, even worse, that they intend to live as a gay person—it’s as if their spiritual gifts cease and so does their ability to lead within a church. It’s as if all of those years are forgotten and overnight a person morphs from spiritual leader to a perverse, pitiful or dangerous human being.

A National Example

When Ted Haggard, a prominent evangelical pastor of a mega church in Colorado, confessed to paying a male prostitute for sex over a three year span, the homosexual issue hit close to home in the American evangelical church. Haggard, who called President George W. Bush each morning to lead him in prayer and offer spiritual advice, was ousted from his religious
community and from his role in a Christian government quickly and sent to exile quietly. He went from leading a mega church to leading just his family from place to place in a nomadic attempt to try and find life again. From being an elite member of one of the biggest social forces in America to being forced into social exile. From being revered as a pinnacle of family values and spiritual power, to rebuffed as a pinnacle of moral failure. “Ostracized and exiled from the state of Colorado.” How’s that for a different kind of resume?

When it was revealed that Haggard, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, had engaged in homosexual activity his status changed from acceptable to unacceptable in his circles with a dizzying haste. He was denounced. Denied acceptance. Denied forgiveness. Denied membership into the Christian world of which he was once one of the kings. Three men, one of whom was prominent Christian leader, James Dobson bravely stepped forward and offered to counsel Haggard. The counseling would be geared towards helping him become “ex-gay”, and putting him back on the right path. When, after a month that wasn’t successful, Haggard was ordered to leave Colorado. He headed for the desert and his spiritual advisors headed for the mountains. Not one word. No contact. Banishment.

**Biblical Basis**

The evangelicals’ treatment of Ted Haggard was decisive and quick as is their treatment of any number of issues contrary to the behavioral norm set by the church. So, what is their guide? What informs their decisions? For some denominations, the Bible holds the answers to everything. Most churches, anti-gay or gay friendly, focus on three distinct passages of the Bible that mention homosexuality to support their varied opinions. The first is found within the Levitical law, and is often dismissed by modern day debaters on each side, as it is seen as
saturated in the culture of the day\(^2\). Five verses later, the law decrees that if a man has sex with a woman while she is menstruating they must be exiled\(^3\). Not to mention the fact that other Levitical passages state that you can’t eat shellfish\(^4\) or wear mixed blend clothing\(^5\). When’s the last time you visited Red Lobster after church?

The second passage gives the account of Sodom and Gomorrah\(^6\), a city destroyed by God for its godless practices and sexual escapades. This story, also heavily saturated in the culture of the day, has been the fodder for hate groups such as the Westboro Baptist Church\(^7\), but most mainstream Bible students can tell you that the implications of what was going on in this city went far beyond normative homosexual practices.

Ron pastors a community Assemblies of God church with a trans-denominational culture. Ron’s focuses as the lead pastor on training future leaders within the church and supporting his church members in recognizing their spiritual growth. Ron’s church also focuses on restoration and outreach to the inner city where his church is located. Ron, himself, is on the board of directors of one of the local, highly successful Exodus International ministries. He

\(^2\) Leviticus 20:13: “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

\(^3\) Leviticus 20:18: “If a man lies with a woman during her monthly period and has sexual relations with her, he has exposed the source of her flow, and she has also uncovered it. Both of them must be cut off from their people.”

\(^4\) Leviticus 11:9-12: These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat. And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters, they shall be an abomination unto you... Ye shall not eat of their flesh, but ye shall have their carcasses in abomination.”

\(^5\) Leviticus 19:19: “Keep my decrees. Do not mate different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.”

\(^6\) Genesis 18 and 19

\(^7\) Westboro Baptist Church has become the face for religiously motivated bigotry in the past decade. They are famous for picketing soldier’s funerals with signs that exalt the death of the soldiers as an act of God to punish America. They are commonly known as the “God Hates Fags” group because their crusade began as a “love crusade” to warn America that its embracing of the homosexual lifestyle would cause God’s wrath to come down on America. For more information, visit their website at your own risk: [www.godhatesfags.com](http://www.godhatesfags.com)
regularly encounters and dialogues with members of the LGBT community. Ron stated that he joined up with the Exodus ministry:

“Because I wanted to find some way to address [homosexuality] without getting lumped into a whole category of far right people that I did not identify with, or agree with their tactics, their rhetoric, and their theology in some cases, or at least the way they were expressing their theology.”

Ron’s attitude towards people was about as sweet and loving as you can get. I met with him in his church’s sanctuary at the end of the day. His heart to love people was complimented greatly by his humility as a perpetual student of the Bible.

If it were not for Romans I, I would be very hard pressed to say that I believe there’s any authoritative source of scripture that gives directives towards the sexual practice between two men or two women. I certainly don’t believe that Leviticus is viable. It’s immersed in the Israeli civic code for their country. Along with a whole host of other things that we wouldn’t assume was timeless like regulations against touching a woman who’s on her period.

The problems with the Sodom and Gomorrah text are: Number one-- it’s a narrative. It’s a story. So, it’s not prescriptive, it’s descriptive. Number two-- there are multiple things at work in that passage, not the least of which is gang rape.

So, I don’t see that as having timeless import for us. When you get to Jesus in the Gospels, Jesus doesn’t talk about it. He addresses divorce. He addresses lust. He addresses money.

To me the only controversial passage is Romans I. The others… I don’t even see as controversial. They’re not in the same category because you’re not taking genre, or history, or context into account.

~Ron,

Romans I, written by the influential apostle Paul, has become the evangelicals’ favorite “go to” verse for condemning homosexuality. The few words contained in the following verses have done more to shape the modern day Christian view of homosexuality than any other Biblical reference.

Here is the Romans passage:
“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion” (Romans 1:21-27).

The interpretation of these passages and their dissemination to the church body is rhetorical analysis at its finest. Not only have the interpretation divided churches against each other and caused the splitting of whole denominations, but it has, in part, launched the political movement of the Religious Right. I thought it was important to have the pastors that I interviewed comment on their specific interpretations in order to clarify some of what they later express. As you will see, depending on which church you are visiting and what their method of textual interpretation is, these passages can be explained in several different ways. Ron continued to expound on the Romans 1 passage.

“The issue centers around what Paul would’ve written relative to a long-term committed relationship. And it’s the word “unnatural” and it is the context that Paul puts it in that means something to me. I have to make an interpretative choice at that point. As far as the actual, technical words are concerned I do feel convinced, just from studying it in the Greek that Paul is saying homosexual activity, whether it’s in a committed or a non-committed relationship, is out of the bounds of the natural sexual orientation that God built in at the creation of Adam and Eve.

My interpretive choice is that I do not believe that is a part of the sexual reality that God created for humanity. But I would NEVER deny the messiness of that claim. I would never deny the conversation with someone who says “Well, I hear you saying that, but my whole experience says completely otherwise to me,” Do you know what I mean? I recognize the complexity of it. But at the end of the day I have to make a choice.
People who say that it is easily clear are not wrestling with that text, because he clearly doesn’t say that there. You have to believe that it’s implied in what he says. It’s not explicit. I have chosen to say that I believe that it is implied in there with that, but I could be wrong.”

I found Ron’s perspective refreshing because he stated clearly, not only that he makes an interpretive choice when he reads the Bible, but that that he could be wrong. This is an exceptional viewpoint and one that most evangelical fundamentalists would take as an offense to the Bible. As we will discuss later, many evangelicals believe there is only one way to interpret the Bible—literally. This “black and white” way of seeing the Scriptures contributes mightily to the force of their aggression towards the gay rights movement.

I asked Darren about the argument given by many gay-friendly churches which suggests that Paul is writing about a certain circumstance of homosexual activity which involves victimization and that Paul obviously did not have a reference point for what committed, same sex partnerships could be. Darren answered:

“Yeah, the basis of Paul’s arguments both here and other places, like I Corinthians where homosexuality is spoken about, it’s never on the basis of commitment that it’s opposed. It’s opposed on the basis of the contravention to the order that God has established.

What’s being described there is the general condition of mankind, where the incidence of homosexuality is used as a great example of a more general condition. Mankind chooses to worship his own understanding. It says they knew God but they didn’t glorify Him as God, and so they became vain in their imaginations, which is to say they think great thoughts which don’t relate to reality.

Their foolish hearts were darkened and the passage goes on to basically describe the homosexual condition. It goes on to describe other things as well. My view is that that is a perfect, precise description of the fall of man. From the point at which we uncouple our hearts and minds from the heart and mind of God and are left with our own vanity---we enter into a process of de-evolution.
What you get is you burn in your lust for something that’s forbidden by the flat-out Word of God. You embrace it. And before long, you define it as normative. You say ‘This can’t mean what it means.’ Now you’re adapting the Word of God to be culturally relevant and you condone it.”

This is the adapting of rhetoric is at its best. Darren, a true fundamentalist, looks at the Romans chapter and the Bible as a whole and says that adaptation of the Bible to be culturally relevant is one step down the infamous “slippery slope” to moral decline—a phrase coined by, you guessed it, Jerry Falwell. This is a common point of view in the evangelical community. Yet Kris, who also believes the Bible to be absolute truth, looks at other commands made by Paul in Romans 1 and notes that those commands do not have to be followed because of their dated contextual significance. Kris is the head pastor of an independent community-based church. The church’s website states clearly that it does not participate in denominational politics and that the church’s vision, not denomination membership, is what defines who they are. Kris’ church sponsors a multitude of ministries that reach out to “relational brokenness” ranging from pornography addiction to pedophilia and from promiscuity to homosexuality. Kris is an ex-gay man, married now for 25 years to his wife. Together they have nine children I interviewed him in a conference room at the monastery while an ex-gay conference was going on there. He was boisterous and engaging. We laughed a lot during our time together.

“It’s not hard to figure out what needs to be culturally stirred up and what doesn’t.

I wrestle with people that want to do back flips with the Bible. I’m a pretty plain interpreter too. You gotta be pinned in a corner before you start doing some of the strange things people do with the scripture.

It’s like, ‘What on earth are you talking about?’ I mean, I think that there are some things that are obviously embedded in culture that you have to ask, ‘What does that really mean?’ For example, the whole women being silent\(^8\), head coverings thing, that’s very complicated. And what’s complicated isn’t that it’s contrary to our culture.

What’s complicated is that Paul seems to say, ‘There’s this here, this here and this here,’ and he means all three of them, so we’ve got to figure out what does he really mean? So then you start analyzing. He’s either a schizophrenic, I mean he’s psycho, or there’s truth there and those three things somehow line up together, and you’ve got to figure out what it is saying.

\(^8\) 1 Corinthians 14: 34 -35: “women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.”
And one of the alternatives is that there is this sense that some of these things that Paul addressed, specifically about women being silent and head coverings, has to do with accommodating culture, which is a common theme in Paul’s writing. So to me, from the original context it is simple to figure out.”

Cultural context, original Greek meanings, and implication in the fallen human condition—all of these have been cited as a foundation to support the literal interpretation of Paul’s passage about homosexuality. Textual flaws, the written process, and weak Papyrus have all been cited as human fallacies that must be considered in interpreting the Bible, and specifically Paul’s writing. None of the pastors had addressed Paul’s reputation in the church.

Paul the Apostle is seen by many in evangelical traditions has one of the most dynamic, wisdom filled, and inspired writers of the Bible. Paul began as a torturer of Christians before he was converted to the Christian faith. He began preaching immediately after his conversion in one of the most compelling stories in Scripture. But his teaching quickly focuses on relationships between men and women. Paul, himself, was a celibate male. He states that it is better to not to marry at all because a man can be a less inhibited servant of God that way. Yet, he also states that if you are burning in passion—it’s much better to marry than to let your passion lead into sexual sin. Paul’s statements are bold and, when read in context, impacting. Many have suggested that Paul was a sexually frustrated man. Still others, because of his intense distaste for homosexuality, have suggested that maybe Paul was a closeted gay man himself. Whatever one chooses to believe, the fact that Paul was an outspoken, new Christian is not overlooked by everyone.
Pastor Bruce asked to speak anonymously as he believes that his views of the homosexual community may not line up exactly with the credo of the denominational church at which he is a pastor. Bruce felt that he would be able to speak more freely if he was able to state his beliefs which are in process rather than having to speak down the line of denominationally stated beliefs. He believes in a church focused on building the Christian community and on valuable relationships. Bruce primarily pastors young people. West coast born, Bruce was probably the easiest interview I had for this section. He smiled constantly, teared up a few times, and challenged me with his dedication to seeking the truth and growing past denominational lines. I interviewed him in his church office, surrounded by pictures of his wife and kids. When discussing the Romans passage, Bruce brought his reservations about Paul to the discussion as a reminder about the need to interpret and consider the original context of Romans 1.

“You have to understand that I have issues with Paul. It’s so interesting that most fundamental Christians can’t have this kind of understanding and consideration of Paul as a human being. To them, Paul is a deity. Paul is more authoritative than all the rest of scripture for some people. I’ll let Paul be human. I’m giving him the benefit of the doubt that he was wrestling with a myriad of moral dilemmas with regard to the first church, issues that he absolutely had to wrestle with.

I guess, I’m really skirting around this issue and I’m sorry about that, it’s just that I wanted to preface what I say with that because I know that Paul is human and he probably has his faults, and sometimes I think he can be read with some of the same attitude and emotion that feeds fundamental Christianity. But I do agree with his theology with regard to homosexuality.

I think, ultimately what you are probably asking me is ‘Do I believe is homosexuality a sin?’ And I would have to say today, yes, I do believe it is a sin. But you’ve got to understand, just because I say that, doesn’t mean that I’m done yet with what I believe judgment is and what ultimate judgment is and what eternity is.”

For many evangelical fundamentalists even a hint that Paul’s human biases may have gotten in the way of his expression of God’s Truth borders on heresy. We will talk about this
more in a later section. However, you can see, already, that though they get to their belief with various levels of interpretation all of these pastors, representing a wide range of denominations, believe that Romans 1 denounces homosexuality as a sin. Yet, in two cases, you find pastors with a mindset of humility. A pastor’s level of humility and comfort with the ambiguities found in the Bible are directly reflected in their congregation’s treatment of homosexuals and others that stand on the outside looking in to the church community.

The “Love the Sinner; Hate the Sin” Syndrome

“Hate all sin, including homosexuality. But embrace and love the sinner. Now, but the question is – what is the heart with which the person enters the building. If they enter the building saying “Lord have mercy, I’m a sinner!” Acknowledging that they’re out of step with the will of God and asking for help – then we’re all about that.

On the other hand, when individuals enter the church demanding that we ignore the clear pronouncements of God’s Word and we embrace and accept people fully in that lifestyle, then I say never. No way. No possible way. People are often quick to say that to kick the homosexuals out would be unloving, yet Jesus Christ said that He came to bring a sword. He was talking about the fact that He stands for the church and the truth divides—Depending on which side of the church you’re on, it could be a sharp divide. There’s unity around the truth not just for the sake of unity. When people want to argue that it’s unloving – I say, it’s never loving to leave people in their sin. Jesus didn’t do that. Jesus met people where they were at and ministered to their sin. For the church to think it is loving, to look sideways at the Word of God and demand to live in their sin as a minister in their church, as a loving thing, is ridiculous.”

~Darren, an orthodox Christian, fundamentalist pastor

Darren’s statement above reflects the mindset of many fundamentalists in regards to how to treat members of the LGBT community. Mainstream interpreters of the Bible in fundamentalist settings teach that homosexuality is a sin. However, isn’t one of the other mainstream interpretations to love people above all other things? Fundamentalist Christians answer this inquiry by saying that they do carry out the exhortation to love by “loving the sinner, hating the sin.” This principle is based on Jesus’ example of love to those who sinned in the
Bible. He ate with them, fellowshipped with them, and loved them without condition. Yet, somewhere between the premise of this attitude and the honest attempt to execute it, “Love the Sinner. Hate the Sin” becomes less of a practiced principle and more of a syndrome. Let’s call it the LSHS syndrome. I think you would find that most gay people not only hate this saying, but seriously doubt the validity of it in practice. Why? Because they’ve experienced the qualified “love” by a fundamentalist with LSHS syndrome and it falls short. In most cases, the only way the gay person in the equation feels loved is by their lack of exile from a LSHS subscriber. An LGBT Christian in a typical relationship with a fundamentalist, LSHS syndrome subscriber should expect to encounter the following things:

1. The phrase “You know I love you but….” Preceding any kind of judgmental or mentality-challenging statement.

2. The terms “lifestyle,” “choice,” and “habitual sin” in reference to their living out of their sexuality

3. Referral to their boyfriend, girlfriend or life partner as their “friend,” “roommate”, “person that you are living with,” or, in many cases, a direct request to not mention their significant other in conversation.

4. Widespread assumption about their lack of relationship with God, their out of control drinking and drugging, and promiscuous bedroom activities

5. A regular, consistent verbal reiteration of their distaste, denunciation, and exception to a person’s gay identity and activities.

Ask yourselves in what relational situation, would you allow a friend to levy so many conditions on your personal interactions with them? Yet, this is what many gay Christians do accept at the hands of their fundamentalist friends and family. If you are unfamiliar with how LSHS works, you are probably asking yourself “WHY?” The answer is complicated. Gay Christians who have grown up in and been involved in the church love God and the church
genuinely. There are aspects of a fundamental, evangelical church that are hard to find at other churches: Lively, modernized worship. Verse by verse study of the Bible. Dynamic and thriving friendships. Coffee bars. But perhaps that greatest thing, which can be found at many churches but is uniquely built in a fundamentalist environment, is the feeling of community. The unity of believers. Like-minded people, dedicated to a certain, specified way of life that know and love the Bible in a passionate way. When a gay Christian comes out and states their intention to live as a homosexual, all of that ceases immediately. Relationships become strained, qualified, or rejected. It is literally like jumping into a pool of ice water. The shock of the rejection is unlike anything else I have ever experienced. Those that loved you while you were on the inside, still love you on the outside but their love becomes qualified according to the LSHS syndrome.

What’s more, the Christians believe that the Bible commands this conditional love.

Contrary to popular public belief, most Christians who cut ties or close relationships with gay Christians don’t do it because they want to hurt or alienate by their judgment. To fundamentalists, there is no “my interpretation” there is only one interpretation. To many of them that means that if you are gay, you cannot be a Christian. If you claim to be both gay and Christian, you are committing apostasy and (according to their interpretation) they should not be associating with someone willing to renounce their faith.

It’s hard to make a case for Christians, because I personally know the pain that encountering the rejection or the LSHS syndrome can cause. Yet, if Christians lash out and say things like “you are going to hell and I cannot associate with you.” Most of them say those things because they believe that tough love will bring a sinner back to Jesus. The same applies to those who constantly remind a gay person of their “sin”, or who send them pamphlets about “returning to Jesus” with their birthday presents (thanks, grandma); Christians don’t always do these
offensive things to offend. In their mind, if someone’s salvation is at stake, no action or statement is too hurtful, or intense, or shocking if it could be effective in bringing a wayward soul back to God. That’s the truth of the matter for many Christians. Does that justify the blatant disregard for the humanity or intelligence of others? Absolutely not.

Let me say for the record that for many fundamentalists the LSHS syndrome represents a genuine attempt to reach out to the gay community. However, though the attempts are genuine, the “tough love” shown is seared with judgmental and often demeaning connotations. In my attempts to start true “outside of the box” dialogue with fundamentalists, I arduously try to paint the heartbreaking picture of what it is like for a gay Christian to come to terms with their sexuality and then to be gradually rejected, preached at, and exiled from much of the community. Sadly, the attitude projected back at me is that people who decide to be gay should stop painting themselves as victims. The inference of this statement wounds deeper than its actual words. In saying this, fundamentalists imply that those who embrace their sexuality deserve to get rejected, be defined as immoral and to hear over and over again how being who you are is wrong. As one pastor I know stated within a conversation about the church’s treatment of gay people:

“If you want to live an alternative lifestyle, and call it "right" with God that is your choice. I won’t judge or condemn you. You will have an opportunity one day, standing before God, to make your case. My opinion won’t matter. But don’t try and force me to bend my perspective of what God's Word says so that you will feel better about yourself.”

Is this pastor trying to bring me closer to God or is he simply lashing out in frustration? I know that neither I nor the other people in this dialogue were simply expressing ourselves—not trying to force anything. Does the fact that this pastor’s intent was to shock me back to “reality” with his harsh words mean that his methods are acceptable? To me, no, because his statement is not
evidencing Christian love. Rather it is full of erroneous assumptions and false accusations. His statement acts as an example of rhetoric from the Christian world that goes too far because it demeans the person it is directed toward. As you will see in the course of this text, there are many fundamentalists who lash out in an aggressive way with little or no regard for the people on the receiving end. Those men and women are in a completely different rhetorical category. I think Kris, who does believe that homosexuality is a sin, stated his exception to the LSHS syndrome the best:

“I think when the Church thinks, ‘How do I respond? What do I do with homosexuality?’ they only respond with a moral reaction. Many churches have a defensive posture without ever really knowing. They may not even want to have a defensive posture but they do. Many churches desire to have a, a loving, redemptive kind of response, but it--even when they use that language, and even when they make the attempt, it turns into judgment. Like the ‘Love the Sinner; Hate the Sin’ thing. . I do not feel like I have to convict people of their sin. I think that’s the Holy Spirit’s job. Right. You don’t really need to hate someone else’s sin. You can hate your own, okay? But you really don’t need to hate someone else’s.”

Is there a way to maneuver around the Christian fundamentalist perception that LGBT people deserve this treatment? Does this treatment ever really help those who are trying to reconcile their faith with their sexuality? Can a dialogue be established between these two groups in order to produce an environment stripped of animosity?

Today, the rhetoric of both groups remains effective at isolating and vilifying the other side. The battle lines have been knowingly and willingly drawn around conflicting views on the origin of homosexuality, its definition, the church’s acceptance or rejection of gays, and what the Bible says on the subject. This war rages on, everyday, in the media, the political realm, church auditoriums, schools, and in the hearts and minds of those who are walking out a path defined by these groups. As these two communities draw lines and set policy in motion, the casualties of this war are not only those who want to remain a part of both communities, gay Christians or
religious gays, but also the Christian and gay moderates who seek to find a way to coexist but are hampered by the socio-political structure of their own communities.

