

To the editor of [www.Presbyweb.com](http://www.Presbyweb.com),

[Hal Porter's letter yesterday](#), in which he commends Rev. Krehbiel for saying, "What is of ultimate importance is the trajectory of Jesus' own ministry," prompts me to pick up on Porter's earlier response ([Nov. 20](#)). I had started to answer the latter but had to leave off for holidays and other, more pressing and important matters. Unfortunately, Porter's Nov. 20 letter had failed to wrestle with my analysis of Porter's arguments in my "[Viewpoint](#)" response of Nov. 15. My two responses to Krehbiel ([February 5](#) and [February 12](#)) pile on additional material that can be used to refute Porter's nearly identical position. Obviously there is no "trajectory of Jesus' own ministry" that is at odds with rejecting a pro-homosex position.

*On straining the meaning of "new and old" in Matthew 13:52.* Porter starts in his Nov. 20 letter by appealing again to a Jesus saying about the scribe for the kingdom of heaven who brings forth new and old—a saying found only in Matthew's Gospel (13:52). He alleges that I "strain this text" when I understand it in the larger context of Matthew's Gospel, including the programmatic statement of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:17-48 where the "new thing" that Jesus does is to close the law's loopholes and intensify its demands. Two of the six antitheses have to do with sex. Against the broader context of Matthew's Gospel in which Porter's favorite saying is found, Porter simply assumes that newness involves loosening existing demands in the law of Moses. But as regards sexual matters the trend in Jesus' teaching is against loosening and toward intensification—certainly in Matthew's interpretation.

I would not accuse Porter of "straining" at the saying about new and old because that would imply that Porter is at least trying to fit it into its literary context. Rather, he simply ignores the context altogether and makes it say whatever he wants it to say.

Later in his letter Porter has to acknowledge my point about Jesus' intensified ethics. Yet he suggests that Jesus really didn't mean what he said or that Jesus said it only to underscore that we are incapable of doing what he commands: "Yes, Jesus intensified ethical behavior not lessened it, as Gagnon appropriately points out, but Jesus did so because he joyfully makes plain the norm for relationships that are celebrated in the Reign of God – a norm we all fall short of." There is no support in the context of Matthew's Gospel for asserting that it is permissible to violate this "norm" or to discount repentance when the norm is violated.

Porter hijacks Scripture. He alludes to it in order to give his statements more credibility. But the reality is that he means something antithetical to its usage in context.

In the end, Porter knows that he cannot justify his interpretation of the saying in context. So, rather than show where my interpretation goes wrong, he makes what can only be described as a childish remark: "Gagnon . . . seems to believe he knows everything Jesus had in mind about what is old and new." In effect: "Cool off the level of intellectual rigor, it's too hot in here." As I said in my first response, if Porter has a better argument, let him make it. Otherwise, his declarations on what Scripture allows are meaningless.

Porter thinks that he “knows” that my respect for Scripture is idolatrous and that my views on homosexual behavior—which are nothing less than the views of Jesus, Paul, and the rest of Scripture’s authors—are “injurious.” Porter “knows” the will of God on the issue of homosexual behavior. He is as certain about his position as I am mine, but with far less reason for being so. So, apparently, it is not certitude that bothers Porter but only certitude that sides with Scripture and Jesus against Porter’s own anti-scriptural convictions.

*Rebutting Porter’s other claims:*

1. *The shape of Porter’s appeal to Jesus* is without merit. The historical evidence shows that Jesus held to an other-sex prerequisite for sexual unions, just as he held to prerequisites in terms of number of partners, degree of blood relatedness of partners, and age of partners. At the same time, Jesus’ stance on sexual ethics did not broaden the opportunities for loving, committed unions but rather further narrowed an already limited array of acceptable options given to him in Mosaic law. Porter repeatedly assumes that Jesus’ outreach to sexual sinners included a validation of their behavior. By this reasoning, Porter believes that “sexual minorities” should have their behavior validated. As it is, Jesus’ aggressive outreach to the “lost” and “sick,” including those among sexual sinners, was motivated by the belief that, *sans* such outreach, the offenders ran the risk of being cast into hell. Validation of behavior was never at issue. Therefore, the proper approach to those engaged in homosexual behavior is to reach out in love to deter them from the very behavior that puts them at risk of not inheriting God’s kingdom. The name “Jesus” functions for Porter as little more than a cipher for whatever he wants to promote.
2. *Why is Porter against faithful and committed adult incestuous unions and polygamous unions?* I am still waiting for Porter, or anyone, to tell me *why* a man-mother or brother-sister union is wrong when conducted in the context of mutual love, consent, and commitment and otherwise exhibiting no scientifically verifiable negative effects (e.g., no personal distress or disease). Likewise, I am still waiting for Porter, or anyone, to tell me *why* we shouldn’t bless and grant full marriage rights to three or more sexual partners who are committed to one another. The whole logic for restricting the number of sex partners at any one time to two is based on the existence of two sexes. If sexual differentiation is irrelevant for mate selection—of course, it’s not irrelevant but Porter thinks it is—*why* hold on to the number two as a sacrosanct, inviolable prerequisite?

