



My Take: The Bible's Surprisingly Mixed Message on Human Sexuality

By Jennifer Wright Knust, Special to CNN

(Editor's Note: Jennifer Wright Knust is author of *Unprotected Texts: The Bible's Surprising Contradictions about Sex and Desire*.)

We often hear that Christians have no choice but to regard homosexuality as a sin- that Scripture simply demands it.

As a Bible scholar and pastor myself, I say that Scripture does no such thing.

"I love gay people, but the Bible forces me to condemn them" is a poor excuse that attempts to avoid accountability by wrapping a very particular and narrow interpretation of a few biblical passages in a cloak of divinely inspired respectability.

Truth is, Scripture can be interpreted in any number of ways. And biblical writers held a much more complicated view of human sexuality than contemporary debates have acknowledged.

In Genesis, for example, it would seem that God's original intention for humanity was androgyny, not sexual differentiation and heterosexuality.

Genesis includes two versions of the story of God's creation of the human person. First, God creates humanity male and female and then God forms the human person again, this time in the Garden of Eden. The second human person is given the name Adam and the female is formed from his rib.

Ancient Christians and Jews explained this two-step creation by imagining that the first human person possessed the genitalia of both sexes. Then, when the androgynous, dually-sexed person was placed in the garden, s/he was divided in two.

According to this account, the man "clings to the woman" in an attempt to regain half his flesh, which God took from him once he was placed in Eden. As third century Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman explained, when God created the first man, God created him with two faces. "Then he split the androgyne and made two bodies, one on each side, and turned them about."

When the apostle Paul envisioned the bodies that would be given to humanity at the end of time, he imagined that they would be androgynous, "not male and female." The third-century non-canonical Gospel of Philip, meanwhile, lamented that sexual difference had been created at all: "If the female had not separated from the male, she and the male would not die. That being's separation became the source of death."

From these perspectives, God's original plan was sexual unity in one body, not two. The Genesis creation stories can support the notion that sexual intercourse is designed to reunite male and female into one body, but they can also suggest that God's blessing was first placed on an undifferentiated body that didn't have sex at all.

Heterosexual sex was therefore an afterthought designed to give back the man what he had lost.

Despite common misperceptions, biblical writers could also imagine same-sex intimacy as a source of blessing. For example, the seemingly intimate relationship between the Old Testament's David and Jonathan, in which Jonathan loved David more than he loved women, may have been intended to justify David's rise as king.

Jonathan, not David, was a king's son. David was only a shepherd. Yet by becoming David's "woman," Jonathan voluntarily gave up his place for his beloved friend.

Thus, Jonathan "took great delight in David," foiling King Saul's attempts to arrange for David's death (1 Samuel 19:1). Choosing David over his father, Jonathan makes a formal covenant with his friend, asking David to remain faithful to him and his descendants.

Sealing the covenant, David swears his devotion to Jonathan, "for he loved him as he loved his own life" (1 Samuel 20:17). When Jonathan is killed, King David composes a eulogy for him, praising his devotion: "greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Samuel 1:26).

Confident claims about the forms of sex rejected by God are also called into question by early Christian interpretations of the story of Sodom. From the perspective of the New Testament, it was the near rape of angels - not sex between men - that led to the demise of the city.

Linking a strange story in Genesis about "sons of God" who lust after "daughters of men" to the story of the angels who visit Abraham's nephew Lot, New Testament writers concluded that the mingling of human and divine flesh is an intolerable sin.

As the New Testament letter Jude puts it:

And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great day. Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and went after strange flesh, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire (Jude 6-7).

The first time angels dared to mix with humans, God flooded the earth, saving only Noah, his family, and the animals. In the case of Sodom, as soon as men attempted to engage in sexual activity with angels, God obliterated the city with fire, delivering only Lot and his family. Sex with angels was regarded as the most dangerous and offensive sex of all.

It's true that same-sex intimacy is condemned in a few biblical passages. But these passages, which I can count on one hand, are addressed to specific sex acts and specific persons, not to all humanity forever, and they can be interpreted in any number of ways.