You will hear many voices in the course of reading this work: the faithful on both sides of this issue, those who are attempting to love them, and those who are trying to save them. You will hear justification from those who stand stalwart and assured in their belief and those who teach these beliefs to others. You will hear the journeys of those who are searching for a place in a religion that they love, but that is often broken in its attempt to love them back. Those who mourn. Those who seek truth. Those who isolate and reject. The casualties of a raging war and those soldiers who refuse to admit defeat. But before we delve into their stories, these modern representations of rhetoric, we should seek to gain a historical context by examining past social movements that spurned a similarly strong reaction from the church. In many case these movements eventually forced a reformation of theology in the Christian church as well as society as a whole. It is these marvels of changing the unchangeable, moving the immoveable that fuel my optimism that change can happen. To apply two infamous phrases, “Yes, we can” and “with God, all things are possible”.
“I like Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”
~Gandhi

CHAPTER TWO:
RHETORIC CHALLENGED. RHETORIC CHANGED

April 5, 2010

Dear Apryl,

President Obama, Speaker Pelosi, and their homosexual and transgender allies are secretly plotting to rush through the so-called Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) in the next few weeks.

ENDA – aptly described as the “cross-dressing teacher’s bill” – will force every American public school to hire men who dress like women as teachers.

In the next few weeks, if President Obama signs ENDA into law, your children will be trapped in classrooms taught by men who dress as women.

ENDA also forces every state and local government (including public schools), and every business with more than 15 employees to treat men who dress as women as federally protected minorities.

Thus, ENDA will:

• Impact critics and faith-based objectors who will be called bigots and troublemakers in school districts
• Allow men who dress as women to enjoy these special rights
• Elevate a serious mental disorder to protected class status

This is unacceptable!

Congress must be flooded with emails, phone calls, and letters demanding that ENDA not be passed. 
TAKE ACTION: Find out if your state is one of the 38 that doesn’t make cross-dressing into a minority group. Then, contact your Members of Congress immediately and ask them to oppose ENDA.

Thank you,
Rev. Louis Sheldon and Andrea Lafferty  
Traditional Values Coalition

A call to action, taken from an actual mass email sent out by the Traditional Values Coalition to those supporters who have signed up to be part of TVC’s “action list.” This organization, founded by Rev. Louis Sheldon in 1980, is dedicated to the “restoration of the values needed to maintain strong, unified families” by focusing their efforts on lobbying for or against such “issues as religious liberties, marriage, the right to life, the homosexual agenda, pornography, family tax relief and education.”

The TVC has advocated for other things as well, such as “cities of refuge” as a mandated quarantined home for all AIDS patients, and the dispelling of “homosexual urban legends” like the myth that homosexuals are NOT child molesters out to recruit innocent children into a deviant lifestyle.

From the use of forceful language to the glaring, errant statements about transsexuals, guaranteed to not only evoke strong emotion but stir feelings of fear and disgust, This email exemplifies rhetoric at its best. Those who read the email but have never encountered a transsexual quickly picture an unshaven male history teacher standing in front of little Jimmy or Susie’s class in red pumps, black leather skirt, a wig, and bright red lipstick. As he points out the difference between latitude and longitude, these concerned parents gag at the thought of his

---

9 All TVC information garnered from www.traditionalvalues.org

10 News-Telegraph, March 10, 1995

11 http://www.traditionalvalues.org/urban/

12 It should be noted that the use of the term “rhetoric” in this text refers to the perception of rhetoric by those outside of academia as a means to persuade and induce action—within or outside of a community’s hegemony. Rhetoric defined as a actual dialogue based on two opposing parties’ willingness to listen, engage in and risk the changing of their own beliefs can be seen as a goal of this thesis. For more information about the academic definition of rhetoric see Kenneth Burke’s works on the subject.
meticulously painted press-on nails glittering just above hairy knuckles outlining the blue and green of the map. In the late afternoon sun of sixth period, he/she turns from the map, bats his fake eyelashes and asks for questions just as his five ‘o clock shadow begins to emerge.

Is this the worst thing that could happen if ENDA is passed? To many evangelical, fundamentalist Christians, the thought of having a cross-dressed teacher or transsexual teaching their children conjures up intense fear and abhorrence. TVC capitalizes on this fear and exploits it by saying things like “under ENDA, a man who dresses in women’s clothing could legally get naked in front little girls in restrooms and shower facilities." The question is: Would a transsexual man choose to get naked in front of little girls in the restroom? The truth is that this projection of a cross-dresser and the reality of the intentions or morals of someone who cross dresses are diametrically opposed. Granted, many Christians have never encountered anyone who fits the above description, perhaps that’s why the TVC chose this image to inspire fear and dedication among its followers.

Fear-inspired rhetoric is nothing new. It has been utilized for centuries and has played an instrumental role in some, if not all, of the monumental social revolutions documented in America’s history. As a friend of mine pointed out “rhetoric was used to reduce: slaves to savages that would rape white women; Asians during WWI to nothing but rice hats, slanted eyes, big teeth; and Jews to evil bankers who poison wells.” In today’s culture wars, the fear of homosexuality has become a rallying cry. TVC’s use of a scary, hairy man/woman shaping the minds of America’s helpless children is effective because of the fear it inspires. Though that example may seem, to some moderate readers, to be completely deranged and unbelievable,

---

13 From an email entitled “Crossdressers in the classroom” received 4/14/10
rhetoric about scary gay people prevails in our society today. Politicians and religious leaders use it all the time.

In a 2005 interview with Fortune Magazine, Pastor Rick Warren, a megachurch pastor and one of the men selected to pray at Obama’s inauguration, responded to a question about gay marriage by saying that a gay couple marrying is similar to letting "a brother and sister to be together and call[ing] that marriage.” Warren continued saying that he’s also “opposed to an older guy marrying a child and calling that a marriage.” The reporter then asked, "Do you think those [situations] are equivalent to gays getting married?” Rick Warren responded emphatically, "Oh, I do." Though less flamboyant than the image of the cross dressing teacher, the effect of Warren’s comparisons is the same. By linking gay relationships to both incest and pedophilia—two of the most reprehensible and frightening sexual deviances in America today—Warren relies on fear to propagate the errant mindset. Likewise, Mike Huckabee, an ordained Southern Baptist minister and a frontrunner for the 2012 GOP presidential nomination, said the following in a recent interview: “Marriage has historically never meant anything other than a man and a woman. It has never meant two men, two women, a man and his pet, or a man and a whole herd of pets.” Huckabee has rounded out the three-headed monster of “homosexual deviance” by subtly linking homosexuality to bestiality.

Bestiality, pedophilia, incest, and cross-dressed indecent exposures in the elementary school locker room: all examples of effective rhetoric employed by opponents to the gay rights issue. Why is this type of rhetoric so effective and appealing? What’s behind the all out attack

14 http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1867664,00.html

15 http://www2.timesdispatch.com/rtd/news/national/national_govtpolitics/article/huckabee_likens_gay_marriage_to_incest_polygamy (retrieved on 4/15/10)
on the LGBT community? The simple answer would be “fear.” But fear of what exactly? I believe there are many answers to this question. Those opposed to LGBT rights fear moral erosion. They fear difference. They fear any kind of affront to what they deem as “normal” and “acceptable.” They fear uncertainty and the unknown. They fear the blurring of the lines of identity. Each of these things is at stake in the fight against LGBT rights today. If gay or transgendered people become a legally recognized category of people in the law, opponents believe they will have no choice but to let the reality of their existence affect their lives in all areas. That belief and the paranoia that accompanies it heighten with each linkage of gay marriage to bestiality and of cross dressers to pedophiles. As the paranoia heightens, so does the gut-level instinct to bond together with others who are equally as paranoid. By solidifying the “us” and vilifying the “them” fuzzy boundaries become unyielding and it makes it easy to know who to fight against.

Today America stands at a precipice of change and whereas those who have struggled for their basic civil rights see it as evidence of a long and arduous fight; the opponents see their clearly defined world of black and white slipping away into a cloud of gray—slowly but surely. Enraged by the audacity of the change and fueled by fear based rhetoric, they do the only thing they know how to do—lash out, scream, and dehumanize those who are grasping for the basic rights of humanity. As my brother in law puts it: It’s “easier for morons to create monsters than accept that someone who is different is a person.”

**We Didn’t Start The Fire**

The rhetorical strategy of dehumanization and vilification of the “them” in order to launch an all out resistance to social change didn’t originate with the Christian resistance to the
gay community. Throughout history there have always been countercultural factions within the Christian community resisting change with vigor while using the Bible as their weapon. They have always painted those who advocate for change as their enemies and used war-laden rhetoric to motivate their support base. These countercultural movements all stood up in their day with confidence (even arrogance) and struck out with vehemence to the perceived assault on their morals, values, and way of life. Example after example will show that they lashed out by the bestialized labeling of their opponents in an effort to win the battle. Example after example will show the pervasive nature of the genuine belief that defending their values was a direct edict from God within those inimical factions. And example after example will show that the battle was lost, the rhetoric was modified, and the belief system changed to accommodate the now justified social change. The Bible says that Jesus is “the same yesterday, today, and forever,” so the question that must be asked is “What human aspect of these factions actually changes?”

It’s easy to look at the battlefield laid out between the Religious Right and the LGBT community and wonder if change is even possible. Both sides so fundamentally believe that their positions of truth are indisputable and seem tautly poised to fight to the death for or against change. Yet, change is already happening. Modern churches have already split over their views of homosexuality. The church is at a crisis point with its back against the wall—pushed there by social pressure. And it’s not the first time. Once this battle of today is seen through the lens of the no less intense or politically charged battles of the past, it is easy to see that America may once again be approaching counter-Christianity social change. Those principles that seem so immutable now are not unlike those that seemed immutable then. Those ways of seeing another social community as less than human and despicable are not unlike those views from the past.

16 Hebrews 13:8
History tells us that the church stands once again at a precipice of change. Through looking at the church’s moments of crisis in the past, we can gain a fuller understanding of just how significant today’s crisis is.

**Profile of a Christian Soldier**

When you go to the Word of God, and this is a really important thing. Would you agree that the enemy, Satan and his minions, are gonna hate and attack those things with the greatest intensity? He’s gonna attack those things dearest to God with the most intensity, right?

You look at any conflict, any war. The enemy is going to direct its efforts at shooting or blowing up the important stuff. You don’t see the enemy sneaking in to bomb the garbage dump of a military camp. No, it’s going to bomb the headquarters, whatever. And I believe that gay marriage is just that institution.

~~Darren, orthodox Christian, fundamentalist pastor~~

Certain factions within the Christian community see the Gay Rights Movement as an assault on their way of life. Before I go any further to implicate that mindset in the social battles of today and in history, I must clearly define who it is that’s fighting. Not all Christians, even those who stand in opposition to the gay rights movement, see the struggle for rights as an assault. Not all Christians frame “difference” within the context of “enemy.” There are many groups of Christians, such as some Episcopalians or other moderate Christians, which advocate for LGBT rights today and have advocated for social change in the past. However, the voices of those groups of Christians are often not the voices heard the loudest in American politics.
Speaking of loud voices, let’s talk about Jerry Falwell who is called the “Tourette’s-Vangelist” by satirical author Robert Lanham\textsuperscript{17} for his reputation of saying horrendous, discriminatory statements against those who don’t ascribe to his Christian worldview. Falwell once said “If you aren’t a born again Christian you are a failure as a human being.” Falwell is the quintessential fundamentalist preacher.

\begin{quote}
“The ... Fundamentalist not only holds to the exposition of the Bible in its every affirmation and attitude, but also sets himself to expose every affirmation and attitude not found in the Bible. His negatives like his affirmations are as many as those of the Bible. To expose is as vital to his faith as to expound the truth of Scripture” (Dollar, 33).
\end{quote}

Fundamentalists can fall into various categories. Separatist fundamentalists “maintain an extreme conservative stance and a doctrine of ecclesiastical or "secondary" separation-which means that church members will associate spiritually or politically only with other believers of like faith” (Holderer, 75). One of the best contemporary examples of staunch fundamentalism would be Bob Jones University in Greenville, SC where students are unable to go on a date without an approved chaperone and are prohibited from wearing any clothes from Abercrombie and Fitch or Hollister because those companies have “shown an unusual degree of antagonism to the name of Christ and an unusual display of wickedness in their promotions.”\textsuperscript{18} BJU’s list of general expectations for their students also reads:

“Loyalty to Christ results in separated living. Dishonesty, lewdness, sensual behavior, adultery, homosexuality, sexual perversion of any kind, pornography, illegal use of drugs, and drunkenness all are clearly condemned by God’s Word and prohibited here. Further,

\textsuperscript{17} From the book “The Sinner's Guide to the Evangelical Right”

\textsuperscript{18} http://www.bju.edu/become-a-student/accepted-students/expectations/dress.php Retrieved on 5/11/10
we believe that biblical principles preclude gambling, dancing, and the beverage use of alcohol.”

However, not all separatist fundamentalists remain as disconnected as Bob Jones University. Many operate within the non-denominational sector of the church and find no value in connecting or hearing about worldviews that are even slightly altered from their own. Falwell is more of an open fundamentalist meaning that he will form relationships with other believers but only for the purpose of political action. Fundamentalists believe political action to defend the cause of Christ to be “integral to the survival of the church” (Holderer, 75).

Holderer designates a separate category for “evangelicals” within the Christian faith, indicating that they are just as dedicated as fundamentalists in regards to spiritual purity. However, evangelicals are much more willing to engage and negotiate with those outside of their belief system (75).

For the purposes of this text, when I refer to evangelicals I will be referring to both groups of Christians. My reasoning for doing such is that these terms have expanded and constricted so often throughout the history of Christianity in the world, that today, it’s hard to tell the difference between the two. I believe the current trend of evangelicals is to be highly fundamentalist and in some cases, separatist, in their thinking. For example, Pat Robertson, called “The Godfather” by Lanham, is defined categorically as an evangelical, however, as you will see, he clearly exhibits the fundamentalist mentality.

Holderer in his continuing description says that “to Fundamentalists, publicly denouncing evil is just as important as edifying the faithful” (76). Christians who have a fundamentalist way

\[19\] http://www.bju.edu/become-a-student/accepted-students/expectations/general.php Retrieved on 5/11/10
of thinking, march confidently into the battle of social issues, armed with their literal belief in the Bible, ready to defend their ideology to the death. This is not an exaggeration, nor is it a new concept. The Bible has often been used as the foundation for fundamentalist rhetoric and the justification for the classification of social change as the effort of the Devil to deceive and separate people from God. In short, for the Christians who have fought on the frontline of battles throughout history the Bible has been their greatest weapon.

**Weapon of Choice**

“If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, JEHOVAH THY GOD” (Deut. 28:58).

The Christian tradition believes that the Bible is, in fact, the word of God; that all scripture is “God-breathed” into the hearts and minds of the men who penned the holy book. Many Christian traditions and denominations hold that the Bible is not only God-breathed or God-inspired but that it is inerrant, infallible, and calls for a strict literal interpretation of its principles. They say the Bible is what it says it is: The Word of God. That would make God one of the most successful rhetoricians in the history of the world. The term “inerrancy” is a huge deal in the Christian world because if the Bible is “inerrant,” it is to be followed word for word. Those who believe in inerrancy and strict, literal interpretation do not have to struggle to discern what is right and what is wrong—the Bible does that for them. Because the Bible holds all truth and guidance for life, fundamentalists often freak out if the authenticity of literal interpretation is questioned. A scholarly suggestion that the Bible may have many valid interpretations and that the literal interpretation could be wrong sounds like a declaration of war to a fundamentalist.
“To me, a slightly altered Bible, and by slightly altered I mean, from appearances it looks the same, but it’s altered in the most fundamental ways, to me that’s more dangerous than a comic book. A comic book is patently false if you’re holding it up as a source of truth. The more dangerous thing is the thing that looks okay.

I mean, what’s more dangerous to people? If they were to come in here and they saw this table, and on the table was a box labeled rat poison and a plate of brownies that had rat poison in them. You’d say, “well, the box, because anybody who comes in will say, ‘I’m not gonna touch that.’ The brownies.” We believe in the inerrancy of the word – no question. The Bible is absolute truth. Not to be interpreted at the risk of losing the standard of Truth.”

~Darren

No interpretation? Is that even possible? My childhood pastor assured us that it was. Sitting in the red plush covered pews of my Baptist church growing up, I recall hearing the pastor teach about the book of Revelation which contains the account of the apocalypse. In it John recounts a vision that he receives from the Lord describing a scene in the middle of the apocalypse where angels are mandated to go and pour out the “seven bowls of God’s wrath on earth.” The description goes on to describe what happens when the wrath-filled bowls empty onto different cities causing anything from the drying of the Euphrates River, to a plague of boils and sores, to darkness which causes men to go crazy and gnaw their own tongues off. After the sermon, I remember asking someone if there were going to be actual bowls in the skies pouring something out during the apocalypse. I thought that seemed bizarre and unlikely. However, that person clearly said “If the Bible says bowls…it means bowls.” My thought? “I wonder what those bowls will look like….”

Tom is the pastor of a non-denominational church that prides itself on being culturally relevant and focused on discipleship. His church focuses on the importance of small groups in

20 These images are taken from Revelation 16:1-17
the church community as places to connect to other church members, study the Bible and grow. I met with him in his church office and found him to be inquisitive and insightful. His comments on inerrancy vs. interpretation reveal a point of interest in the “literal interpretation/inerrancy” argument.

“We believe and teach that the Bible is an inerrant, inspired word of God. That we take it, I don’t want to say literally, but we take it as it is. We do take it literally at times, but not exclusively literally like when Jesus says, “I’m the door,” we don’t think He’s made of wood. We interpret it pretty literally. So, we don’t look for figurative examples. They’re just listed as they are. So, we try to take them as such.”

The “Jesus-as-door” metaphor does not stand alone as an example of the not-so-literal, literal interpretation of the Bible. Consider this passage, taken from Matthew 5:27:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

Most churches would consider this passage (a common passage cited as a condemnation of masturbation) as a warning against the all-consuming presence of sexual sin. The allusion to gouging out a wandering eye or cutting off a stimulating hand indicates how strongly God feels about this subject. However, churches do exist that believe that God mandates obedience, at all cost even if it means maiming yourself. These churches, of course, don’t advocate self harm or even encourage their congregation to hurt themselves. A faithful walk with God and a seeking heart to obey Him should prevent you from ever reaching that point. Yet, the belief is that the

---

21 Passage taken from the New International Version
Bible means just what it says—no interpretive choice allowed. Because of instances like these, which call for interpretation, many churches distinguish between the actual literal (in the purest sense of the word) meaning of the words on the page and the revelation, or the intent and spirit of God’s words as absolutely without error.

Interpreting the Bible could feasibly be called the greatest rhetorical feat in the history of mankind. Why? Because no other book in history has been proliferated so widely, digested so thoroughly, and been as effective in forming the identity, laws, and practices of a dominant group of people. For centuries pastors and Biblical scholars have been reading the Bible, studying the Greek and Roman word roots and proclaiming that the words in the Bible are God’s Truth. From those proclamations, the principles are disseminated through millions of parishioners, congregants, students and children. Because of this perceived direct, unquestioned relationship between the Bible and God’s word, many believers in the U.S. (specifically fundamentalist and evangelical Christians) feel justified in vehemently denying any alternate interpretations of Biblical “truth.” In fact, so convinced that their interpretation of the Bible is the ONLY interpretation, they set out to be the enforcers of the rules and principles attributed to God’s will for humanity. As we will see, this enforcing has had a long and complex history, riddled with the infliction of pain and rejection on various people groups.

Within the Christian community, much diversity exists in Biblical interpretation. Many prominent denominations believe and affirm that interpretation of the Bible is essential and even admit that there may be errors within the text due to the fact that humans transcribed it—not God, himself. Fundamentalists reject all theory and interpretation that they see as non-literal or subjective. This belief is evidenced by a common saying in evangelical circles: “The Bible Says
It. I believe it. That settles it.” Evangelical denial that other valid interpretations could exist attributes to their separatist mindset—even though those who suggest alternative interpretations also identify as Christians. Their strict adherence to one literal translation and their exaltation of the Bible as without error has directly resulted in the wartime mentality of Christians. Bruce has a specific theory about those who sport the “Bible Says It, etc” bumper sticker:

“...I feel like much of the problem with just about anything in life, any issue, is most people are lazy and especially particular religious groups. People tend to be lazy in their intellectual pursuits, and I think with regard to fundamental Christianity in the western world, over the last 75-100 years, there’s been a little bit of anti-intellectualism built into some of that which I think is frankly, unhealthy, so I would like to say that, whatever I say today, is part of my journey where I’m at today.

I wrestle with this issue because I’m a pastor, and I love people. Because I’m still on the journey of trying to discover all the feelings I have with regard to some of the issues at stake because the issues related to the gay community, whether they be, you know, theological, cultural, political, whatever, I think that there is much to be learned and much to be processed.”

Laziness could definitely be an explanation of the follower mindset of the congregants; however, most pastors who claim the literal interpretation of the Bible also regard themselves as students of it. Many of them have studied the meanings of the Word down to its Greek and Roman origins. In saying there is no interpretation other than the literal one, fundamentalists have, in essence made a rhetorical choice to selectively interpret the holy text. Note Peter Herriot’s thoughts on this matter:

“This ability to selectively interpret the holy book is basic to the power of fundamentalist leaders. They can highlight the differences from modernism by selecting for the attention of the faithful those elements of the book which most differentiate them. So their morality is a direct contrast with promiscuous modernism. This enables leaders to create a clear distinction between the faithful and their secular enemy on an issue about which they have chosen to fight…[such as] general contemporary anxiety about the fate of the family…By their choice of particular texts, and by their new interpretation of those texts, leaders mandate themselves to do what they want to do” (19).
Selective interpretation for the empowerment of fundamentalist leaders directly influences the power struggle between the church and movements for social change. Their unquestioning use of the Bible as the foundation for their rallying cry has proven to be a most effective force.

But could it be that the way many Christians view the Bible is ungodly? Adrian Thatcher believes that Christians today and through history have committed one of the various sins that they preach against: idolatry. In his book, *The Savage Text: the use and abuse of the Bible*, Thatcher states that believers literally worship the Bible instead of Jesus Christ. Jesus, he claims, is the “Word made flesh” as noted in John 1:14. Therefore, Jesus is the Word of God, not the Bible. Jesus is God’s self-disclosure not the actual written word. Thatcher notes that Christians have elevated the Bible to a divine status which actually rivals Jesus’ position. “The Person is replaced by the proposition: flesh by words; the Word of God by written and much-disputed, text.” (Thatcher, 4) It is this elevation that arms the Christian soldiers in the counter cultural battle with confidence in their interpretation of the Bible as ultimate truth. This is called Bibliolatry. Thatcher defines Bibliolatry:

“Bibliolatry [is] literally the worship of the Bible…by the elevation of the text of the Bible to divine status. If it is believed that the Bible is free from error, it becomes like God (who alone is to be worshipped) because God is incapable of making mistakes.” (glossary)

This elevation of the Bible has had toxic consequences for the ethics, behavior, and teachings of Christians and churches—not to mention the politics of believers throughout history. The Bible has been used to justify atrocities like the current day battle in Uganda over the law ordering life imprisonment or death for homosexuals. The basis for the proposed law is Biblical scripture. Thatcher explains the tragedy of making the Bible into a savage text:
“The savage text is not the Bible. It is what Christians have made of the Bible when they have used its pages to endorse cruelty, hatred, murder, oppression, and condemnation, often of other Christians. The savage text is what the Bible, or parts of it, becomes when it enables Christians to convert the good news of God’s revealed love in Jesus Christ into the bad news that people are the wrong color, or race, or gender, or denomination, or orientation, or religion, or class, or empire, just because they differ from the Christians who are preaching this bad news.

The savage text belongs to a “mind-set” that authorizes condemnation of any view or practice which is not that of its official or most powerful readers. When the Bible becomes a savage text, the theology that is proclaimed from is already faulty. The savage text makes hatred holy. It makes seekers after truth its jealous guardians. Perhaps the worst feature of the savage text is the divine authority it claims for its strictures” (Thatcher, 5).

The mindset Thatcher refers to here has been the theological underpinning for the culture wars against social change launched by the church. “Holy hatred” seems contradictory to the teachings of love by Jesus in the Bible. However, the term closely relates to the Christian catchphrase, “righteous anger.” This term though widely applied throughout the movement is commonly ascribed to God or Jesus. For instance in the Old Testament when God wiped out the entire population of the Earth by flood, saving only Noah, his family, and representatives of the animal species, he did so because humans had become so wicked and depraved in their relationship to him22. “Righteous anger” is often ascribed to Jesus during his cleansing of the temple in Mark. Jesus approached the holy temple and found that business was being conducted there. In a rare show of anger, Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers and other vendors declaring “My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.”23 Some Christians use examples like these to proclaim that when work is being done that is against the will of God, anger is permitted because of the affront to God and his people. These justifications serve as further confirmation to those in the Christian community who would

22 Story found in Genesis, chapters 6-9
23 Story found in Matthew 21:12–17
fight with venom against social change. In fact, “holy hatred” runs rampant through the religious factions that fuel the countercultural wars. I have heard Christians justify their rhetoric against the gay rights movement by saying that if God hates the “sin of homosexuality” so can they. This hatred, prevalent in our society today, is not a new tactic. In fact, holy hatred and righteous anger have been an omnipresent fuel to the instigation and sustaining of the historicized battles between Christian factions and movements for social change.

“Holy hatred.” “Epic battles between Christian soldiers and social change.” “Bibliolatry.” Though these terms may sound melodramatic or sensationalist, they are all documented aspects of the church’s war against social change throughout the history of America. When pressure builds and the church can fight no harder, rhetoric changes and so do belief systems. Just as antebellum churches split over the issue of slavery, so the church has begun to split today over the issue of homosexuality. These moments of crisis rise up in reaction to social change, altered Biblical interpretations, and the raising of religious rhetoric from didactic to pejorative; from inspirational to oppressive. By understanding the motivations and nuances of these historical battles, we can bring the current battle of evangelicals vs. LGBT community into sharper focus.
“You have tons of subversive stuff especially in the New Testament about God surprising the religious establishment—refusing to be put in a box. It’s like God is saying, ‘Oh you think I’m like that and this is what I do? You’re wrong, ‘cause I can also do this, and I can make it great.’ Look at Jesus’ parables—constantly subversive. God was doing unlikely, surprising things. When these parables were heard by first century ears, they were shocking! It was like “How can you say the Samaritan is good?” When I retell that parable to my students, I say ‘instead of the Samaritan, imagine like a drag queen hooker on Broad Street.’

In the same way, I always find it interesting—the passages that could be construed as homosexuality make up seven to ten possible verses in the whole Bible. Seven to ten! Yet, they are just latched upon. It’s going to take the culture to change before they let go of those—and I always think it’s so ironic, here are these people holding onto these seven to ten verses. I want to say ‘You’re missing out on this huge experience of this incredibly grand, subversive, exciting God by wanting to do this very black and white, this is right, this is wrong sort of thing.’ In my reading of the Bible, God just refuses to deal with that sort of black and white thinking.

~Dale Smith, Religion professor, Actor

Battles in History: SLAVERY

“I affirm…that Jesus Christ has not abolished slavery by a prohibitory command; and second, I affirm, he has introduced no new moral principle which can work its destruction, under the gospel dispensation; and that the principle relied on for purpose, is a fundamental principle of the Mosaic Law, under which slavery was instituted by Jehovah himself.”

This quote, by Baptist minister Thorton Stringfellow in his work Scriptural and Statistical Views in Favor of Slavery, was published in 1856 and summarized the view of many religious advocates of slavery in America. Citing the Law of Moses and the lack of intervention or prohibition by God, this preacher and others like him advocated fervently for the continued enslavement of millions of black men, women and children in the South.

On the other side, black and white, slave and free, rejected the use of scripture to tighten the shackles and inflict pain on themselves or their fellow man. Charles G. Finney, a
Presbyterian preacher, known for his highly radical views and preaching methods said the following in his *Revivals of Religion*:

“Slavery is, pre-eminently, the *sin of the church*...Let Christians of all denominations meekly but firmly come forth, and pronounce their verdict, let them clear their communions, and wash their hands of this thing, let them give forth and write on the head and front of his great abomination, SIN! And in three years, a public sentiment would be formed that would carry all before it, and there would not be a shackled slave, nor a bristling, cruel slave driver in this land.”

Noll describes Finney as “the North’s most visible promoter of evangelical Christianity” which, he notes, had by then “become the nation’s dominant expression of religion” (God and Race, 32). Finney’s abolitionist stance angered his counterparts in the South sparking a multitude of biblically based refutations of abolitionism and pro-slavery arguments. Regularly cited were Biblical encounters of slaves by Paul or Jesus. (God and Race, 33) In those encounters, neither Jesus nor Paul ever condemned slavery. Pro-slavery southerners also learned preachers and theologians, reasoned that if Jesus had thought something was wrong with slavery—surely he would have eliminated it when he saw it. Pro-slavery Christians cited the encounter in the book of Philemon where Paul instructed the runaway slave, Onesimus, to go back to his master to support their case (Noll, *Civil War*, 33). Pro-slavery Christians also looked to the Old Testament to give examples of Biblically recognized slavery such as the passage in Genesis 9:25-27 where God cursed Canaan, the Son of Ham, who had dishonored his father Noah. Genesis says that God punished all descendents of Ham by ordering them to be slaves to the descendants of his brothers.

The biblical battle over slavery raged on, as is commonly known. Pro-slavery Christians used the Bible to fire up the confederate soldiers and send them off to war, while the anti-slavery advocates encouraged those who risked their lives in the course of abolition that God was
watching over them as they did His will. How could these diametrically opposed sides be convinced that they were so right? Why wasn’t it obvious to those supporting slavery that it was contrary to the spirit of Christ? Why wasn’t the abolitionist position easier to assert?

Aren’t these questions similar to those that are asked today in regard to the LGBT community’s fight against the Religious right? Many in the LGBT community cite verses that speak of God’s love for his creation as their defense against the evangelical attack. Their assertion that regardless of what the Bible says, love is the ultimate rule, makes sense to those outside of the evangelical camp. However, inside the camp, those arguments are dismissed quickly and degraded due to their reliance on “ignoring” the scriptures that openly talk about homosexuality.

Most abolitionists cited moral judgment as the reason to oppose slavery. Noll asserts that:

“The most direct biblical attacks on slavery were ones that relied on common sense, the broadly accepted moral intuitions of American national ideology, and the weight of ‘self-evident truth.’ They were also the easiest to refute. More complicated, nuanced, and involved biblical attacks against slavery offered a more formidable opposition. But because those arguments did not feature intuition, republican instinct, and common sense readings of individual texts, they were much less effective in a public arena” (Civil War, 40).

Abolitionists, such as Jonathan Blanchard, also cited verses in the Bible which asserted the principle of the equality of men. Blanchard, a staunch abolitionist, once stated:

“Abolitionists take their stand upon the New Testament doctrine of the natural equity of man. The one-bloodism\textsuperscript{24} of human kind:--and upon those great principles of human

\textsuperscript{24} From Acts 17:26: “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”
rights, drawn from the New Testament, and announced in the American Declaration of Independence, declaring that all men have natural and inalienable rights to person, property, and the pursuit of happiness.”

There are certainly similarities to be drawn. The bottom line is that the church, especially in the South, stood up and proudly proclaimed that the Bible was on their side in supporting slavery. In fact, one of the Christian Right’s most prominent organizations, the Southern Baptist Convention was formed in 1845 as a reaction against the American Baptist Missionary Union’s refusal to appoint slaveholders as missionaries (Noll, Civil War, 36). Those who formed the SBC felt that it was against the will of God and the biblical mandate of slavery to belong to an organization that treated slave owners as a minority.

Today, I doubt you could find one American church that would echo the sentiment that slavery is a commendable institution created by God. The Southern Baptist Convention’s current statement of faith says nothing about supporting slavery and in fact recognizes the sanctity of all life saying “At the moment of conception, a new being enters the universe, a human being, a being created in God's image. This human being deserves our protection, whatever the circumstances of conception.” What caused this change? How did the rhetoric of that day turn from advocating to today’s rhetoric of abolishment? Simply stated, the commonplace interpretation of the Bible changed because the socially accepted norm changed. When the Civil War was over and slavery was abolished, the pro-slavery evangelical sect had to surrender its position in the culture war. The church had to change its stance on their “literal” interpretation of the Bible to say that they had misjudged what the verses that mention slavery really meant. The abolitionists, however, marched on.

25 http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/pssanctity.asp
The fight was far from over once the slaves were emancipated. Blacks, though freed from physical slavery, still suffered from the slave stigma well into the next century. Armed with one victory, they continued their fight on the next great battlefield: civil rights. Not surprisingly, the struggle seemed familiar as they found themselves, once again, engaged in a debate about their inherent worth as human beings—regardless of race. Their opponent? Evangelicals wielding the Bible as their justification for opposing civil rights. History, literally, began to repeat itself and with most of the same arguments that had been launched by both sides in the previous battle over slavery.

"The facilities should be separate. When God has drawn a line of distinction, we should not attempt to cross that line.... The true Negro does not want integration.... He realizes his potential is far better among his own race... integration will destroy our race eventually."

Can you guess who uttered these words in response to the Civil Rights movement? A White Supremacist, maybe? A member of the KKK? No, these words were uttered from the pulpit of Thomas Road Baptist Church located in Lynchburg, VA as part of a 1958 sermon entitled “Segregation or Integration: Which?” The preacher? A fiery young man named Jerry Falwell.26 Soon after the Supreme Court mandated the desegregation of schools in the famous Brown vs. Board of Education case, Falwell launched into action against the civil rights movement. He even “[enlisted] with J. Edgar Hoover to distribute FBI manufactured propaganda against the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and publicly denounced the 1964 Civil Rights Act as "civil wrongs."27 Falwell had not yet begun to build his political empire. At that time he was just a
preacher echoing the sentiments of many preachers throughout the South. No one could anticipate the ammunition that this man, alone, would contribute to this and other wars between the evangelicals and the initiators of social change.

The arguments for and against desegregation echoed and in many cases repeated the arguments for and against slavery. Those advocating for desegregation and the granting of civil rights to people of color often cited Frederick Douglas’ writings which gained prominence during the abolitionist movement. Douglas’ 1861 article “The Pro-Slavery Mob and the Pro-Slavery Ministry” addresses the issue of color in relation to American Christianity:

“All who at the North, we think would defend Slavery, even from the Bible, but for this color distinction...Color makes all the difference in the application of our American Christianity...The same book which is full of the Gospel of Liberty to one race, is crowded with arguments in justification of slavery of another. Those who shout and rejoice over the progress of Liberty in Italy, would mob down, pray and preach down Liberty at home as an unholy and hateful thing.”

Interestingly, those who voiced their opposition to the Civil Rights Movement focused on race as a biological factor in denying black people their rights—an argument that, in spirit, would be reversed in the evangelicals’ war against the LGBT community. Most referred back to the same Genesis passage mentioned above. Here is the full text:

“And [God] said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.”

Defenders of white supremacy often surmised that all black people are descendents of Ham and therefore are cursed and meant to be subjugated to the other races.

28 Genesis 9:25-27
This controversial interpretation and linkage of the curse of Ham to black subjugation can also be found in the history of the fundamentalist Church of the Latter Day Saints also known as the Mormon Church. Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon Church, initially supported slavery in the 1800s stating that support for slavery could be found in the sacred book, The Book of Mormon. As the 1800s wore on, Smith changed his mind even running for president in 1844 on an anti-slavery platform. During his campaign, Smith asserted that lands held by the public should be sold to free the slaves. Blacks were welcomed to become part of the congregation of the Church of the Latter Day Saints but not as members in the priesthood. This designation continued well into the 1900s as evidenced by this statement from the presidency of the Mormon Church in 1949:

“The attitude of the Church with reference to the Negroes remains as it has always stood. It is not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of direct commandment from the Lord, on which is founded the doctrine of the Church from the days of its organization, to the effect that Negroes may become members of the Church but that they are not entitled to the priesthood at the present time.”

As the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum and shape, the Mormon Church straddled the battle lines by issuing yet another statement declaring that black people were entitled to all the civil rights afforded by the U.S. constitution and Bill of Rights. The statement, written in 1958, affirmed that Black Mormons would enter the “celestial kingdom,” a distinction that had not been made up to that point in time. However, the statement furthered the conflict by mentioning that black Mormons were not guaranteed to become priests. The Mormon Church was trapped, you see, between their moral judgment and the rhetoric of their traditional

29 All historical information taken from http://www.blacklds.org/history

30 http://www.blacklds.org/history
interpretation of the Holy Book of Mormon. They were locked in the middle of the greater struggle between tradition and social pressure to change.

The Mormon Church, like many evangelical churches, continued to fight against civil rights for all people. Even after the African Americans won their rights through 1964’s Civil Rights Act, the Mormon Church still had to deal with what they saw as the only interpretation of their sacred book. That changed in 1978, when Spencer W. Kimball, the acting church prophet at the time, claimed that God had spoken to him personally through a vision and told him to change the interpretation of The Book of Mormon. Here is part of the text of his official proclamation to that end:

―[God] has heard our prayers, and by revelation has confirmed that the long-promised day has come when every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood, with power to exercise its divine authority, and enjoy with his loved ones every blessing that flows there from, including the blessings of the temple. Accordingly, all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color. Priesthood leaders are instructed to follow the policy of carefully interviewing all candidates for ordination to either the Aaronic or the Melchizedek Priesthood to insure that they meet the established standards for worthiness.

We declare with soberness that the Lord has now made known his will for the blessing of all his children throughout the earth who will hearken to the voice of his authorized servants, and prepare themselves to receive every blessing of the gospel.‖

A significant shift of rhetoric, contingent only on the word of a prophet, changed the Mormon Church forever. Though it should be noted that most evangelicals would classify Mormonism as a cult who worship a false god, they would also acknowledge the Mormons as one of the most fundamentalist, conservative religious groups in existence today. Therefore their grappling with rhetoric in light of social pressure to change mirrors that of the evangelical church throughout

[^31]: http://scriptures.lds.org/en/od/2
history and today. They have fought alongside evangelicals in almost every major culture war in American history.

Many mainline protestant churches, including the Presbyterian and Baptist churches, also experienced the breach of their rhetoric within the battle over civil rights. Consider these statistics given in Lambert’s *Religion in American Politics*:

“African Americans were virtually invisible in the marketplace of religion. In one analysis of black Protestants at the end of the Depression in 1939, 90 percent worshipped in ‘separate Negro denominations.’ Of the remaining tenth, 90 percent were part of segregated congregations. Thus only about 1 percent ‘actually gathered together with whites to worship’” (Lambert, 169).

Lambert goes on to assert that white Protestant denominations, in general, still saw and propagated the theory that blacks and whites were unequal. Martin Luther King, Jr. had hoped that the common bond of Christianity would elevate religion above race. Yet, he was disappointed, Lambert says, to find out that it was just the opposite and “race transcended religion” (169). Lambert focuses on two specific church denominations in his discussion on white Protestant contribution to racial segregation. The Southern Baptists famously furthered the white southern culture’s belief about the inequality of the black race. “Segregated worship was divinely ordained” claimed the Southern Baptists:

“After examining three studies of Southern Baptist sentiments regarding race, one commentator concluded, “’It is enough to say that Southern Baptists defended Negro degradation in the mid-twentieth century as fervently as they had Negro slavery in the mid-nineteenth’” (Lambert, 169).

*A Time* magazine article published in 1963 pictured Southern Baptists as being the “rearguard of the civil-rights battle,’ with many of them believing that ‘segregation derives from the law of God’” (Muse, 51). Yet, they weren’t the only ones. The Presbyterians also fought.
After splitting in 1861 over the issue of slavery, further infighting and splitting ensued over the extent of involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. One southern Presbyterian group famously voted in 1929 in favor of “interracial good will and understanding—after carefully segregating the Negro delegates” (Lambert, 170). The factions of the Presbyterian Church did not join together again until 1983—well after the passing of the Civil Rights Act. White protestant uprising against the granting of civil rights to the black community caused one black leader to posit “Of all the groups devoted to social uplift, I have least hope in the White Christian minister” (Lambert, 169). Ironic, isn’t it? For a religion that speaks of love and respect for fellow man to be seen as enemy number one by those fighting for their basic human rights, means that something had to have gone terribly wrong. Yet, we see the exact same mindset by some evangelicals today. The battle rages on with the same soldiers, the same type of fight, and the same perception from the opposite camp.

While it would be remiss to not mention those protestant churches in America who fought for the other side against their prejudicial counterparts, it is important to note that those churches were in the minority. In 1963, The National Council of Churches, which had a long tradition of fighting segregation, demanded that the church in America “confess her sin of omission and delay, and to move forward to witness to her essential belief that every child of God is a brother to every other” (Lambert, 180). Not surprisingly, this proclamation spurned overt backlash from Protestant conservatives. One man in particular, Reverend Carl McIntyre, a far right preacher and radio evangelist, voiced his ire by organizing the American Council of Christian churches. This organization’s creed of racial segregation enlisted over ten million members and “rallied against civil rights agitation as part of a communist plot to subvert American values” (Lambert, 180). This was certainly meant as a battle cry against segregation.
Yet, little did they know that the cry would echo for centuries. Even today, members of the far right will link the “homosexual agenda” with the overthrowing of social order and communism, evidencing the continuity of the church’s war against social change movements.

**Battles in History: INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE**

It would have been easy to assume that with the passing of the Civil Rights act in 1964 race would become less of an issue. Yes it’s true that African Americans emerged victorious in the Civil Rights conflict, yet there were still battles to be fought. Race issues still lingered and sides were chosen along party and religious lines. One such case of the continued war against social change can be found in relation to interracial marriage.

“We are an Independent, Bible-believing, family-oriented church. We stand without apology for the historical Fundamentals of the Faith.” This statement of faith, posted on the website of the Baptist church I grew up in, denotes the church’s dedication to its fundamentalist roots. I remember once when I was very young having a crush on one of the little black boys in my elementary school class. I freely admitted my newfound love to my family members who recoiled with alarm. My family quickly referenced this verse:

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?... As God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

---

32 2 Corinthians 6:14-18
It’s clear now, that the command to not be unequally yoked is followed directly by the phrase “with unbelievers” yet, that part wasn’t added to my family’s admonishment of having a crush on a black kid. In that moment, I was being taught clearly by my family who had been taught very clearly from various pulpits over the years that being linked to a black man was forbidden in the Bible. I definitely questioned this assertion but there was no room for permission in the eyes of my family. Later in life, when I briefly began seeing the same kid, now a man, and I introduced him to my family members, he felt the racist vibe so strongly that he neglected to date me after that night. Unfortunately, this story is not an isolated one. I am certainly not the only person brought up in the fundamentalist tradition who has had this verse construed in this way.

Banned in the United States until 1967, interracial marriage evidenced the lingering of stigmatized black ideology. In 1959, a multiracial couple from Virginia pled guilty to violating the state’s law against interracial marriage (Loving vs. Virginia). The couple was banned from Virginia for 25 years as punishment. The judge in the case said the following in his decision:

"Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix."33

The multiracial couple, who had pled guilty were banned them from the state of Virginia for 25 years as punishment for their marriage. The Lovings appealed the decision all the way to the Supreme Court where the conviction was finally reversed in 1967. The ruling judge wrote the following:

33 http://www.multiracial.com/government/loving.html
“There can be no doubt that restricting the freedom to marry solely because of racial classifications violates the central meaning of the Equal Protection Clause.

These statutes also deprive the Lovings of liberty without due process of law in violation of the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The freedom to marry has long been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men.

Marriage is one of the "basic civil rights of man," fundamental to our very existence and survival. To deny this fundamental freedom on so unsupportable a basis as the racial classifications embodied in these statutes, classifications so directly subversive of the principle of equality at the heart of the Fourteenth Amendment, is surely to deprive all the State's citizens of liberty without due process of law. The Fourteenth Amendment requires that the freedom of choice to marry not be restricted by invidious racial discriminations. Under our Constitution, the freedom to marry, or not marry, a person of another race resides with the individual and cannot be infringed by the State.

These convictions must be reversed. It is so ordered.”

