

HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE MISINTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE:

An Analysis of Dr. Michael Brown's Appearance on the Piers Morgan Show

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On December 20, 2013, conservative biblical scholar Dr. Michael Brown appeared on (the now defunct) CNN's Piers Morgan show to debate the homosexuality issue as it related to the comments that were made by one of the stars of the television show Duck Dynasty, who stated in an interview that homosexuality is a “sin.”

When Morgan asked if Brown could point to a single instance of Jesus himself denouncing homosexuality, Brown responded that he could cite not one but three examples. The examples that he cited are as follows: According to Matthew 5, Jesus “did not come to abolish the law of the Torah, but to fulfill.” This is a reference to the Old Testament book of Leviticus, in which homosexuality is condemned. The second verse that was cited was Matthew 15, where, according to Dr. Brown, Jesus said that “all sexual acts committed outside marriage defile the human being”—although he did not explain how this pertains to homosexuality. The third example that Dr. Brown cited was Matthew 19, in which Jesus is recorded saying that “marriage as God intended it, is the union of one man and one woman for life.” Conservatives were quick to declare Dr. Brown's appearance on the show a decisive victory for their cause, and even used the occasion to mock Piers Morgan for being “schooled.”

However there are problems with the examples that Brown cited. First, Brown only cited passages from the Gospel of Matthew; however, as will be shown, the Gospel of Matthew is especially problematic in terms of its accuracy. Furthermore, in Matthew 19 Jesus does not indicate that “sexual immorality” is homosexuality; although he does cite “adultery.” Here is how the verse appears:

For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.
These are what defile a person; [. . .]
—Matthew 15:19

In this case, how are we to know that sexual immorality does not pertain to other issues, such as rape, bestiality, and incest? The assertion that “sexual immorality” refers to homosexuality is actually only a forced and erroneous assumption.

Likewise, in Matthew 19 Jesus is not talking about homosexuality, but rather he is specifically referring to an issue that is related to divorce. Here is the context:

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

—Matthew 19:3-6

Jesus used an example of a man and a woman simply because that is the most common form of marriage, not because he was making a statement about homosexuality. Therefore, Jesus was actually advocating for the institution of marriage itself.

Furthermore, according to Dr. Brown: “all sexual acts committed outside marriage defile a human being.” If this is true then he would be inadvertently making a case *for* gay marriage!

It is at this point that a Judeo-Christian fundamentalist would cite the Old Testament in order to reinforce the claim that sexual immorality pertains to homosexuality. The reference to homosexuality is found in Leviticus 18:22, in which we are told that Yahweh (i.e., “Jehovah”) considered homosexual acts to be “detestable.” However, in the very same book of the Bible Yahweh also decreed that his followers must not cut the hair on the sides of their head, nor trim the edges of their beard (Leviticus 19:27); nor could they “wear clothing woven of two kinds of material,” or plant their fields with “two kinds of seed” (Leviticus 19:19). They were also instructed not to eat pigs, which would include bacon and ham, and seafood that do not have “fins and scales,” such as crabs and lobster (Leviticus 11:7-10). In this case, one must wonder how many strict fundamentalists, including Dr. Brown himself, are guilty of violating these out-dated infractions? Furthermore, according to the very same book of the Old Testament, slavery was permitted! (Leviticus 25:44) This raises the question: why then are the proponents of the book of Leviticus not advocating for the reinstatement of slavery!

Moreover, in the very same book of the Bible, Jehovah not only ordered a blasphemer to be stoned to death (Leviticus 24:23), but affirmed the law “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (Leviticus 24:20); both of which are practices that Jesus overturned! (Matthew 5:38; John 8:7)

The final passage that Dr. Brown cites is the following:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

—Matthew 5:17-18

In order to understand this passage in the book of Matthew it is necessary to understand the book of Matthew itself. Biblical scholars have conceived a “Two Source Theory” concerning the history of the authorship of the gospels of the New Testament. The first source has been traced to Mark—who was not one of the original disciples. Besides the Gospel of Mark, the other original source material that scholars believe that other gospel authors (of Matthew and Luke) referred to was the so-called “Q” material (From the German word *Quelle*, meaning “source”). Even though the original Q source has yet to be found, most biblical scholars agree that it must have existed.

Although the author of the Gospel of Matthew is attributed to the disciple of the same name, scholars know that it was actually written by an anonymous scribe, and that the name of the disciple was added as a title to the document at a later time—which was done in order to increase its credibility (Harrington 1991). What the author did was use the Gospel of Mark, as well as the original Q source, as a reference, which he then infused with the interpretation that was popular among the group of Christians that he was a member of (i.e., the “Mattheans”) (Harrington 1991). Scholars believe this group was most likely located in Antioch (modern-day Turkey) (Nolland 2005). Indeed, according to Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (Galatians 2:11-14), Antioch was the location of a Jewish-Christian community who believed in the retainment of Mosaic law (i.e., the “circumcision group”). It was also a group that was specifically affiliated with Peter (i.e., Cephas/Kefa), which explains why Peter is referred to as the “rock” of the Christian movement in—and only in—the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 16:18). It can therefore be concluded that it was a member of this community (i.e., “M-Source”) who inserted favorable references to both Peter and Old Testament law in the Gospel of Matthew.

