

An Open Letter to Brandon and Jen Hatmaker on Homosexuality and the Bible

Dear Brandon and Jen,

We've never met or talked before, but I appreciate the fact that you read my book *Can You Be Gay and Christian?* while studying the issue of homosexuality and the Bible. And I understand that right now, you do not want to interact with others leaders and believers about this subject, which is why, I imagine, my staff received no reply to our emails to you.

Still, I am writing this letter with the hope that you will read it and give it further prayerful consideration and that, even if you reject my words now, you will remember what I wrote in the days to come.

I'm also writing this email for the sake of many who follow your lives and ministries and who will, quite tragically, be deceived and destroyed by the new stance you have taken.

But let me say this first to each of you.

Jen, you're obviously quite well-known as a TV star and popular Christian author, but I'm sorry to say that I had never heard of you before your interview with Jonathan Merritt. Yet when I read that interview, in particular your explanation of why you now supported same-sex "marriage," what struck me was the love in your words.

It's clear that you care about other people, but in this case, your love for them has caused you to compromise truth, which means that your love is out of sync with God's love, and so, rather than helping people you are hurting them.

And Brandon, when I read your lengthy post on Facebook,

explaining how you came to your new beliefs, I heard your sincerity loud and clear. You did not make this major shift lightly, and I don't minimize the hours you put into doing research and engaging with others. So when I categorically differ with your conclusions, it's simply because your conclusions are wrong, not because you didn't study.

And to the two of you together, while I am sure you are now on a downward path that will negatively affect your ministries in the years to come—most importantly, in the destructive effect you will have on young people who look to you for guidance—I don't view you as evil people, and I understand that from your point of view, you are simply following Jesus.

I see you then, as sadly misguided more than sinfully malicious, and I do hope that, in the days ahead, you will have the humility and courage to reverse your course and return to the Word and Spirit in terms of the critically important issue of homosexuality and the Bible.

Getting to the main points, then, I understand that you have now embraced the position that God blesses monogamous, committed, same-sex relationships. As for the Bible's condemnation of homosexual practice, Brandon wrote that, "Every verse in the Bible that is used to condemn a 'homosexual' act is written in the context of rape, prostitution, idolatry, pederasty, military dominance, an affair or adultery."

That is completely inaccurate and patently false.

First, in Paul's list of sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 the words *malakos* and *arseknokoites* are used, the former fundamentally meaning "soft" and sometimes applying to the passive partner in a homosexual sex act, and the latter literally meaning "lying with a man," based on the Greek translation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, which explicitly prohibit a man lying with another man.

Some versions, like the ESV, translate these words together as “men who practice homosexuality,” and simply stated, there is nothing in these words, in particular *arseknokoites*, which Paul uses again in 1 Timothy 1:10, that is related to “rape, prostitution, idolatry, pederasty, military dominance, an affair or adultery.” I can assure you that if you study every major lexicon of biblical Greek and classical Greek, you will find this confirmed. I cite lengthy lexical studies in *Can You Be Gay and Christian?* as well, and I personally checked out every major Greek dictionary when researching this.

That’s why even the GLBTQ online encyclopedia states (regarding these two Greek words), “The meanings of these Greek nouns have been the subject of lively debate, largely provoked by gay authors anxious to show that Paul and the early church had not intended to condemn homosexuality per se as harshly as has been traditionally supposed, but only a degraded type of pederasty associated with prostitution and child abuse.

“Recent scholarship has shown conclusively that the traditional meanings assigned to these words stand. So do the traditional translations: the Latin translation ‘commonly used in the church,’ and therefore known as the Vulgate, and the English King James Version (KJV).”

So gay scholars contributing to a totally pro-LGBT encyclopedia see what you cannot see. Does this mean anything to you?

Second, the prohibition against homosexual practice in Leviticus 18:22 is in the context of forbidden sexual unions, because of which God was about to drive out the Canaanites, and there is nothing that states that homosexual unions are only forbidden in the context of “rape, prostitution, idolatry, pederasty, military dominance, an affair or adultery.” Not a word. Rather, a man lying with a man is plainly forbidden just as incest or adultery or bestiality are

forbidden.