On June 20, 1995, the Southern Baptist Convention issued a formal apology for the racist mentality under which it had been formed and for the racist mentality it had propagated. The apologetic resolution denounced racism wholly and asked for forgiveness from the African American people it had discriminated against for decades. One year later, the SBC spoke out against the continued prejudice displayed towards the mixing of races displayed by a small church in GA who had started proceedings to disinter the body of a newly buried mulatto baby from its all white cemetery. When interviewed about the situation, the baby’s maternal grandmother, Sylvia K. Leverett, reported that a deacon of the church, Logan Lewis, stated that “they don't allow half-breeds in their cemetery." When Lewis was asked if that was his mentality, he confirmed his statement saying 'that's a 100 percent white cemetery.'

---


35 [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_n21_v112/ai_17332136/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_n21_v112/ai_17332136/) Retrieved on April 12, 2010

The SBC issued a formal statement urging the church to remember that it operates under the “Lordship of Christ” stating confidently that “[Christ] has made it clear that racism in any form is the antithesis of His gospel.”\(^37\) 100 years, 50 years, even 20 years earlier, if confronted with the statement above, members of the SBC would have vehemently denied that any claim against racism in the Bible existed. Yet, they changed their rhetoric as the social context changed. As they became more educated about the origins and equity of the races, their interpretation of the Bible, once thought to be indisputable, evolved. The rhetoric completely reversed in Christian circles in the 1990s in all major cases but one.

In 1998, Bob Jones University, a strong separatist fundamentalist institution, denied a man named James Landrith admission to their university because he was married to a black woman. An official letter from the university claimed: “God has separated people for His own purpose” and that the university “is opposed to intermarriage of the races because it breaks down the barriers God has established”\(^38\) (Haynes, 3-4). This was not the first occurrence of an interracial marriage controversy at the highly conservative school. In fact, Bob Jones had, at this time, been locked into a lengthy battle with the court system over its tax exempt status as a religious institution for over a decade. An initial ruling in 1970 rescinded the university’s tax exempt status based on the fact that their policy on the non-admission of interracially married students violated the 14\(^{th}\) amendment. This battle continued through appeals until 1983 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against BJU and ordered them to revoke their policy on interracial

---


\(^38\) Ibid
marriage, or else lose their tax exempt status. BJU refused and paid a million dollars in back taxes.  

In March of 2000, amid a drop in annual fundraising and pressure from President George W. Bush, BJU dropped its policy against interracial marriage. Later in 2008, the university apologized for its previously racial policies admitting:

“We failed to accurately represent the Lord and to fulfill the commandment to love others as ourselves. For these failures we are profoundly sorry. Though no known antagonism toward minorities or expressions of racism on a personal level have ever been tolerated on our campus, we allowed institutional policies to remain in place that were racially hurtful.”

Contrast this statement with the one written ten years earlier in the letter to Landrith and ask the question “Why?” BJU claimed no divine revelation as the Mormon Church did. No explanation was given. The president of BJU at the time was Stephen Jones, the great grandson of founder Bob Jones. Could it be that simply time, a new generation, a new context wore away at the staunchly held beliefs of these institutions? If so, will the church’s rejection of the LGBT community one day be an afterthought? A moment in history eroded by the enlightenment that time brings to the issue? Will the LGBT community be able to look back one day at the war it waged for its rights and see the change in rhetoric of the church?

Battles in History: WOMEN’S RIGHTS

The Women’s Rights movement has seen and been engaged in all of the above conflicts between Christianity and social change. From its birth during the Abolitionist movement to its
rise as a public force for change through the Feminist movement of the 20th century, women’s rights have been intertwined with movements advocating freedom. Women who worked beside men and slaves for their freedom learned quickly that many of the same people who supported the oppression of the slaves supported their oppression as well. In fact, Davis asserts that the “very concept of freedom was a consequence of slavery” (6). Women, immersed in the fight against slavery and the forwarding of freedom regardless of race, realized that “in striving to strike [the slaves’] irons off, we found most surely that we were manacled ourselves” (Anderson, 122). Women looked around them and realized the rights that the slaves were being denied, were rights they were denied as well. As Davis notes:

“Increasingly, femal abolitionists underscored the fact that married women could not own property, make contracts, bring suits, or sit on juries. They could be legally beaten by their husband and were required at any moment to submit to their husbands’ sexual demands” (11).

Replace the word “husband(s)” with “master(s)” and the similarity between the women’s rights movement and the anti-slavery movement is apparent. This comparison had been drawn years before the abolitionist movement, during the French Revolution when reformers remarked on the similarity between “chattel slavery and the subordinate position of women” (Davis, 11).

Women grasped onto these similarities and fought hard for their own rights alongside abolitionists but found discrimination and disappointment even within their own societal circles. For instance, the abolitionist males neglected to add women’s rights to the 14th and 15th amendments even when prodded by female advocates (Davis, 15). Women also found themselves fighting against other women who represented the pervasive Southern, religious attitude of subordination on the basis of natural order. Louisa McCord, for one, invoked God and socialism in her rhetoric against the women’s rights movement. Though she admitted that
women did not receive equal treatment, she asserted that “the women’s rights movement, antislavery, and economic protectionism all revealed the creeping influence of European socialism in the United states” (Davis, 13). In regards to abolitionism she stated: “[Abolitionism was] a hideous deformity of vice…gibbering out of its horrible obsenitites of ‘socialism’ and ‘communism,’ drags upon its track a shouting mob, who in their ravings for ‘negro abolition’ and ‘universal equality’ trample under foot God’s law and man’s law.” McCord’s rhetoric took a downward turn into mockery when she addressed the plan of women to ride the wave of emancipation with the slaves: “Follow close, ladies. The door of privilege is open pretty wide for the admission of Cuffee. Should he get in, surely you might follow…Mounted on Cuffee’s shoulders, in rides the lady” (Fox-Genovese, 242-289).

Pro-slavery, anti-women’s suffrage movements echoed both of McCord’s sentiments often citing God’s law or order as a justification for comparing women, even white women, to slaves. This trend continued into the 1900s with women finally gaining the right to vote in 1920. Women, though they could vote, battled through the 1900s to decry the concept of submission and subordination that many religious sources tried to use to oppress them. I believe the struggle for women’s rights and affirmation as equal to man is ongoing, even today. Even though the Equal Pay Act of 1963 was passed to ensure that women were paid equal wages in the workplace, this legislation did not achieve full equality. It was strengthened in 2009 with the passing of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. New legislation has been introduced in the House in 2010 called the Paycheck Fairness Act which is aimed to deter wage discrimination by closing loopholes in the EPA and barring retaliation against workers who disclose their wages. The bill

41 "Cuffee" was a derogatory term for black men used in the slavery period.
also allows women to receive the same remedies for sex-based pay discrimination that are currently available to those subject to discrimination based on race and national origin. In America, women fight against stereotypes in the political realm but in the Christian home many are still fighting for their equality. This battle rages on today and evidences yet another area of changing rhetoric within the church.

Though there has been progress, women’s rights are often still attacked within the evangelical realm. Let’s start with some of the oldest perceptions of women in the light of religion:

"What is the difference whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any woman.....I fail to see what use woman can be to man, if one excludes the function of bearing children." St. Augustine (354 to 430 CE)

"As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from a defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence." St. Thomas Aquinas (1225 to 1274)

"If they [women] become tired or even die, that does not matter. Let them die in childbirth, that's why they are there." –Martin Luther (1483-1546)

The church, as a whole, has come a long way in its recognition of the value and roles of women. However, many churches remain stuck in outdated thinking and misapplication of interpretations of Biblical scriptures in this area.

Where does it start? I think most Christians would say “Genesis.” The first book in the Bible tells the story of the temptation of Eve, the first woman ever created. As the story goes, Eve, hungry for power and knowledge, allows herself to be deceived by an evil serpent who convinces her that the mandates God has levied for Eve and her husband Adam in the garden of
Eden are selfishly motivated. God does not want his human creation to know as much as he knows or to have more power than what he has given them. Eve then makes the choice to disobey God’s command and causes “the fall of man.” What does this mean? That all of mankind will be born separated from God by their sin, and in need of a mediator to draw close to God. God’s consequence for Eve was: “To the woman [God] said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

This is the first mention of men “ruling’ over women in the Bible and in this context, it seems as if it is a punishment for Eve’s choice. However, the very creation of Eve in Genesis 2, lays the foundation for the multi-centennial view of women as subject to man. The Bible states that Eve was created as a “suitable helper” for Adam. God took a rib out of Adam’s chest and made Eve from that rib.

These texts, in addition to countless stories in the Old Testament of women being treated as property or being a nameless one among a concubine of 100 helped to form the once-prevalent and still enduring sentiment that the Bible clearly defines women as subject to men. And, just as in slavery and civil rights days where biblical lessons against defying or disobeying were amplified as an attempt to keep slaves and blacks in “their places” so these passages and others like them have been used since the inception of Christianity to do the same thing for women.

“As long as the husband is following the mandate of the Lord, the wife should submit to his leadership even though she may disagree with it. God’s standard is true. Yet in many marriages, the wife is more able than her husband. Regretfully a woman with great abilities sometimes marries a man who does not have much ability. This wife must resist the temptation to dominate her husband. Her husband will sometimes make decisions that

42 Genesis 3
43 Genesis 2:18-25
the wife feels are wrong. She must either gently persuade her husband or pray that God will change her husband's mind.”

—Pat Robertson

In the above quote, Robertson references “God’s standard.” This belief that God’s standard is female submission to her husband comes from Ephesians 5:22:

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”

This verse alone has been the scriptural bane of the feminist movement in America for centuries. Though the passage goes on to say that men must love their wives, little attention is paid to the instructions for men in this passage by some fundamentalists groups and more emphasis is placed on the word “submit” just as the word “rule” is singled out in the Genesis passage from above. The concept that a woman’s only role is in the home raising the children and keeping the house straight for her man has been fought against for centuries.

In the 1950s only 18% of women who had children under the age of the 18 worked outside of the home. By the 1980s the percentage was 54% (McElroy, 102). What happened to shift the paradigm so quickly? In the 1970s, at the height of the second wave of feminism the book “The Total Woman” was the nonfiction bestseller, selling over 10 million copies. The author Marabel Morgan existed as the very antithesis of feminism and advocated total submission by women to their men according to the principles of evangelical Christianity. In the book, Morgan insists that it is the woman’s job to keep her husband from being bored, to keep him stimulated by wearing makeup, and to sacrifice herself for her husband’s many needs.

---

44 The 700 Club, July 27, 1995

The book even suggests ways to look more attractive and adventurous to your man. The now famous scene from *Fried Green Tomatoes* where Kathy Bates attempts to wrap her naked body in saran wrap to seduce a man is the direct result of the Morgan’s suggestion to do so in *The Total Woman*. Here’s is just one passage of the many that I could quote from this book as an illustration of the non-feminist nature of *The Total Woman*: “It is only when a woman surrenders her life to her husband, reveres and worships him, and is willing to serve him, that she becomes really beautiful to him. She becomes a priceless jewel, the glory of femininity, his queen” (Morgan, 80).

Morgan’s book was, no doubt, heralded by the male constituency of Christianity at the time. Her views towards women, though not as prevalent in secular society, still exist in some form within the modern church. Consider this quote from one of our favorite Religious Righters, Pat Robertson: “I know this is painful for the ladies to hear, but if you get married, you have accepted the headship of a man, your husband. Christ is the head of the household and the husband is the head of the wife, and that's the way it is, period.” 46

The propagation of this mentality does not come just from these men, notorious for their strict views but also from the Southern Baptist Convention which currently states the following about women in ministry:

“Women participate equally with men in the priesthood of all believers. Their role is crucial, their wisdom, grace and commitment exemplary. Women are an integral part of our Southern Baptist boards, faculties, mission teams, writer pools, and professional staffs. We affirm and celebrate their Great Commission impact. While Scripture teaches that a woman’s role is not identical to that of men in every respect, and that pastoral leadership is assigned to men, it also teaches that women are equal in value to men.” 47

46 700 Club, January 8, 1992

47 http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/pswomen.asp Retrieved 4/2/10
This statement represents a kind of evolved view of women by the Christian Right. It is an admission of the “equality” of women and of their value and ability to the Christian community. However, it stops just short of granting women the right to take hold of the role of pastoral leadership. Does this sound familiar? Just as the Mormon Church welcomed black congregants and stated their value to the church, it levied a similar restriction. Utilizing this kind of granting of rights with one major restriction is deft rhetoric in action. The SBC still refuses to let go of the patriarchal nature of the Baptist church where men are elevated and women are not, just as the Mormon Church refused to let go of the white purity of its clergy.

Other denominations have changed their rhetoric in response to social pressure and enlightenment just as churches changed in relation to slavery and interracial marriage. Despite this statement in 1920: “‘The Church must frankly acknowledge..that it has undervalued and neglected the gifts of women and has too thanklessly used their work,’” (Meyer, 241) the Episcopalian church was stalwart in their desire to keep women out of higher offices within the church. For example, Episcopal Bishop C. Kilmer Myers asserted that since Jesus was male, women could not be ordained, echoing the sentiment of the Episcopalian church in the 1970s. Since bishops represent the “face of Jesus” to the congregation, many Episcopalians questioned the ability of women to accurately reflect the face of a male deity (Daly, 4). For years, the progress stalled on that question. Women were ordained as bishops but were done so with the disclaimer that the theological objections that had been raised were valid. However in 1997, a resolution was passed within the Episcopalian church that read:

“No member of this Church shall be denied access to the ordination process, postulancy, candidacy, ordination, license to officiate in a Diocese, a call to a cure in a Diocese or Letters Dimissory on account of their sex or their theological views on the ordination of
women. No member of this Church shall be denied a place in the life and governance of this Church on account of their sex or their theological views on the ordination of women;”

The resolution acts as yet another example of radically changing rhetoric within the realm of the Church. Myer’s reservations were biblically based and endured for decades, however, this view changed.

The question is “Can it happen again?” Can the adamant positions of the church, fortified by favorable scriptural interpretation, change with regard to homosexuality? I submit that they can. In fact, in the next section I will provide you with concrete evidence of rhetoric that is already being changed by the church in relation to homosexuals. You have just read the account of social battle after social battle being fought in the name of God. In each case, where the rhetoric changed it did so totally. Churches weren’t saying that slavery was wrong despite what scripture said. No, churches admitted over and over again that they had interpreted the scriptures wrong. As a recovering fundamentalist, I certainly struggle to picture Rick Warren or Pat Robertson confessing one day that they have had a revelation and that God has spoken to them that members of the LGBT community should be recognized as a full member of the family of God. I imagine that many of the people who suffered through these battles felt the same way despite this history.

CHAPTER THREE:
PERFECT ENEMIES

Today’s battlefield, much like the ones described above, did not evolve overnight. For years these two communities have clashed and collided leaving a bloody trail of conflict and pent up frustration. Politically, the tensions between the gay community and the religious community have been characterized by turmoil, violence, misunderstanding, and rejection. Attempts at forging inroads for understanding are often undermined by the extremists of each group and the hateful tone of the rhetoric launched back and forth between these two entities—much the same as the previous cultural battles. What many who take sides on this issue do not realize is that this battle has been mutually effective to both sides involved. As Gallagher and Bull describe in their book, “Perfect Enemies: The Battle between the Religious Right and the Gay Movement”:

“Religious conservatives and gay activists have become perfect enemies, propelling each other’s movement and affecting the politics of the country as a whole… Unfortunately the bitterness of the fight has done little to shed light on either side. Slanderous, unsupported charges, especially from the religious right, and characterizations have come to replace civil discourse…The emphasis is on scoring points, on winning at all costs, without respect for the other side or even for the truth. As some leaders on both sides have discovered, it is easiest to raise money when your opponent is demonized out of all recognition” (Gallagher and Bull, xiv-xv).

Religious leaders have used the issue of homosexuality to build an empire and to rally the troops towards unity by presenting a united front against those who, in the church’s opinion, choose this dark sin and threaten the moral fabric of America. As more and more people have stepped forward out of the closet, their treatment by some members of the church has served as powerful glue to bond gay people together with one another and against those who use religion to batter and discriminate. Church communities insisting that homosexuality is a choice and a perversion are being answered by accusations of intolerance and an assertion of the innate nature
of homosexuality from the gay community. Though it’s difficult to say that the LGBT community has benefitted from being discriminated against, the fact is that the gay rights movement has been able to grow and gain support from outside of the gay community because it has such a staunch enemy in the Religious Right. Others, especially those outside of the Christian community at large, willingly became allies of the gay community because of the atrocities handed out by the extremists of the Religious Right. To understand the complicated relationship between these two groups fully, it is essential to first know who is doing the fighting in today’s battle.

**God’s Enforcers: The Religious Right**

No doubt you ask yourselves who believes the obviously manipulative rhetoric shown above by the Traditional Values Coalition. The answer is found on TVC’s website in the section entitled “About TVC”: “TVC speaks on behalf of over 43,000 churches bridging racial and socio-economic barriers and includes most Christian denominations.” In the grand scheme of things, 43,000 churches may not seem like a big deal or a cause for concern. However, the TVC is more than just a rogue religious group spreading its influence out among other believers in the Christian faith. It exists as part of a powerful lobby in Washington, D.C.: The”Christian Right” part of the more widely defined “Religious Right.”

The Christian Right exists as:

“an interlocking group of organizations which emerged in the late 1970s in response to widespread dissatisfaction with the perceived erosion of traditional mores and values. Like other preservationist movements, the [Christian Right] has attempted to imbue public policy with what it describes as "traditional values” (Wald, 2).

49 [http://www.traditionalvalues.org/about.php](http://www.traditionalvalues.org/about.php)
The Religious Right includes the Christian Right and other people and organizations “from a wide variety of conservative theological beliefs, ranging from traditional movements within Baptist, Mormon, and Calvinist organizations to theologically conservative groups within Lutheranism, Calvinism and Catholicism. Religious Right can refer to any religiously motivated conservative movement, whether specific to one religion or shared across religious lines.”

Groups ranging from Focus on the Family’s Family Research Council, to Exodus International (the world’s largest Christian ex-gay ministry) to the Moral Majority (founded by the Rev. Jerry Falwell) and the Christian Coalition (founded by Pat Robertson) and even the Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormon church) compose part of what has become a major player in the political scene of the 21st century.

Though these organizations locate themselves in various places along the spectrum of religious beliefs, they have united over the years to fight political issues in the name of God and moral virtue. The issue of choice in the last two decades has most definitely been civil rights for the LGBT community. In 2008, the battle in California over Proposition 8, which clearly defined marriage as being between one man and one woman, exists as the most prominent example in recent history. Groups from the Religious Right literally broke the bank in funding the fight in California to overturn the ruling which gave same-sex couples the right to marry—even if the organizations had no financial or ministerial claim in California.

50 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_right

51 The terms “Religious Right” and “Christian Right” are often used interchangeably. However, whereas the Religious Right incorporates other conservative religions besides Christianity, the Christian Right generally refers to the portion of the Religious Right made up of ONLY Christian organizations. Just to confuse you further, the Christian right can also be called the “Evangelical Right.” There will be explanation of these terms later in the text.
Focus on the Family reportedly spent over $500,000 to fight Prop 8, famously sending the organization into a financial tail spin resulting in the laying off of over 200 workers. The American Family Association, whose self-stated goal is “to motivate and equip citizens to change the culture to reflect Biblical truth and traditional values,” also donated $500,000. Another major denominational church, the Mormon Church, also fortified the fight against gay marriage in California significantly. Their actual monetary contribution varies from site to site, but they are estimated to have contributed anywhere from 40% to 75% of the 36 million dollars raised in California during the “Yes-on-8” campaign and 80-90% of the campaign’s volunteer workforce. Concerned Women for American founded by Beverly LaHaye, whose husband Tim LaHaye co-founded the Christian Coalition with Pat Robertson and co-authored the famous “Left Behind” series, placed itself in the top 12 contributors to the Proposition 8 campaign by giving $409,000.

Why are these organizations moved to, not only step into the political realm, but to contribute their money and manpower on such a large scale to fortify a political campaign and one, that in many cases, did not occur in the state where the organizations are located or where their members solely reside? The simple answer is that the groups that make up the Religious Right share a common belief that the same moral code they live by and teach to their congregations should be the adopted moral code of America society as a whole. In order to further this objective, organizations within the Religious Right fight the battles to preserve this

---


54 [http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/churchstate/2236/when_mormons_mobilize:_anti-gay_prop_8_effort_%E2%80%98outed%E2%80%99](http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/churchstate/2236/when_mormons_mobilize:_anti-gay_prop_8_effort_%E2%80%98outed%E2%80%99)
moral code wherever they need to be fought, as evidenced by the battle for Proposition 8 in California.

"The founding document of the United States of America acknowledges the Lordship of Jesus Christ because we are a Christian nation." --Pat Robertson

Paramount to the motivation of the RR is the underlying belief that America needs to return to its founding principles. Because America has strayed so far from the foundational Christian principles upon which it was established, the RR feels that it should step outside of its traditional ministerial role and exchange its hymnbooks for political literature; its sermons for political orations and its sacraments for petitions and other lobbying tools. One of the chief arguments against religious involvement in the political arena comes from Thomas Jefferson’s concept of the separation of church and state. However, most argue separation of church and state does not even exist as it is not specifically mentioned in the constitution. In addition, applications of this concept often circumvent the clearly stated principle of “freedom of religion.” Many famous Religious Righters have spoken publicly on this subject:

“Yes, religion and politics do mix. America is a Nation based on biblical principles. Christian values dominate our government. The test of those values is in the Bible. Politicians who do not use the Bible to guide their public and private lives do not belong in office.” 55 Tim LaHaye

A sentiment that echoes Rev. Jerry Falwell’s ideological belief that: “The idea that religion and politics don’t mix was invented by the Devil to keep Christians from running their own country.”

Many people who oppose the work of the Right assert that this insistence that America’s founding principles were Biblical is erroneous. Mark Noll, in his book “God and Race in

55 This quote as well as the donation amounts were taken from: http://www.californiansagainsthate.com/dishonor-roll/
American Politics” explains that he thinks this assertion came to be because of some key miscalculations made by the Founders of America. One miscalculation, according to Noll was “to think that removing the national government from the religion business would make religion a noncontroversial factor in national political life” (Noll, God and Race, 28). At the time of the writing of the first amendment only Virginia and Rhode Island were operating under a system of total separation of church and state where “government...posed no religious conditions for participation in public life” (Noll, God and Race, 28). The Founders’ purpose in instituting the ban on the establishment of religion in America seemed to be to circumvent the intense conflicts which had taken place in other parts of the world due to the government-established churches. Noll asserts that the Founders could never have anticipated the type of religion which would take hold in America yielding another miscalculation by the Founders.

“Moderate and conservative Founders hoped for the continual influence of the churches that had either been established in the colonies (Congregationalists…Episcopalians) or quasi-established (Presbyterians). They expected these churches to act as sources of order, decorum, and social control. By contrast, progressive Founders, like Thomas Jefferson, hoped for the spread of enlightenment faiths that more closely resembled deism than traditional Christianity” (29).

Thomas Jefferson even went so far as to (wrongly) predict that in 1822 that Unitarianism would become the “general religion of the U.S.” 56 Noll claims that the Founders completely misjudged the potential onslaught of the evangelical sect of Christianity characterized by aggressive pursuit of “personal transformation [and ]…a desire to exert informal influence in society” (29). This aggressive pursuit produced religious followers at a rate that doubled the exploding population of the U.S. Here are some statistics Noll uses to illustrate this explosion of religion in response to the new freedom given by the Constitution:

---

56 Can be found in Jefferson’s Extracts from the Gospels. Ed. Dickinson W. Adams.
“In 1790 [before the Bill of Rights was written] there existed less than a thousand Methodist churches; by 1860 there were almost twenty thousand...Baptists grew from under a thousand churches to more than twelve thousand; Disciples/Christians leapt from zero to over two thousand...The census of 1860 found that more than 95% of the places of worship enumerated for the whole country were Protestant” (30).

This explosion, fueled by the freedom of religion guaranteed in the first amendment of the constitution, utilized the democratic principles that were now granted to citizens of the United States to rapidly outnumber their non-religious counterparts. In doing this, these aggressive religious groups took the freedom meant to exclude a theocracy and instead, created and helped to form a national identity in hopes of a theocracy. It is that lop-sided identity establishment that the Religious Right believes qualifies America as a “Christian Nation” though the Founders never intended or anticipated it as such (30).

These events directly correlate to the dedication of the Religious Right to participate in policy development and to lobby the government for a return to Christian values in the U.S.

A Co-Mingled History

The church has long condemned the act of homosexuality. Dating all the way back to Biblical times and the writings of the Apostle Paul, Christians have declared homosexuality as unnatural and perverted. But the church was not alone in its condemnation. For most of America’s history, the church, science, and society at large all believed that homosexuality should be classified as a perversion. Working together, these three entities endeavored to construct the confines of the virtual “closet” which served many purposes. First, it kept gay people separate from the rest of society by the fear of rejection and discrimination. Second, it

57 Britannica Concise Encyclopedia defines “theocracy” as “Government by divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided. In many theocracies, government leaders are members of the clergy, and the state's legal system is based on religious law.”
was successful in garnering support from outside influences in pressuring gay people to stay separate and live their lives in secret—out of the public eye. In essence the closet was constructed by the powerhouses of societal influence to instigate the virtual segregation of the LGBT community.

This segregation was easily implemented because of the massive support of the religious, scientific and societal institutions. The history of the endeavor by homosexual people to bring the view of homosexuality about of the closet and into mainstream thought against these institutions evidences many successes but mostly defeats until the end of the 20th century. However, the history is fascinating and worth a brief outline here.

The first known use of the concept of “heterosexual” occurred in 1892 in the Chicago Medical Recorder. In 1895, Oscar Wilde, the openly homosexual playwright was tried and convicted of “gross indecency” and sentenced to two years of hard labor in a British prison. Being gay in those days was not only illegal but subversive. In 1905, Freud published his seminal work Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality in which he discussed his theory of the origins of homosexuality. The term “transvestite” and “transsexual” were introduced in 1910 and 1923 respectively by Magnus Hirschfeld, a German homosexual rights pioneer. The first short fiction to be defined as gay literature was written and published by Richard Bruce Nugent, a Harlem Renaissance writer. In 1930, one year after the Great Depression began, the Hollywood Production Code was ratified. This code specifically banned the use of any homosexual material or references in film. Fast forward to the year 1950 to the “Lavendar Scare” episode when 91 state department employees were fired because their sexuality defined them as security risks.
This, of course, occurred during the reign of Joe McCarthy’s communist witch hunt and is perhaps the first major event erroneously linking communism to homosexuality.

Political and scientific rhetoric intensified in the 1950s and 60s marked by the decision of the American Psychological Association (APA) to classify homosexuality as a “sociopathic personality disturbance” in its first DSM. One year later, Eisenhower signed Executive Order 10450 which designated that federal employees can be legally fired for being gay. Hollywood turned more “gay-friendly” in 1961 by revising its code to allow depictions of homosexuals in film. In 1964, the same year that the Civil Rights Act was ratified the first picket and protest for gay rights occurred at a U.S. Army induction center in New York. The nation’s gay community found their voice in 1967 with the first publication of The Advocate (the same year that the Virginia interracial couple was tried and convicted of breaking VA’s law against the mixing of races). The APA, always a huge player in society’s view of the homosexual community, changed its description of homosexuality to a “non-psychotic mental disorder” in 1968 (Eaklor, xxxi-xxix).

Everything changed in the year 1969: the year of Woodstock, the founding of the first homosexual activist group, and the year of the Stonewall riots. The Gay Liberation Movement became galvanized by the events at Stonewall, where police raided a gay bar in New York and the gay patrons of the bar stood up and fought the police off. This event was the birth of the gay rights movement. Suddenly there was an explosion of advocacy from the LGBT community. Universities began to integrate gay studies’ programs, first in Nebraska (1970) then in California (1972). Gay rights thrust itself into the consciousness of the American people aided considerably by the other major movement of the time: feminism. Yet not originally. N.O.W.
(National Organization for Women) shares an ambiguous history with the gay rights movement. Wanting to keep women’s rights separate from gay rights (in hopes of a faster attainment), the New York Chapter famously kicked all lesbians out in 1970. Two years later, N.O.W recognized “the oppression of lesbians as a legitimate concern of feminism.” This integration of causes made both movements easy fodder for the Religious Right (Eaklor, xxxi-xxix).

From that point on, the gay rights movement went through overhaul after overhaul and suffered thru many seasons of disorganization and political failures, mostly at the hands of the Christian Right. Groups such as the Gay Liberation Front (formed in NY immediately after the Stonewall riots) and Gay Activists' Alliance stepped to the forefront and actively petitioned the gay community to be out and proud and the public to see gay people as normal and non-threatening. The Gay Liberation Movement struggled to find a voice and an impacting political presence for their goal of sexual liberation. However, it did give birth to the modern day Gay Rights Movement in the mids 70s. Suddenly the focus of these groups was not liberation but reform and the acquisition of rights. Their resistance to the widespread imposition of so called religious values to their private lives was a steady constant in their movement.

**New Weapons. New Warriors.**

The 1970s served as a fertile time for the would-be Religious Right as well. In fact, many say that the Religious Right, as it is today, was born in 1976. That was the year that a popular Baptist preacher from Lynchburg, VA travelled around the country doing rallies titled “I love America.” Falwell’s motivation for going out and reaching the religious masses was a reaction to what he saw as the decay in American values evidenced in the rise of the gay rights and feminist movements. Falwell declared that the days of separation of church and state were
over and urged Christians to stand up and get involved politically to fight the forces of evil threatening to erode America’s Christian foundation (Liebman and Wuthnow, 55-57). Falwell contended that America was sliding down a “slippery slope” of immorality and it was up to Christians to fight for their values. The Moral Majority dramatically became the strongest organized political force representing core Christian values. Its success relied on Falwell’s exceptional skill at fundraising and the seasoned leaders he surrounded himself with. Among the critical issues lobbied against by the Moral Majority were the Equal Rights Amendment, homosexuals’ right to be recognized and accepted, and censorship of television stations, radio stations and other media that promoted anything but traditional family values as outlined in the Bible. Falwell lead the Majority for most of its existence and, in doing so, dealt the gay rights movement a huge blow. The 1970s also saw the addition of a completely different kind of weapon to the Religious Right’s arsenal. The emergence of groups such as Exodus International and Love Won Out ministries strained the tensions between these communities even further.

Ex-gay ministries, like Exodus International, sprang up and multiplied, offering transformation and freedom to those within the church that wanted to exchange their sexual identity for their identity in Christ. Their claim that those who have been entrenched in the homosexual lifestyle can walk free and even participate in “normal” heterosexual relationships, both boosted the confidence of the church and infuriated gay Christians. Once a contributing, devoted sect of the church and now exiled to the periphery, like the lepers of Biblical times, gay Christians had been basing their contravention of the church on the assertion that homosexuality wasn’t a choice but an innate part of their identity.

The public proclamation of ex-gay men and women willing to come forward and declare their choice to walk in their religious identity and apart from homosexuality changed the playing
field dramatically between the church and the gay community. Ex-gay success stories became the most potent ammunition in combating the claims of gay people everywhere that their sexuality was not a choice. Their thinking was that if people are able to overcome their struggle with homosexuality and live a normal heterosexual lifestyle, then all people should choose to do so as a heterosexual lifestyle aligns itself with the Word of God. Suddenly, political allies formed for and against homosexuality characterized by intense fervor and heightened negative rhetoric.

**AIDS and the 80s**

In the 80s with the onset of the AIDS epidemic, the focus of gay rights’ groups became education while still fighting off the oppressive voice of judgment of the Religious Right on the members of their community suffering with the disease.

The movement finally found its voice and gained power around the 1992 presidential election. Just as the Religious Right had been rapidly gaining strength and momentum by its denunciation of the “homosexual lifestyle,” the gay rights activists had been gaining strength by characterizing all Christians as hypocrites and by decrying their judgment of AIDS sufferers as inhumane.

“Though their financial resources and number of supporters were dwarfed by those of the religious right, gay activists had become darlings of the media, routinely garnering positive coverage for the first time in the movement’s history. Gays and lesbians had become a central, though still controversial, constituency within the Democratic Party. For the gay movement and the religious right, the obscurity of the late 1960s and early 1970s found their recompense in the visibility of the 1990s” (Gallagher and Bull, 3).

---

58 Ex-gay ministries will be explained in more detail later in the text
“AIDS is not just God's punishment for homosexuals; it is God's punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals.” ~ Rev. Jerry Falwell

The Moral Majority dissolved in 1987, after mobilizing millions of Christians throughout the country to put Ronald Reagan, a conservative Christian, in the White House. Lack of financial contributions led to the end of Falwell’s official reign as the pre-eminent preacher turned politician. He posited that many didn’t feel the need to contribute after watching their values be reinstated through Reagan’s presidency (Liebman and Wuthnow, 55-57). Falwell verbalized that sentiment in 1989 when he boasted: “Our goal has been achieved…The religious right is solidly in place and…religious conservatives in America are now in for the duration” (Allitt, 158). Though the Majority was gone, Falwell remained active in the political scene and watched the rise of the next powerful Christian political organization.

"It is interesting, that termites don't build things, and the great builders of our nation almost to a man have been Christians, because Christians have the desire to build something. He is motivated by love of man and God, so he builds. The people who have come into [our] institutions are primarily termites. They are into destroying institutions that have been built by Christians, whether it is universities, governments, our own traditions, that we have.... The termites are in charge now, and that is not the way it ought to be, and the time has arrived for a godly fumigation.”

-- Pat Robertson, New York Magazine, August 18, 1986

The Christian Right found its next figurehead in Pat Robertson, a well-known Christian broadcaster and political insider. Robertson competed for and failed to secure the republican presidential nomination in 1988. But Robertson, like Falwell had political savvy. As he garnered support for his nomination, Robertson accumulated contact information for millions of conservative Christians. Once his nomination bid failed, Robertson turned that group into the
Christian Coalition. The CC began to establish itself then as a tour de force for political education and recruitment for the Christian Right. Its self description is:

“A political organization, made up of pro-family Americans who care deeply about ensuring that government serves to strengthen and preserve, rather than threaten, our families and our values. To that end, we work continuously to identify, educate and mobilize Christians for effective political action.”59

Listing one of its main objectives as advocating a “pro-family agenda,” the Christian Coalition, with Robertson at the helm declared literal war on the gay community. Armed with the AIDS outbreak as ammunition, Robertson utilized fear-inducing rhetoric about the spread of AIDS to solidify his base of supporters. 60 And he did so unabashedly:

"I have known few homosexuals who did not practice their tendencies. Such people are sinning against God and will lead to the ultimate destruction of the family and our nation. I am unalterably opposed to such things, and will do everything I can to restrict the freedom of these people to spread their contagious infection to the youth of this nation."

American evangelicals were convinced that they were under attack and that their children were going to be recruited by AIDS infested homosexuals so they bonded together and stepped up into a roll of active politicism. Robertson proved that his coalition had staying power by actively leading it for the next decade.

The Gay Agenda and the 90s

As the years progressed and opposition to Robertson mounted, he carefully crafted his rhetoric to ensure that he remain the voice of Christianity in the U.S. One such implemented

59 http://www.cc.org/about_us Retrieved on 4/14/10

60 You can read more interesting information about Robertson in David John Marley’s book, Pat Robertson: An American Life.
rhetorical skill was turning the tables on the “victim” cry of feminism and the gay rights
movement. By turning American Christians, their way of life, and their values into victims of
the aggressive, immoral, evil forces for social change, Robertson and his coalition became the
catalyst for the polarization and mobilization of the Religious Right against both of those
movements. Though the victim mentality was new, Robertson’s employment of fear was not:

"Just like what Nazi Germany did to the Jews, so liberal America is now doing to the
evangelical Christians. It's no different. It is the same thing. It is happening all over again.
It is the Democratic Congress, the liberal-based media and the homosexuals who want to
destroy the Christians. Wholesale abuse and discrimination and the worst bigotry directed
toward any group in America today. More terrible than anything suffered by any minority
in history."

--Pat Robertson, Interview with Molly Ivins, Fort Worth Star-Telegram,
September 14, 1993

In the ‘90s, Christian fundamentalist groups like Falwell’s Moral Majority, Robertson’s
Christian Coalition, and Dobson’s Family Research Council (FRC) proudly denounced the
immoral behavior of homosexuals, classified their identity as a lifestyle and evoked emotion by
boiling down sexual identity to the sexual act, making it not only detestable but avoidable. They
went one step further though when, in 1992, Dobson’s Family Research Council coined the term
“the gay agenda” in an effort to solidify the Christian Right’s support through the instigation of
fear. FRC distributed a video with the same name in which Paul Cameron, a founding father but
now excommunicated member of ex-gay ministries stated erroneous and highly inflammatory
untruths such as “75 percent of gay men regularly ingest feces and that 70-78 percent has had a
sexually transmitted disease” (Herman, 78). The Christian Right, realizing that they had an
opportunity to strengthen and expand their base of support released three other videos in the
name of education to further characterize gay people as a threat. These videos were *The Gay
Agenda in Public Education* (1993), *The Gay Agenda: March on Washington* (1993) and
Dobson, in his book “Marriage Under Fire,” details the siege of American morality at the hand of the LGBT community and their goal driven agenda:

"Those goals include universal acceptance of the gay lifestyle, discrediting of scriptures that condemn homosexuality, muzzling of the clergy and Christian media, granting of special privileges and rights in the law, overturning laws prohibiting pedophilia, indoctrinating children and future generations through public education, and securing all the legal benefits of marriage for any two or more people who claim to have homosexual tendencies."

Suddenly, instead of fighting for the recognition of their sexuality and granting of rights on all fronts, gay people were depicted as focused attackers out to compromise the moral standards of conservative America, overhaul education, and recruit children to the gay lifestyle. These rhetorical efforts combined for a one/two punch with Exodus International’s success stories. A common thread among these testimonies was that gay people are miserable, conflicted lost souls consumed by their substance abuse filled attempts at living in denial about the sinful nature of their lifestyles. Gay people are empty souls choosing to abandon their faith because their shame prevents them from living in the presence of God while engaging in the gay sexual lifestyle. This widespread, generic characterization of members of the LGBT community became key in forming weapons against them. By painting all gay people as lost, lonely, tortured souls the Christian media appealed to the compulsion, ingrained into its members by Christianity, to help sinners draw close to the heart of God. Using this type of characterized rhetoric also made it easier for the Church to dismiss the demands of the LGBT community for recognition and acceptance.
The War Over LGBT Civil Rights

“Here’s the nub of the issue: You’re saying what’s keeping you from having these civil rights, civil union rights, is all of the votes of the religious right who oppose what you do and who you are, and you’d say is that justified? It’s not fair. But from the standpoint of a Christian, to acknowledge and grant, and say okay the same rights that are a tenant to marriage should be extended to the gay union is to make a vote for approval of the lifestyle. It would be hypocritical to say that God’s Word says no, but we’re gonna accommodate. See – that’s where the rub is, to vote in favor of those kinds of rights would be to condone something that we’re teaching is not right. It is contrary to the Word of God.

You could say that obviously the Christian community wants to see a social order and political system that’s faith-friendly and pro-faith. I wouldn’t say that the primary concern of the church should be to manipulate the political process, but at the same time, we are called to stand for the truth. When the political system wants to take a direction that’s opposed to the truth, we have to stand. You’re trying to impose your view, and we’re trying to impose our view, so we’re the same. You see? We’re the same in that we’re both proposing something, but we’re not the same in that we’re both right. It’s no longer politically correct to insist that a point of view is right and another point of view is wrong. I don’t have that problem. I don’t need to be politically correct.”

~~Darren, orthodox Christian, fundamentalist pastor

The LGBT community hoped that they had successfully helped to elect an ally to their cause when Bill Clinton stepped into the presidency in 1992. Clinton and his wife Hilary openly supported gay rights initiatives and reached out to the LGBT community during his presidential campaign. However, Clinton’s years in office would result in a series of steps forward and back for the gay community:

“After Clinton left office in 2001 GLBT Americans, like many others, continued to have mixed feelings about him and his legacy. He had publicly courted and supported GLBT groups more than any previous president, had appointed openly gay and lesbian people to federal positions, and had declared June 1999 (and again in 2000) Gay and Lesbian Pride Month; but he also had an uneven record delivering on this and other causes” (Eaklor, 212).

Clinton’s uneven record included the passing of the “Don’t Ask. Don’t Tell,” the military policy aimed at preventing witch hunts for LGBT service members. Though Clinton may have
meant this policy to recognize the value of LGBT service members it, in effect, served only to deepen and affirm the virtual closet that gay members of the armed forces already operated within. Worse still, the conservatives won the majority in the Congress during the midterm elections of 1994. Conservatives quickly introduced legislation called “Contract with America” that advocated a very narrow definition of the family within a section entitled “Family Reinforcement.” The bill partially passed along other provisions against the welfare system and Clinton willingly signed it into law (Eaklor, 211-212). Little did Clinton know that DADT and narrow definitions of marriage would become the subject of passionate debate and advocacy that dominates our political scene today. Clinton’s mixed legacy also directly contributed to the other hot button issue of today: same sex marriage.

In 2010, LGBT couples lack over 1000 legal benefits automatically given to heterosexual, legally recognized marriages. The struggle for these rights serves as the intersection for the most brutal encounters in today’s battle. Gay marriage leapt to the forefront of America’s consciousness in 1983 with the well-publicized and tragic case of lesbian partners Sharon Kowalski and Karen Thompson. Kowalski became disabled after a horrific car accident caused by a drunk driver which left her without the ability to speak or move. Thompson, Kowalski’s partner for over four years, rushed to the hospital to find that because she had no legal rights to Sharon she was not entitled to any information about her condition. Thompson begged to know whether her partner was dead or alive but the hospital would not inform her. Desperate, Thompson “came out” to Kowalski’s parents and begged to see her partner:

“The Kowalskis responded that Karen was a crazy woman and was never to see their daughter again. At that point Karen saw an attorney, only to learn that she had no legal
rights as far as Sharon was concerned. The Kowalskis sued for guardianship, claiming that Karen was just Sharon's landlady and that their daughter was not a lesbian.”

Next, the Kowalskis moved their daughter to a treatment facility far away from Thompson and denied her access to her partner. Sharon Kowalski eventually gained the ability to communicate through typing on a keyboard. She repeatedly asserted that she wanted Thompson as her legal guardian and NOT her parents. None of this mattered though in a court system that did not recognize the relationship between Thompson and Kowalski as anything deserving of basic human rights privileges. Thompson engaged in a legal battle with Sharon’s father until she finally won guardianship in 1991, eight years after the car accident (Eaklor, 185-186). Thompson made this statement in an article published in “On the Issues Magazine” in 1987:

"I've had the blinders ripped off. I can no longer live in my little isolated world and go to work and then, after work, live my own personal life and nobody knows me. I was very non-issue oriented. But once you do have the blinders taken off. You see oppression in one area, then you start to see oppression all around you. And it's almost overwhelming. Now, I not only see what homophobia does to people and how it can be used against them, but also I can make the tie to racism, sexism, ageism, the disabled - it's all connected. And I didn't know that before ... I'm a totally different person now and I'll never be able to go back to the person that I was."

The article, written before she won custody, speaks of the enormous amount of legal debt Thompson accumulated during the fight. She admits being weary but states: “If Sharon and I don't fight this, then how many others will have to experience it because we didn't? It's got to stop somewhere.”

Thompson had no way of knowing how protracted this particular battle would be. Maybe Clinton, whose policy choices seemed to be more geared to holding on to his presidency than anything else, didn’t realize it either. In response to court decisions in Hawaii and Vermont


62 Ibid
leading to sanctioned same sex marriage, the conservative Congress introduced The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in the mid nineties. Conservatives, seeing the trend in Hawaii and Vermont, felt that Congress should “go on the record” with their anti gay marriage stance to prevent any kind of federal legislation in the future which would grant the same rights.

“Essentially, the act defined federal marriage as between a man and a woman, and authorized states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states” (Eaklor, 215).

DOMA accomplished much more than that in spirit. The evangelical Christian community rejoiced (and continues to rejoice) in DOMA’s potential introduction of Biblically based definition of marriage as between “one man and one woman” into law.

As Congress debated the fate of DOMA it simultaneously debated ENDA (the act referred to above in the TVC email) for the first time. LGBT activists campaigned fervently for the federal protection from employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. On September 10, 1996, Congress passed DOMA while defeating ENDA. The final vote to defeat ENDA? 50 votes for defeat; 49 votes to pass it. On that single day in history, the LGBT community endured a slap in the face with a simultaneous punch in the gut. Clinton signed DOMA into law in 1996 and endured such a backlash that he issued an Executive order in 1998 prohibiting antigay discrimination by the federal government (Eaklor, 216). ENDA, as we know, continues to be reintroduced year after year and is often seen as the next plausible victory for the LGBT community.

As gay activists pressed harder to obtain the right to marry their loved ones, the Christian Right found a new fervor in defending what they believed to be an all out attack on the sacred spiritual covenant of heterosexual marriage. The battles that have ensued over the term “marriage,” what it means, who has the right to enter into it, and who needs to defend it have
been epic in recent days. Most noticeably, the battle over Proposition 8 in the 2008 election, spurned bitter rhetoric from both groups towards each other. Christians who wanted to protect hetero marriage were termed homophobic and quickly became labeled as “hate-mongers.” Gay people fighting for their right to marry were quickly labeled as deviants bent on destroying a sacred covenant, turning girls into lesbians, and throwing the balance of world procreation out of whack.

With the renewed fight for and against same sex marriage a shift in public support and acceptance has grown from years past. A recent Newsweek poll found that “in 2004, people were evenly divided on the question, with 47 percent favoring a constitutional amendment prohibiting gay marriage and 45 percent opposing one. In the latest poll, however, 52 percent oppose a ban and only 43 percent favor one.”

However, an overwhelming majority of evangelicals still believe homosexuality itself is wrong. In fact a recent USA Today poll found that 64% of evangelicals believe that homosexuality should be “discouraged” by society. 64 Using statistics such as these, some gay rights activists continue to characterize all Christians as judgmental, hypocritical, hate-mongers intent on dictating the rights and choices of private citizens according to their own moral and religious standard.

As the battle over gay marriage intensifies in the political realm, so do the tensions between the gay community and the evangelical community. The rhetoric spewed by both the religious representatives and the representatives of the gay communities on blogs, TV, and other forms of media has reached a new level of ire and has continued to feed the scorn, rejection, and


pain surrounding this subject by both camps. As a result of these events and events that have transpired through the last four decades, the chasm of division has deepened between these groups. Often, their opposing positions are built on stereotypes and wide erroneous assumption about the motives and character of members of both camps—these errors have turned what could have been a healthy dialogue of difference into a hotly debated gridlock. As gay activists ask “why must the church hypocritically perpetuate hatred of a people group?” evangelicals wonder “Why do homosexuals continue to choose sin and flaunt it in the face of society?” However, we need to be asking a different set of questions.

In light of history and of the severely fought battles of today, we need to be asking if change is possible and, if it is, how? The battle lines are clearly drawn. Each army seems impervious not only to change, but to the very mention of it. Neither will surrender because both believe that their positions are undeniably correct. The LGBT community stands in defiant resistance asserting their legitimacy, their authenticity, and their right to be recognized. The evangelical Christians stand unyielding and oftentimes arrogant because they feel they have God on their side. Is it possible that this decade long battle with all of its pent up hatred, and list of wrongs done and atrocities committed, will defy history and remain deadlocked? Could this be an isolated unique struggle, invulnerable to change?

My confident answer is “no!” This battle has followed the traditional path of the other battles discussed in history. The anger expressed by the LGBT community does not outweigh the ire of the slaves fighting to be freed of Biblically imposed chains. The stubborn commitment to winning rights for the LGBT community does not surmount that of the African American commitment for the same. The LGBT assertion that the church wrongly and savagely manipulates Scripture to support their position on pertinent cultural issues is no louder or
stronger than that of the women who, for centuries, have maintained their assault on errant Biblically based oppression. The conditions for the battle are the same. Two questions remains: “Are the tactics used in this battle similar to those used previously?” and “Do the effects of these tactics signal a coming change?” I hope to answer these questions, not by my words, but through the words of those who have fought alongside me and those we have opposed.
CHAPTER FOUR:
SAME TACTICS—DIFFERENT WAR

Rhetoric as a weapon is designed to persuade and affect those at which it is aimed. We have already seen much evidence of rhetoric being used in this manner throughout the battles of history and today. Yet rhetoric has a sinister side as well. Kenneth Burke defined “rhetoric” in the following ways:

"The use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other human agents"

"The use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (*Rhetoric of Motives*, 41)

Used in the course of Christianity’s counter cultural battles, rhetoric supports stereotypes, clarifies (or invents) who the enemy is, and dehumanizes that enemy. In essence leaders of both movements scream rhetoric as a battle cry to rally the troops together against a vilified enemy. Several tactics in the deployment of rhetoric weave a common thread thru the historical battles discussed previously and today’s battle between evangelicals and the LGBT community. By evidencing their varied forms and application to the issues at hand, we can gain even further insight to the similarity of today’s struggle with struggles of the past. The excerpts included here are derived from my interviews with people from all sides of this issue.
Tactic #1:

NATION DOMINATION/OVERHAUL OF ENTIRE SOCIAL ORDER

Consider the words of Martin Luther King, Jr in the midst of the Civil Rights struggle:

“The Church can help by showing that Negroes do not want to dominate the Nation. They simply want the right to live as first-class citizens, with all the responsibilities that good citizenship entails. The Church can help by showing that the continual outcry of inter-marriage is a tragic distortion of the real issue. It can show that the Negro’s primary aim is to be the white man’s brother and not his brother in law. Many Churchmen are already aware of these things, but the truth is so widely distorted by the hate groups that it needs to be reiterated over and over again.” (King, 220)

This quote confronts the church about one of its most popular rhetorical strategies: The threat of nation domination and a wholesale change in social order. In the Civil Rights era, the church employed this strategy to convince those that aligned with their anti-civil rights stance that if blacks were granted rights—they would try to take over the nation and mess up the balance of pure race procreation. All of these claims were false, of course, because those struggling for civil rights were doing just that. They were not seeking such a change and were not planning a social takeover. Yet, that truth did not change the effective nature of the strategy, nor does it today. Consider the following quote from Pat Robertson:

“If the widespread practice of homosexuality will bring about the destruction of your nation, if it will bring about terrorist bombs, if it'll bring about earthquakes, tornadoes and possibly a meteor, it isn't necessarily something we ought to open our arms to.”

-- The 700 Club television program, August 6, 1998

Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson used the threat of nation domination most deftly. Even though their reign as the religious leaders of the day has passed, nation domination continues to be interwoven in the RR battle cry against the LGBT community. Today we find less articulation of the actual threat by mainstream evangelicals and an evolution of the concept into a perceived
threat that the LGBT community wishes to hijack the social order in favor of their agenda.

Here’s Darren again.

“[Same sex marriage] is a frontal assault on the order that God has established. See, think about this – you and I live in a time when we knew the before and the after, but let’s assume that today every state in the union adopted a constitutional amendment to permit gay marriage. My children’s children, your children, that’s all they’ll know. They’ll know that the institution of marriage is pretty much an agreement to live with another person, sex doesn’t matter, just preference. What they’re going to be deprived of is an understanding of God’s relationship to His people that He intended them to have. That we have removed that from their experience.”

–Darren, Orthodox Christian, fundamentalist pastor

When Darren speaks about the “order that God has established” he is speaking of the previously mentioned passage in Ephesians 5 where Paul states a woman must submit to a man. The passage also states that man should love the woman as “Christ loves the church.” Darren’s asserts that if this order is disrupted by a woman loving a woman, for instance, that God’s mandated order for relationships will be obliterated. This sentiment was also echoed by Kristin, a leader in Exodus International, when she explained why members of Exodus go to lobby legislators each year against same sex marriage rights.

“We go to general assembly every year and it is very political. And what we do is- just by virtue of being there and standing up at a committee meeting -we’re making a political statement. In a sense what we’re saying is, ‘You really don’t have any right to change the book of order on this issue, because this is not a civil rights issue. This is not a race issue. We are not denying people their civil rights as if they were Black, or a woman, or anything like that’.

This is an issue of sexual morality that has always been a huge issue in the church. One of the first counsels in the church, this is in the book of Acts, one of the first times the churches got together in a counsel they were debating over circumcision. Should Gentiles be circumcised? And so they went through this whole thing. They sent a letter to all the churches. It basically said, ‘To become a Christian you do not have to be circumcised… to be a Christian. However you must follow these things…” and one of them was sexual morality.”
Christians believe that God established a social order which included, among other things, a design for marriage between one man and one woman. So, when they say that they believe ratifying gay marriage would disturb the entire social order of the planet, they mean it. Their fundamentalism does not allow them to see that the social order would be amended and not change completely. Heterosexual marriage would remain the same. Christian marriage would remain the same. To most same sex marriage activists in the LGBT community, gaining their right to marry their partner has nothing to do with the religious perception of marriage. However, it is ironic that evangelicals stand so strongly on the “one man/one woman” rhetorical stance. The Bible in multiple places, including in Jesus’ time, illustrates marriage as between one man and many women. Polygamy was prevalent throughout the Bible. Yet, there is little mention of this during the “one man + one woman = God’s definition for marriage and social order” defense.

Why do people within the Christian community believe that the introduction of same sex marriage would change the entire social order? Why are they afraid of change and why do they fight it with such vengeance in this area? Kris, a non-denominational pastor who opposes gay marriage explained this fear and compulsion to fight.

“When you take away a culture’s ethic, it causes them to be confused. In American life, you have some people that are actually trying to hold onto an ethic and you have those that are trying to redefine an ethic so they’ve said, ‘Who cares what the ethic is? Let’s just write a new one.’

The Church wrestles with a standard of righteousness. And I wish that their wrestling was a desire to have righteousness really reign in their life. But oftentimes, that’s not the case. More than they would want to admit, they’re struggling with losing popularity. There was a time and place in American culture where the Christian ethic was a dominant ethic. And there was no question, everyone knew that was the ethic. Even the people that ignored the ethic-- there was no question that they were ignoring the ethic but the ethic wasn’t being challenged. That’s where the compulsive need comes in is, ‘Okay, we gotta figure out what the ethic will be.’
So they feel stuck. That’s that whole ‘Culture is slipping away from us.’ There’s this sense of ‘Oh no, for the name of righteousness’ sake, we need to hold onto a standard.

And they’re wrestling more with American culture—there’s this panic. I always just tell them, ‘Do you have an ethic? Do you know where you stand?’ If you know where you stand, take a deep breath and relax.”

**Tactic #2.**

**Using the Exception of the Few to Fight the Reality of the Many**

Marabel Morgan is just one example of the traditional, conservative women showcased by the RR to fight off the forces of feminism. A woman, with all the knowledge and experience of those women who were fighting so intensely to win their freedom from the male patriarchal system, was the perfect enemy. Morgan, by advocating a life of submission and living to please your man rather than a life of empowerment wounded feminists at the core of their convictions. Remember Louisa McCord and her taunting of colonial women’s rights advocates? In both cases, the conservative groups fighting against social change pointed to these women and women like them as justification for not supporting the movement for women’s rights. If these women would choose not to be liberated, then surely those that demand liberation must be mislead, deceived.

The ex-gay movement operates in the same way for those who oppose civil rights for gay people. However, the movement did not begin as a political weapon and many within the movement would deny that it is a political movement today. In 1976, leaders of several religiously based ministries focused on helping those entrenched in homosexuality find a better
way of life through Jesus, met in California. The groups reached out to those who reject their same sex attraction and wanted to learn to be “healed” of it. Kent Philpott, who headed one such group called Love in Action, wrote several books clearly outlining the ministerial philosophy and religious basis for early ex-gay ministries. Philpott’s book, *The Third Sex*, disputes that homosexuality is an innate identity:

“There is no third sex! For many reasons…men and women have exchanged the truth about God for a lie and have become homosexual. Homosexuality is a choice, a choice to be and do what was not intended….The simple conclusion is that there is no such thing as a bisexual or homosexual according to God’s order. Both distortions of original sexuality exist for the same reason man hid from God in paradise—rebellion.” (Philpott, 172-173)

By insisting that homosexuality is a choice, Philpott laid the groundwork for developing a ministry to help gay people choose to not be gay. Philpott, who along with Frank Worthen ran Love in Action, asserted that a balanced regimen of religion and counseling could free any homosexual. Tanya Erzen, who spent over a year at Love in Action as part of her research for her doctoral dissertation outlined Philpott and Worthen’s approach this way: “Homosexuals could change not through counseling alone but through a relationship with God. It was the failure to achieve this relationship that triggered sexual falls.” (Erzen, 28)

Exodus International, which gets its name from the story of Moses leading captives out of the wilderness and into freedom, was originally named “Free All Gays,” according to Erzen. However, after the ministry leaders realized what the acronym would be, the name Exodus was chosen instead. (Erzen, 33) The ministry’s original mission statement from the 1976 formation until 2001 read as follows:

---

65 The Book of Exodus
“EXODUS is an international Christian effort to reach homosexuals and lesbians. EXODUS upholds God’s standard of righteousness and holiness, which declares that homosexuality is a sin and affirms HIS love and redemptive power to recreate the individual. It is the goal of EXODUS International to communicate this message to the Church, to the gay community, and to society.” (Erzen, 33/Davies, 19)

Exodus groups maintain the position that change was possible if the person trying to change had enough faith they could successfully supplant their sexual identity with their religious identity. Attendees were encouraged to lead a strictly celibate lifestyle (no sexual contact of any kind with the same sex and no masturbation) while waiting for their orientation change through faith. Most of the founders of Exodus were ex-gays themselves and found the “gay lifestyle” to be lonely and promiscuous. Exodus was founded to try and help those who wanted to come out of homosexuality. To this day, Exodus ministries do not recruit people to their programs, contrary to popular belief in the LGBT community.

Soon after its establishment, Exodus met with significant controversy as many of its leaders left the ministry because they could not live up to the standards of sacrifice that Exodus deemed essential to finding freedom. In what has become ex-gay lore, in 1979, one of Exodus’ founders, Michael Bussee and his ex-gay associate Gary Cooper, set out to visit a church in Virginia to speak about Exodus’ mission and success. Somewhere between California and Virginia the men confessed their longstanding hidden love for each other. Instead of delivering the speech that the Virginia church expected, they advocated change in the church’s policy towards homosexuals and maintained that there should be a movement of understanding and
acceptance. (Erzen, 34) The two men left their wives and remained partnered until 1991 when Cooper died of AIDS related sickness. Bussee wrote the following in 1990:

“After dealing with hundreds of gay people, I never met one who went from gay to straight. Even if you manage to alter someone’s sexual behavior, you cannot change his or her true sexual orientation. If you got them away from the Christian limelight and asked them, ‘Honestly now, are you saying that you are no longer homosexual and you are now heterosexually oriented?’ Not one person said ‘Yes, I am actually now heterosexual.’” (Bussee via Erzen, 35)

Orientation change, for most people, is not a logical goal, however behavioral change is. But there are those few who claim to have experienced an orientation change as well and though they are in the minority, their stories are highly publicized.

In the course of my research I travelled to Exodus’ headquarters in Orlando, FL and interviewed Randy Thomas, Exodus’ Vice President. Randy, a former homosexual, does claim that he has experienced a change in his sexuality:

“I didn’t come here because I was hiding from anything. I was out and proud and I was actually afraid of religion and churches. I’m not in denial. I honestly believe what I’m doing here, and I honestly want to do what I want to do. I don’t have to hide behind anything, and if you ask some of those people on the far right, they know that I don’t play around. I’m not hiding from anyone. I wasn’t in the closet when I was gay; I’m not in a closet now when I’m not.

I haven’t had a complete change of my sexuality. My goal was to be content in Christ. I have had a change in sexuality, a very strong significant one, but that’s not the barometer of my healing or journey or goal. I was never ashamed of being gay when I was gay. I don’t have to be ashamed of that changing in my life.

I was 100 percent gay, I used to tell people in the gay community the only woman I was attracted to was Janet Jackson, and that’s ‘cause I wanted to be in the video with all those other male dancers.

---

Exodus has grown to encompass 236 local ministries in America and Canada.\(^{68}\)

Advocating the formation of a religious identity to replace a sexual identity along with participation in reparative therapy, Exodus boasts huge successes in the ex-gay world. But what kind of success rates do they really offer? In 2007, two professors Mark Yarhouse and Stanton Jones set out to try to obtain verifiable data about the success of Exodus ministries. The result was ““Ex-Gays?”: A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change In Sexual Orientation” published by Intervarsity Press, you can find the link below.\(^{69}\) Here is a summary of what they found:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15% “Success: Conversion”</td>
<td>Subjects who reported that they felt their change to be successful, and who reported substantial reductions in homosexual attraction and substantial conversion to heterosexual attraction and functioning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23% “Success: Chastity”</td>
<td>These were subjects who reported that they felt their change to be successful, and who reported homosexual attraction to be present only incidentally or in a way that does not seem to bring about distress, allowing them to live happily without overt sexual activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29% “Continuing”</td>
<td>These persons may have experienced modest decreases in homosexual attraction, but were not satisfied with their degree of change and remained committed to the change process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15% “Non-Response”</td>
<td>These persons had experienced no significant sexual orientation change. These subjects had not given up on the change process, but may be confused or conflicted about which direction to turn next.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4% “Failure: Confused”</td>
<td>These persons had experienced no significant sexual orientation change and had given up on the change process but without yet embracing gay identity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{68}\) [http://www.exodusinternational.org/content/category/6/24/57/](http://www.exodusinternational.org/content/category/6/24/57/) Retrieved 4/18/10

These persons had clearly given up on the change process and embraced gay identity.

This report also claimed that attempts to change one’s identity were not harmful.

Whether reparation therapy is harmful is a hotly contested statement by the ex-gay movement’s opponents and by the American Psychological Association. The APA released a report in 2007 which identified reparative therapy as harmful: “efforts to change sexual orientation are unlikely to be successful and involve some risk of harm.”70 However, in 2009, the APA revised their stance once again by stating “it is ethical -- and can be beneficial -- for counselors to help some clients reject gay or lesbian attractions.”71 The APA went on to establish guidelines asserting that:

“The therapist must make clear that homosexuality doesn't signal a mental or emotional disorder. The counselor must advise clients that gay men and women can lead happy and healthy lives, and emphasize that there is no evidence therapy can change sexual orientation.

But if the client still believes that affirming his same-sex attractions would be sinful or destructive to his faith, psychologists can help him construct an identity that rejects the power of those attractions. That might require living celibately, learning to deflect sexual impulses or framing a life of struggle as an opportunity to grow closer to God.” 72

Exodus International sent out a celebratory email when the new APA guidelines were published claiming a victory for the validity of the movement. In the early years, Exodus served as a touchstone for the RR in refuting the validity of the gay rights movement, yet it played a passive role. Once Exodus began to speak out politically, it became a powerful weapon in the hand of the Religious Right. With the support of testimonials from Exodus and advocacy from

70 http://www.apa.org/topics/sexuality/index.aspx#cantherapychange  Retrieved on 4/18/10
71 http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124950491516608883.html#MARK  Retrieved on 4/18/10
72 Ibid
Exodus’ leadership, the Religious Right effectively construed the gay community’s claim of innate homosexuality as unfounded and contrived.

I interviewed four separate leaders in the Exodus International organization: Randy Thomas, Kristin Tremba, whose ministry One by One partners with Exodus in equipping churches to help those struggling with homosexuality, and two other local leaders of Exodus chapters who chose to remain nameless. As an ex-ex gay, I entered all of these interviews with a slight chip on my shoulder; however, I was quickly reminded that the spirit of these ministries, to me, is not as villainous as they may seem. I was also reminded that like me, those who come to these ministries for help, come because they WANT change. My contention and one that I discussed with each leader was that when Exodus aligned itself politically, it created enemies in the very community it was trying to help and garnered its horrific reputation in the LGBT community. By aligning itself against the LGBT community and with the Religious Right, it had become easy to vilify the entire ex-gay movement.

“I agree with you somewhat. I think the key, for me, is honest dialogue and how you treat me. In other words, if I’m going to align myself in some way with a conservative cause politically I have to be really careful about that and I have to be able to talk to people about what my motivations are.

[Local ex-gay ministry] always says, ‘Stay out of politics because this is ministry.’ So, for the most part I do. You know, I’ll get calls, ‘Will you come down. We’re doing something for the legislature, would you come down and speak on behalf…’ and I say no, I will not do that because it sets me up in a oppositional position to people who I care about, and who someday might, for any reason, even if it’s not about same sex attraction need to come in the door of my ministry for something. If they see me as their opponent they’re not going to do that.”

--Director, ex-gay ministry on the east coast
Randy Thomas, too, admitted that aligning himself and Exodus politically had produced some negative views of ex-gay ministries in the past.

“There are several people on the far right who do not like me, who think I’m too soft. We’ve argued about how I think that some on the far right stigmatize the gay community that I was a part of, that I love. There are some people who are not my fans over there, but you will never see that. I wish I knew at 20 what I know now. I wish I knew in 2003 and 04, when I was testifying in Massachusetts and on Capitol Hill, because I would have been a lot more comprehensive in how I got my views out there. Like when I went and lobbied on Capitol Hill against hate crimes, it got reported that Exodus was on Capitol Hill lobbying against hate crimes.

What people didn’t hear was me in a senator’s office saying, ‘Okay, I was beaten and had guns pulled on me when I was a gay man outside of gay bars on separate occasions, and I know that there is homophobia in Donaldson, Tennessee, cause that’s where I got the crap beaten out of me, that’s where the cops ignored me.’ I was saying, ‘Homophobia is out there, but it’s not a Federal case.’

I said ‘What you need to do is, instead of passing bad hate crimes legislation, is find a respected, civil, gay leader, yourself, a person like myself or a respected conservative Christian, and have a town hall meeting to address it.’ But that doesn’t get reported on CNN.”

Kristin Tremba strongly defended the right of ex-gay groups to participate in the struggle against gay rights groups but also showed a balance in perspective.

“We were up on Capitol Hill a few years ago saying, ‘Hey, here are our stories. It’s possible.’ And clients should have self-determination on what they want to do and the church shouldn’t be barred from speaking out.

I think the reason that we have to speak up and say, ‘Change is possible’ is because the world is saying it’s not possible. That you’re born that way; that it’s just like being right-handed, or having blue eyes. It’s just impossible to change; therefore we must instill these basic legislations like for gay marriage and everything else. And we’re saying, ‘No, it is not an inevitable reality for everyone- that you’re born that way.’