In this case, some might argue that the community in Antioch could have received direct information from Peter; however, even though Peter was one of the original disciples, he cannot be considered to be a reliable source. This is because, according to the Gospel of Matthew itself (as well as the Gospel of John), Peter never understood the true teachings of the Christ and was scolded several times by Jesus himself because of his ignorance (John 18:10-11; Matthew 16:23; Matthew 15:15-16; Matthew 14:29-31). When, or if, Jesus ever called Peter the cornerstone “rock” of the future Christian movement, it was a statement that was clearly based on Peter's optimistic disposition—which is indeed the context of the statement—rather than his mental comprehension.

The truth is that the alleged utterance of Jesus that is recorded in Matthew 5:17-18 is in neither the earlier Gospel of Mark nor in the original Q source; nor is it in any other gospel for that matter. This is because these words that were attributed to Jesus were added at a later time. Indeed, the Gospel of Matthew is filled with errors. For example, Matthew 27:9 references a passage that is attributed to the prophet Jeremiah together with Judas and thirty pieces of silver, which is presented in a prophetic context; however, no such passage exists in the book of Jeremiah. What is even more telling are the passages in the Gospel of Matthew that contradict information that is reported in the other gospels. For example, in John 21:16 Jesus referred to Simon Peter as the “son of John”; but in Matthew 16:17 he is referred to as the “son of Jonah.” Likewise, in Luke 3:23 it is reported that Joseph was the son of Heli, who was the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, etc.; but in Matthew 1:15 it is reported that Joseph was the son of Jacob, who was the son of Matthan, the son of Eleazar, etc.. Mark 7:26 reports that one of the women who sought out Jesus was a “Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia”; but in Matthew 15:22 she is said to be from Canaan. In Luke 11:1-4 it is reported that Jesus delivered the Lord's Prayer only to the disciples; but in Matthew 6:9-13 (beginning in Matthew 5), he is said to have delivered the Sermon on the Mount before the multitudes. In Luke 23:39, only *one* of the criminals who was crucified next to Jesus insulted him, while the other one accepted Jesus as the Savior; but in Matthew 27:44, *both* of the criminals “reviled him.” In Mark 10:19, it is recorded that Jesus instructed the people to “honor your father and mother”; but in Matthew 10:35, we are told that Jesus had come to cause “division” between a “man and his father, and a daughter against his mother.” The Gospel of Matthew not only contradicts the other gospels, but there are even passages in Matthew that contradicts itself! For example, in Matthew 5:22, Jesus says do not call someone a fool; but in Matthew 23:17 he calls the Pharisees “blind fools!” Likewise, Matthew 10:5 and 15:24 report that the gospel was only to be reported to “the lost sheep of Israel”; but in Matthew 28:19 (and Matthew 12:17-21) the gospel was to be spread to the Gentiles. Furthermore, Matthew 1:17 lists fourteen generations between Abraham and David, while Matthew 1:2 lists thirteen. This is because the account that is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew is the least accurate of all

the gospels. Therefore, the previously cited passage, in which Jesus is reported to have claimed that he did not come to abolish the old laws, is simply not accurate. Furthermore, Jesus actually *did* attempt to abolish, or at least challenge some of the laws that were enacted in archaic times (e.g., Matthew 5:38-39).

Some might make the case that God is perfect and therefore corrections would not have been necessary, but according to the Bible itself Yahweh was capable of regretting his own actions (Genesis 6:6; 1 Samuel 15:11; 2 Samuel 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21:15; Jeremiah 42:10).

In regards to the apostle Paul, who was also influential in those formative years, it should be understood that he was not one of the original disciples, and therefore we can not expect his interpretation to be completely accurate. Indeed, there are differences in the type of message that was originally professed by Jesus, and that which was later promoted by Paul (Wilson 2009). For example, Mark 2:15 records that Jesus ate with sinners, but according to 1 Corinthians 5.11, Paul instructed his followers *not* to eat with sinners. It is also disingenuous to cite the words of Paul to support an anti-homosexual argument when it was Paul himself who stated that the Old Testament law was no longer required for salvation (Romans 7:6, 6.24; 2 Corinthians 3:14; Galatians 2:16, 3:13, 23-25, 2:21, 5:4). Furthermore, according to Paul's own teachings, people will not be saved by the old covenant, but by the "new covenant" (2 Corinthians 3:6, 3:14), which simply required "faith" in Christ (Galatians 3:11). Therefore, when Paul condemns homosexuality (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Romans 1:26-27) he is actually contradicting himself.

Of course, these findings contradict the claims made by hardened fundamentalists, who adamantly assert that the Bible is completely "inerrant." However, what must be taken into account is that these documents were both written and interpreted by man, and even a zealous Judeo-Christian traditionalist must admit that man is an imperfect being. Indeed, distinguished New Testament scholar, Bart D. Ehrman, presents a compelling case in his works, *Misquoting Jesus* and *Forged* (and others), that the Bible is actually filled with the mistakes of man. His works remind us that no original copies of the Bible exist, and that the copies that do exist are not only from centuries later but contain many differences that were both unintentional mistakes, as well as intentional edits and additions that were committed by the scribes.

Therefore, Dr. Brown not only did not take the dubious history of the Gospel of Matthew into account, but he also made unsubstantiated assumptions and even misinterpreted scripture.

The fact is that consenting adults who engage in intimate and loving relationships are not evil. Indeed, it is the discrimination, the persecution, the hatred, and the violence that is being directed at homosexuals that is the real "sin."

SOURCES

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