

# Forty-Five Questions for Evangelicals Supporting Marriage Equality

Nigel Chapman, M. Div., 2 July 2015

## Abstract

Kevin DeYoung is the author of "What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?" His recent articles on CrossMap and then The Gospel Coalition pose five and forty questions, respectively, to Christians who think they can support same-sex marriage and still see themselves as consistently Evangelical in their approach to Christian scripture. These questions are reasonably simple from my perspective. My major difference from DeYoung is that I begin with the existence of same-sex orientation, and then consider same-sex marriage biblically in that light. I find that this resolves most of the more pressing pastoral and theological questions. For more information, refer firstly to the Introduction at 180.org.au, and then the Romans 1 paper.

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**Kevin DeYoung**

Kevin DeYoung is the author of *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?*<sup>8</sup> His recent articles on *CrossMap*<sup>9</sup> and then *The Gospel Coalition*<sup>10</sup> pose five and forty questions, respectively, to Christians who think they can support same-sex marriage and still see themselves as consistently Evangelical in their approach to Christian scripture. These questions are reasonably simple from my perspective. My major difference from DeYoung is that I begin with the existence of same-sex orientation, and then consider same-sex marriage biblically in that light. I find that this resolves most of the more pressing pastoral and theological questions. For more information, refer firstly to the *Introduction*<sup>11</sup> at 180.org.au and then the linked *Romans 1*<sup>12</sup> paper.

- Also see: *Some New Questions for Evangelicals Opposing Same-sex Marriage*<sup>13</sup>

Please note that this is not a complete argument, just whatever thoughts were relevant to someone else’s list of questions. Refer to the full articles<sup>14</sup> for a comprehensive study.

**“Five Questions for Christians who believe the Bible supports Gay Marriage” (Kevin DeYoung, CrossMap, 11 May 2015).**

The original article<sup>15</sup>.

**1. On what basis do you still insist that marriage must be monogamous?**

I would say that it *should be*, though not that it absolutely *must*. God acknowledged other arrangements, including the polygamy of Abraham, Moses and David, as true marriages in parts of scripture. It is equally clear though, through the “lens” passages in Mark 10 and Matt 19, that these are not the overarching biblical ideal.

That is an aside, however. My argument for same-sex marriage actually depends on monogamy, and views it as normative:

<sup>8</sup><http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1433549379/deyorestandre-20>  
<sup>9</sup><http://www.crossmap.com/blogs/five-questions-for-christians-who-believe>  
<sup>10</sup><http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2015/07/01/40-questions-for-christians-now-waving-rainbow-flags/>  
<sup>11</sup><http://180.org.au/probably-the-shortest-working-argument-for-evangelicals>  
<sup>12</sup>[http://180.org.au/romans-1-and-evangelical-same-sex-marriage\\_20140906.html](http://180.org.au/romans-1-and-evangelical-same-sex-marriage_20140906.html)  
<sup>13</sup>[http://180.org.au/questions-for-evangelicals-opposing-marriage-equality\\_20150704.html](http://180.org.au/questions-for-evangelicals-opposing-marriage-equality_20150704.html)  
<sup>14</sup><http://180.org.au>  
<sup>15</sup><http://www.crossmap.com/blogs/five-questions-for-christians-who-believe>

Same-sex marriage fulfils every aspect of the biblical ideal of marriage that is actually possible for a same-sex oriented person to fulfil: a lifelong union of sexual and romantic intimacy, of care and companionship, of faithful monogamy, and the possibility of raising a family. The only aspects of the ideal that are missing from this picture are the ones precluded by a constitutional incapacity for heterosexual attraction, whether sexual or romantic. (See [here](#)<sup>16</sup>.)

So biblical monogamy is central to my argument. DeYoung appears to presuppose that any argument for same-sex marriage must be working from a position of compromise, which of course leads him to wonder “Why stop at just one compromise?”

## 2. Will you maintain the same biblical sexual ethic in the church now that you think the church should solemnize gay marriages?

Precisely – and encourage LGBT people to do the same. That is the whole point of actually solving, not just coping with, the problems that same-sex orientation has posed for Evangelicals. These problems have been evident since it first became apparent that orientation really existed, did not typically respond to treatment (see [here](#)<sup>17</sup>), did not entail paedophilia, had not been helped in any obvious way by criminalisation or ostracism, is a constant part of everyday life for millions and millions of people worldwide, and could have happened to anyone – any of our friends, any of our children, any of us.

Once again, the question asked appears to presuppose that an argument for Evangelical Same-sex Marriage must automatically be a compromise, rather than the natural application of scriptural principles to a question which Scripture did not address. In this case, that question combines the existence of same-sex orientation and the social viability of same-sex marriages. While many arguments for “affirming” positions have, I believe, been build on compromise and often misreading, I suggest that the argument I have put forward<sup>18</sup> is not one of that kind. Critiques of this view are of course appropriate and welcome.