And, we’re here to say that we don’t believe that you are. We believe that across the board. Not just for me, but also for all of you. We have every right to proclaim that Jesus can free us from that. And even as Believers we may differ.
But we also believe firmly, that we live in a free society and that you have every right to be gay and celebrate it if you want."

“Every right to be gay and celebrate it if you want” sounds foreign when juxtaposed to how ex-gay ministries are portrayed in the media and by ex-participants. The ire of some of those who have gone through these ministries and come out with excess baggage instead of freedom was obvious in the responses to my online survey.⁷³

**Question: What do you think of Ex-gay Ministries?**

“Harmful, toxic cesspools that are deceiving, lying and harming people and their families.”

“They are a complete sham.”

“Abusive. Uneducated, with the inability to understand and grasp God's love for ALL people. In a sense, they are contributing to the already high suicide rates in gay youth especially. I would never support these groups and would do all I can to try to stop them from harming anymore people.”

“I feel that they are doing what they are being led to do. I believe that it is rather haughty of them to think they know better than God what is right. I believe they continue to enforce the self-loathing that society and organized religion has tried to dictate as a way of controlling the masses for their own gain which ultimately causes more problems than it solves.”

“All an ex-gay ministry is a collection of people that are too afraid to embrace their homosexuality and desire so badly to be “included” that they are prepared to lead a sham life. Unfortunately the church, capitalizes on that fear to press its own anti-gay agendas.”

The last response touches on an important subject. Why are people motivated to attend an ex-gay ministry and to put themselves through these rigorous, emotionally draining programs? One reason, as hinted at above, is because people, like myself, who grew up in the church community, served in it, and centered their entire life in church face being completely

---

⁷³ Because of the nature of my survey on same sex attraction, 95% of my participants chose to omit identifying information and remain completely anonymous.
ostracized once they admit that they are gay. Unfortunately for some churches, the ex-gay program functions, essentially, like probation. If a person still classifies themselves as “struggling with homosexuality” and proves their desire to change through dedication to God, those people are welcome to stay on as full-fledged (though cautiously regarded) members of the church community. The ex-gay membership is a triage, a safe zone of sorts. Many Christians with same sex attraction choose to stay in that safe place because they can work towards negotiating within themselves and within the church, a life that is both pleasing to God, addresses their attraction and retains their membership within the Christian community. These people choose to live celibately because even though it denies their sexuality, they believe it pleases God. Yet many other ex-gay Christians, like those I interviewed, truly seek to be free from their same sex attraction and are willing to do whatever it takes to be free. These people often choose to date the opposite sex and try to marry heterosexually. Within the LGBT community, ex-gay ministries can spark a fiery conversation punctuated by anger and resentment because to them it seems cruel to counsel someone to be anything other than who they truly are. I found the answers about ex-gay ministries to be the most emotionally charged responses in my online survey.

**Question: What is your opinion of ex-gay ministries? (cont’d)**

“I hate to be so blunt and lose all my credibility as a somewhat nice and well spoken person, but... they're faggots.”

“What the heck is "ex-gay"? Can you be ex-human? Can you be ex-live?”

“Awesome! It is wonderful to know I am not alone. These ministries have met a need that churches were not equipped to do. A great resource for churches. I am victorious because they gave me the tools needed to walk with God.”
“The journey kept me locked down in who i really am and i tried to date men because that was normal and the ideal. i failed miserably and did not date anyone for years. i felt less-than.”

“Evil. I know their hearts are in the right place, but the damage they do to people is untold. Not only to the people involved, but their families (the parents are told it's their fault) and the unwitting people these ex-gays end up marrying (it's a fake marriage to someone who will never love them the way they deserve to be loved, and a perversion of true marriage). I think it's one of the worst things the church is doing today.”

“The [ex-gay program] taught me to flee from my feelings. It taught me to shut up my initial thoughts and fight through the "temptation". It put a stain on what could have been so pure. I found that it's "cure" was only temporary. I felt like a failure when I realized my same-sex attraction was not gone. I resorted back to internalizing everything until it all came to a head in my long-term relationship with the last boy I was with. I caused him a ton of heart ache because of it.”

“[Ex-gay programs] are important, essential for change! These programs affect me positively and continuously. Forgiveness is essential! God is forgiving! I have learned the importance of my forgiving others. Jesus blood covers it all. And The Holy Spirit guides me in all areas I let him. I was deeply suicidal. I do know I would not be in church or alive if it weren’t for this [ex-gay] program and the people around it.”

The entries above evidence the strong negative and positive emotion of those who have gone thru or have observed others go through an ex-gay ministry. To evangelicals the positive stories of success justify the church’s allegiance to the political forces endeavoring to stop the gay rights movement. The negative stories serve to feed their constant perception that the LGBT are angry, biased people in denial of their own sin. To the LGBT community the positive stories incense anger and confirm their bias that every “ex-gay success story” represents a brain washed individual in denial of their homosexuality. The negative stories feed their constant perception that ex-gay ministries are torture chambers run by homophobes. And so, the rhetoric plays out and the battle intensifies.
Exodus grows bigger each year and as it grows continues to exhibit testimonials of real identity change. Their focus on identity perception as a means of changing one’s thoughts and actions dominates their ministerial philosophy.

“The identity is one of the things I talk about. What is our primary identity? We are created as image bearers of God that has to be our first identity as a believer. If I have feelings of attractions, those are feelings I have. Help! But are they my identity?

It’s only been 150 years where sexuality has begun to be labeled as identity vs. discussed as behavior. It’s very interesting. Something you do vs. something you are. If I take on a label that this is who I am, then that creates a filter of this is what I do. As opposed to ‘I do these things but it’s not necessarily who I am.’ That label leads to the shaming many times. The child who spills the grape juice is shamed…” look at what you have done, you can’t do anything right, you are such a slob” vs. ‘Oh look it spilled, let’s clean it up.’ Is it behaviors that you’ve done that can be addressed or is it that you are flawed/defective?

We identify our identity as image bearers. That’s the identity that we work with. We don’t label anybody, if someone chooses to label themselves—they are doing that.”

—Anonymous Exodus ex-gay leader

I interviewed 13 people who attend an Exodus based ministry on the east coast. Each of them came into the interviewing room with a fake name and asked me to strike any kind of identifying information that they accidentally revealed during the course of the interviews. Person after person shared their story of captivity and unhappiness within the gay community and their journey to freedom through their faith and Exodus. They used the same language showing me that, for better or for worse, rhetoric plays an important role in unifying the ex-gay community as well. For instance they all described going through the ex-gay program as “open-heart surgery” or “a good pain.” Each carefully outlined their struggle for identity and their happiness since identifying as God’s child and not as “gay.” None of them claimed to be completely healed yet, most offered that their attractions for others of the same sex have
diminished significantly. Many were married and had had multiple children at the time I was interviewing them. Many of them were single and still had faith that they would develop attractions to the opposite sex. A few felt called by God to be celibate. None of them had positive things to say about their time “in the lifestyle.” And yet, every single one answered “Yes” or “Absolutely” when I asked them this question: “If you didn’t feel that the Bible prohibited homosexuality would you be living as a gay man or woman?” I was shocked by the wholesale affirmative responses to that question. Whereas, at the beginning of my time with them, I had been labeling them as “in denial” or “misguided,” by the end I was both sad and full of respect. Believing that God condemned a significant portion of their natural inclinations, these people did make a choice. They weighed what they thought to be their viable options and chose to give them a try. Choosing to replace their sexual identity with a religious identity—being centered on Christ—these folks walk a difficult path. That was the choice they made. Those from the RR like to state and restate that homosexual orientation, in itself, is a choice. But it seemed to me, that the choice being made here was NOT to be gay or, more specifically, not to act gay. Most leaders of ex-gay ministries, if they have integrity, will inform their participants that in order to make this transition, it’s important to “white knuckle it” through the early years of abstaining from homosexual activity. The following is an actual story told to me by an ex-gay leader, about Gene Chase, a member of Exodus International and teacher at Messiah Bible College. His story serves as a clear example of “white knuckling it”:

“At my first Exodus conference, I heard a man give his testimony. He had experienced homosexual feelings and behaviors but made a commitment of pressing through. He was

---

74 A common reference made within ex-gay circles meaning the gay lifestyle. I used to say it myself.
committed to a heterosexual relationship. Married this woman, had children….he said physiologically it took him several years for his biology to catch up with his heart and his head.

He said the thing that happened in their lovemaking, is that in the early stages in their marriage, he could not provide any of the ‘lubrication.’ It took 5 years into the marriage but he said ‘my body caught up with my heart and my head.’

He was telling this story of how he was going to a debate when the big scare of AIDS had come out and it was bad. His wife stopped him and said ‘Gene, are you going to prove them wrong, to prove yourself right or are you going to present some things for them to consider? If you are doing the first you’ve already lost.’

And hopefully what we do here is provide people things to consider.”

Leaders encourage their participants to “consider” choosing a heterosexual relationship and to choose to walk in their true definition of masculinity or femininity. By their ideology, it’s important to remind your body who you really are. The following excerpts an open letter written by Gene Chase to a friend struggling with homosexuality and clearly represents the ex-gay mentality:75

---

**Dear Warren,**

*Your sexual feelings are a learned response at a time when you were too young to know that you were learning them. For example, in our culture women's armpits are considered unattractive. They are shaved, deodorized, and not at all erogenous. However, in some cultures armpits are covered in the same kind of caring and shy way with which we, in our culture cover women's breasts.*

*In this case clearly what we find sexually arousing is a culturally learned response. By the same token, a boy who grows up in a home in which he cannot find a woman attractive or cannot relate as a man among men to male role models is learning a pattern of erotic response.*

*Because erotic response is learned, it can be unlearned. That is not to say that you will unlearn it easily. It does mean that your growth in grace can include an increasing freedom from sexual bondage--for that is what inappropriate erotic response becomes if it is allowed full expression.*

---

75 [http://home.messiah.edu/~chase/h/articles/art2.htm](http://home.messiah.edu/~chase/h/articles/art2.htm) Retrieved 4/18/10
I know that you are angry at the way God made you. Consider King David’s response when he reflected on how God created him. Instead of being angry at God, he was able to thank God for the wonder of his body [Psalm 139:14]. Perhaps you are envious because of others who are better looking, or who are more socially at ease, or who do not seem to have a problem with sexual temptation. The grass always seems greener on the other side of the fence.

Psychologists call homosexual response a "reparative strategy." That is to say, the thought of an alternative is too heavy a burden to bear, so homosexuality is first seen as a way out. If a man fears women, then a relationship with a man seems "safe." If my father is perceived as being absent, then seeking a person to father me is a way to build a substitute relationship. Homosexuality is then the meeting of a legitimate need in an illegitimate way.

A person who is homosexually tempted can find a place of peace and rest. In some cases, God will give you the gift of a wife; in other cases, He will give you the gift of singleness. In every case He will give you the gift of Himself, the Sufficient One.

Yours sincerely,

Gene Chase
March 23, 1989

It used to be common practice in the ex-gay world to prompt members to participate in stereotypical gender activities in order to help “the body line up with the heart and head.” Men sought to play football and go camping, while women took part in makeup parties, etc. However, in 2001, Alan Chambers became the President of Exodus and many of these older ways of thinking evolved into more modern philosophies. I attended the Exodus International Freedom Conference at Wheaton University in July of 2009. I sat in on and recorded a workshop by Alan Chambers and was surprised when he evidenced this change blatantly:

“I don’t live the life that I expected to live today; I live a life that’s better than I expected. I’m thrilled I am who I am. I’m thrilled God is who He said He was and He has been faithful to me all of these years to give me the ability and the power to overcome. He’s given you all that same ability, and I hope if you don’t feel that way today that someday you will feel so incredibly grateful for the life that you have, for the person that God made you.
I’m really glad that I’m a decorator. I’m really glad that I know how to shop. My wife is, too, and she’s really glad that I don’t spend every Sunday and Saturday afternoon and every Monday night watching football. She loves that we get to go shopping.

I’m not going to despise who God created me to be. I’m not saying He made me a decorator. He made me uniquely who I am, and I love it. I live a life that is beyond my wildest dreams, a joy incomparable.

I think that’s the kind of joy that God wants to give us, some Christians aren’t joyful, and I think that’s something that we’ve got to change. I’m so grateful. I’m so happy. I’m a gayer gay than I ever have been, if we use that in a 1950s context, you know what I’m saying? I wouldn’t go back for anything.”

--Alan Chambers, workshop, July 2009

Chambers obviously celebrates his effeminate qualities and urges others to do so as well.

Chambers, as the new leadership at Exodus, focuses on the participants having realistic expectations of change rather than white knuckled, fabricated change. This focus hails a rhetorical shift toward less judgment and more realistic encouragement. His hope in changing this internal rhetoric is that those seeking to be delivered from the emotional brokenness characterized by same sex attractions will seek to be authentically who they are in Christ.

This struggle for acceptance within the ex-gay community hints at an internal counter-cultural battle. Among the many things that deeply disturbed me while attending the conference, was the pervasive use of Tactic #2 (Using the Exception of the Few to Fight the Reality of the Many) by Exodus leaders on their own participants. Chambers, himself used it during the same workshop cited above.

“Very quickly after getting involved in homosexuality – and probably you guys who know my story or because it’s your story – I realized this is not going to meet my needs. But I was addicted. It was intriguing, and I thought I didn’t find Mr. Right tonight. Maybe Mr. Right will be at the bar tomorrow, and that began this cycle of trying to find out if I could meet my needs myself. Maybe I could help God along. I went to those bars. I went home with people. I went
into relationships as an empty vessel looking for someone to fulfill my needs only to leave every encounter, no matter how long it was, more empty than I had been when I entered into it.

My best day in homosexual relationship or my best day in pursuing sinful relationships doesn’t compare to my worst day – I would rather have my worst day in a life of obedience than my best day back then. They don’t compare. And I don’t get paid enough to say that. There is no ulterior motive for me to say that, other than it is the absolute truth. I can wholeheartedly say I would not go back for anything. I wouldn’t.”

The characterization of all homosexual relationships as empty, unfulfilling and transitory threaded itself through every single session I attended at the conference. I kept thinking how rhetorical the characterization was because many people in the audience had probably never experienced a committed long term homosexual relationship. Most Christians who experience same sex attraction are forced by threat of being ostracized to skulk around in secret to explore their sexuality. Bar hopping and picking up people as a way of looking for a relationship would always result in eventual loneliness—whether a person is homo or heterosexual. To me, Exodus’ allusion that all homosexual relationships consist of dark alleys, back rooms of clubs and empty existence seriously handicapped their participants from even imagining a “real” committed same sex relationship. I became more frustrated as the days went on.

My frustrations culminated in a complete anger when, while attending a morning session I heard the testimony of an avid Prop 8 supporter who had been raised by a lesbian mother. This woman proceeded to trot out every major rhetorical tool in the book to manipulate the crowd. She understood her audience well and played to their sympathies with developed rhetorical skill. She started by recounting the story of her fated conception. Her mother had been encouraged by her partner at the time to set out on a one night stand to conceive her. She never knew her father. The mother, apparently an extremely unhealthy woman, went through multiple girlfriend changes and “forced” her daughter to call every new one “Mom.” This woman went on to
describe how she’d been told as a child that she “threw like a girl” and was made to keep her hair cut short like a boy. She paused for effect and choked up with emotion, as she described how she’d been taught to hate men and had no idea how to relate to one by the time she was out on her own. She found a patient husband and conceived her first child. Her lesbian mother had an epiphany at her bedside in the maternity war when seeing how much her son in law loved and cared for the new baby. The lesbian, who had apparently been completely ignorant of any relevancy of existence for members of the male race, stated: “I can see, now, why you should have had a man around when you were little.” The auditorium exploded in applause with shouts of “Amen,” “Thank you, Jesus!” “That’s right. That’s right.” Stunned, I sat there trying to collect my thoughts while the woman finished her testimony with a political statement. “Now you know why when those who were against Prop 8 tried to debate me, they had nothing to say.”

I could not have invented a better example of using the exceptional experience of the few to fight the reality of the many. Just as no Exodus speakers that weekend acknowledged the existence of long term fulfilling same sex partnerships, no examples of children raised by healthy same sex parents were mentioned. They employed Tactic #2 perfectly. I confronted Randy Thomas with this tactic during our interview. Thomas acknowledged the one-sided rhetoric but maintained that it was not a contrived strategy. Thomas explained that the one dimensional aspect of the testimonials was simply a commonality in the experience of those who were sharing. None of those who testified had experienced a healthy long term same sex relationship, instead their jaunt into the LGBT world consisted of one night stands, drug use and emptiness.

This highlighted common experience among prominent ex gays illustrates an observation I have made throughout my research. One ex-gay that I talked to admitted to having sex with
over 500 people in his 20s; another told of his desperate addiction to drugs and his career as a prostitute before he came to Exodus; one more spent 23 of the 32 minutes I spent interviewing him weeping as he told me of the evil apparitions that used to haunt him as a gay man and the heavenly visions he sees now that he is obedient to the Lord. There were women who left their husbands for a lesbian lover, abandoned their children and then returned dejected and used. I even had one woman who had endured such horrific abuse as a child at the hands of her father that her personality had split into several different entities. When she began to talk about her first lesbian relationship being the first time she felt loved, her body contorted, she moaned loudly, dissociated, used another voice and changed the subject. I don’t discount the validity of these testimonies at all. However, these extreme stories do not represent every ex-gay person I’ve interviewed or known, but I have seen a pattern. Many times, those who are able to make the complete switch to living a heterosexual lifestyle have had extreme pasts resulting in extreme brokenness. I never heard one ex-gay say that they grew up in a healthy, two parent home with a white picket fence and a minivan. It begs the question: Are those who are successful in the ex-gay world, successful because they were truly homosexual or is it because they were lost and broken and chose to express it in a homosexual manner? Most certainly, there’s a difference there.

Ex-gay testimonials are utilized by the RR to maximize the exception of these few to negate the validity of the many. For years they have used success stories like those I’ve described to assert that civil rights need not be granted to a group of people who have chosen what they are and who could choose to be different. A pastor friend of mine, the same one I mentioned earlier, during a Facebook dialogue said to me “You have all of the same rights that I do in America. You have the right to choose to marry heterosexually. Your choice to be in the
homosexual lifestyle is what precludes you from those rights. You made the choice—so you have to suffer the consequences.” This flippant dismissal of the seriousness of my sexuality demeaned my desire to have full civil rights. Unfortunately this is a pervasive mentality within the RR and one that operates on the foundation of ex-gay testimonials. They serve as solid footing on the battlefield against social change as have similar mentalities in the present and past.

**Tactic #3:**

**The Fear Game**

“Collective fear stimulates herd instinct, and tends to produce ferocity toward those who are not regarded as members of the herd.”—Bertrand Russell

Fear is a most powerful tool in winning any kind of conflict—the instigation of it, the fostering of it, and the actions produced by it. People often do things that break every self-imposed standard of conduct when under the influence of fear. Fear causes nothing less than abnormal behavior within this virtual battleground between evangelicals and social change. Sure, in the days of slavery and perhaps the Civil Rights Movement, evangelicals instigated fear amongst those that rose up. Churches were burned. Slaves were beaten. Civil Rights Leaders were killed. Martin Luther King, himself, spoke about the culture of fear:

> “Many of the present problems which we confront can be explained in terms of fear. So many irrational fears have cropped up around the question of integration that have no basis in reality. I have come to see that we not only have the job of freeing the Negro from the bondage of segregation, but we also have the responsibility of freeing our white brother from the bondage of crippling fears. One of the best ways to rid ourselves of fear is to center our lives in the will and purposes of God.” (King, 220)

Evangelicals have consistently used the tactic of fear against their own people. Instigating fear and apprehension about the inevitable changes that would come if the designated social change succeeded in winning the battle serves to unify their support base and create soldiers ready to
fight furiously for their cause. Ordinary Christian men and women transform into hostile warriors, capable of doing or saying most anything to avert their own fear and stir fear in those who would challenge their position. The same happens within the gay community especially in reaction to a major event of discrimination. The Church’s use of fearful rhetoric on their own people is quite fascinating.

“How Abolitionism leads, in multitudes of cases, and by a logical process, to utter infidelity…One of its avowed principles is, that it does not try Slavery by the Bible; but it tries the Bible by the principles of freedom…This assumption, that men are capable of judging beforehand what is to be expected in Divine revelation, is the cockatrice’s egg, from which in all ages, heresies have been hatched.” (Van Dyke, *Fast Day Sermons*, 137)

At first glance, the above statement may not seem so fear-inducing. The reference to utter infidelity conjures up a sense of anarchy especially to those who hold fast to Biblical principles as a guide for their lives. However, the employment of the image of a cockatrice acts as the incisive rhetorical strategy. The cockatrice, a mythical creature featured in poetry from the Elizabethan era, sports the head of a rooster on a dragon’s body. It was said to have been born “from a rooster's egg, hatched by a serpent or a toad.” The cockatrice’s “look” or “breath” was poisonous.

In general, it was regarded as a hideous beast to be feared and was credited with killing many men. What’s even more fascinating is that the cockatrice is mentioned multiple

---

Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.” (Isaiah 14:29)

“For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the LORD.” (Jeremiah 8:17)

“They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper.” (Isaiah 59:5)

The use of “cockatrice” in the above quote about abolitionism was a deft rhetorical tool used to inspire fear and allegiance among those on the pro-slavery side of the battlefield. Just like the TVC or Rick Warren or Huckabee use the image of pedophiles, those who practice bestiality and subversive cross dressers to inspire fear today.

Nowhere is the modern use of the fear tactic so clearly evidenced as in the religious rhetoric surrounding the events of 9/11. I could provide examples from Falwell, Robertson, Dobson and your local Baptist or Evangelical preacher. My pastor at the time decried Falwell’s timing in saying much of what I will report below but agreed with him in spirit and premise. As a young twenty something who was struggling with my own sexuality to hear that my homosexual
activities and feminist mentality contributed to the loss of lives at the World Trade Center compounded the grief I was feeling as an American with repressive guilt. Falwell and Robertson’s quotes surrounding the tragedy of 9/11 represent their best try to capitalize on a culture of fear and direct it towards those whose movements stood in opposition to fundamental Christianity. Pat Robertson interviewed Falwell on the 700 Club on September 13, 2001.