The book of Leviticus, for example, is directed at Israelite men, offering instructions regarding legitimate sexual partners so long as they are living in Israel. Biblical patriarchs and kings violate nearly every one of these commandments.

Paul's letters urge followers of Christ to remain celibate and blame all Gentiles in general for their poor sexual standards. Jesus, meanwhile, says nothing at all about same-sex pairing, and when he discusses marriage, he discourages it.

So why are we pretending that the Bible is dictating our sexual morals? It isn't.

Moreover, as Americans we should have learned by now that such a simplistic approach to the Bible will lead us astray.

Only a little more than a century ago, many of the very same passages now being invoked to argue that the scriptures label homosexuality a sin or that

God cannot countenance gay marriage were used to justify not “biblical marriage” but slavery.

Yes, the apostle Paul selected same-sex pairings as one among many possible examples of human sin, but he also assumed that slavery was acceptable and then did nothing to protect slaves from sexual use by their masters, a common practice at the time. Letters attributed to him go so far as to command slaves to obey their masters and women to obey their husbands as if they were obeying Christ.

These passages served as fundamental proof texts to those who were arguing that slavery was God’s will and accusing abolitionists of failing to obey biblical mandates.

It is therefore disturbing to hear some Christian leaders today claim that they have no choice but to regard homosexuality as a sin. They do have a choice and should be held accountable for the ones they are making.

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Jennifer Wright Knust.

My Take: The Bible Really Does Condemn Homosexuality

By Robert A. J. Gagnon, Special to CNN

(Editor’s Note: Robert A. J. Gagnon, Ph.D., is associate professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and author of *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* and (with Dan Via) *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views.*)

In her recent CNN Belief Blog post "The Bible's surprisingly mixed messages on sexuality," Jennifer Wright Knust claims that Christians can't appeal to the Bible to justify opposition to homosexual practice because the Bible provides no clear witness on the subject and is too flawed to serve as a moral guide.

As a scholar who has written books and articles on the Bible and homosexual practice, I can say that the reality is the opposite of her claim. It's shocking that in her editorial and even her book, "Unprotected Texts," Knust ignores a mountain of evidence against her positions.

It raises a serious question: does the Left read significant works that disagree with pro-gay interpretations of Scripture and choose to simply ignore them?

Owing to space limitations I will focus on her two key arguments: the ideal of gender-neutral humanity and slavery arguments.

Knust's lead argument is that sexual differentiation in Genesis, Jesus and Paul is nothing more than an "afterthought" because "God's original intention for humanity was androgyny."

It's true that Genesis presents the first human (Hebrew adam, from *adamah*, ground: "earthling") as originally sexually undifferentiated. But what Knust misses is that once something is "taken from" the human to form a woman, the human, now differentiated as a man, finds his sexual other half in that missing element, a woman.

That's why Genesis speaks of the woman as a "counterpart" or "complement," using a Hebrew expression *neged*, which means both "corresponding to" and "opposite." She is similar as regards humanity but different in terms of gender. If sexual relations are to be had, they are to be had with a sexual counterpart or complement.

Knust cites the apostle Paul's remark about "no 'male and female'" in Galatians. Yet Paul applies this dictum to establishing the equal worth of men and women before God, not to eliminating a male-female prerequisite for sex.

Applied to sexual relations, the phrase means "no sex," not "acceptance of homosexual practice," as is evident both from the consensus of the earliest interpreters of this phrase and from Jesus' own sayings about marriage in this age and the next.

All the earliest interpreters agreed that "no 'male and female,'" applied to sexual relations, meant "no sex."

That included Paul and the ascetic believers at Corinth in the mid-first century; and the church fathers and gnostics of the second to fourth centuries. Where they disagreed is over whether to postpone mandatory celibacy until the resurrection (the orthodox view) or to begin insisting on it now (the heretical view).

Jesus' view

According to Jesus, "when (people) rise from the dead, they neither marry or are given in marriage but are like the angels" (Mark 12:25). Sexual relations and differentiation had only penultimate significance. The unmediated access to God that resurrection bodies bring would make sex look dull by comparison.

