



## "God and Sex" or "Pants on Fire"? Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times* on the Bible and Homosexuality

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Nicholas Kristof, a columnist for the *New York Times*, has produced an ill-informed op-ed piece on the Bible and homosexuality: "God and Sex" (*New York Times*, Oct. 23, 2004). Kristof states: "Over the last couple of months, I've been researching the question of how the Bible regards homosexuality." All three of the scholars cited in his editorial are homosexual persons with an obvious ax to grind, and two of these are not even *biblical* scholars. Clearly, Kristof needs to branch out in his research efforts more than he has. In an editorial loaded with sarcasm for "traditional" views, Kristof ironically offers up multiply flawed readings. The irony is heightened when one notes the title of his very next op-ed piece, "Pants on Fire?" (Oct. 27, 2004). The byline is: "Reality to George W. Bush is not about facts, but about higher meta-truths." Substitute the name "Nicholas D. Kristof" and apply it to his assessment of the Bible and homosexuality.

The overall purpose of Kristof's editorial is political: to persuade "conservatives," or "liberals" who should be convincing conservatives, that there is little credible basis for opposing "gay marriage" within the Bible itself. He hopes that by doing so he can weaken efforts to pass amendments blocking "gay marriage" in various states. Kristof gives the impression that he personally cares little about what Scripture says about homosexuality, apart from this utilitarian political purpose. The end result is a rather cynical and even sophomoric effort on Kristof's part that, to the discerning reader, only strengthens the case for opposing "gay marriage." (For my own treatment of the "gay marriage" issue, see my short presentation in the September 2004 issue of *Presbyterians Today*, the fuller version of which appears on my website at [www.robagnon.net](http://www.robagnon.net).)

### *The "God Made Homosexuals" Argument*

Kristof begins by asking rhetorically: "So when God made homosexuals who fall deeply, aching in love with each other, did he goof?" The question is not thought through.

First, no scientific study has even come close to verifying that homosexuality is a condition determined directly and irrevocably at birth. For example, several of the least sample-biased identical twin studies indicate that seven-to-nine times out of ten, when one member of a identical twin pair self-identifies as non-heterosexual, the co-twin self-identifies as heterosexual—even though identical twins are genetic matches and share the same intrauterine hormonal environment. Kristof cannot even establish a model of

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congenital determinism for homosexuality, let alone one that correlates such determinism with a "God made homosexuals" claim.

Second, Kristof takes no moral or religious account of the difference between impulse-oriented traits and immutable, benign, non-behavioral traits like race or ethnicity. Impulse-oriented traits are not absolutely immutable, since the intensity of impulses can be elevated or lowered during the course of life, sometimes radically so. Moreover, impulse-oriented traits are generally directed toward specific behaviors and are often not inherently benign. For Kristof's argument to work, he has to make the elementary mistake of assuming that all such traits are "made by God" and that to think otherwise is to assert that God "goofed." Yet polysexuality (dissatisfaction with monogamy), pedosexuality (attraction to children), and alcoholism are every bit as biologically based as homosexuality, to say nothing of "normal" impulses for self-centeredness, narcissism, arrogance, envy, and greed. Does Kristof want to pose for these his two alternatives: either "God made people that way" and so wants them to satisfy such desires or "God goofed"?

Third, Kristof's opening line falls flat from a Christian theological standpoint. The apostle Paul characterized sin in his letter to the Romans (chs. 5-8) as an innate impulse running through the members of the human body, passed on by an ancestor, and never entirely within human control. Appealing to the congenital character of an impulse does not necessarily absolve it from being sinful. Jesus likewise talked about an array of impulses emanating "from within, out of the heart of human beings," that defiles humans, including actively entertained impulses for sexual behaviors that God categorically forbids in Scripture (Mark 7:20-23). Kristof's biology-equals-morality rationale has one wondering whether Kristof has ever heard of the well-attested saying of Jesus that one cannot be his follower unless one "takes up one's cross," "denies oneself," and "loses one's life" (Mark 8:34-37). Or has he ever come across any of the numerous texts in Paul's writings that refer to "dying to self," no longer living "in conformity to the flesh," the "new creation," and "living for God"?

### ***The "Sodom Is Not About Sodomy" Argument***

Kristof fares little better when he begins discussing biblical texts on homosexual practice. In a condescending manner, he prefaces his remarks by comparing religious scruples regarding homosexuality to brainless statements like "If English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it's good enough for us," or to a disavowal of evolution. As it is, Kristof's own analysis shows that he too is a fundamentalist of sorts in his religious thinking—a fundamentalist of the left who allows his own vested ideology to get in the way of a fair review of what the Judeo-Christian Scriptures have to say about homosexual practice.

Not surprisingly, Kristof dismisses the story of Sodom in Genesis 19:4-11, and Ezekiel's interpretation of it, as "about hospitality, rather than homosexuality." Kristof snidely comments that "the most obvious lesson from Sodom is that when you're attacked by an angry mob, the holy thing to do is to offer up your virgin daughters." Actually, the

surrounding narrative implicitly criticizes Lot for offering up his daughters rather than trusting in God's provision. This is indicated by the successful action of the angels in blinding the mob and by the subsequent payback of incest committed by Lot's daughters against their father.

Citing Mark Jordan's *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*, Kristof states as fact that "it was only in the 11<sup>th</sup> century that theologians began to condemn homosexuality as sodomy." The true facts are that, long before the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a number of early Jewish and Christian writers picked up on the male-male sexual activity of the Sodomites as inherently degrading. In the 1st century (A.D.) alone, one can cite among others: Philo, Josephus, and, some critics to the contrary, Jude 7 and 2 Peter 2:6-10 (on the last two texts go [here](#), pp. 10-13, or [here](#), section V.). Ezekiel, back in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., knew the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-24), or a precursor document, and interpreted the Sodom story in part through the lens of the absolute Levitical prohibitions against male-male intercourse (18:22; 20:13). When Ezekiel 16:49-50 describes the sin of Sodom as "not aiding the poor and needy" and "committing an abomination," it refers to two different offenses, as the list of vices in Ezekiel 18:12 makes clear when it distinguishes these two phrases.

The Deuteronomistic History (Joshua through 2 Kings), another work of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., contains a parallel story to the story of Sodom; namely, the Levite at Gibeah (Judges 19:22-25). There can be little doubt that the male-male dimension of the threatened sexual activity factored prominently in the Deuteronomistic Historian's indictment of the residents of Gibeah, given his apparent revulsion elsewhere in the History for the *consensual* homoerotic associations of the *qedeshim* (literally, "consecrated ones"), cult figures who sometimes served as the passive receptive partners in male-male intercourse.

The narrator of the Sodom story in Genesis 19, the "Yahwist" (J), also tells the similar story of Ham's rape of his father Noah in Genesis 9:20-27 ("seeing the nakedness of" is a Hebrew metaphor for having sexual intercourse). Few would argue that such a story indicts only *coercive* forms of incest with one's father. Like Leviticus 18, the narrative blames the subjugation of the Canaanites on a "kitchen sink" of sexual sins, including incest and male-male intercourse, acts that are morally wrong whether they are done to a consenting or coerced partner.

Kristof himself acknowledges that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 oppose, at least, male anal sex, even on the part of consenting partners. Why, then, would he think that the narrator of Genesis 19 might have approved of a consensual act of male-male intercourse? Indeed, every narrative, law, proverb, exhortation, metaphor, and piece of poetry in the Hebrew Bible having anything to do with sexual relations presupposes a male-female prerequisite.

Finally, to assume that the narrator of Genesis 19 would have been favorably disposed to an act of consensual male-male intercourse is absurd in view of ancient Near Eastern texts that held in low repute men who *willingly* consented to be penetrated by other men.

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It is obvious from these concentric circles of historical and literary context that the Sodom story contains an indictment of male-male intercourse per se, though one would never know it from Kristof's editorial.

