

WATCH: Brown vs. Vines, the 'Gay Christian' Debate You've Waited For

Biblical Christians and the LGBT movement—in its various incarnations—spend lots of time talking past each other and not much engaging one another.

But that all changed on Saturday.

On June 28, Matthew Vines, the Harvard student-turned-face of the “gay Christian” movement, squared off against biblical apologist Dr. Michael Brown on Moody Radio’s “Up for Debate” program.

The question: Can you be gay and Christian?

Vines, 24, claimed that the Bible has nothing to say about committed, monogamous, loving same-sex relationships, and that its clear admonitions against homosexual relations don’t apply to Christians today.

The Core Issue: Interpreting the Bible Through Me, or Interpreting Me Through the Bible

“It’s harmful for gay Christians to ask them to basically avoid any kind of romantic intimacy for their entire lives because their sexuality is irredeemably broken,” Vines stated early in the debate.

But Brown argued that Vines, a professing evangelical, bases his whole analysis off the wrong foundation.

“Very fundamentally, we can interpret the Bible through the lens of our sexuality, as Matthew’s doing, very overtly saying that’s how he’s done it in his own life, or we can interpret our sexuality through the lens of the Bible,” said Brown.

“You come to radically different conclusions. The Gospel, according to Jesus, if we want to follow Him, starts with, ‘deny yourself, take up the cross and follow me,’ not, ‘affirm yourself’ and now make the Gospel fit into that. And it’s a very peculiar idea that the Bible can very explicitly speak against something, but if you do it repeatedly in a loving relationship, somehow it becomes good. No, that’s not the case.”

Vines’ Celibacy Dilemma: All or Nothing?

Vines’ frustration was with the idea that, for professing Christians who identify as gay, the only real option is lifelong celibacy. For Vines, this is unfair and therefore cannot be the ultimate teaching of Scripture. But Brown’s response was different.

“You cannot judge the message by our reaction to it,” Brown noted, citing the story of the young man found in Mark 10. In that passage, Jesus has a rather “unfair” message for the rich young ruler: “Go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (v. 21). The man walks away depressed. Brown made the point that the man’s reaction to Christ’s command didn’t invalidate the orders given, then, transitioning back to the topic of homosexuality, explained that he has seen the “exact opposite fruit” in the lives of several gays who, upon hearing what Scripture says about sexuality, have repented and found transformation through Christ.

At least one such transformed person found their way to the YouTube video to share her thoughts.

“I was gay when I was younger, and knew I had been born that way, and went to bible studies with ‘gay Christians.’ As we would get to Scripture about homosexual sin, the teacher would always say that it doesn’t apply to loving gays. I would ask questions about the other sins like adultery? Of course it

only applies to gays. I came to the realization, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that you cannot be gay and Christian. I am now married, and happy that I have been delivered from that lifestyle sin," wrote YouTube user Lisa Spears.

Interestingly, Vines didn't have a problem with people "converting" from homosexual practice. Instead, his response brought the issue back to an unstable view of Scripture.

"I'm actually perfectly fine with the idea of sexual fluidity," Vines explained. "My point is that there are many people for whom that does not happen... There are some people for whom lifelong celibacy is the necessary consequence of the total rejection of same-sex relationships."

Vines' celibacy argument implied a grave injustice in lifelong sexual restraint. But Brown reminded Vines that at the core of following Christ is self-denial. If Christians are to be willing to die for the sake of the gospel, giving up their wealth, homes and personal comfort to walk the Calvary road, why is celibacy an inconceivable evil?

And contrary to Vines, Brown posited that the Bible *does* have a solution for those who cannot reasonably commit to a life of celibacy: marriage.

"Paul says, yes, not everyone can be celibate; therefore, let every man have a wife and every woman have a husband. That's his solution, which, remarkably, Matthew doesn't quote in his book because it undermines his whole position," Brown asserted in reference to 1 Corinthians 7.

"God understands desires. How do you define sexual orientation? Being romantically and sexually attracted to the same sex? The Bible fully understands having those desires. The Bible fully understands fallen human nature. And also there are people who have attractions—let's say a man who is only attracted to preteen girls—what does he do? Does he say,

'Well, I can't be celibate for life'? No, the fact is, we must give ourselves completely over to the Lord," said Brown.