## 3. Are you prepared to say moms and dads are interchangeable?

No. But neither would I say that single parents, be they male or female, are inadequate to raise children. And a same-sex marriage, having just as many genders as a single single-parent, but double the number of actual carers, should be at least as effective on those grounds. There is, to my knowledge, no campaign by Evangelicals to ban single parenting, or even single-parent adoption. The supposition that children will be harmed by same-sex parenting has not, so far as I have seen, been borne out by the evidence. Same-sex marriage has been law in Canada for 10 years now, and longer in some parts of Europe: Where is the harm that demands prohibition? If it was worth all that effort to prevent, shouldn't it be worth the same effort to prohibit, if we are really thinking of actual, endangered children?

<sup>16</sup>[http://180.org.au/probably-the-shortest-working-argument-for-evangelical-same-sex-marriage\\_20150210.html](http://180.org.au/probably-the-shortest-working-argument-for-evangelical-same-sex-marriage_20150210.html)

<sup>17</sup>[http://180.org.au/evangelical-churches-and-same-sex-orientation\\_20140906.txt](http://180.org.au/evangelical-churches-and-same-sex-orientation_20140906.txt)

<sup>18</sup>[http://180.org.au/romans-1-and-evangelical-same-sex-marriage\\_20140906.html](http://180.org.au/romans-1-and-evangelical-same-sex-marriage_20140906.html)

## 4. What will you say about anal intercourse?

Within the combined context of orientation and marriage, there is no biblical or moral reason to oppose it. That is to say, the biblical reasons for condemning same-sex intercourse in antiquity don't condemn this in the case of marriage, making it in practice the same thing for same-sex oriented people that heterosexual marriage is for heterosexuals. A lengthier-than-normal quote may be required to make this point about the condemnations:

We have by now considered twelve biblical reasons for condemning same-sex intercourse, and whether they apply to the case of a same-sex marriage between two same-sex oriented people. Eight of these reasons addressed self-evident evil and harm in such cases as prostitution, promiscuity, adultery, rape and exploitation (which would include pederasty), disease transmission, compulsive sexual behaviours, a progressive corruption of heterosexual desire that entrenches these outcomes, and a consequential connection with false worship. These reasons, though, were clearly not applicable to same-sex marriages, which I think is why Evangelicals do not use them in public argument. The other four, which have certainly seemed to apply, have not held up under examination: Morally significant harm has not been demonstrated, biblically or practically. Arguments from “nature” are ambiguous, unless they mean only perversion of desire, which for Paul they minimally do, but in which case they are inapplicable to the case of lifelong orientation. A perfect divine ideal is not the same thing as a universal moral obligation, and does not preclude reasonable exceptions, of which scripture gives us several examples in the case of marriage itself. And disgust presupposes moral abhorrence, which is to say, it needs at least some of these first eleven reasons to justify it, and none do. These last four reasons certainly appear in scripture as if they were moral condemnations, but when they did they supported and complemented the first eight. They were never asked to stand alone as we have asked them to. Anything matching those first eight condemnations will be reasonably called unnatural, will be socially harmful, will violate heterosexual norms of marriage, and will thus be morally abhorrent in a way that could be shown to anyone, and which they could reasonably be expected to acknowledge. It is easy, then, to see why Paul thought that gentiles would know that these things were wrong, and why, on the other hand, same-sex marriages in contemporary life have not been seen as self-evidently immoral in the way that Evangelicals feel they should have been. (See [here](#)<sup>19</sup>.)

This is very brief synopsis of an argument that runs for many pages, and should be followed up in detail in the case of disagreement.

What I would then say about anal intercourse is this: Same-sex intercourse outside of marriage remains biblically condemned. I'll stress that I mean married in God's sight, regardless of anyone else's recognition, which I suspect the biblical writers would affirm if questioned. Anal intercourse between married heterosexuals may presumably be regarded as a matter of discretion

<sup>19</sup>[http://180.org.au/romans-1-and-evangelical-same-sex-marriage\\_20140906.html](http://180.org.au/romans-1-and-evangelical-same-sex-marriage_20140906.html)

for individuals. Something like a third of male same-sex couples do not engage in anal intercourse, so for the majority of same-sex couples this is a rather academic question. But for the rest, the underlining warrant of same-sex intercourse is that it should be expected to perform the same essential function as heterosexual intercourse does in establishing and deepening an intimate marital bond between a couple. In the absence of a moral condemnation arising from scripture, and in light of the conclusion that God sees these as true marriages, that seems to be fairly straightforward.

## 5. How have all Christians at all times and in all places interpreted the Bible so wrongly for so long?

Christians have been broadly correct in their interpretations because by and large they lived in societies that were relevantly closer to biblical societies than they were to ours. It is only comparatively recently that same-sex marriage for same-sex oriented people became socially viable, and that same-sex orientation came to be generally understood. That is what is different now. We are addressing a new question, not something on which Christians in history ever commented; and as I have argued<sup>20</sup>, when we look at the combined case of orientation and marriage, none of the biblical condemnations apply to it. Just as happens in the case of heterosexual marriage, the structures and commitments of marriage resolve the social and personal problems subsisting in sexual desire.