### *The "Irrelevance of Levitical Prohibitions" Argument*

To Kristof's credit, he acknowledges the obvious: The prohibitions of male-male intercourse in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are just that. But Kristof fudges a bit by suggesting, with some scholars, that the prohibition may be limited to "male anal sex." To insinuate, however, that these prohibitions do not imply any opposition to non-insertive homoerotic behavior makes about as much sense as arguing that the prohibitions of incest, adultery, and bestiality have no implications for erotic behaviors short of penetration. Following Kristof's logic, erotic kissing and fondling of one's mother would have been acceptable in ancient Israel so long as no penetration occurred. The prime overarching concern of the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 is not status differentiation, much less misogyny, but rather issues of structural congruity and incongruity. A male is not another male's sexual counterpart; a woman is.

Kristof notes that the prohibition of homosexual practice "never made the Top 10 lists of commandments." Neither did the commands not to have sex with one's mother or with animals. That doesn't mean that such commands were less significant than the command against adultery. It means that the Decalogue dealt with typical offenses and a number of the commands were suggestive of others. The commandments to honor one's father and mother (5), not to commit adultery (7), and not to covet a neighbor's wife (10) all suggest a male-female prerequisite to sexual unions. It should also be noted that Leviticus 20:10-16 groups the prohibition of male-male intercourse with other first-tier sexual offenses, including adultery, incest with one's stepmother or daughter-in-law (and, by implication, one's mother and daughter), and bestiality. Thankfully, when Paul dealt with a case of adult, consensual incest in 1 Corinthians 5, he didn't draw Kristof's conclusion that incest "never made the Top 10 lists of commandments." Simply put, while the Decalogue contains important commands, it is not a "Top Ten list."

Kristof adds, again sarcastically, "a plain reading of the Book of Leviticus is that male anal sex is every bit as bad as other practices that the text condemns, like wearing a polyester-and-cotton shirt (Leviticus 19:19)." To compare the significance of the prohibition of male-male intercourse to the prohibition against wearing a garment made of two different materials is highly tendentious and shows an extraordinary lack of hermeneutical (i.e., interpretive) sensitivity to the witness of Scripture. The penalty for wearing a garment made of two different fabrics was probably just the destruction of the fabric (compare Deuteronomy 22:9-11). Moreover, the prohibition of cloth mixtures was not absolute. Mixtures of linen and wool were enjoined for some Tabernacle cloths, parts of the priestly wardrobe, and the tassel of the laity. The reason for the prohibitions appears to be that mixtures symbolized penetration into the divine realm (so Jacob Milgrom). This does not mean, however, that all mixing has a sacral quality, for not even priests are permitted to engage in bestiality; nor that all mixing is forbidden, for

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*heterosexual* intercourse requires a greater degree of mixing than *homosexual* intercourse. The prohibition of cloth mixtures in Leviticus 19:19 and some other prohibitions in the chapter (notably the laws in 19:27-28), are not taken up in the New Testament. Their temporal limitations are self-evident, possessing as they do a largely symbolic character. Incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, and bestiality perhaps have a negative symbolic value. Yet their wrongness is hardly exhausted by viewing them as symbols.

### ***Kristof's Failure to Distinguish the Best Analogies***

This brings us to the question: Why didn't Kristof choose the prohibition of incest as a far closer analogy to the prohibition of male-male intercourse than an alleged analogy to cloth mixtures? There is much to commend an analogy between incest prohibitions and the prohibitions of male-male intercourse.

- Both sets of prohibitions involve acts of sexual intercourse that are strongly, pervasively, and absolutely proscribed in the canon of Scripture (this is certainly true of man-mother incest). Indeed, both are mentioned in the sex laws in Leviticus 18 and, in ch. 20, among first-tier sexual offenses.
- Both acts, incest and male-male intercourse, are regarded as wrong because they involve sex with another who is too much of a structural same—incest on the familial level of blood relatedness (no sex with "the flesh of one's own flesh" according to Leviticus 18:6), homosexual practice on the level of sex or gender. (Note that the cloth-prohibition involves a prohibition against mixing *different* things, not things that are too much alike.)
- Both acts can be conducted in the context of consensual, committed, monogamous, adult relationships.
- Both acts suffer from a disproportionately high rate of negative side-effects: incest from procreative abnormalities and intergenerational sex; male-male intercourse from higher rates of sexually transmitted disease, mental health issues, multiple sex partners, short-term relationships, man-boy love, problematic sexual practices (like penile-anal or oral-anal intercourse), and gender identity disorders. At the same time, neither incest nor male-male intercourse (nor any other form of consensual sexual practice, including polyamorous behavior) produces scientifically measurable harm to all participants in all circumstances.