The Biblical Issue: Did the Holy Spirit Know About 'Sexual Orientation'?

Vines position tried to find a middle ground on the typical "clobber passages" in the Bible about homosexuality: that those texts don't address gay monogamy.

"This entire conversation we're having about gay Christians and their committed relationships is not a conversation that the Christian tradition has been having before the mid-twentieth century. It's not a conversation that Scripture directly addresses. In that sense, I'm not arguing for the overturning of 2,000 years of church history. I'm simply acknowledging that we're in a new situation, faced with a new issue of gay Christians," claimed Vines.

Vines continued to argue that because no Christian writers of the past allegedly ever addressed the consequence of lifelong celibacy, believers are put in a "new interpretive environment" in which to analyze biblical sexuality.

But Brown pointed out that Vines' position strips the Bible—and the words of Jesus Himself—from any kind of trustworthiness at all.

"That's the whole fatal flaw of Matthew's argument. It's saying that God Himself did not understand the concept of sexual orientation, which is outrageous—and that He inspired the writers of Scripture to write things that would be terribly harmful to same-sex attracted people, because if sexual orientation is a true concept, it's existed through the ages. So God inspired people to write the opposite of that to hurt people for 3,000 years, until somehow in the aftermath of the sexual revolution, when our sexual morality is in massive decline all around us, we discover this new thing called sexual orientation."

The issue of biblical inspiration became so heavy that moderator Julie Roys, who along with Moody Bible Institute asserts the orthodox Christian view of homosexuality, was forced to jump in with her own question for Vines.

“How do we know that our modern concept of sexual orientation—which again, most evangelicals actually don’t affirm—the modern concept that this is a fixed, immutable trait, core to your identity, how do you know that that concept is true?” Roys pressed Vines. “It almost seems like you’re saying that the Scriptural writers didn’t get that, like they had a bad anthropology. Is that what you’re saying?”

Vines claimed to uphold that Scripture is trustworthy on matters of anthropology, but that Paul and the other biblical writers were speaking to different historical circumstances—not gay monogamy.

“He’s talking about people who become so inflamed with their lusts and passions, and go off—they were having sex with people of the opposite sex, now they’re even having sex with people of the same sex. It’s a sign of their excess, their wantonness. It’s not a question of whether Paul was negative or neutral towards same-sex relations; he was clearly very negative. But the entire framework for his discussion of same-sex relationships was fundamentally different from our own. And this is the key point, pointing out that Paul is not talking about sexual orientation, he’s not talking about gay Christians.”

“Can you cite me any first century texts that refer to long-term, committed same-sex relationships?” Vines challenged Brown.

Brown explained that Plato’s *Symposium* discussed such relationships some 400 years prior to the time of Christ, and therefore the concept was clearly not foreign to the minds of the New Testament writers. Vines, discounted that example

because the gay relationship in Plato's writing starts as pederastic (that is, beginning at childhood).

Vines later attacked the use of a commonly cited verse from Leviticus 18: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (v. 22, ESV). According to Vines, the command applied only to the Levitical priesthood and was never meant for Christians.

Vines, pressed to provide a rationale for why the Levitical law would disallow homosexuality if gay relationships were not ultimately sinful, bizarrely claimed that such regulations were "based on the rejection of inverted gender roles in a patriarchal culture"—meant to maintain patriarchy.

Brown, a Jewish believer in Jesus and scholar of Semitic languages, took a different approach to the Old Testament laws.

"Leviticus 18 is for all people at all times," Brown retorted. "If Matthew wants to throw out Leviticus 18, what that means that there are no laws against incest."

The Bottom Line: Me vs. God

Vines' underlying premise, according to Brown, was, "This is who I am, therefore, God, you somehow have to affirm me."

Instead, Brown proposed a God-centered view of sexuality.

"In Jesus, you have everything you need, whether you're gay, straight, bi, however you identify yourself... God knows who we are. He has given us a better way," said Brown.

"All things are possible with God. Are you saying God *cannot* change someone's sexual orientation?"

Who won? Watch the full debate below: