

Homosexuality and the Church, Part One – Dan Hitz

Many in the church are being overwhelmed by the cultural push and political pressure to accept homosexuality as an acceptable expression of sexuality. This article looks at one of the most popular authors of this viewpoint, Matthew Vines, and his book *God and the Gay Christian*. Joe Dallas' seven-part blog, *Assessing Matthew Vines "God and the Gay Christian"*, is a major resource for this article. His blog can be found at www.joedallas.com/blog.



Popular culture and the legal atmosphere of the day are challenging many Christians to determine what they truly believe about sexual expression. The question of the day seems to be if we as Christians will live within the Scriptural parameters for sexuality that we say we believe. Many younger people within the church may not even be able to cite Scriptural parameters for sexuality. We as Christians must understand the Creator's intent for our sexuality, and submit our lives to Christ if we are to have any hope of reaching the lost.

Unfortunately, many in the church struggle with sexual integrity. A 2014 study by Christian Mingle, a Christian dating site, revealed that among 18 to 59 year olds, 63% embrace having sex before marriage. According to a recent Covenant Eyes report, 50% of Christian men and 20% of Christian women are addicted to pornography. Many in the church are allowing the culture, and their own emotions, to dictate their morality instead of standing on the truth of Scripture. In the past, John 3:16 was the most familiar Scripture. Now it seems as though Matthew 7:1, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged," has surpassed John 3:16 in popularity. Christians are beginning to buy into the worldly belief that saying a particular behavior is wrong or sinful is improper judgement, forgetting that we are called to use Scripture to determine if a particular behavior is acceptable or not. Another partial Scripture is fast gaining ground in familiarity. 1 John 4:8c, "...God is love." Many in the church believe that God loves them and wants them to be happy. They use this as validation to embrace leaving their spouse to marry another or to embrace homosexuality. They are embracing a false grace without repentance. While it is true that God loves us, it is not true that His primary goal on this side of eternity is to make us happy. We cannot forget the Lord's instructions to his followers in Matthew 16:24, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me." This hardly supports the "God loves me and wants me to be happy" theology of today. It is true that the Lord provides a means of forgiveness and grace for anyone who is involved in the worst of sin, but His grace also requires repentance and submission to His Lordship. The same loving Savior who told the woman caught in adultery that He did not condemn her, also instructed her to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11). We must not make life decisions based on our emotions and what feels good. We must make our life decisions based upon the truth of Scripture. The challenge lies in an observation of human nature that when emotions are increased, the rules change. This is what we see happening in much of the church today, particularly in the gay-affirming church.

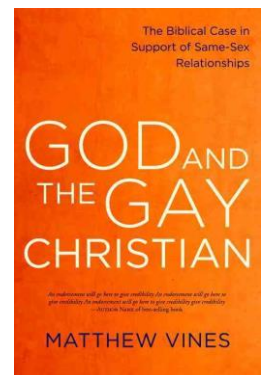
In part five of his blog, *Assessing Matthew Vines "God and the Gay Christian"*, Joe Dallas writes, "When plain truth condemns what we love, our choices are few. We can abandon what we love in obedience to the truth, we can rebel openly against the truth, or we can attempt to re-write the truth to appease our own conscience and silence our critics." This is what we see happening in the gay-affirming movement. There is a changing of the rules, a redefining of words, a distortion of grace, and an erroneous interpretation of what the Scriptures really say about sexuality.

What makes Matthew Vines and his book so successful? He certainly is not the first gay-advocate, or even gay-Christian advocate to promote a gay-affirming theology. Other familiar advocates include Michael Bussee, one of the founders of the now defunct Exodus North America; Mel White, founder of Soul Force and a former ghost writer for top Christian leaders; and Justin Lee, founder of the Gay Christian Network. Certainly the implosion of Exodus North America and the life of John Paulk, co-founder of Love Won Out, who is divorced from his wife and is once again openly gay, lend cultural credibility to their theology. All of the above have helped to create a strong push towards the Christian

acceptance of homosexuality. However, it is important to note that another co-founder of Exodus North America, Frank Worthen, continues to live a life submitted to Christ and remains faithfully married to his wife. Worthen, now in his late 70s, returned to ministry in 2012 and helped found Restored Hope Network, a network of Christian ministries which upholds the Biblical truth of transformation. It is notable that John Paulk's ex-wife, Anne, is also one of the founders of Restored Hope Network and serves as the executive director. The voices of those who were once "ex-gay" and are now "ex-ex-gay" do not silence Biblical truth, nor do they silence the public testimonies of others who have walked away from homosexuality. Those testimonies include singers Dennis Jernigan and Donnie McClurkin; Andrew Comiskey, founder of Desert Stream Ministries and author of the Living Waters program; and former gay publication editors Michael Glatze of Young Gay America or Charlene Cothran of Venus Magazine. Popular media may focus on those who have returned to homosexuality, but there are multitudes who continue to submit their sexuality to the Lord Jesus Christ and embrace Biblical sexuality.

Matthew Vines is different from his predecessors. He is a winsome man in his mid-twenties, educated at Harvard, and most notably grew up in a conservative Christian home. He understands the hearts of those in the conservative church and speaks their language. I've personally heard him speak during the PCUSA convention at which they voted to become a gay-affirming denomination. I spoke to him in passing and have to admit that he is very respectful and disarming. His viewpoints are very persuasive if you accept them on the surface. Unfortunately, that is where many in the church stop and change their theology. However, Vines' theology falls apart when you sincerely begin to examine it in the light of sound, traditional Scriptural interpretation.

In *God and the Gay Christian*, Vines leans heavily on an emotional interpretation of the Scriptures which follows the "God loves me and wants me to be happy" theology of today. The basic structure for his stance is founded on multiple presuppositions which are presented within the first few chapters. Not surprisingly, his first presupposition is that God loves us and wants us to be happy. Second, some people are born homosexual. Third, homosexuality as an inborn trait is inherently unchangeable. Forth, a person cannot be happy and fulfilled unless he or she is in a marriage style relationship. Fifth, since God loves us and wants us to be happy, and a gay-identified person cannot be happy without a marriage style relationship, God is fine with him or her entering into such a relationship with a member of the same sex. The final justification for same-sex relationships that we will look at in this article comes from a misapplication of Jesus' teaching to judge a tree by its fruit. Vines claims that homosexuality expressed in a committed, loving relationship bears good fruit and that mandatory celibacy for gay Christians is more than many of them can bear and will therefore produce bad fruit. Following Vines' thinking, one would have to practice unhealthy emotional detachment to avoid falling into sinful relationships if same-sex relationships were not allowed. This would cause further harm and more bad fruit. These presuppositions are used to support his reinterpretation of Scripture and his pro-gay theology. We will look at God's design for sexuality through the Scriptures before answering Vines' assertions.



It is important to note that many in the LGBT community – with Vines' being a rare exception – accuse Christians of picking and choosing which Old Testament laws they will uphold, and which laws they will ignore. They may chide Christians for enjoying a sausage, egg and cheese biscuit from their favorite fast food restaurant while those same Christians maintain that homosexual expression is prohibited. Our response can be found in the book of Acts. In Chapter 10, the Lord shows Peter a vision of various unclean animals and instructs him to get up and eat. When Peter objects, the Lord tells him not to call anything unclean that He has declared clean. Therefore, we are now allowed to eat a sausage, egg and cheese biscuit if we want too. In Chapter 15, the account of the counsel in Jerusalem where the early church leaders convened to determine which laws the Gentiles were required to follow, abstaining from sexual immorality was one of the four laws they were required to keep. The early church therefore brought forth the Old Testament sexual laws, their basis for sexual conduct, into the New Testament.

Acts 10:11-15 NIV ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." ¹⁴ "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." ¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

Acts 15:29 NIV You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.



It is also important to note that many in the gay community will observe that Jesus said nothing about homosexuality in the New Testament, and use that to support the idea that He must not have been against such behavior. Once again, Vines is an exception to this practice. In his book, *The Gay Gospel*, Joe Dallas points out that the absence of a statement from Jesus does not prove that he did not address the issue. It isn't recorded that Jesus said anything against spousal abuse or bestiality, yet no one would say that He was in support of those

behaviors. John 21:25 reads that the entire world could not contain an account of everything that Jesus did while He was on the earth, which is a clear indication that Jesus did and said much more than is recorded in Scripture. There are New Testament Scriptures that do specifically address homosexuality. Romans, Chapter One is one example. There are many more. The passage listed below includes both heterosexual and homosexual sin as something that needs to be repented of, and something that has been overcome by members of the Corinthian church.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NIV ⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Let's take a closer look at the Biblical parameters for sexuality. God ordains sexual expression only within the boundaries of a life-long marital covenant between one biologically born man and one biologically born woman. When the Pharisees were questioning Jesus about divorce, He reiterated the Father's design for marriage in Mark 10:6-9.

Mark 10:6-9 NLT ⁶ But 'God made them male and female' from the beginning of creation. ⁷ 'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, ⁸ and the two are united into one.' Since they are no longer two but one, ⁹ let no one split apart what God has joined together."