At the same time Jesus regarded the male-female paradigm as essential if sexual relations were to be had in this present age.

In rejecting a revolving door of divorce-and-remarriage and, implicitly, polygamy Jesus cited Genesis: "From the beginning of creation, 'male and female he made them.' 'For this reason a man ...will be joined to his woman and the two shall become one flesh'" (Mark 10:2-12; Matthew 19:3-12).

Jesus' point was that God's limiting of persons in a sexual union to two is evident in his creation of two (and only two) primary sexes: male and female, man and woman. The union of male and female completes the sexual spectrum, rendering a third partner both unnecessary and undesirable.

The sectarian Jewish group known as the Essenes similarly rejected polygamy on the grounds that God made us "male and female," two sexual complements designed for a union consisting only of two.

Knust insinuates that Jesus wouldn't have opposed homosexual relationships. Yet Jesus' interpretation of Genesis demonstrates that he regarded a male-female prerequisite for marriage as the foundation on which other sexual standards could be predicated, including monogamy. Obviously the foundation is more important than anything predicated on it.

Jesus developed a principle of interpretation that Knust ignores: God's "from the beginning" creation of "male and female" trumps some sexual behaviors permitted in the Old Testament. So there's nothing unorthodox about recognizing change in Scripture's sexual ethics. But note the direction of the change: toward less sexual license and greater conformity to the logic of the male-female requirement in Genesis. Knust is traveling in the opposite direction.

Knust's slavery analogy and avoidance of closer analogies

Knust argues that an appeal to the Bible for opposing homosexual practice is as morally unjustifiable as pre-Civil War appeals to the Bible for supporting slavery. The analogy is a bad one.

The best analogy will be the comparison that shares the most points of substantive correspondence with the item being compared. How much does the Bible's treatment of slavery resemble its treatment of homosexual practice? Very little.

Scripture shows no vested interest in preserving the institution of slavery but it does show a strong vested interest from Genesis to Revelation in preserving a male-female prerequisite. Unlike its treatment of the institution of slavery, Scripture treats a male-female prerequisite for sex as a pre-Fall structure.

The Bible accommodates to social systems where sometimes the only alternative to starvation is enslavement. But it clearly shows a critical edge by specifying mandatory release dates and the right of kinship buyback; requiring that Israelites not be treated as slaves; and reminding Israelites that God had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt.

Paul urged enslaved believers to use an opportunity for freedom to maximize service to God and encouraged a Christian master (Philemon) to free his slave (Onesimus).

How can changing up on the Bible's male-female prerequisite for sex be analogous to the church's revision of the slavery issue if the Bible encourages critique of slavery but discourages critique of a male-female paradigm for sex?

Much closer analogies to the Bible's rejection of homosexual practice are the Bible's rejection of incest and the New Testament's rejection of polyamory (polygamy).

Homosexual practice, incest, and polyamory are all (1) forms of sexual behavior (2) able to be conducted as adult-committed relationships but (3) strongly proscribed because (4) they violate creation structures or natural law.

Like same-sex intercourse, incest is sex between persons too much structurally alike, here as regards kinship rather than gender. Polyamory is a violation of the foundational "twoness" of the sexes.

The fact that Knust chooses a distant analogue (slavery) over more proximate analogues (incest, polyamory) shows that her analogical reasoning is driven more by ideological biases than by fair use of analogies.

Knust's other arguments are riddled with holes.

In claiming that David and Jonathan had a homosexual relationship she confuses kinship affection with erotic love. Her claim that "from the perspective of the New Testament" the Sodom story was about "the near rape of angels, not sex between men" makes an "either-or" out of Jude 7's "both-and."

Her canard that only a few Bible texts reject homosexual practice overlooks other relevant texts and the fact that infrequent mention is often a sign of significance. It is disturbing to read what passes nowadays for expert "liberal" reflections on what the Bible says about homosexual practice.

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Robert A. J. Gagnon.