Some time ago distraught parents at a Presbyterian camp shared with me that their daughter was involved in a “threesome.” She was having sex with her husband and a live-in female lover; the husband was having sex with both women and produced children by both. She insisted that their relationship was nobody’s business but their own; that they loved each other and were committed to one another. Now what can Porter say to that? He cannot say that there is anything structurally incongruous to such a relationship because he does not believe in such a principle. He cannot appeal to creation precedent—as Jesus did in Mark 10:6-8 and Paul in both Rom 1:24-27 and 1 Cor 6:9-20—because he has already

disregarded the even clearer witness of the creation accounts to a heterosexual prerequisite. He cannot contend that there is no “sexual orientation” involved because they can claim that they, unlike others, are not “wired” for monogamous unions. Moreover, the daughter of the distraught parents claims to be bisexually-oriented. She does not want to deprive herself of the joys of both homosexual and heterosexual bonds. Porter cannot say that such a relationship inevitably harms the children because he has no scientific proof for anything but, at most, a disproportional rate of harm. The children are okay with the relationship; it is the “polyphobic” society that they live in that could potentially cause damage. In all this, one should bear in mind that Scripture regards same-sex intercourse as a far more serious offense than multiple-partner unions. Polygamy, like divorce, is treated in the Old Testament as a concession to human (male) hardness of heart—a concession that both Jesus and Paul implicitly revoke. However, nowhere in Scripture are any exceptions made to same-sex intercourse. If Porter does not feel any obligation to maintain the heterosexual prerequisite, why should the limitation to two partners at any one time be considered sacrosanct?

3. *Getting “straight” why Scripture rejects homoeroticism.* Porter assumes over and over again that the reason for the Bible’s indictment of homosexual practice was the absence of “fidelity and commitment”; consequently, that the presence of fidelity and commitment should validate homosexual unions. As it is, a dearth of fidelity and commitment is *not* the primary reason for the Bible’s indictment of homoeroticism. The basis for the indictment was always the compromise of gender integrity in attempting to merge with a sexual same or like rather than with one’s sexual complement—producing a distorted sexual half rather than a sexual whole. The fact that Porter thinks—without a shred of evidence to substantiate his thought—that Paul today would add to Gal 3:28 that “there is neither gay nor straight” underscores how deeply Porter misunderstands Paul’s reason for objecting strenuously to same-sex intercourse. I have laid out some of the evidence in my second response to Krehbiel.

Porter says that homosexuals and heterosexuals should be held to the same requirements. What Porter overlooks, of course, is that an other-sex requirement is one of the requirements that all persons are held to, irrespective of whether homoerotic desires exist in conjunction with some heterosexual functioning or are exclusive, temporary or lifelong, mild or intense. Saying that homosexuals and heterosexuals should be “held to the same standards”—minus the standard that there be a male and female to restore the original sexual whole—is like saying that those who want to establish an adult incestuous union and those who do not, or “polyphiles” and monogamists, or pedophiles and those attracted to adults, should be “held to the same standards.” Porter quotes approvingly from the discredited study document, “Presbyterians and Human Sexuality” (1991): “Gays and lesbians are capable of sustaining relationships of fidelity and commitment, as are heterosexuals.” So are persons who experience incestuous, polyamorous, and pedophilic desires. So what? Jesus certainly did not believe that “fidelity and commitment” were the only requirements for valid sexual unions. Incestuous desires violate the prerequisite for non-kin relationships. Polyamorous desires violate the prerequisite that a sexual relationship be limited to two persons.

Pedophilic desires violate an age requirement. And homoerotic desires violate the prerequisite of a sexual complement to achieve a sexual whole, if sex is to be had.

This truncating of sexual prerequisites to “fidelity and commitment” and the concomitant abolition of any natural, structural prerequisites for sexual unions is one of the most dangerous corollaries of the push for validating homosexual unions. And it is why the ACLU now files briefs for polygamy (based on the recent Supreme Court decision on sodomy) and why Presbyterian ethicist and homosexual, Marvin Ellison (of Bangor Theological Seminary), can ask, “How exactly does the number of partners affect the moral quality of a relationship?”

Sincerely,

Robert A. J. Gagnon, Ph.D.  
Assoc. Prof. of New Testament  
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary