

THINKING CHRISTIAN

Do we hold the truth? No, the Truth holds us...

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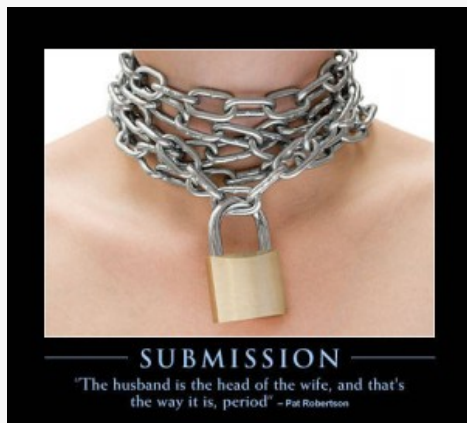
Last year's battle was over whether Christianity is true...

APOLOGETICS: FIGHTING LAST YEAR'S BATTLES, LAST YEAR'S WAY

When I led the *True Reason* project earlier this year, I did it because I thought it would do good to show how weak New Atheist leaders are in reasoning, even as they try to feature it as their great strength. I think the book has probably done a lot of good. I hope so, anyway.

But I am coming to see that it's a skirmish being fought on an old battlefield. It's last year's war. Probably last decade's. That fight isn't over, and it still needs to be pursued, but there's a much more strategic field of battle, to which we apologists must devote much more of our resources.

I offer you this in illustration:



Do you feel the power of those images? How are we going to answer *that*?

Here's the problem: the rhetorical landscape is asymmetrical, off balance, skewed. Every one of these images conveys a false message—yet with lightning speed and superb effectiveness. Everyone who looks at them knows exactly what they're about. No background needs filling in; no explanation is necessary. Viewers get it emotionally more than they know it mentally. It's blazingly fast: the message slips almost past their brain into their gut, where the effect is strong and lasting, regardless of its not being true.

Every one of these images conveys a false message —yet with lightning speed and superb effectiveness.

November 12, 2012 - 6:00 am

By [Tom Gilson](#)

Posted in [Intellectual Engagement](#), [Life and Choices](#), [Thinking Christianly](#), [Worldviews](#)

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Discover the best-selling ebook *True Reason*, only \$2.99! — "Anyone who engages with these arguments thoughtfully will discover that it is surprisingly difficult to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist." (Dr. Timothy McGrew, Western Michigan University)

The truth, on the other hand, takes a good while to explain. That's what I mean by asymmetry: our message is true; and when fully understood it's a far better message than theirs, but there are so many gaps to be filled in, how are we going to get it across? How will we even get people's attention? If Christianity is intolerant, and anti-woman, and pro-slavery, and hateful, and anti-equality, who's going to sit and listen long enough to learn that it passes the tests of historicity and rationality?

Last year's battle was over whether Christianity is true. This year's battle is over whether it's ethical to entertain the possibility that it's true.

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We can't just quickly turn around the rhetorical asymmetry, so we're going to have to do it the old-fashioned slow way. We still have to catch our listeners' attention, just as these slogans do. We still have to get to the gut, as these messages do. Obviously we have to do it honestly and legitimately, or else we contradict our own position.

Strategically speaking, the answer is not in philosophy, which for too many listeners is boring, and which takes only a very indirect route to the heart. I've made the mistake of thinking that was the right way to go. It's certainly a right way to go, and I'm not interested in slowing down anyone's philosophical researches. I'll come back to that in a minute.

If, however, our purpose is to persuade, philosophy isn't doing it. It may win rationally, but strategically it fails far more often than it succeeds. Historical apologetics may be more effective in some ways. Neither approach, however, is oriented primarily toward reaching the heart.

What is, then? *Story*.

Story grabs people's attention. *Great* story reaches the heart. Great story that *tells truth* changes lives forever.

The reason I became involved in apologetics was to see lives changed while proclaiming God's truth and goodness. I think I have done some of that: I have proclaimed God's truth and goodness. The evidence of lives changed, however, has not been what I had hoped for. Actually sometimes I have fallen into the error of doing apologetics for the sake of winning the contest. It's not pretty when a Christian does that.