More on Knust's Blunders about the Bible and Homosexuality: An Addendum to My CNN Editorial

by Robert A. J. Gagnon, Ph.D.

March 3, 2011

I couldn't squeeze all or even most of my criticisms of Prof. Dr. Jennifer Wright Knust's editorial at CNN's Belief Blog, "The Bible's surprisingly mixed messages on sexuality" (Feb. 9, 2011), in my same-site response, "The Bible really does condemn homosexuality" (March 3, 2011).

Note that the title is that of the Religion Editor, added at the last moment without checking with me. I would say 'homosexual practice,' not 'homosexuality.' My own suggested title was more positive: "The Bible's surprisingly consistent message on sexuality." Within the article the editor stripped away nearly all my citations of primary sources.

The editors of the Belief Blog limited my word count to roughly the size of Knust's editorial. This limitation was excruciating given the number of dumb arguments that Knust made and the array of counterarguments at my disposal for answering each of these. So I limited myself there to treating her two key contentions, her androgyne argument and her slavery analogy, and put here my response to the rest of her claims.

I'm sure Prof. Knust is a nice person in other contexts but it is inexcusable to be so uninformed (and even condescendingly abrasive) about a subject on which she claims to be an expert.

A clarification: My comment about "the Left" not dealing with the significant literature that disagrees with their homosexualist interpretation of the Bible

refers to the religious Left (i.e. persons generally dismissive of Scripture), not the political Left. I should have made that point clearer.

More on Knust's Androgyne Argument

It is not accurate to say, as Knust does, that Jesus "discouraged" marriage. He merely created the option for those like himself who "made themselves eunuchs because of the kingdom of heaven" on *pragmatic* missionary grounds (Matthew 19:9-12). Foregoing marriage and thus all sexual relations was an option for those who wanted to proclaim the message about God's kingdom with greater freedom of movement and risk than would otherwise be the case with a spouse and children.

In response to my rebuttal Knust might argue that the existence of hermaphroditic or "intersexed" persons in our society undermines Jesus' argument that the creation of two primary sexes, "male and female," is an indicator that God limits sexual unions to two persons. It doesn't.

First, the phenomenon of the intersexed involves an amalgam of the two primary sexes, not distinct features of a third sex. Second, extreme sexual ambiguity is very rare, encompassing only a tiny fraction of one percent of the general population. Usually an allegedly intersexed person has a genital abnormality that does not significantly straddle the sexes; for example, females with a large clitoris or small vagina, or males with a small penis or one that does not allow a direct urinary stream. The extreme exception merely underscores the prevailing rule of foundational twoness.

Third, the category of the "intersexed" no more justifies an elimination of a two-sexes prerequisite than does the equally rare phenomenon of conjoined ('Siamese') twins justify the elimination of a monogamy principle; or than does some fuzziness around the edges of defining "close blood relations" and "children" justifies the elimination of standards against incest and pedophilia. Fourth, homosexual persons who seek to discard a binary model for sexual relations do not claim, for the most part, to be other than male or female. Thus they, at least, remain logically and naturally bound to a binary model for mate selection.

More on Knust's Slavery Analogy

Knust's insinuation that Paul wouldn't have cared if masters sexually abused their slaves is absurd, inasmuch as Paul rejected *all* sexual relations outside of marriage, to say nothing of coerced relations.

Relative to the slave economies of the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman Mediterranean basin the countercultural dynamic of ancient Israel and the early church appears quite liberating. The countercultural dynamic of Scripture with respect to homosexual practice moves decisively in the

direction of equating liberation with freedom from enslavement to homoerotic impulses.

No culture in the ancient Near East or in the Greco-Roman world was more strongly opposed to homosexual practice than ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity.

David and Jonathan

Knust makes a mistake common to persons unfamiliar with ancient Near Eastern conventions when she discusses David's relationship to Jonathan. She confuses non-erotic, covenant-kinship language with erotic love language.

All of the expressions that she takes as erotic in the David and Jonathan narrative have stronger Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern parallels with non-sexual relationships between close kin of the same sex. The narrator of the Succession Narrative (1 Samuel 16:14 to 2 Sam 5:10) legitimizes David's succession of King Saul by showing that David was accepted by Jonathan into his father's household as *an older brother*, not as Jonathan's lover (see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 146-54). For example:

- Compare "the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam 18:1; cf. 20:17) with "[Jacob's] soul is bound up with [his son Benjamin's] soul" (Gen 44:31) and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18); compare it too with the language of covenant treaties, such as "You must love [him] as yourselves" (addressed to vassals of Assyrian king Ashurbanipal) and the reference in 1 Kings 5:1 to King Hiram of Tyre as David's "lover."
- Compare Jonathan "delighted very much" in David (1 Sam 19:1) with (1) "The king [Saul] is delighted with you [David], and all his servants love you; now then, become the king's son-in-law" (1 Sam 18:22); with (2) "Whoever delights in Joab, and whoever is for David, [let him follow] after Joab" (2 Sam 20:11); and with (3) the reference to God "delighting in" David (2 Sam 15:26; 22:20).

When David had to flee from Saul, David and Jonathan had a farewell meeting, in which David "bowed three times [to Jonathan], and they kissed each other, and wept with each other" (1 Samuel 20:41-42). Is this an erotic scene? Not likely. Only three out of twenty-seven occurrences of the Hebrew verb "to kiss" have an erotic dimension. Most refer to kissing between a father and a son or between brothers.

At one point in the narrative Saul lashes out at his son Jonathan: "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse [David] to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's

nakedness?" (1 Samuel 20:30-34). Does this remark imply that David and Jonathan were in an erotic relationship? No, Saul here simply charges Jonathan with bringing shame on the mother who bore him by acquiescing to David's claim on Saul's throne (cf. 2 Samuel 19:5-6).

When David learns of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan he states of Jonathan: "You were very dear to me; your love to me was more wonderful to me than the love of women" (2 Samuel 1:26). The Hebrew verb for "were very dear to" is used in a sexual sense in the OT only two out of twenty-six occurrences. A related form is used just three verses earlier when David refers to Saul as "lovely"—hardly in an erotic sense. Jonathan's giving up his place as royal heir and risking his life for David surpassed anything David had known from a committed erotic relationship with a woman. David is not referring to erotic lovemaking on the part of Jonathan. As Proverbs 18:24 states in a non-erotic context, "There is a lover/friend who sticks closer than a brother."

The narrators' willingness to speak of David's vigorous heterosexual life (e.g., his lust for Bathsheba) puts in stark relief their complete silence about any sexual activity between David and Jonathan. Homosexual interpretations misunderstand the political overtones of the Succession Narrative in 1 Sam 16:14 – 2 Sam 5:10. Jonathan's handing over his robe, armor, sword, bow, and belt to David was an act of political investiture (1 Sam 18:4) that transferred the office of heir apparent.

The point of emphasizing the close relationship between David and Jonathan was to establish the fact that David was not a rogue usurper to Saul's throne. He was rather adopted by Jonathan into his father's "house" (family, dynasty). He has become Jonathan's beloved older brother. Neither the narrators of the Succession Narrative nor the author(s) of the Deuteronomistic History show concern about homosexual scandal. The reason for this is that in the context of ancient Near Eastern conventions, nothing in the narrative raised suspicions about a homosexual relationship.

The New Testament View of the Sodom Story

Citing Jude 7 Knust alleges that "from the perspective of the New Testament" the Sodom story was about "the near rape of angels, not sex between men." She misinterprets Jude 7. Understood in relation to leading first-century Jewish commentators (Philo and Josephus), Jude 7 should be read as a rhetorical figure known as hendiadys (literally, "one by two"): *By attempting to commit sexual immorality (men with males)*, the men of Sodom got more than they bargained for: nearly having sex with angels (compare the parallel in 2 Peter 2:7, 10). For further discussion of Jude 7 see pp. 9-13 of an online article [here](#).

There is no tradition in early Judaism that the men of Sodom were even aware that the visitors were angels (on the contrary, compare Hebrews 13:2:

"... entertained angels unawares"). Furthermore, Paul's indictment of homosexual practice in Romans 1:24-27 has multiple echoes in its context to the Sodom story, with no hint of an offense toward angels. The New Testament witness does indeed understand a key element in the judgment of Sodom to be attempted man-male intercourse.

The Canard that Only a Few Bible Texts Reject Homosexual Practice

Knust dismisses the texts that reject homosexual practice as "few." But limited explicit mention can be an indication of an irreducible minimum in sexual ethics that doesn't need to be talked about extensively. Bestiality, an offense worse than homosexual practice, is mentioned even less in the Bible; and sex with one's parent receives a comparable amount of attention to homosexual practice.

The Bible's attention to homosexual practice is also not as limited as Knust pretends it to be. Knust leaves out some texts that have to do with homosexual practice. A case in point are the repeated references in Deuteronomy through 2 Kings to the "abomination" of the *qedeshim* (so-called "sacred ones"), cult figures who engage in consensual sex with other males, also echoed in the Book of Revelation (22:15; 21:8).

Even more importantly, every biblical narrative, law, proverb, exhortation, metaphor, and poetry in the Bible that has anything to do with sexual relationships presumes a male-female prerequisite – no exceptions. A more consistent ethical position in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation could hardly be found. This is not, as Knust claims, "a very particular and narrow interpretation of a few biblical passages."

Knust's Claim that the Bible Doesn't Reject Homosexual Practice Absolutely

Knust claims that texts like Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and Paul's indictment of homosexual practice in Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10 are not absolute indictments of all homosexual acts for all time. She makes a number of sloppy allegations.

She states that the Levitical prohibitions applied only to Jews living in Palestine. However, the laws in Leviticus 17-18 apply also to non-Jews living in Israel. By the period of the New Testament they make up the "Noahide laws" that Jews thought were binding on Gentiles (see, for example, the Apostolic Decree in Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). Both Jews living outside Palestine and "God-fearing" Gentiles attracted to the Jewish religion understood the prohibitions of incest, adultery, man-male intercourse, and bestiality in Leviticus 18 and 20 as morally binding on them.

Knust states that the prohibitions address only male homosexual practice but this is true only in a pedantic sense. Lesbianism isn't mentioned in Leviticus

because such behavior was largely unknown to men in the ancient Near East where society tightly regulated women's sexual lives (it goes virtually unmentioned elsewhere). The first-century Greco-Roman world did know about lesbianism so it is not surprising that Paul explicitly rejected it in Romans 1:26, in keeping with the normative Jewish view of his time.

Knust states that "biblical patriarchs and kings violate nearly every one of these commandments." It is true that some of the close kin marriages forbidden by Levitical incest law are practiced by the patriarchs. Nevertheless, this exemption is withdrawn for later generations by biblical narrators - and the worst forms of consensual incest are never accepted in the Bible. As with Jesus' rejection of concurrent and serial polygamy, an earlier permission in sexual ethics is retracted.

Knust says: "Paul's letters urge followers of Christ to remain celibate." Like Jesus, Paul commends to converts a celibate life, but on pragmatic missionary grounds, not because sexual relations in the context of marriage are a bad thing. Like Jesus, he insists that marriage is no sin and a necessary institution for those who would otherwise drift into immorality. Not that this was the only value of marriage for Jesus and Paul. Neither person was known to be an ascetic. Jesus was accused of being "a glutton and drunkard" (Matthew 11:19) and Paul boasted that he knew how to be content both in lack and in abundance (Philippians 4:12).

Knust adds to her indictment of Paul that he "blames all Gentiles in general for their poor sexual standards." I'm not sure what her point is here. Relative to the sexual morality of Jews, Gentile sexual morality on the whole was indeed in very bad shape. Read the graffiti found in the ruins of first-century Pompeii to get a sense of how bad things were. Homosexual practice was a case in point but so too the widespread sex with prostitutes, adultery, and fornication.