Should you argue that Leviticus 18:21 mentions sacrificing children to idols and that we should therefore understand v. 22 as forbidding homosexual practice only in the context of idolatry (which would be a massive exegetical stretch in this chapter), then what about v. 23, which forbids bestiality? Is that only forbidden in the context of idolatry? And why, pray tell, did Moses put homosexual practice next to bestiality unless those practices were especially heinous deviations from God's order?

And what about 20:13, in which homosexual practice is forbidden in the same way that incest, adultery and bestiality are forbidden, without any reference to idolatry in the context?

In point of fact, there is not a syllable in these verses that connects homosexual practice to rape, prostitution, idolatry, pederasty, military dominance, an affair or an adulterous homosexual union. Not one syllable.

Therefore one of your major points—which, of course, is one of the most central (and flawed) arguments of gay apologists—breaks down entirely. And candidly, I firmly believe that had you not first opened your heart to gay couples and the possibility of being wrong in your interpretation of Scripture, you would never have come up with such interpretations.

Not only so, but Paul's strong words against homosexual practice in Romans 1:26-27 do not say that homosexual practice is only wrong if it's in the context of idolatry. Rather, Paul is explaining the human race's descent into sin, as we rejected God in favor of idols and were given over to the desires of the flesh, which include sexual immorality and homosexual acts, which Paul states are a violation of God's created order. Prof. Robert Gagnon, the foremost authority on

the Bible and homosexual practice, and whose book you didn't mention in your Facebook post, demonstrates this clearly.

In other words, regardless of its cause or origin, Paul sees homosexual practice as against nature—meaning, the natural order established by God in Genesis 1.

That's why Bernadette Booten, herself a lesbian as well as a scholar of lesbianism in the ancient world, wrote, "I see Paul as condemning all forms of homoeroticism" in her book *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*.

Again I ask, why does a lesbian scholar see what you are not able to see?

You say (in harmony with gay apologists), "But not one of these Scriptures was written in the context of marriage or civil union (which simply did not exist at this time). Each act mentioned in the Bible was sin, no doubt. In context, we believe the same today."

But once again, you miss the point of these verses.

First, any homosexual union is a violation of God's design for men and women, which is why Leviticus 18:22 forbids a man to lie with a man the way he lies with a woman, speaking of sexual penetration—regardless of whether the people involved are strangers or lifelong partners and which is why Paul described as contrary to the created order. When God says that something is "detestable," it does not become holy when you do it over and over again with the same person.

Second, Paul certainly knew of committed, same-sex relationships in his day, as I documented after my short radio debate with Matthew Vines, who could not offer a single verse from Scripture to support his position and who instead hid behind the false argument that if Paul had known of loving gay relationships, he would have approved of them.

That's why Louis Crompton, a respected scholar of 19-century British literature and a pioneer in gay studies, stated, "According to [one] interpretation, Paul's words were not directed at 'bona fide' homosexuals in committed relationships. But such a reading, however well-intentioned, seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstance. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian" in his book *Homosexuality and Civilization*.

It's also noteworthy that there are ancient Jewish traditions, some perhaps known in Jesus' day or before, that stated that one reason God destroyed the earth in Noah's day was because of same-sex "marriage." See Genesis Rabbah 26:5; there are other, ancient rabbinic texts as well.

You also need to ask yourself the question, "If God was so loving and kind in giving His Word, why did He make gay people suffer so much until the last few years, when the church finally realized that gays could get 'married'? Why put them through so much unnecessary pain and heartache for 3,500 years or more? Why torment gay couples by saying things like, 'Husbands love your wives and wives submit to your husbands' (Eph. 5) as if only heterosexuals could marry? And why state that an antidote for sexual immorality was for 'each man to have his own wife, and each woman her own husband' (1 Cor. 7:2)? Why not say, 'Let each person have his or her partner'? Why make the whole book so heterosexual?"