Story grabs people's attention. Great story reaches the heart. Great story that tells truth changes lives forever.

I realize now that in order to be faithful, true, and strategically effective in today's rhetorical environment, I'm going to need to get a lot better at sharing stories. There's no shortage of them to be told. The Bible itself is much more narrative than it is essay, and church history offers libraries full of opportunities. And which is more likely to change a distrusting skeptic's mind: an accurate exegesis of [Colossians 3:22](#), or the true historical story of how Christianity has repeatedly led to the demise of slavery? It's a trick question, actually. [Col. 3:22](#) can only be properly interpreted with and through story: the historical context in which it was written. The whole Bible is like that.

What then about

What then about apologetical theology and philosophy? A true apologist will study hard and learn well in those

*apologetical
theology and
philosophy?*

disciplines, which will always be crucial in the life of any Christian who cares about thinking. Strategically they're also essential in the background, to ensure that we have a solid and proper understanding of the truths we're telling. And they're still crucial as foreground messages for those who are ready to listen on those terms, who have made it past the emotional barriers created by today's distorted rhetoric. They're the right way to go in those academic settings where they answer the questions that are actually being asked.

I am in no way dismissing the value of these disciplines. The point is that our message must always be legitimately suited to the audience and the purpose, and there are times when strategy calls for other approaches. Our age is one in which it's time for a new strategy to come to the fore. Apologetics has been very strong on philosophy and theology in recent decades. I've ridden along with that trend. For the sake of effective communication, though, I intend to pick up my church history and biography books again, like I haven't done in many years. If I could write imaginative stories I would; instead I hope at least to re-tell actual ones.

I said recently there would be changes coming to this blog around the first of the year. This will be one of them: more telling of the Christian story from the Bible, from history, and from around the world. We can't overturn the rhetorical situation overnight, but we can chip away at it by getting our audience's attention one story at a time.

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TFBW wrote:
[November 12, 2012 at 8:17 am](#)

1. Aristotle taught that dialectic and rhetoric were two sides of the same coin, more or less, and that it pays to be a master of both, so maybe you're right. Clearly there's an awful lot of rhetoric coming from the other side.

That shift in tactics is not what springs first to my mind, though. My first impression is that we have a large supply of salt that's lost its savour, and that's why it's not being effective. That being so, I don't expect a simple shift in tactics to be productive: there are much harder, more fundamental questions to be addressed. Introspection is the order of the day.

My perspective is, of course, coloured by my experience, which has been rather sour of late — and by that, I mean the last five to ten years, not days. Perhaps you're less cynical than I am.

John wrote:
[November 12, 2012 at 10:56 am](#)

2. You say, "Every one of these images conveys a false message—yet with lightning speed and superb effectiveness." Is it possible that these images convey some truth?

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
11:10 am

3 | Yes. Obviously. Lies are always more effective when mixed with some truth.

Tim wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
11:40 am

4 | I applaud your recognition that there is a war being waged attempting to stain the popular opinion of Christianity. The depths of theology and philosophy are needed and rationality is encouraged, but often the war is played out on an emotional level that must also be addressed. Looking forward to seeing more.

SteveK wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
12:05 pm

5 | This is definitely a move in the right direction, Tom. Here's how I see it.

As Christian's our primary leading message – in word and in deed – needs to be about God's love, hope and forgiveness, changed lives, etc. That's the Christian message that people fall in love with – the message that will hold people's attention through thick and thin.

Unfortunately that message has been put on the back burner in favor of another message – the message of Bible facts and logical/philosophical argument.

These things don't win hearts. They are too dry and sterile. These things are still valuable and are needed – because they validate our message of love, hope and forgiveness – but these things should not be our main emphasis.

We've got to reorder our priorities, and when I say 'we' I'm pointing the finger at myself.

Longstreet wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
12:52 pm

6 | "Is it possible that these images convey some truth?"

Some truth? Sure.

Now, a test. Is it possible that these images convey a twisted, distorted and incomplete view of the truth?

John wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
12:57 pm

7 | What is the true message in those images? Why is the story about Christianity being impeded by some Christians? I know some Christians who tell a great story but don't live it. However, I think there is a real challenge of living and telling the Christ story in an authentic way – I affirm your desire to do so.

Larisa Dell wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
1:34 pm

8 | If this is what God is calling you to do, then it doesn't matter if anyone else thinks it's a good idea or not–still, I applaud the direction you are taking. 😊 Christ told many stories to teach deep spiritual truths, and it still remains the best way (apart from music) to leave a message that people will remember long after you've stopped speaking. If it goes along with love in action, then it's even better!

John wrote:
[November 12, 2012 at 3:26 pm](#)

9. Is it possible that these images convey a twisted, distorted and incomplete view of the truth? Sure.

Is it possible that some Christians twist and distort Christianity so much that they cannot receive the truth from these images – all they want to see is the incomplete truth?

What is true about these images? The answer is not the problem of Christianity. The problem is how some Christians live out the story of Christianity.

Tom Gilson wrote:
[November 12, 2012 at 4:20 pm](#)

10. Anything's possible, John. It's even possible that you might have a point to make, rather than just asking questions about what's possible. If so, what is it?

I don't want to dance around every possible inference or implication. I don't need to deny that some Christians have made some mistakes about some things. If you have something you'd like to bring up for discussion, you're warmly invited to do so; but these vague questions are just, well, vague questions.

John wrote:
[November 12, 2012 at 5:51 pm](#)

11. Tom,
 It is possible that I may have points. I did say, in case you missed it, that I affirm your desire to focus on stories – that's a point I have to make.

Also, you did not respond to Longstreet, unless that's you, who indirectly was responding to me. Do you want him to make a point to?

You can choose to respond to my question as rhetoric or not., No need for sarcasm, Tom. I am sincere in my questions. Thanks.

John

Tom Gilson wrote:
[November 12, 2012 at 5:55 pm](#)

12. Hi, John. I thought Longstreet's question was a rhetorical one; that's why I didn't respond.

I have already responded to your questions. If you have any points to make in connection with them, as I said, you're warmly invited to make them known. I say that sincerely and with no sarcasm intended.

Sault wrote:
[November 12, 2012 at 6:03 pm](#)

13. Specifics – two of the signs that you've given as examples are responding to Pat Buchanan and the Westboro Baptist Church (the third and fourth examples, respectively).

I don't think that I need to familiarize your readers with the Westboro Baptist Church, but I can offer at least [a few examples of Pat Buchanan's views](#). It is an understatement to say that he is racist and a homophobe.

Since you have given them as examples, are you planning on

defending them (the WBC and Pat Buchanan)? Do you feel that their viewpoints are examples of truthful Christian principles, or are they examples of how "some Christians have made some mistakes about some things"?

BillT wrote:
[November 12, 2012 at 6:06 pm](#)

14.

The problem for Christianity is the same problem that many have who hold traditional religious, social and political beliefs. Those that oppose those beliefs are willing to lie about those they oppose, they are very good at lying and they control the media that disseminates those lies. Thus the tactics of the New Atheists and the SSM proponents. Rationality is of no consequence and quite purposefully so. They are not interested in logically convincing anyone. They know that smearing one's opponent is easier and more effective.

Tom Gilson wrote:
[November 12, 2012 at 6:08 pm](#)

15.

Here's what I'm trying to say, John. I think I've already said most of it. Whatever legitimately negative truth there is in these images, it applies to Christians and/or nominal Christians doing wrong. It's not true about Christ, God, or God's word. Yet imagery like this is not only directed towards fallible humans, but also toward God and his revelation.

No one says we've gotten everything right. That's not part of our story; our story is one of serving a good God who makes us better than we would otherwise be on earth, but not one who makes us close to perfect. I'm not pretending perfection. This post was about correcting an error I've been making. I've admitted other mistakes elsewhere. This wasn't the place to go into all that, though.

So I can't discern why you're continuing to ask questions that I've already tried to answer. That's why I'm asking you to make a point instead, if you have one, which I'm confident you do. I'd like to hear it.

Tom Gilson wrote:
[November 12, 2012 at 6:14 pm](#)

16.

Sault:

The third image was a response to Pat Robertson, not Pat Buchanan. The fourth one is not tied to Westboro; it's directed toward the so-called hate that's supposedly involved in generally opposing SSM. In my experience that hate can be found in some but not all SSM opponents. Parsing the difference between the two groups (if I may split them simplistically that way) is part of what I'm hoping to see people do through telling the true story of Christians and of Christianity.

Sault wrote:
[November 12, 2012 at 8:02 pm](#)

17.

Thank you for the clarifications. I managed to misread one and misidentify the other. Sheesh, my apologies!

Just keep in mind that the reason that the signs are effective is not because New Atheism has done such a good job at explaining the context - Christianity has done a perfectly good job of doing

that, and the New Atheists are simply capitalizing on that.

Look at my earlier mistake – why would I see a sign saying “Hate is Not A Family Value” and think WBC if I hadn't seen them holding vaguely rainbow-ish colored signs proclaiming how much God hates homosexuals? Why would I not let that color my view of the rest of Christianity if I don't see other Christians denouncing them?

Christians have let the most vocal among them define them, and if they don't get out there and start denouncing those who use words like “hate” then you've only brought it upon yourself. You may say that you aren't hateful, but on the other hand, have you spent significant time denouncing those who are? Where are you drawing the line? I'm not accusing you here, sometimes the easiest way to communicate who you are is to say who you aren't!

If I was in your shoes I would have taken the opportunity to emphasize how much I disagreed with the hateful messages of the WBC, Buchanan, or Robertson. Pat Robertson is just as homophobic as Pat Buchanan – [blaming hurricanes on gay people, for instance](#). The fact that you displayed a sign with a quote by Pat Robertson... well, aren't you sending a mixed message?

Tom Gilson wrote: 18.
November 12, 2012 at 8:13 pm

This post wasn't about the WBC. It wasn't about Buchanan. It wasn't even about Robertson but about someone's use of what someone purports to be from Robertson, without context.

I'm sorry I haven't met your expectations in criticizing all these Christians. I'll take your strategic advice under advisement. Meanwhile I also want to make it known that the slavery billboard, the woman in chains, the distortion of Leviticus, the twisted message concerning family values—these are not characteristic of Christianity as Christ demonstrated it, nor are they accurate pictures of what Christianity has been through the centuries.

Can I show that by picking fights with Christian leaders with whom I disagree? No, I don't think that's the best approach. It's just dirtying myself with nastiness I don't want to be a part of. Not that I've never done it. It's just that there's a limit to how much time I want to spend on it. Honestly I doubt I could do it enough to satisfy you without making myself as bad as what I was criticizing in the process.

Better to show that Christianity through the centuries has been the best thing that ever happened to women, to slaves, and to people of all walks who want to live lives of truth, fulfillment, honor, giving, and worship of the one true God.

John wrote: 19.
November 12, 2012 at 8:28 pm

Thanks Tom. I feel listened to by you. I apologize if I stepped in to your blog in process. I was reading on another group that referred to your blog post. As a Christian, who is passionate about message of Christ, I don't like the behaviorist/work

approach or mentality to Christianity by Christians. I really like the narrative approach to winning hearts to Christ.

I think that those images have something true to teach us. It's like irate customers have something to teach the business that they are irate with.

So, my point is how can we receive their story and not how can we build a more effective story? There is no better story than the story of Jesus Christ. Is Apologetics more about invincible intellectual come backs rather than the story of what Christ has done in my life? I do have a frustration related to the American brand of Christianity which is messed up big time. The images reflect to large degree the story brand that they have created about us. I know my thoughts may step on toes. I seek to state that we are broken human beings in forever need of Savior. We don't need to shame our enemies or neighbors to Christ. Our stories in Christ have power to cause people to repent.

Tom Gilson wrote: 20.
November 12, 2012 at 8:37 pm

Thanks, John.

I like the question you've asked in your last paragraph, including the way you expanded it afterward.

Yes, there are irate customers. Some of it's beyond our control. The gospel is not attractive to everyone, and we're only called to be at peace as far as it's within our reach to do so.

But how can we listen better? I'd like to be working on that. It's hard when the message they're sending is so obviously distorted as these images are, but if there weren't at least a kernel of truth there—southern slaveholders and confused patriarchs, for example—no one would give those images another moment's thought.

But that's far from the whole story. These images win partly because some people want them to win, regardless of their accuracy or otherwise. That accounts for some of their success.

Another very major in their success is that people don't know the true story. They don't know that where slavery was abolished, it was generally by Christians or by others heavily influenced by Christians. They don't see that (whether or not the ideal has been reached—it hasn't) women have fared *far, far* better under Christian influence than in any other set of major cultural influences.

So because of that ignorance they can think Christianity is sexist, when in fact it remains on a global and historical scale the best thing that's ever happened to women.

It all fits together if we do it right, which I'm sure I never have, even though I think there's an ideal there worth shooting for. It's story, it's testimony, it's academic arguments, it's living the life, it's prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit. It's all of these. Not just one, not just another.

God help us figure all these things out.

JAD wrote:
 November 12, 2012 at
 8:44 pm

21.

Are gay activists capable of bigotry?

According to one defender of traditional marriage, Frank Schubert, they certainly are. From the gay activist's perspective he says:

“There's no room for religious consciences in this type of debate. It's not live and let live. It's a one-way street...”

He also said violence is bound to follow. In fact, he said that on Election Day, a small church in Maine was hit by graffiti, including a swastika, simply for displaying pro-marriage signs.

Similar events happened several years ago in the state of Washington, when a petition to limit marriage to a man and a woman was circulated.

The names of the petition signers were made public, and death threats followed some who had supported traditional marriage. In that fight, homosexual activists promised they would get the names of those who wanted to protect traditional marriage and post them online so that they could encourage supporters of homosexuality to create “uncomfortable conversations” with the signers...

The same thing happened during the fight over Prop 8 in California.

There, threats that were documented included:

“I'm going to kill the pastor.”

“If I had a gun I would have gunned you down along with each and every other supporter”

“We're going to kill you.”

“You're dead. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon ... you're dead.”

“I'm a gay guy who owns guns, and he's my next target.”

“I warn you, I know how to kill, I'm an ex-special forces person.”

“Get ready for retribution all you bigots.”

Burn their f—ing churches to the ground and then tax the charred timbers.”

<http://www.wnd.com/2012/11/gay-marriage-adopted-now-come-the-lawsuits/>

Are the gay activist cited above being hateful? Where are the gays disavowing that kind of thing?

Have Pat Buchanan or Pat Robertson ever issued death threats?

d wrote: 22.
[November 12, 2012 at 9:49 pm](#)

BillT,

Its ironic to see the rather shocking and sweeping generalizations you make against atheists and/or SSM proponents in post #14, given the basic message of the OP and the ensuing thread.

Are you voicing your disagreement with the sorts of principles that lead Tom to make this statement:

“ Parsing the difference between the two groups (if I may split them simplistically that way) is part of what I'm hoping to see people do through telling the true story of Christians and of Christianity. ”

Or is that sort of careful parsing only needed when Christianity is under the microscope?

Tom Gilson wrote: 23.
[November 12, 2012 at 9:58 pm](#)

BillT said that there is evidence gay activists are capable of bigotry, and he presented some of that evidence. Time will tell how much of an over-generalization it proves to be. Within a certain band of gay activism I'm quite sure it's entirely accurate. Outside that band I'm quite sure it doesn't fit at all. The question is: which one drives the movement's interactions with the courts and the public? We'll see.

d wrote: 24.
[November 12, 2012 at 10:02 pm](#)

Tom,

I think you are mistaking JAD's post for BillT's #14 which contained no evidence of anything except bad, emotional, irrational thinking (though I do wonder if JAD has ever bothered to look at how many death threats get sent to secular public figures - for PZ Meyers they are somewhat routine, or so I hear)

As for the observation that some gay activists are capable of bigotry... duh?