Robertson made these comments before the interview:

“We have thought that we're invulnerable...we have been so concerned about money. We have been so concerned about material things. The interests of people are on their health and their finances, and on their pleasures and on their sexuality...we have allowed rampant pornography on the internet. We have allowed rampant secularism and occult, etc. to be broadcast on television. We have permitted somewhere in the neighborhood of 35 to 40 million unborn babies to be slaughtered in our society. We have a court that has essentially stuck its finger in God's eye and said we're going to legislate you out of the schools. We have insulted God at the highest levels of our government. And, then we say 'why does this happen?'”

Falwell then appeared on the show and willingly attributed blame:

“Throwing God out successfully with the help of the federal court system, throwing God out of the public square, out of the schools. The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People For the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularize America. I point the finger in their face and say 'you helped this happen'.”

September 11th is arguably one of the America’s most tragic national events. Fear and paranoia ran rampant in the days following the attacks. Falwell and Robertson, in true RR form, could not sit idly by and simply offer condolences and encouragement. They seized the rhetorical moment to push their troops forward in the battle against social change by playing the game of fear. As I read these quotes, I realize that I worked for Jerry Falwell, met him, and ate meals with him one
year after he made these comments. I heard them and was angered but I was motivated to continue working in a Christian organization as a way to corral my same sex attraction. If that doesn’t evidence the powerful pull to want to be freed of sexuality in order to continue to belong to the Christian community—I don’t know what does. The fear of rejection and losing my place in Christianity formed by years of hearing teaching from the pulpit worked its oppressive power on me as it has on so many others. That entry—Liberty University—is the one I wish I could forever strike off my Christian resume.

Bonnie, a career music teacher, Christian, and lesbian waited until she was in her mid-forties to outwardly grapple with her sexuality. Bonnie struggled internally with grief and confusion for so long because she watched how other “sinners” were treated by the church. Fear of losing her membership kept her in the closet for decades.

“I did go to those healing conferences and I bought all the literature I could buy about overcoming gayness and homosexuality. But, I went to the ones in North Carolina. The reason that I didn’t do Exodus was because then I would have been exposing myself to other people—making myself vulnerable.

If the church had found out that I had an issue with homosexuality I would have been removed from playing the piano. I was in fear because I enjoyed playing, and I did not want to be removed in that type of way. I’d seen them do that with other people who had affairs, or who were getting divorced, or all kinds of things that they were just removed from their position.

I spent quite a number of years battling it and ending my relationships because I knew it was wrong. Here I’m going to church every Sunday and pretending that I am free of my sins and I’ve confessed everything, and yet harboring this huge, huge secret.”

Both of Bonnie’s brothers are gay. However, her younger brother sought help through an Exodus group and now identifies as ex-gay. Bonnie remembers that one of her brother’s friends went
through Exodus, as well, and couldn’t deal with his failure to become ex-gay. She said “he committed suicide because of his sexuality.”

“People that have been sequestered to people who are like them often fear those that are unlike them. Whether it be a foreigner, a black person in a white church, a gay among straights. It’s their lack of personal connection with difference that is the root of their fear. They may say “Can I accept this person? Will this person accept and understand me?’ and it’s the fear of the unknown that drives them to back to the safety of likeness. I would characterize that as ignorance based discrimination of others.

Another form of discriminatory behavior is lashing out against the rhetoric handed down by families and cultures. My mom used to say “all homeless people are drunks. All black people are ignorant. All gay people are pedophiles.” If those mentalities go unchallenged it leads to hatred. When I told my mother, a fanatical fundamentalist, I was gay as a young adult, she said “I’d rather you be a drug addict or a prostitute—anything but that!” She followed it up quickly by saying “It’s not my fault!”

~Adrian, a person of faith and a lesbian

The members of the Religious Right have become experts at playing the Fear Game.

Many of the people I interviewed attributed the RR’s success to their propagation of fear within their own movement. Kris, a non denominational pastor, is also ex-gay. He attributes most of the rejection that gay people experience at the hands of the church to the church’s fear and lack of understanding of what homosexuality is. During his journey out of homosexuality, Kris describes why the group of pastors who mentored him affected him the most.

“I told them my past and they embraced me. They weren’t afraid of me, they hugged me--I mean they touched me, they provided so much healing without ever really knowing it. They just loved me in my process, you know? They didn’t doubt me. I wasn’t the suspicious one. They focused on my obvious sin, not on my feelings, and did not condemn me. They just weren’t afraid of me.

When I started my own church, I said ‘We’re not afraid, and we won’t be afraid. They are not a threat. You don’t treat the sexually broken as a threat.’ And I think I just threw that door open. Our first reaction will not be fear. And, for many churches, that IS their first reaction.”
Joan,\textsuperscript{77} leads an ex-gay ministry on the east coast. Of all the leaders of an ex-gay ministries that I interviewed, Joan’s perspective seemed more balanced and less indoctrinated. Where many people that I spoke to in the ex-gay world aggressively pushed the participants of their program to attain benchmarks of “change” and “success” Joan quietly encourages her clients to let their process unfold naturally—in whatever direction God leads. Above all, Joan evidenced a fundamental respect for members of the LGBT community that was, in no way, punctuated by judgment or condemnation. She got involved with Exodus because she had a daughter who experimented with same sex relationships and she wanted to make sure she dealt with it in the healthiest way as a parent and a Christian. Joan says that fear and not understanding her daughter’s desires propelled her to react in a negative way.

\begin{quote}
“I look back at when my daughter came into homosexuality. I was in a very different place then than I am now and I almost drove her crazy. She finally said, “You have got to get some help.” I was so fearful that, basically, because of my fear I was constantly trying to passive aggressively control her.

Scared people behave badly. And you see that fear is based on a lie, basically. Because the fear is based on thinking that you are going to be influenced, or that someone is going to influence someone to become a lesbian or gay. That is totally whacked. Where does that come from? Ignorance, I would have to say ignorance. Not knowing people, not getting to know people who are in the gay community. One of the best encounters I ever had was, I was doing a speaking engagement and I got protested. The overall protest was very respectful, but there were just a few people who were not too respectful.

One of the things that got thrown my way was, ‘Everything you do is based on homophobia.’ And I said, ‘How do you explain the fact that I am going to leave here, and go spend the night at Embassy Suites with a couple of my friends who are lesbians? And we are going to enjoy the hot tub together and we are going to have a great time?’

I am phobic of mice. If a mouse comes in the room, I am going to jump on the table. Trust me if I had a phobia of homosexual individuals, people who are living a same sex relationship, I would
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{77} Alias
not be leaving to go spend the night with a couple of people who are friends of mine, who are wonderful, funny, smart, great people, and they know where I stand on sexuality. I know where they stand, we respect each other and we just have a blast.

You know, if I were homophobic I could not do that. But the flip side of that is if I didn’t have true friends that put a face on things for me, maybe I would be homophobic. You know what I’m saying?"

Another pastor I interviewed, Bruce, asked to be given a pseudonym in this project because he knows that his view towards gay people don’t line up with the views of his denomination. Bruce often finds himself at odds with the harsh treatment of the LGBT community by the Religious Right. Of all the pastors I interviewed, he was the most flexible and open to change. He also believes that fear plays into the battle between the RR and the gay community. However, he thinks the fear goes both ways.

“If I were to describe for you what I consider to be the great moral human condition, it’s that we would be so self centered and so consumed with ourselves that we would not be able to have these kind of relational activities with God and with each other, and so, the epitome of sin for me is that inability to interact with other people in some kind of loving form.

For me, and this would be my personal struggle, and keep in mind that I do come from a fundamental background, but I have come somewhat more center, of say the evangelical conservative right because I think that’s really the extreme.

I think most smart people know this, but you know it never makes it into the media or never really gets totally public on a grand scale, and that is that a growing number of evangelicals are in fact minded towards an intellectual pursuit and dialogue of these kinds of issues. There are many of us who have grown weary of the lack of compassion and the spirit of what’s seems to be motivating some of the extreme right. I’m judging their motive and their heart and everything because it feels a little bit hateful, it feels extreme.

Go to the other side, to the extreme gay community that is perhaps proactive and sometimes violent and sometimes hateful, at least angry. I look towards that and don’t understand that, by even classifying them as extreme. I’m in some ways stereotyping and in some ways discriminating against them as well. So that’s part of my personal dilemma. It’s the very act of
being in the middle and looking to either side is almost the same as being on one extreme or the other. So I struggle a little bit with that.

I hate the whole, you know, Adam and Steve instead of Adam and – I hate that. That’s fear. I mean, I guess that’s what I’m saying, but I would never say it that way because it just sounds so just so unloving and so mean-hearted. Hopefully you feel it in my heart.”

Many of my conversations with pastors from various denominations eventually landed on fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear of the possibilities. Fear of shaken faith. So, I asked them what the church could do to ease the relationship between itself and the gay community. I loved the responses that I got. First, from Ron, a caring Assemblies of God pastor who encounters people from the LGBT community regularly:

“It’s a great question. First of all, pastors need to get away from speaking despairingly about the gay community-- making broad sweeping indictments, judgments, things like that. Because the more educated I become the more I realize I don’t know much at all unless I really understand people’s circumstances. That’s the first thing. That’s got to stop immediately.

Secondly, I do think that there are things that a church can model or a pastor can model for their leaders. Like, for example when you do address of the issue of homosexuality, how do you talk about it? Walk through different parts of the Bible, explain to people, you know. Thirdly, I think that to speak lovingly of all people. Show them the power to love and react. Now, that gets really interesting for people because sometimes people think that when you say ‘to love’ means to condone everything about a person.

I think a big one is the dialogue piece between people. Unfortunately the media tries to caricature both sides with extreme spokespersons because it’s more entertaining. We’ve got a real media problem. I think it’s got to happen at the grassroots levels in communities.”

Robin, a pastor at a Metropolitan Community Church and a happily partnered gay man, approached our interview with quiet contemplation and the wisdom acquired by being a veteran of this fight between the LGBT community and the Religious Right. I interviewed him in his church office, beneath a poster of Audre Lorde. His personality and quiet confidence impacted me greatly making me feel at ease and drawing me into our discussion. I was distracted only by
the beautiful silver dangling earrings he was wearing which I wanted to wear myself. The MCC church movement was established as a gay-affirming entity and has played an active role in activism for LGBT rights. Robin’s attitude as he spoke about the possibility of dialogue between members of the LGBT community and Christians was cautiously optimistic.

“MCC identifies itself as a denomination with a mission. It's in our global missions statement to help with the- of course I just said this one- it's going to leave me here, it's in our church mission statement too. To promote the Holy integration of sexuality and spirituality.

It's my belief that the Church isn't just in trouble over homosexuality, the Church is in trouble over human sexuality. The honesty level of conversation leaves a lot to be desired, the fullness of the conversation. We, as largely LGBT and therefore on the sexual margins for so long, have an obligation and an opportunity to teach the wider church about what it means to be really integrated with your sexuality, and to have that really integrated with your faith.

I am a person of hope because of the grounding of my faith, I am very clear that God is very much all about expanding life, and about expanding love. I do believe that dialogue is possible- but I have tried to be pretty realistic about the fact that when I encounter folks who are Christian- whether they are Evangelical, Fundamentalist, or even main-line Christians who have really serious issues around homosexuality- -often times the ability to have dialogue is very, very, very, small. It is a very small opening.

This church- and MCC, generally speaking, is loaded with people who have struggled their way through their own faith journeys- many times to overcome internalized stuff- then to encounter family stuff to the point of people, families saying, ‘I don't have a son anymore because he is gay. He is dead to me.’ I have had several people who are going through that now with their family for religious reasons.

I grew up in an Episcopal environment. It was politically, and even theological somewhat conservative, but I was always given the idea that things- that God was still working. Therefore, the word of the Bible always needed reinterpretation. Sometimes it is really hard to have a conversation where the assumption is that ‘this is absolutely the inerrant Word of God. There is no change. It is exactly what is written here.’ That's kind of a closed system.

I told Robin that my theory of effective dialogue between these two warring factions centered around respect and an acknowledgment that gay/straight, woman/man, Christian/atheist all share
a common humanity. From that acknowledgement, in the absence of hurtful rhetoric, I believe productive dialogue is possible. Robin agreed but challenged me with his insight.

“I think common humanity is the core question. You’re right. It’s the place to start with dialogue.

I think that the where the commonality can come is the understanding that, from the evangelical side, the construction of gender is very, very essential in the underpinnings of Christian theology. If we start messing around with these categories, and it’s not just a socially unacceptable thing that we think is “icky” though I think that factor exists. That’s the reason I think it is so fearful for the folks in the more evangelical or the conservative side of religion. I give them credit for their sincerity for sure. They really think civilization is at stake.

For our part, in the LGBT community, we have to become, as a people secure enough in ourselves to be able to actually talk about difficult things, and try to get people to engage without judging them. We need to be really getting honest about this stuff rather than shutting down.”

Robin was right. If these two entities are ever going to lay down arms and move on to fight another battle the following things would need to exist on either side of the battle line: honesty, acknowledgment of the humanity and beliefs of the other side, less defensiveness and more responsiveness—tolerance. In significant and small ways, these things have been achieved between historically warring factions in America. Maybe not all white Southerners began to immediately believe that slavery was not a Biblical mandate but some did and others followed. Maybe not all 20th century white Americans believed that black people, if given their rights, wouldn’t overtake the world, but some did have eyes to see it and others followed. Maybe not all devout Christian men, secure in their patriarchal mindset believed right away that women had value outside of the kitchen and the bedroom but some began to believe. As the war wore on and casualties mounted up, some of those men began to see the value of woman as woman and others
followed. Can the process be the same between the church and the LGBT community? History hints that it can but hinting won’t get the job done.
CHAPTER FIVE:

SHifting MEntalities, ShifTing HistorY

Is this battle different? Why should you believe that history will repeat itself and warring dynamics will shift? My answer is that the shift is already happening. In America, the Episcopalians have always been a frontrunner in accepting what the American majority church deems unacceptable. They were one of the first denominations to ordain women and to affirm gay and lesbians as full church members without discrimination. They made history in 2003 when electing the first openly gay male bishop, Gene Robinson. Robinson a devout Episcopalian grew up hating his sexuality. He sought deliverance through reparative therapy which he calls “one of organized religion’s cruelest ruses, it preys on gay men and women desperate for affirmation from the churches and families in which they were raised, pretending to enable them to abandon their homosexuality for the sexual orientation that God intended for them.” (Robinson, Crisis, 28) And though the Episcopal church in America “is one of the few denominations left in that country where liberal theological views are encouraged or even tolerated “ (Herriot, 83), Robinson’s ordination served as a catalyst for one of the most polarizing and controversial episodes in the history of the Anglican Church in North America. Uproar ensued, evangelicals condemned, and the leadership of the Anglican Church panicked. They formed a commission to study the effects of the crisis on the church as a whole. When the commission reported in October of 2004, it “criticized the Canadian and American Churches for failing to consider the impact of their decisions on the rest of the Communion. In particular it rebuked those bishops who took part in Bishop Robinson’s consecration service despite having
been warned of the damaging consequences.” (Herriot, 84) The report went on to question Robinson’s participation in leadership of the Anglican Church before concluding “‘There remains a very real danger that we will not choose to walk together. Should the call to halt and find ways of continuing in our present communion not be heeded, then we shall have to begin to learn to walk apart’” (Herriot, 84). The church split soon after.

Though Robinson and the gay-affirming branch of the Episcopal Church have endured everything from death threats to vandalism to rhetorical questioning of their spiritual validity, they have remained strong in their endeavor to support gay and lesbians as fully accepted and fully equal members of their church. Other denominations such as the Baptists, Evangelical Lutherans, and United Church of Christ have come out in full support of the LGBT community or have interdenominational divisions which support LGBT members. Homosexuality is a hot button issue within most churches across America. One pastor told me that when new people come to inquire about his church, one of the top three questions they consistently ask centers on the church’s belief about homosexuality.

Soldiers from both sides of this conflict are constantly engaged in heated battle. Ground is gained, lost, and surrendered on a daily basis in today’s media. CNN, MSNBC, Fox News constantly run inquiries into the LGBT vs. Religious Right war. Roundtable discussions are conducted, articles are written, and stories from the front lines are reported and listened to with urgency. Rhetoric flies back and forth, often punctuated by anger or hate. Both sides misunderstand each other. Both sides react out of emotion. Each week, a new closeted member of the LGBT community admits their homosexuality in order to try and fortify the fight, take a stand, or start a dialogue. Those admissions have the power to completely stop the Religious
Right in its track, if only for a second, when they come from within--revered members of Christian culture who proudly say “I’m gay. I won’t hide it anymore.”

The most recent admission to send a huge tremor through the Religious Right’s camp was that of Jennifer Knapp. Knapp is a Grammy nominated, multiple time Dove Award winner\textsuperscript{78}, highly respected Christian recording artist and has sold over 1 million copies of her music (in the Christian music world—that’s huge). She performed at almost every big venue Christian concert or music festival in the late 90s and early 2000s. Her songs were seminal and were sung repeatedly during evangelical and fundamentalist worship services across the nation and the world. When she left the Christian music industry, it was widely reported that she was gay, yet no one said so for sure and the DADT policy of the church assured that her music stayed intact though she was no longer performing.

In 2009, she began singing again in small venues but with the release of her new CD, Knapp thought it was time to set the record straight. On April 13, 2010 she came out while being interviewed by \textit{Christianity Today} and immediately set off a media firestorm.

“You remove the social problem that homosexuality brings to the church—and the debate as to whether or not it should be called a "struggle,"…you remove the notion that I am living my life with a great deal of joy. It never occurred to me that I was in something that should be labeled as a "struggle."

“The struggle I’ve had has been with the church, acknowledging me as a human being, trying to live the spiritual life that I've been called to… So it's difficult for me to say that I’ve struggled within myself, because I haven't. I've struggled with other people. I've struggled with what that means in my own faith. I have struggled with how that perception of me will affect the way I feel about myself. But there are people I care about within the church community who would seek to throw me out simply because of who

\textsuperscript{78} Christian’s music version of the Grammy
I've chosen to spend my life with. I wanted to acknowledge [my homosexuality]; I don't want to come off as somebody who's shirking the truth in my life.\footnote{http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/music/interviews/2010/jenniferknapp-apr10.html?start=2 Retrieved on 4/15/10} “

The battle intensified to a fury. The blogosphere lit up with messages of condemnation, grief and excitement. Knapp appeared on Larry King Live on Friday, April 23, 2010 along with an evangelical pastor from California and surprisingly Ted Haggard. This show was a microcosm of the entire war between the Religious Right and the LGBT community. Pastor Bob spewed his rhetoric of Biblical condemnations of homosexuality. Knapp challenged him by mentioning the alternative ways to interpret the Bible. She assured him that she had spiritual advisors in her life who interpreted the Bible as a sacred text and found no issue with her sexuality. Pastor Bob said “I’m not sure they do, Jennifer. I love you, I am concerned for your salvation.” Ted Haggard walked the path in between the two representative soldiers, beautifully, showing the discernment he has gained from being exiled to looking at mainstream Christianity as an outsider. His message was one of tolerance and of individual freedom to pursue religion in a personal way.

Pastor Bob did not agree. He called Knapp “deceived”, told her she was sinning, mentioned perversion and offered to be there when she turned back to God. Knapp encouraged Pastor Bob to continue to teach what he was called to teach to his congregation but to leave her name out of it. The episode, complete with Larry King’s personal jabs at Pastor Bob, was tense at worst and representative at best. Social networking sites lit up with traffic, much of it heavily laden by hateful rhetoric.

I found myself watching the show and cheering both Knapp and Haggard on for their willingness to be true to themselves. I found myself listening to Bob’s accusations and
judgments; looking at the arrogant smirk characteristic of so many from the Religious Right; and wondering when this war will end. I wondered when both sides would lay down their weapons and operate with acceptance and dialogue rather than scorn and hatred.

America is on a precipice of change. If I couldn’t see that from watching the debate on Larry King, I can see it from the history of battles similar to these. I can see it in the shared tactics, shared arrogance, shared fervor between today’s battle and yesterday’s. I watch with sadness as Knapp journeys into the realm of gay Christian living where she will be forced, because of her popularity, to defend her religious validity and her sexuality incessantly. I’m sure there will be hate mail. I’m confident that her CDs will be pulled from the shelves of Christian bookstores all across America. They might even be burned. The God Hates Fags organization will probably protest outside of her “lesbian concerts” and in the midst of that chaos and aggression, the truth of Jennifer Knapp will be overlooked as it is for so many gay Christians. In the midst of warring factions and emotionally charged judgments, her humanity will be forgotten. She will be labeled a deviant by some and an activist by others—neither a title that she wants. She is just a woman who is seeking to carve out a place in the landscape between a denomination that doesn’t accept her and a community that hates where she’s come from.

My hope is that this battle will eventually be resolved in the political realm and the LGBT community will be given the rights they deserve, regardless of religion. It will join slavery, the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Rights movement in the history of the church vs. social change. Its story will be told along with every culture war fought by the church. Yet once rights are finally won or lost, the real work begins. It is only after the weapons are laid down, the rhetoric is pushed aside and reactionary emotions have calmed that the battle can truly
be won. Productive dialogue aimed at improving relations, respecting humanity, and finding a path to peaceful co-existence will be the weapon that wins the war against dehumanizing and demeaning the difference in others. How quickly that happens and how many casualties fall in the meantime is up to those of us that are fighting.

“We must realize that we are grappling with one of the most weighty social problems of the century, and in grappling with such a problem there is no place for misguided emotionalism. We need a leadership that will stress the necessity for keeping our hands clean as we struggle for freedom and justice. We must not struggle with falsehood, hate, malice, or violence. We must never become bitter. We must never succumb to the temptation of using violence in the struggle, for if this happens unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness and our chief legacy to the future will be endless reign of meaningless chaos. There is still a voice crying through the vista of time saying to every potential Peter, “Put up your sword.” History is replete with the bleached bones of nations and communities that failed to follow this command. We must make it clear that it is injustice which we seek to defeat and not persons who may happen to be unjust. We have before us the glorious opportunity to inject a new dimension of love into the veins of our civilization” (King, 223).

~Martin Luther King, Jr
Bibliography
Bibliography