Before modern times, a same-sex oriented person should have gotten heterosexually married, been faithful to their partner and raised children. This was unlikely to have been a romantically or sexually satisfying existence, but in pre-modern times marriage was less about romantic and sexual fulfilment than either modern people or the biblical ideal expect it to be – and most conspicuously so for women. Before most people lived in cities, even finding other same-sex oriented people would have been a challenge. Someone who was heterosexually married, though, would have had children to look after them in old age, if they made it, and would have fulfilled their tribal or societal obligation to reproduce – another economic and military vestige of the past. I am speaking about western societies here; there are cultures in which these concerns apply as much today as they ever have, and those cultures must work these issues through for themselves on their own terms. But in the western world, by and large, marriage is better expressed today than it ever was in biblical times, and that is a wholly and profoundly Christian development – excepting our divorce rates. As Evangelicals, we can and should do better now than was previously possible.

## “40 QUESTIONS FOR CHRISTIANS NOW WAVING RAINBOW FLAGS” (Kevin DeYoung, The Gospel Coalition, 1 July 2015).

The original article<sup>21</sup>.

A while after writing the preceding five answers, I saw that

<sup>20</sup>[http://180.org.au/probably-the-shortest-working-argument-for-evangelical-same-sex-marriage\\_20150210.html](http://180.org.au/probably-the-shortest-working-argument-for-evangelical-same-sex-marriage_20150210.html)

<sup>21</sup><http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2015/07/01/40-questions-for-christians-now-waving-rainbow-flags/>

a special long-play edition<sup>22</sup> has also appeared – AND WE’VE SWITCHED TO ALL CAPS, although that may just be The Gospel Coalition’s natural style (I know that because I use a lot of their podcasts in my church). In the interests of completeness, then...

## 1. How long have you believed that gay marriage is something to be celebrated?

About two years, since sorting out what I considered to be, by any Evangelical standards, a biblical response to the existence of same-sex orientation, and evaluating same-sex marriage in that light. That was about four years into a process of serious reading and thinking through the questions involved, and interacting with people who were directly concerned.

## 2. What Bible verses led you to change your mind?

All of the passages that are usually considered relevant made a contribution in one way or another, and I think that is reflected in the final argument. Primarily, Romans 1 helped to establish that scripture does not take account of orientation, so that a position on orientation had to be derived from scripture’s condemnations of same-sex intercourse and also its ideal of marriage. Each of those convictions is individually taken to preclude the other. But my finding has been that asking both at once – the actual question before us – shows that same-sex marriage neither fits the biblical condemnations, nor fails the biblical ideal of marriage. To call that an unexpected result would be something of an understatement. Also, I can tell you there’s a certain delicacy involved in getting feedback on this kind of writing, at least without getting anyone sacked from their church or college...

## 3. How would you make a positive case from Scripture that sexual activity between two persons of the same sex is a blessing to be celebrated?

I only argue this in the combined case of same-sex orientation and same-sex marriage, but then that is the main case before us. The short version of that long argument<sup>23</sup> goes like this:

- Rom 1 shows that scripture doesn’t address orientation (or same-sex marriage, obviously).
- As far as I can see there are 12 biblical reasons for condemning same-sex intercourse, but none of these condemn the case of same-sex marriage. Either the marriage or the orientation eliminates each reason for objecting.
- For same-sex oriented people, same-sex marriage is closer to the biblical ideal than either half-heterosexual marriage or mandatory life-long celibacy, and closer than some things which God recognized as marriages in scripture, including patriarchal polygamy.
- Accordingly, as Evangelicals, we ought to view same-sex marriages as true marriages in God’s sight, and conduct ourselves accordingly.

Naturally, that is a criminally abbreviated summary rather than a complete argument, but it is the outline.

<sup>22</sup><http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2015/07/01/40-questions-for-christians-now-waving-rainbow-flags/>

<sup>23</sup>[http://180.org.au/romans-1-and-evangelical-same-sex-marriage\\_20140906.html](http://180.org.au/romans-1-and-evangelical-same-sex-marriage_20140906.html)

#### 4. What verses would you use to show that a marriage between two persons of the same sex can adequately depict Christ and the church?

I wouldn't suggest that it needs to do so, because marriage is, like the image of a vine or a body, only one of several powerful metaphors for the relationship between Christ and the church, and they are each only partial representations of the truth.

However, with that caveat given, I think same-sex marriage is probably a better symbol, insofar as the aspects of marriage which are unique to the heterosexual relationships (procreation and patriarchy, at least in antiquity) are not part of the biblical analogy between Christ and the church. On the other hand, "love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family" (guess what document I'm quoting?), which clearly do apply to same-sex marriages, sit squarely at the intersection of christology and ecclesiology.

#### 5. Do you think Jesus would have been okay with homosexual behavior between consenting adults in a committed relationship?

This question could cover either a *de facto* relationship or a marriage, and makes no reference to orientation. I am only addressing the case of same-sex oriented adults in a same-sex marriage. If my argument is correct that God recognizes these as true marriages, whether in church or society, then Jesus would not so much be "okay" with that, but would positively celebrate it in exactly the same manner as any other marriage.

#### 6. If so, why did he reassert the Genesis definition of marriage as being one man and one woman?

Heterosexuality is part of the biblical ideal, although this was not Jesus' focus in Matt 19 and Mark 10, where he emphasized the permanence of the union in reply to a question about *laissez-faire* divorce rorting in the Hillelite style. However, a good and even perfect ideal is not necessarily a universal obligation and certainly does not preclude some sensible exceptions in edge cases, of which there are already examples in scripture in the specific case of marriage. The case of a person who actually does not possess heterosexual attraction, whether sexual or romantic, is a fairly obvious candidate for exactly that kind of exception, because for them, a heterosexual marriage would only ever be half-heterosexual, thus lacking some of its intended and intrinsic strengths.

#### 7. When Jesus spoke against porneia what sins do you think he was forbidding?

I'll group this together with *pornois* in Rev 21; see question #10 (below).

#### 8. If some homosexual behavior is acceptable, how do you understand the sinful "exchange" Paul highlights in Romans 1?

It means that heterosexuals cultivated same-sex relationships, to the detriment of their sexual preferences and the neglect of

their wives. This was the most common and notorious form of sexual immorality in Hellenistic life and so a natural slam-dunk for Paul's argument about the unrighteousness of gentile culture in Romans 1 (see for comparison, Wisdom 14 in the Apocrypha, on the effects of idolatry on public morality). It is probably worth spelling out here the lines of evidence that show Paul is not conscious of addressing same-sex oriented people in Romans 1. If he were addressing same-sex orientation:

- Why address it as a characteristically gentile problem? That is not true of orientation, which appears to occur just as frequently in any group of people, be they Jews or gentiles.
- Why address it as a consequence of idolatry, something that is not true of orientation? Paul was first of all referring to the actual worship of the actual statues of sexually promiscuous deities, you will recall, which is relatively rare in western society today. And in the case of figurative "sexual idolatry," it clearly fails to explain people growing up same-sex oriented in our own churches.
- Why address the passions themselves as the subject of a voluntary "exchange", by people who should have known better? That is not true of orientation, which is not voluntarily chosen, though it is certainly the case where heterosexuals deliberately cultivate same-sex desires, as Hellenists did.
- Why does Paul describe the passions themselves as shameful (*pathē atimias*) in v.26? Evangelicals equate same-sex attraction with temptation, but do not hold that temptation is a sin or otherwise a source of shame before God. For a temptation to be a source of legitimate shame, it must have flowed from prior moral compromise. Again, this is not true of orientation.
- Similarly, why does Paul address it as a *progressive corruption* of desire, something that is similarly not true of constant same-sex attraction over the course of a person's life?

Various Evangelicals have argued that Paul *must* have known about concepts at least analogous to orientation because they appear in classical writers. If so, they say, it must be quite significant that he still made no special exception for them. But we don't know what he did and didn't know from classical writers, and it must be considered at least somewhat doubtful that a theological Pharisee would lend them any automatic credence as authorities on moral issues. We do know, however, and from his own words, that he is not addressing orientation in any form that we must understand it today.

#### 9. Do you believe that passages like 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Revelation 21:8 teach that sexual immorality can keep you out of heaven?

I do, and live accordingly. As an aside though, I think you'll find bodily resurrection in a recreated heavens and earth is more properly the Christian hope (Rom 8, 1 Cor 15).

#### 10. What sexual sins do you think they were referring to?

I would say that the relevant action of the *pornois* (the sexually immoral) in Rev 21 and elsewhere, and the referents of Jesus'

and others' use of *porneia*, should be considered to encompass all the sexual sins in the biblical vice lists, including *malakos* and *arsenokoites* in 1 Cor 6. My argument is not that same-sex intercourse is in every case morally good, any more than I would say that heterosexual intercourse is. I believe that what scripture condemned is still condemned and for the same reasons. The question is whether the case of same-sex marriage matches the condemnations as a whole; in other words, whether this represents *porneia* (and related concepts) in the first place.

### **11. As you think about the long history of the church and the near universal disapproval of same-sex sexual activity, what do you think you understand about the Bible that Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Luther failed to grasp?**

I commented on this above (Question #5, in Part 1), but in regard to these writers, there are two basic points that they did not have to consider but which we must: The recognition of same-sex orientation, and the social viability of same-sex marriages. There's a particularly unfortunate collision between these worlds when Aquinas progresses up to homosexuality through a list of different kinds of fornication (the category in which he sets it, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3.122), and offers as a preliminary argument that "Now in the human species the female is clearly insufficient of herself for the rearing of the offspring, since the need of human life makes many demands, which cannot be met by one parent alone." Even setting aside his classically derived concepts of Natural Law, it's clear that he's working without either of our primary questions in mind. In historical terms, I think it's only after the First World War that it begins to be viable to put the two of them together, and people begin to do so. I'll comment further on this in my other answers...