Sexual expression includes visual, hand/genital contact, hand/buttocks/breast contact, oral sex, anal sex, and intercourse. Unfortunately, there are many who have rationalized that everything short of sexual intercourse is acceptable – or at the very least, less unacceptable, than intercourse – and can therefore be practiced by Christian couples. When we consider that Adam and Eve were alone in the garden with each other and the Lord and they still realized that they needed a covering for their nakedness, we can understand the parameters for sexual integrity more clearly.

Genesis 3:7 NIV Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

The Covenant Eyes report on porn stats cited earlier states that 50% of college aged men and 20% of college aged women see pornography use as an acceptable form of sexual expression. Pornography involves lustful thoughts, viewing the nakedness of others, and usually facilitates masturbation. Although there are no Scriptures specifically forbidding masturbation, there are many Scriptures declaring lustful thoughts to be sinful. Therefore pornography use is sinful and masturbation with lustful thoughts is sinful.

Matthew 5:28 NIV But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Some in the church cannot point to a Scriptural prohibition on sex before marriage. They rationalize that it is okay for committed heterosexual couples to engage in sexual activities prior to marriage, especially if they intend to get married at some point. 1 Corinthians explains the need for a man and woman to marry before engaging in sexual activities. The passage even encourages married couples to engage in sexual intimacy regularly to avoid sexual temptation.

1 Cor 7:1-5 NIV 1 Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” 2 But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. 3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Even within marriage there are limitations on the marriage bed. Godly sexual expression honors and builds intimacy. It does not shame, cause physical pain, or risk infection. Before surrendering to political and cultural pressure, the medical community confirmed that anal sex was unhealthy. Besides the risk of bacterial infection, the sphincter muscles of the anus do not have a two way response. They are built to open in one direction to allow for the elimination of waste. Tearing and damage can result even in the case of careful engagement of anal sex. As a counselor, I have heard of couples using pornography to “enhance their sexual activities” or engaging in masochistic behaviors. They use Hebrews 13:4 as the rationalization that anything is acceptable within the marriage bed because some versions, like the New King James, read that the marriage bed is undefiled. Yet, the New International Version reveals the heart of God; the marriage bed is to be kept pure. Marriage does not give a green light to defiling, harmful, or disrespectful behavior; even if agreed upon by the husband and wife.

Hebrews 13:4 NIV Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

This article is not intended to shame or condemn anyone who has engaged in wrongful sexual practices. It is intended to uphold a Scriptural standard and call those to repentance who have sinned. Forgiveness is available to all, no matter what they have done, or are currently doing. Transformation is available to all who submit their lives to the Lordship of Christ. Repentance requires us to acknowledge and confess our sin, and to accept God’s grace to walk away from our sin. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 is 2000 year old evidence that there were heterosexual and homosexual sinners within the Corinthian church who received forgiveness and restoration through Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:9 is another beautiful reminder of the mercy available to us from God.



1 Cor 6:11 NLT There was a time when some of you were just like that, but now your sins have been washed away, and you have been set apart for God. You have been made right with God because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you.

1 John 1:9 NKJV If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

These Scriptures on sexuality are far from conclusive, but they do provide a general overview for this article. Now let’s take a closer look at Matthew Vines’ presuppositions in light of the Scriptural parameters for sexuality. We would all agree that God loves us. This is a core belief of our Christian faith. We may even agree that God wants us to be happy, but we would greatly disagree about what that means and how happiness is achieved in the Christian life. In John 16:33, Jesus tells the disciples

that they will have trouble in this world. In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas preached to the early church that they “must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God”. It isn’t that the Lord wants us to be miserable. Jesus even declared that He spoke things to the disciples and instructed them to ask for things in His name that their “joy may be full” (John 15:11 and 16:24). The Lord is looking for something much deeper than happiness in our earthly circumstances. He is working in our hearts to bring us “peace that transcends all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) and have an eternal joy that transcends all of our earthly circumstances. Certain activities may give us earthly happiness for a season, but our Creator knows what activities are healthy for us and contribute to our eternal joy. As Christians, we are called to deny the sinful desires of our hearts in order to follow Christ and achieve true eternal peace.

Matthew 16:24 NKJV Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.



Vines’ next presupposition is that some people are born gay. Scripturally, we can agree that all people are born in sin. In Psalm 51:5, David declares that he was not only sinful at birth, but sinful from the time that his mother conceived him. Through Romans 3:23 we can conclude that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. Realizing that we are all born with a sin nature negates justification of any behavior merely because we are born with a propensity for that behavior. Many in the LGBT community state that there are physiological factors that cause one to be born gay including genetic indicators,

epigenetics, or hormonal washes. A 2008 publication by the American Psychological Association declares that there is no conclusive proof as to what causes homosexuality. Interesting to note that there are genetic indicators for alcoholism and anger, but no one would recommend embracing those traits simply because one may be genetically inclined to them. Regardless of a physiological causation or a spiritual causation, the grace of God for repentance and transformation is available to all.