Why would God inspire His Word to be written in such a way that: 1) He sets out His ideal for marriage as the union of one and one woman for life (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-6); 2) He explicitly forbids homosexual acts of any kind; 3) He only mentions homosexuality in the most extreme and negative contexts; 4) He never says one positive word about a homosexual relationship; and 5) every single law, custom,

parable, teaching or example having to do with marriage is always heterosexual? Why do that as a loving God—unless homosexual practice is, in fact, always sinful and wrong in His sight?

And if it is true that “God’s dream for marriage is so incredibly nuanced” (your words) and that the whole basis for it is monogamous, committed relationships, then on what basis do you oppose two gay brothers from “marrying”? If love is love, why not? (This is actually a serious, relevant question. Please give it thought.) In Jen’s words, “From a civil rights and civil liberties side and from just a human being side, any two adults have the right to choose who they want to love. And they should be afforded the same legal protections as any of us. I would never wish anything less for my gay friends.” In saying that, you have now departed from the Word and embraced the mantra of gay activism.

Of course Brandon states emphatically that you have not abandoned your high view of Scripture and that most gay-affirming churches still hold to a high view of Scripture, but that too is patently false.

First, you are claiming that God’s Word has misled people for centuries, simply because it was allegedly not aware of committed same-sex relationships. Second, whether you recognize it or not, your view of Scripture has been changed because of gay relationships, just as New Testament scholars like James Brownson and Luke Timothy Johnson changed their views on Scripture because of their gay children. What happens when you meet devout Muslims or Jews or people of other religions? Will that change your view of salvation only through Jesus?

Third, you are arguing that Jesus was somehow limited in His understanding of human nature and sin—an impossibility based on John 2:24-25 and many other verses—since He reaffirmed and even deepened the moral teaching of the Torah (Matt. 5:17-20),

He said that all sexual acts committed outside of wedlock were sinful (Matt. 15:19; note the word *porneia* in the plural), and He stated explicitly that marriage was the union of a man and woman for life, as intended by God at creation (Matt. 19:4-6). So either Jesus didn't see the pain and struggle of gays in His day as He looked into their hearts, or else He chose not to address that pain and instead affirmed only heterosexual relationships. Either way, you have lowered your view of Jesus.

As for the vast majority of gay-affirming churches (and theologians and leaders) of which I am aware, over time, their views become more and more liberal, and they continue to compromise in other areas of doctrine and practice, often having a looser view of sin in general over time. And in doing something as radical as seeking to redefine marriage, you have already put yourself outside the pale of evangelicalism, which is why LifeWay made the right decision to no longer sell Jen's books.

And lest you or your followers think that LifeWay is being cruel, I remind you of what Rosaria Butterfield, a former lesbian feminist activist, said recently: "If I were still in the thick of the battle over the indwelling sin of lesbian desire, Jen's words would have put a millstone around my neck." Those are sobering words. How terribly tragic it is that, in your desire to save gay lives, you will ultimately destroy them.

And so it won't be a surprise me in the days to come if: 1) in times of conflict between the church and the LGBT community, you consistently take the side of LGBTs, even siding against your brothers and sisters in the Lord; 2) you embrace more and more aspects of gay activism, including transgender activism; 3) you begin to broaden your circles of fellowship, embracing more liberal "Christians" who deny key aspects of the historic faith; and 4) if I'm right about the first three, after a number of years—perhaps even a decade or more—in the name of

“grace,” you will begin to inch toward a form of universalism. At the very least, in the name of “grace,” your congregational standards of holiness will soon be compromised.

I appeal to you both, then, in the name of Jesus and out of a heart to see LGBT women encounter the fullness of God’s love—and I know many who have in many fine churches throughout America—to abandon your erroneous position and return to the Word’s wonderful union of grace and truth.

And if that is not something you are willing to consider right now (you will surely tell me your new insights are greatly blessing the LGBT community), then at the least, save this article, and a few years from now, look back at my predictions made immediately above. If they’re proving true, you’ll know for sure the worst is yet to come, at which time I will urge you again: Please do not harden your hearts.