### **12. What arguments would you use to explain to Christians in Africa, Asia, and South America that their understanding of homosexuality is biblically incorrect and your new understanding of homosexuality is not culturally conditioned?**

Those people may live in societies that are closer than ours to the cultures of biblical antiquity (i.e. tribal groups, subsistence agriculture, strong honour-shame cultures, highly sexualised public religion), in which same-sex marriage was not yet socially viable, and the best option for a same-sex oriented person was to marry and have children. These will not have been romantically or sexually fulfilling lives, but for most of our history, marriages were substantially more concerned with individual and societal survival, and all social honour that was built upon that basis. This was in many respects out of touch with those aspects of the biblical ideal involving mutuality, oneness, and sexual and romantic attachment. Otherwise though, I would suggest that the argument I am presenting is in no way inaccessible to any biblically literate person in any culture, and that facing up to the existence of same-sex oriented people will raise mostly the same questions for them that it has for us, and especially for Evangelicals. It's just invariably a shock to begin with.

### **13. Do you think Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were motivated by personal animus and bigotry when they, for almost all of their lives, defined marriage as a covenant relationship between one man and one woman?**

As a non-American, I'd answer, who cares? But generalising the question in the manner I think is intended, I see no need to project that assumption on anyone who opposes marriage equality. Then again, I also think it's mainly up to them to find a way to demonstrate that lack of animus or bigotry by their words and deeds, and by demonstrating both understanding and empathy in regard to same-sex oriented people.

### **14. Do you think children do best with a mother and a father?**

See my reply to question #3 in DeYoung's shorter list of 5 questions (above).

### **15. If not, what research would you point to in support of that conclusion?**

As I noted above, my view of the alleged dangers of same-sex parenting are based on the comparative absence of horror stories, family breakdowns, abandoned and neglected children, and so on, emerging from countries where same-sex marriage and parenting has been happening for a generation or more, and legally recognized for at least a decade. And this is so despite enormous media campaigns and lobbying that has seized upon anything of this sort they could use. So I'm kicking the burden of proof back across to you and saying, if you think it's dangerous, show that to be so. Not marginally different, because many things, including residual social stigma could be causing that. *Actually* problematic. We are all of course familiar with studies showing better well-being for children in same-sex parented families, though in my opinion that simply reflects the higher degree of sheer determination (and resources) that have been required for same-sex couples to have a family at all, and may decline toward the average as the phenomenon becomes more mainstream.

Not incidentally, the phrasing of this question "with a mother and a father" rather than "with heterosexual parents" introduces a bias, by grouping absentee heterosexual parents together with same-sex parented families.

### **16. If yes, does the church or the state have any role to play in promoting or privileging the arrangement that puts children with a mom and a dad?**

Heterosexuality, with maybe 98% market share, at least by conservative figures, doesn't require a lot of extra "privileging." What does require privileging is fidelity, commitment and devotion. I don't think the state can do much to privilege these things, though churches can, and apparently need to. Other things being equal, I regard same-sex marriage as a step forward in these regards, because it means more people are embracing monogamy, fidelity, and lifelong commitment, as they go through all of life's hardships together.

## 17. Does the end and purpose of marriage point to something more than an adult's emotional and sexual fulfillment?

Yes it does, marriage has many dimensions, to which I refer in these answers.

In reply, though: Does the end and purpose of marriage point to something *less* than an adult's emotional and sexual fulfillment? – as in the case of an ultimatum between half-heterosexual marriages or facing the prospect mandatory life-long celibacy, typically from early adolescence onward?

## 18. How would you define marriage?

I'm not proposing any new definition of it; the normal biblical definition is what I believe I give in my own discussion of marriage<sup>24</sup>:

Evangelicals correctly understand the biblical ideal of marriage as a lifelong heterosexual union of faithfulness, monogamy and sexual and romantic intimacy, amongst other qualities. This naturally complements forming families and raising children, and should be regarded as a universal ideal wherever it is possible.

The only thing to note is that, in a specific and exceptional case, a few percent of people lack heterosexual attraction, and so the biblical ideal is constitutionally unattainable for them.

## 19. Do you think close family members should be allowed to get married?

Despite having grown up in a country town, I can offer no relevant insight on the merits or otherwise of inbreeding. But I am aware of no argument, either biblical or civil, to support incestuous marriages. As with the case of polygamy, there is no question of orientation to consider. And of course, nothing undermines the generally reasonable expectation that a person could marry outside of their immediate family without suffering undue oppression. Presumably some kind of analogy between incest and same-sex marriage is intended here (*a la* Gagnon); but it will need to be spelled out a little more clearly.

## 20. Should marriage be limited to only two people?

Polygamy is a little different to the case of incest, as it is not called a sin in scripture. On the contrary, Abraham, Moses and David were married to multiple women at the same time, and so violated the biblical ideals of exclusivity, mutuality and oneness in those relationships, in spite of having been clearly capable of limiting themselves to a single monogamous marriage. Yet these appear to have been true marriages in God's sight, and while none of those men could have led a Pauline house church, they could have certainly belonged to one, or else the prohibition in 1 Tim 3:2 makes little sense. So it is difficult to argue that polygamy is completely unacceptable to God. However, Scripture sets an initial ideal that has no place for polygamy, and then moves consistently away from its practice, so that we

should regard it as something substantially less than the ideal. I would say it should be deprecated by teaching an expectation of monogamy, unity, mutuality, faithfulness, and intimacy, which I think are the key points of tension between polygamy and the biblical ideal. Probably the most consistent position is to say that there may have been situational arguments for polygamy in tribal life, which also may exist in some analogous societies today, but which do not exist in ours.

## 21. On what basis, if any, would you prevent consenting adults of any relation

and of any number from getting married?

This is a more specific form of questions #23-24, I'll answer it there.

## 22. Should there be an age requirement in this country for obtaining a marriage license?

I'm surprised there isn't; we have one of those in Australia. I would say yes, though I can't regard that as a biblically supported judgement given the average ages for marriage and betrothal in the ancient world. I would say maturity is to be preferred in making life-long choices, and that this modifies some social norms that were taken for granted in the Old and New Testaments.

## 23. Does equality entail that anyone wanting to be married should be able to have any meaningful relationship defined as marriage?

I wouldn't argue that.

## 24. If not, why not?

For a same-sex oriented person, same-sex marriage is closer to the biblical ideal than either half-heterosexual marriage or mandatory lifelong celibacy. If I have previously established that same-sex intercourse matches none of the biblical condemnations when considered in this context, then this consideration becomes decisive. Because I'm arguing *within* the biblical ideal, and on that basis, any redefinition of marriage is precluded. All the more so then for some completely arbitrary redefinition.

## 25. Should your brothers and sisters in Christ who disagree with homosexual practice be allowed to exercise their religious beliefs without fear of punishment, retribution, or coercion?

See #26, below.

<sup>24</sup>[http://180.org.au/romans-1-and-evangelical-same-sex-marriage\\_20140906.html](http://180.org.au/romans-1-and-evangelical-same-sex-marriage_20140906.html)

## **26. Will you speak up for your fellow Christians when their jobs, their accreditation, their reputation, and their freedoms are threatened because of this issue?**

This depends on whether they are discriminating or not. I will presuppose that Evangelicals are generally agreed that they are not to discriminate, and that good Evangelicals do not in fact do so. They look back rather proudly on Christian civil rights advocates, and so on, and say “Had *we* lived in the days of our fathers...”. So Evangelicals ought not to be seeking “religious exemptions” from discrimination law, but rather demonstrating one of two things: Either that they are not actually discriminating, or that the discrimination is morally important in civil terms, not only in religious terms.

There are two ways in which discrimination might occur. The first is through gross hypocrisy, saying in effect that People A are worse sinners than People B, a position Evangelicals have been careful to repudiate in recent times. Suppose, for example, that a Christian cake shop would make a wedding cake for an unrepentant adulterer, or the fifth wedding of a serial divorcee, but not for a same-sex couple. If so, their ostensibly moral objections are arbitrarily selective, to say the very least. Similarly, if a minister is happy to pick up an honorarium for marrying a cohabiting couple without any comment on that matter (“Love wins?”), but then not even attend a same-sex marriage because they “have to take a stand for biblical morality!”, then what kind of stand are they taking?

However, Evangelicals have two main objections to same-sex marriage, the first being that it is an institutionalisation of a sin (thinking that this falls under the biblical condemnations), and the second being that it isn’t really “marriage”. My preceding point only addressed one aspect of the first of these issues. The second issue can be more easily framed as a matter of principled objection or freedom of conscience. But making this argument depends on showing that Evangelicals are not in fact engaging in discrimination as they apply that principle in practice. Are they saying that same-sex orientation does not actually exist? And let me be clear what I mean by that: Are they saying that there is not in fact a small percentage of any population whose experience of romantic and sexual attraction has been permanently and involuntarily and exclusively directed toward others of the same sex? Well, good luck with arguing that these people don’t exist; I’ll just recommend you read *Torn* or *Washed and Waiting*, two very different Christian accounts of growing up same-sex oriented. Or are we saying rather that some people should be treated differently to others in civil society because of something that is, for all purposes, an innate quality that they possess? Now in my jurisdiction, that’s *precisely* the legal definition of discrimination. If an Evangelical cannot distinguish their position from discrimination, then they are believing and behaving inconsistently. I would advocate for a gracious approach where they are sincerely persuaded that they must do so, but that is an accommodation, and I would very much understand why others, if they are being denied equality at law by those Evangelicals, might very reasonably think differently. The issue is orientation and then discrimination, not “lifestyle choice” and “disagreement”.

## **27. Will you speak out against shaming and bullying of all kinds, whether against gays and lesbians or against Evangelicals and Catholics?**

Yes. Though as I have already said, and will reemphasize, it is critically important that Evangelicals defend themselves suitably from the charge of discrimination, without simply dismissing it as a political ploy, or “bullying”. And it is equally important that Evangelicals and Evangelical institutions both acknowledge and publicly repent of their own shaming and bullying, because for us these are actual and often unacknowledged sins before God, and zeal will not excuse them. (I’ll comment further at #37.)

## **28. Since the evangelical church has often failed to take unbiblical divorces and other sexual sins seriously, what steps will you take to ensure that gay marriages are healthy and accord with Scriptural principles?**

I’m answering this from the final conclusion that we should affirm them as true biblical marriages, and so give them the same support and encouragement as any other, which I have argued to be the properly Evangelical response to same-sex orientation. Why would same-sex oriented people, who have had to fight for the opportunity to marry in the eyes of the law, treat it as lightly as the heterosexual Christians addressed by this question? Surely if straight Evangelicals are morally inconsistent people in some systematic way, then they should sort that out regardless of what LGBT Evangelicals do or should do.

## **29. Should gay couples in open relationships be subject to church discipline?**

Like heterosexuals they should be married and monogamous or single and celibate. Whatever this means for the polity of any given congregation should be the same for heterosexual and same-sex oriented people.

## **30. Is it a sin for LGBT persons to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage?**

Yes, the situation is the same as for heterosexuals. There is, I think, one caveat to add, however. If heterosexual Christians were hypothetically to live in a country where civil marriage somehow did not exist, then they would live in whatever de facto relationships might exist, all the while understanding that before God they were truly married. I think that is the present situation for same-sex oriented Christians in western society.

## **31. What will open and affirming churches do to speak prophetically against divorce, fornication, pornography, and adultery wherever they are found?**

I don’t believe in being “open and affirming,” and won’t speak for those who do. This expression covers several different views and is not sufficiently distinguished from theological compromise to be viably Evangelical. Speaking for myself, I would refer to



myself as “LGBT-Equal” on the understanding, as I have argued, that God views same-sex marriages between same-sex oriented Evangelicals as true marriages. That means that there is no longer any distinction to be made between orientations, whether in pastoral care, mission, leadership, education, personal life, or any other category of Christian life – LGBT Evangelicals should fall in love and marry, just like anybody else. I think LGBT-Equal churches would do exactly the same thing as any other churches for the issues raised by this question.

### **32. If “love wins,” how would you define love?**

I recognize that as Rob Bell’s (apparently despised?) expression, but I haven’t read his book and have no interest in defending whatever he means by it.

### **33. What verses would you use to establish that definition?**

See my comment at #32.

### **34. How should obedience to God’s commands shape our understanding of love?**

We’re getting a bit rhetorical here, yes? :)

For the record, we should understand God’s commands to be an expression of his nature and character, which in part means perfect love and perfect holiness in perfect unity. Whenever we perceive a conflict between these, then we have a problem to resolve. I’ll comment a little more on this at #37.

### **35. Do you believe it is possible to love someone and disagree with important decisions they make?**

Yes, but with one important note for the present subject. If a “disagreement” can’t be actually explained, then something is seriously wrong. I’ll speak generically about popular opinion for a moment: People don’t respond to Evangelicals by saying, “Well I disagree, but I respect where you’re coming from.” They say: “Aren’t you actually discriminating against, and vilifying and, when you get the chance, harrasing my LGBT friends and family members?” And the reason they say that is that Evangelicals can’t finish a certain sentence, at least not in any persuasive way in the public arena. It goes: “Sure, same-sex oriented people really exist, but my view of them is not actually discrimination, because...” Or at least, we generally haven’t in the public debate over same-sex marriage.

In consequence, people have considered our position to be just as automatically discredited as the positions that some of our denominational forebears held on slaves, non-whites, and women; if you read what they wrote, they didn’t *hate* African-Americans (for example), they just happened to “disagree” that emancipation would be good for them, because they “disagreed” that they were the equal of white people, and could not imagine such a surely-disastrous social experiment even being attempted; “Jesus never advocated this!”, they said, and on they went. Freedom of conscience does protect the right to disagree, but we would not say in other cases that it offers a right to discriminate in public life. Now race and orientation are not identical

issues for a number of reasons, though that is more notably so from a Christian perspective, but do you see why they appear directly analogous to most of our neighbours, and why posing them as a question of “disagreement” seems to be ducking and weaving? The context and justification for same-sex marriage is same-sex orientation. We must address discrimination in regard to orientation, and not call it disagreement.

### **36. If supporting gay marriage is a change for you, has anything else changed in your understanding of faith?**

Nothing substantial of which I am aware, but then, finding a genuinely Evangelical solution to the problems raised by orientation shouldn’t have non-Evangelical side-effects.

### **37. As an evangelical, how has your support for gay marriage helped you become more passionate about traditional evangelical distinctives like a focus on being born again, the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the total trustworthiness of the Bible, and the urgent need to evangelize the lost?**

I would say that supporting gay marriage is a consequence of resolving a very obvious contradiction in Evangelical thought. Because theology is an organic whole, this carries benefits across-the-board in life and faith.

Evangelicals have not known what to do with same-sex oriented people. Variously, we have denied that they really exist; that same-sex orientation could have happened to absolutely any one of us, or any of our friends or children, with seemingly the same probability; that it is thus a part of being human. We have tried to slot them into ill-concieved and ineffective therapies and told them that it was their own shameful fault if they could not change, with entirely predictable mental health effects; we equated orientation with disease and loudly compared it with paedophilia. We compelled them to form romantically and sexually handicapped half-heterosexual marriages, or else face mandatory lifelong celibacy. We made them hide in fear in churches, knowing that no-one would understand. We did this to a completely random selection of people, something Jesus and Paul both actively opposed when they spoke against the prohibition on marriage or the enforcement of mandatory celibacy. When they wanted to have families, we said they would be bad parents. Some of us, far from visiting the sick in hospital (cf. Matt 25), celebrated the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s as God’s judgement. We retreated from one position to the next as each in turn was publicly exposed, but never apologised for the damage we caused by our earlier views, because our culture-war was too important, and we didn’t think we had any alternative. We did all this saying we were only being faithful to scripture, and that we loved people “too much to leave them as they were”. But in public life we gave comparatively little sign of having understood the basic, pervasive experience of growing up same-sex oriented, and could never plausibly distinguish our position from a position of discrimination, that is, of treating people differently to their detriment, because of an innate quality they possess. So we stayed “on message” about politics and danger. We gladly alienated a whole world of desperately vulnerable people, from ourselves, from faith, and from God, and many of them, to their credit, learned to make do without us, and went from strength to strength.

All these things we did had the direct consequence of discrediting the gospel of Christ, the trustworthiness of the Bible, and our own public credibility, pretty much across-the-board. If we step back for a moment and resolve these contradictions in our own position, then we necessarily gain traction on other matters central to our faith. But after having gotten orientation so wrong, for so many years, it's a long way back. The simplest and surest way to keep the church at large in a position of social marginality is just to get the one defining civil rights issue of each succeeding generation more or less completely wrong. The irony is that since the 1930s at least, Christian ministers were in the best position to have resolved these challenges at a pastoral level, long before they ever became a political landmine.

**38. What open and affirming churches would you point to where people are being converted to orthodox Christianity, sinners are being warned of judgment and called to repentance, and missionaries are being sent out to plant churches among unreached peoples?**

Most "open and affirming" churches are theologically liberal. I'm aware of some recent large churches who assert an Evangelical identity and have faced up to the problems raised by orientation, and they will presumably continue as they otherwise have in these regards. But I have no close connections with the leadership or congregation of any such church and so, will decline to answer for them. It differs in other states, but in my own city of Sydney, my position is reasonably unusual, and I am involved in a reasonably small church.

**39. Do you hope to be more committed to the church, more committed to Christ, and more committed to the Scriptures in the years ahead?**

Very much so. I would say that removing inconsistencies in our understanding of both scripture and the world around us is one of the biggest contributions that ant of us can make toward that end.

**40. When Paul at the end of Romans 1 rebukes "those who practice such things" and those who "give approval to those who practice them," what sins do you think he has in mind?**

Every sinful characteristic of Hellenistic society, including its homosexual practices. As I have argued<sup>25</sup> though, Paul's own language in Romans 1 shows that he cannot be presupposed to be addressing orientation, and the substance of his condemnations shows that they do not apply to same-sex marriages.

(In reply: In this verse, Paul also assumes that Gentiles "know" that what he condemns is wrong, so that he can argue his case from common moral knowledge. Can modern Evangelicals do so? If so, why haven't they? Or are we speaking about something different to what Paul is?)

<sup>25</sup>[http://180.org.au/romans-1-and-evangelical-same-sex-marriage\\_20140906.html](http://180.org.au/romans-1-and-evangelical-same-sex-marriage_20140906.html)

## More Questions?

I ask a set of questions in reply here. There are a lot of them, but I think they're reasonably comprehensive.

- [Some New Questions for Evangelicals Opposing Same-sex Marriage](#)<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup>[http://180.org.au/questions-for-evangelicals-opposing-marriage-equality\\_20150704.html](http://180.org.au/questions-for-evangelicals-opposing-marriage-equality_20150704.html)