Paul's indictment of homosexual practice in Romans 1:24-27 is clearly absolute. This is indicated by multiple layers of evidence, including: the strong echoes to Genesis 1:26-27 in Romans 1:23-27; the nature argument based on the material structures of creation (compare Romans 1:26-27 with 1:20); the indictment of lesbianism, not known for exploitative practices; the emphasis on mutuality ("inflamed with their desire on one another," 1:27); Jewish and Christian texts from the second and third centuries rejecting same-sex marriage; and the broader Greco-Roman context where some moralists and physicians condemn as "against nature" even loving forms of homosexual practice by persons congenitally predisposed to same-sex attractions.

After her skewed assessment of what Scripture has to say about homosexual practice, Knust asks: "So why are we pretending that the Bible is dictating our sexual morals?" There is no pretending. The Bible's witness against

homosexual practice is consistent, strong, absolute, and countercultural, as any informed stance will recognize.

The Contribution of Philosophical Reasoning and Science

The notion that Scripture provides firm and clear moral guidelines against homosexual practice is all too obvious. Although Knust intimates that the only arguments that could be used against societal endorsement of homosexual unions are (invalid) scriptural ones, there are other reasons drawn from reason and science. These include good philosophical arguments, where it is reasonable to view as inherently self-dishonoring and self-degrading sexual arousal for what one already is and has as a sexual being – males for essential maleness, females for essential femaleness – and the attendant effort at reuniting with a sexual same as though one's sexual other half.

In effect participants in homosexual practice treat their individual sex as only half intact, not in relation to the other sex but in relation to their own sex. If the logic of a heterosexual union is that the two halves of the sexual spectrum, male and female, unite to re-form a single sexual whole, the logic of a homosexual union is that two half-males unite to form a whole male, two half-females unite to form a whole female.

Finally, there are good scientific arguments against affirming homosexual practice, including the disproportionately high rate of measurable harms associated with it. These harms correspond to gender differences between males and females: for homosexually active males, higher numbers of sex partners lifetime and STIs; for homosexually active females, shorter-term unions and mental health issues (even relative to homosexually active males). These gender-type harms are not surprising since in a homosexual union the extremes of a given sex are not being moderated, nor the gaps filled, by a true sexual counterpart.

Condemnation, Love, and Grace

Knust caricatures the moderate view of the Bible on homosexual intercourse as "the Bible forces me to condemn them" (i.e. "gay people"). Augustine put it better in explaining his dictum "Love and do what you want": "Let love be fervent to correct, to amend. . . . Love not in the person his error, but the person; for the person God made, the error the person himself made."

Ironically, it is Knust who brings condemnation on persons who engage in homosexual practice in a serial-unrepentant manner. She acts as judge and jury, substituting God's judgment for her own by acquitting persons of behavior that the Bible's authors view as endangering their inheritance of eternal life.

Which parents are loving: Parents who are negligent in preventing their young children from touching a hot stove (or, worse, give assurance that no harm will come) or parents who strenuously warn their children to avoid such behavior? Much more is at stake in affirming homosexual behavior than any burn that comes from touching a hot stove.

Judgment and grace are the opposite of what Knust portrays them to be. In Romans 1:18-32, which includes Paul's searing indictment of homosexual practice (1:24-27), Paul depicts God's *wrath* as God stepping away from moral intervention, thereby allowing people to gratify themselves in impure, degrading, and indecent behavior. As a consequence, offenders heap up their sins and bring upon themselves cataclysmic judgment at the End. By contrast, Paul presents God's *grace* in Romans 6:14-23 as God through Christ actively stepping back into the lives of believers in order to destroy the rule of sin and put a stop to impure and shameful practices.

I welcome further dialogue or debate with Prof. Knust in print, radio, or television. A televised discussion in particular would give a much larger audience a chance to see what kind of case can be mounted on each side of the question. How about it CNN?

Robert A. J. Gagnon, Ph.D., is associate professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and author of [The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics](#) and (with Dan Via) [Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views](#).