Whatever defects there may be in the analogy to incest, there are certainly far fewer drawbacks than an analogy to fabric blends. We don't expect an analogue to match in all respects the thing to which it is being compared, for then it would cease being an analogue and would become instead the thing itself. But we do differentiate near and remote analogues on the basis of the quality and number of the points of contact.

So the question remains: Why didn't Kristof write, "a plain reading of the Book of Leviticus is that male anal sex is every bit as bad as other practices that the text condemns, *like having sex with one's mother (Leviticus 18:7)*," instead of ". . . like

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wearing a polyester-and-cotton shirt (Leviticus 19:19)"? Kristof chose a remote analogy when a close one was available to him. Why did he do this? Obviously he was blinded by his own ideological aims.

Kristof's carelessness also comes across in his blog "KristofResponds" at <http://www.nytimes.com/kristofresponds>. In several follow-ups to his editorial he cites various Old Testament laws that we no longer follow, mustering all the theological sophistication of a laundry list. In Kristof's "spray method" it matters not to him whether the example at hand was:

- Carried over from the Old Testament to the New or omitted from the New (the latter either because the proscription, prescription, or practice was treated as a specifically Jewish matter or because it was viewed as an instance of Mosaic permissiveness to "hardness of heart," chiefly male);
- Categorized by Scripture as a marginal concern or as a major offense;
- Pervasively maintained in each of the Testaments, at least implicitly, or probably held only by a single author or two;
- Similar to the prohibition of homosexual practice in only one or two superficial areas or in many areas of deep structure.

Kristof appears to be more concerned with dispensing with the biblical witness against homosexual practice, by any means necessary, than in carefully listening to the texts in question and sensitively appropriating them for a contemporary context.

#### ***The "David and Jonathan Did It" Argument***

Kristof assures his readers that "the Bible is big enough to encompass gay relationships. . . . For example, 1 Samuel can be read as describing gay affairs between David and Jonathan." I do not know of any reputable biblical scholar, even on the pro-homosex side, who contends that David and Jonathan had "gay affairs." Such a contention shows no sensitivity to ancient Near Eastern conventions of male-male, non-erotic sociability, the typical use of love language in covenant-treaties, and the political apology for David's rise to power. I have nine pages in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* on why a homoerotic reading misconstrues the Succession Narrative in 1 Samuel (pp. 146-54). How about reading it, Mr. Kristof?

#### ***The "Jesus Said Nothing About It" Argument***

Kristof tells us that while "Jesus never said a word about gays," he did warn against amassing wealth (Kristof misinterprets Jesus as contending that all persons should sell all their property). Jesus also never said a word about man-mother incest but few would contend that Jesus' "silence" on such a matter indicated his lack of concern. (Indeed, in 1 Corinthians 5 Paul could recommend action against incest "in the name of the Lord Jesus," despite the absence of a specific saying of Jesus on the subject.) It would have

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been absurd for Jesus to go around first-century Palestine telling fellow Jews to stop having sex with members of the same sex. Quite simply, no one was doing it, at least not publicly. As regards sexual matters, Jesus focused on areas of dispute and did not belabor biblical core values in sexual ethics that (1) he agreed with and (2) no one in early Judaism publicly disagreed with or violated in practice.

We do know that Jesus in Mark 10 appealed to Genesis 1:27 ("God made them male and female") and Genesis 2:24 ("For this reason a man shall . . . become joined to his woman and the two shall become one flesh") as texts normative and prescriptive for defining appropriate sexual behavior. Simply because he focused on marriage's indissolubility and its monogamous character does not mean that he disregarded the obvious other-sex prerequisite given in the phrases "male and female," "a man . . . becoming joined to a woman." To the contrary: Jesus' fixation on the number "two" in a sexual relationship was itself predicated on the existence of two sexes ("male and female he made them"), whose union creates a necessary and sufficient sexual whole that needs no third partner. The story of the creation of woman in Genesis 2:18-24 provides a beautiful illustration of the fact that man and woman are each other's sexual counterparts, two halves of a single sexual whole. The Hebrew word often translated "rib" is better understood as "side," in accordance with its 40 other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible and some subsequent ancient interpretation of Genesis 2. A same-sex partner does not, and cannot, reunite the two sexual halves into an integrated whole.

Kristof charges "conservative Christians" with inconsistency because they don't rush to get themselves castrated in alleged accordance with Jesus' praise for those who make themselves eunuchs (Matthew 19:10-12). But here Kristof shows himself to be a literalist of the text—when it serves his purposes to be so, even if the text points in a different direction. Clearly Jesus was making an *analogy or comparison*, not establishing an identity, between literal eunuchs and people "who made themselves eunuchs" by taking on voluntary celibacy "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." Moreover, Jesus did not prescribe such celibacy for all persons but "only those to whom it is given"—recognizing, of course, that structural prerequisites remain for valid sexual unions.

Kristof even goes so far as to claim that Jesus' healing of the centurion's "boy" or "slave" in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10 may indicate Jesus' approval of homosexual behavior. He alleges that the centurion and the slave may have been lovers and notes that Jesus said not a condemnatory word about the relationship. The argument is ridiculous. If the centurion and his slave were engaged in a homosexual relationship, then it was likely to have been of a particularly coercive and exploitative sort. Using Kristof's logic, we would have to suppose, then, that Jesus was in favor of coercing slaves to have sex with their masters and to feminize their appearance (up to and possibly including castration), inasmuch as Jesus did not speak explicitly against it. Luke speaks of Jewish elders in Capernaum (Galilee) interceding on the centurion's behalf. Should we suppose that these elders too were okay with homosexual unions of this or any type, when all the evidence from Jewish texts of the Second Temple period and beyond indicates unequivocal and absolute opposition to all homosexual practice? Certainly neither Matthew nor Luke read the story to support homosexual unions. Luke portrays the centurion as a "God-fearer"

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("he loves our nation and he himself built the synagogue for us"), which makes it highly unlikely that the centurion engaged in homosexual activity. Abstinence from homosexual activity and other illicit sexual unions was a minimal expectation of the "Noahide laws" for Gentiles developing in early Judaism. Certainly, too, not all masters were having sex with their male slaves so Jesus could hardly have assumed homoerotic activity on the part of the centurion. I have argued in my own work on this story that the earliest recoverable version, lying behind the Matthew-Luke agreements (Q) and the variant version in John 4:46-54, involves an official at Capernaum, in the employ of Herod Antipas, whose "boy," i.e. "son," was on the verge of death (only Luke reads "slave"). Certainly the official was not having sex with his son!

Kristof never bothers to consider an array of evidence that points to Jesus' acceptance of his Bible's strong opposition to homosexual practice, including Jesus' appeal to the normative status of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, mentioned above.

- We know that Jesus at a couple of points (adultery of the heart, divorce) actually intensified the demand on sexual ethics, even as he reached out aggressively to those most violating that demand and at greatest risk of not entering the kingdom of God. Jesus was a much less vigorous critic of the law of Moses than Paul and we know what Paul's view on same-sex intercourse was. Jesus believed that what one did sexually could get one thrown into hell; that one should "cut off" an eye or hand (again, Mr. Kristof, a metaphor!) if it threatens one's downfall because it is better to go into heaven maimed than to go into hell full-bodied (Matthew 5:29-30).
- We have no record of anyone in the Judaism of Jesus' day expressing anything less than strong opposition to any and all homosexual practice. If Jesus had wanted his disciples to have a different view, he would have had to tell them so. As it was, the earliest church was united in its opposition to homosexual practice. For example, the "Apostolic Decree" in Acts 15 welcomes Gentiles while prohibiting the "sexual immorality" (*porneia*) that typifies Gentile life—a text with clear links to the sex laws in Leviticus 18.
- Jesus could speak of "sexual immoralities" which everywhere in early Judaism included a prohibition of homosexual practice (again, see the so-called "Noahide laws" binding on Gentiles).
- Jesus obviously accepted the commandment against adultery in the Decalogue, which in context presupposed a man-woman marriage and was treated by many Jews of the period as an overarching rubric for the major sex laws against incest, same-sex intercourse, and bestiality.
- Jesus acknowledged Sodom's role in Scripture as the prime example of abuse of visitors (Matthew 10:14-15; Luke 10:10-12), which in the context of other early Jewish texts indicated a special revulsion for the attempt at treating males sexually as females.

The notion that Jesus was neutral toward homosexual unions, much less favorably disposed, is historically preposterous. Mr. Kristof should know better.



### *The "Paul Is All Alone and Untrustworthy" Argument*

Kristof admits that "the religious right" is correct in seeing Paul as opposed to "male homosexuality" (Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; *pace* Mr. Kristof, it's not only the "religious right" that doesn't want to see coercive cultural validation of homosexual practice). Yet he claims "the right has a tougher time explaining why lesbians shouldn't marry because the Bible has no unequivocal condemnation of lesbian sex." He thinks that it is possible that Romans 1:26 refers to "sex during menstruation or to women who are aggressive during sex." This non-homoerotic interpretation is so improbable that it can be easily discounted. (Kristof acknowledges that Bernadette Brooten, a lesbian New Testament scholar who has worked extensively on lesbianism in antiquity, is convinced of a reference to lesbianism in Romans 1:26.)

The parallel phrasing of Romans 1:26 and 1:27 leaves little doubt that lesbian intercourse was intended in 1:26: "even *their females exchanged the natural use* [i.e. of the male] for one contrary to nature, and *likewise also the males, having left the natural use of the female*, were inflamed in their yearning for one another, males with males." For the "likewise also" of 1:27 to be appropriate, both the thing exchanged and the thing exchanged *for* must be comparable—here sex with members of the same sex, not non-coital sex. Male and female homoeroticism are paired often enough in ancient sources so that there is nothing surprising about such a pairing in Rom 1:26-27. In addition, while it was commonplace to refer to female homoeroticism as "unnatural," there are no explicit references in ancient texts to anal or oral *heterosexual* intercourse as unnatural.

Finally, in the context of the Greco-Roman world, it is not possible that Paul could have been strongly opposed to male homosexual practice while being favorably disposed to female homoeroticism. For although there was some openness among Greek and Roman moralists to specific forms of male homoerotic practice, attitudes toward female homosexual practice were uniformly negative. Paul's statement that "even their women" engage in such practices underscores the point. That Paul and other biblical authors were opposed to lesbian intercourse can be taken as an historical given.

In the end Kristof utterly rejects Paul as "our lawgiver" because Paul elsewhere instructs women to be veiled and to keep their hair long (1 Cor 11:2-16). However, as we have seen, the attempt by Kristof to isolate Paul from a much broader opposition to homosexual practice across the canonical landscape must be judged a failure. It is not just a question of ignoring Paul but rather of ignoring Scripture's united, strong, and unequivocal witness. Furthermore, the analogy regarding veils is a poor one, just like his analogy between the Levitical laws concerning male-male intercourse and mixing two kinds of fabric. Paul does not consider the hairstyles and veiling to be a do-or-die issue. No warning is given regarding possible exclusion from the kingdom of God for those who disregard this "custom," unlike the one that he issues regarding same-sex intercourse (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). His ultimate concern is that Corinthian women and men not attempt to disregard all marks of sexual differentiation in attempts to exercise prophetic gifts. There are overtones of concern here for a slippery slope leading to homoerotic

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practices or at least the appearance thereof. Kristof confuses the cultural accoutrements of Paul's concern for homosexual practice for the concern itself. Hairstyles and headdresses are poor analogues to a form of sexual behavior that Scripture pervasively, strongly, absolutely, and counterculturally rejects. Again, a much closer analogue to Paul's opposition to homosexual practice is his opposition to incest, even of an adult, consensual variety (1 Corinthians 5). Conveniently, Kristof again chooses to ignore the stronger point of comparison.

### ***Kristof's "Solutions" and the Charge of "Cherry Picking"***

Kristof closes by recommending one of two "solutions" to the allegedly insoluble problem of appropriating the Bible for a contemporary context. One "solution," he suggests, is to "emphasize the sentiment in Genesis that 'it is not good for the human to be alone' [Genesis 2:18], and allow gay lovers to marry." The problem with this interpretation is that it completely ignores the man-woman structural prerequisite for sexual relations portrayed in Genesis 2:21-24. The story requires a sexual complement, not just a nondescript intimate life partner. A woman supplies what is missing from male sexuality. A man cannot become "more male" by merging with another male. Genesis 2:21-24 illustrates a conditional opportunity for sexual intimacy, not an opportunity by right that disregards embodied existence and deep-structure prerequisites.

The other "solution" proposed by Kristof, perhaps flippantly, is to "ban marriage altogether" since "Paul disapproves of marriage except for the sex-obsessed, saying that it is best 'to remain unmarried as I am.'" Yet, like so many of his other interpretations of biblical texts, Kristof misunderstands Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 7. Yes, Paul commends singleness but not because he is anti-passion, much less anti-marriage, but rather because of pragmatic missionary considerations in a time of persecution and great stress. Nor is it fair to conclude that Paul says everything that he believes about marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, as if Paul thought that marriage served only the purpose of a legitimate safety valve for pent-up sexual desires. His arguments were probably conditioned in part by the Corinthian contention that they, as "spiritual people," were beyond sexual temptation. In addition, Kristof's observation presupposes enjoining sexual relations by unmarried persons whereas this was precisely the circumstance that Paul was trying to prevent. Of course, unlike Kristof and like Jesus, Paul was not requiring an end to marriage but only putting forward an alternative for those who had a gift to abstain from sexual relations. Like Jesus, too, Paul was not elevating a "right to sex" over structural prerequisites for sexual unions. Burning sexual desire was not an excuse for circumventing various prerequisites (for gender, degree of blood unrelatedness, number of sex partners at one time, age, etc.).

Kristof's ultimate complaint is that "conservatives" "cherry-pick biblical phrases and ignore the central message of love." The reality is the obverse of what Kristof argues, at least so far as Kristof's op-ed piece is concerned. It is Kristof who approaches the biblical text with the singular aim of bending it to his own purposes. He often ignores literary and historical context matters inconvenient to his reading, makes a series of specious

***Jesus' command to love embraced everyone while his sexual ethic narrowed to one other of the other sex. Maintaining structural prerequisites to sexual intercourse, then, does not violate Jesus' emphasis on love.***

exegetical moves, and develops no coherent or consistent criteria for distinguishing close analogues from distant analogues. He "cherry-picks" Scripture for texts that, he hopes, will make any significant appeal to Scripture look absurd in a vain effort to make opposition to homosexual practice look arbitrary. To call an appeal to the Bible's witness against homosexual practice "cherry-picking" is more absurd even than contending that the Bible's witness against man-mother incest is "cherry-picking." What would constitute "cherry-picking" is the attempt to show that a two-sex requirement for sexual unions is a marginal concern of the writers of Scripture.

As regards Kristof's complaint that "conservatives" "ignore [the Bible's/Jesus'] central message of love," it is hard to see how this is so unless one simply equates love with the desire for sexually intimate relationships. Clearly, such an absolute equation is misguided. Jesus interpreted Leviticus 19:18, "love your neighbor as yourself," as broadly as possible so that "neighbor" meant "anyone with whom you might come into contact, whose help you might want to solicit in an hour of dire need, including an enemy." Yet Jesus construed the Genesis creation stories as narrowing the number of sex-partners lifetime to one. So his command to love embraced everyone while his sexual ethic narrowed to one other of the other sex. Maintaining structural prerequisites to sexual intercourse, then, does not violate Jesus' emphasis on love.

What is unloving is to celebrate the developmental shortcomings in being erotically attracted to what already is or has as a sexual being: male for maleness, female for femaleness. An attempt at completing the sexual self through merger with a sexual same is a manifestation of sexual narcissism or sexual self-deception. It is buying into a lie about one's sexual identity. "Gay marriage" must always be an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, inasmuch as marriage presupposes the reunion of the two sexes into an integrated sexual whole. True love, the kind of love promoted by Jesus, retains and sometimes even intensifies core values in sexual ethics in Scripture—of which the two-sex requirement is foundational—while reaching out in love to those most inclined to violate that standard.

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