Answers to Your Questions: For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality (APA, 2008) There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.

What about Vines’ presupposition that homosexuality is unchangeable? We’ve already looked at 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 that provides 2000 year old evidence that some in the Corinthian church embraced homosexuality at one point, repented, had their sins washed away, and were made right with God. There is also over 100 years of secular research verifying that an individual can experience a shift in their orientation on a continuum from exclusively or almost exclusively same-sex attracted to exclusively or almost exclusively opposite sex-attracted. Summaries of this research can be seen at www.narth.com, the website for the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity. In reality, most who are walking away from homosexuality experience a shift somewhere between the two extremes of the continuum. It is here that the gay community upholds an “all or nothing” demand on transformation. They will state that if someone continues to experience any same-sex attraction whatsoever, then they truly haven’t changed at all. This is a double standard not applied to any other forms of recovery including alcoholism, depression, or anxiety. The Bible makes it clear that we will continue to experience temptation while on this earth and that Jesus, Himself, was tempted in every way we are yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). The devil will continue to hurl the same fiery darts at us that have tripped us up in the past in an attempt to draw us back into our fallen nature. We can safely assume that even happily married heterosexual people are tempted from time to time to lust after, or even engage in illicit sexual activity with, someone other than their spouse. Rational Christians would never tell them to stop resisting the natural urge they were born with and embrace their “true

self” as an “adulterous Christian”. Why is there a double standard which encourages ex-gays to stop resisting their unwanted sinful temptations and embrace their sinful identity as a “gay-Christian”?

Ephesians 6:16 NKJV ...above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

Vines asserts that a person cannot be happy unless he is in a marital style relationship. First of all, it doesn't take long surveying our married friends to realize that not all married people are happy. There are many single people that seem to have more peace than our married friends. In reality, if one does not learn to be content as a single person, he will not be content if he has a spouse. He may actually become angry with his spouse if she fails to fulfill him like he expected her to. Through Scripture, we can conclude that the Apostle Paul learned to be content in whatever state he found himself (Philippians 4:11). In Corinthians he writes that he wishes all people would remain unmarried like he was (7:8), but urges them to marry if necessary because it is better to marry than to burn with lust (7: 9). We can build a case that there are some that would have a difficult time remaining single and would struggle with lust. This brings us to Vines' next conclusion that since a gay-identified person can't change and can't be happy unless he is in a marital style relationship, then a loving God would want him to become married to someone of the same gender so he would not be miserable. Even if it were absolutely true that one cannot be happy unless he were married to someone of the same gender, this does not allow for same-sex marriage. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul cried out to the Lord three times to have his thorn in the flesh removed. It sounds as though any logical person would agree that his thorn in the flesh was a real problem and that anyone would want it to be removed. Rather than removing it, the Lord responded to Paul by instructing him to rely on His grace. In other words, God told Paul to trust Him for the grace to experience a peace that transcends his earthly difficulty, rather than removing that difficulty from Paul's life. God saw an eternal purpose in Paul's difficulty that was far more valuable than a temporal answer to his problem. The Lord can provide grace to single people struggling with same-sex attraction and empower them to live a victorious and fulfilling life.

2 Corinthians 12:8-10 NIV ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

This brings us to the last presupposition, that like Jesus, we can judge a tree by its fruit (Matthew 7:16-18). As Joe Dallas points out, this kind of theology does not rely on Scripture to tell us what is acceptable or unacceptable behavior, this kind of theology actually requires obvious harmful consequences in order to declare a behavior unacceptable. To be intellectually honest, we have to admit that there actually are committed same-sex couples with loving and supportive interactions which produce good fruit if we ignore the eternal consequences and merely examine the temporal results. In the same way, we would also have to agree that there are loving, supportive adulterous relationships in which the adulterous man and woman truly do love each other and offer each other emotional strength and support. In no way does the good fruit of their mutual love and support negate the bad fruit or the eternal consequences of their adultery. Simply put, the apparent good results of sin do not justify the sin or negate the reality of sin and its eternal consequences. Sometimes, the consequences of sin are not always obvious until it is far too late.

Proverbs 14:12 NKJV There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

Romans 6:23 NIV For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In next month's article, we will look at some of Matthew Vines' specific theological viewpoints that reinterpret and redefine Scripture to sculpt a gay-affirming theology.