Tom Gilson wrote: 25.
[November 12, 2012 at 10:10 pm](#)

You're right-I mixed up those posts.

BillT is right about the New Atheist leaders, according to observations and experience. He's right about a lot of SSM proponents, too. There's a whole lot of falsehood being perpetrated. The only question is whether these are people who (a) don't know better and are therefore somewhat innocent, or (b) don't know better but they *should* know better, so they're telling falsehoods less innocently, or (c) know better and are out-and-out lying.

I don't know which group is which. Though a falsehood is a falsehood, and therefore it's always wrong, not all falsehoods are lies with moral culpability attached to them.

I do have this to say, though: three of these images are intended to portray Christians as inhuman brutes. Are you proud of that

on your side?

Crude wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
10:32 pm

26.

“ The truth, on the other hand, takes a good while to explain. ”

Not always. Sometimes, the truth can be told in a lightning fast way.

I largely agree with what you're saying here, Tom. But I think the intention to answer rapid, oversimplified and false slurs with exhaustive, plodding but factional explanations is a mistake. You say focus on story, and that's important - but frankly, I don't think it's the only necessary response here.

In my opinion, the proper Christian response is to be fast - as fast as it takes those 4 images to convey their point. There's a lot to be angry about. Perhaps it's time to actually get angry.

Maybe the proper response to a Peter Singer speculating that, perhaps infanticide is morally acceptable, even preferable in some situations, isn't to sit down and have a reasoned talk with him about his point of view and try to find common ground while sussing out where he's mistaken. Maybe the proper response is loud - angry - condemnation. And maybe anyone who defends Singer should get it too.

Maybe what we need are a few jpgs with black borders showing aborted infants and famous quotes in defense of abortion as 'a woman's right to choose' or a right a woman has to control over her own body, for starters. All for a start.

d wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
10:52 pm

27.

“ Maybe what we need are a few jpgs with black borders showing aborted infants and famous quotes in defense of abortion as 'a woman's right to choose' or a right a woman has to control over her own body, for starters. All for a start. ”

Believe me, there are plenty out there already...

d wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
11:03 pm

28.

“ Maybe the proper response is loud - angry - condemnation. And maybe anyone who defends Singer should get it too. ”

There's plenty of that too, when it comes to Singer...

bigbird wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
11:03 pm

29.

Perhaps it is time for the Christian church to re-evaluate our opposition to SSM.

It doesn't matter what reasons we give and how good they are, we

are coming across as if we hate gays.

Maybe we need to acknowledge the realities of living in a secular society and support making SSM legal if that's the way society is headed. That doesn't mean the church has to *endorse* SSM, or perform SSMs. That doesn't mean we think it is right.

But we need to ease up on the hysteria and realize it isn't the end of society if a small minority of marriages are SSMs. The battle is surely lost in the next decade anyway. And maybe gays would slowly begin to realise we don't hate them.

Crude wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
11:07 pm

30. “ Believe me, there are plenty out there already... ”

Not enough, not with enough skill, and not coordinated quite as well. Further, notice that the pro-life movement is one area where there's been some actual long-term success.

And like I said, that should only be taken as a beginning. Christians have plenty to be outraged about and to scream about. There are plenty of subjects that can be put in nice, jpg form, with some skill and attention behind them.

BTW d - what do you think of infanticide? Morally justifiable?

Crude wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
11:08 pm

31. “ There's plenty of that too, when it comes to Singer... ”

Not nearly enough.

Crude wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
11:48 pm

32. “ Really? ”

Yep. Really. I'm sure you're miffed.

“ In circumstances where it would be an obvious and unquestionable mercy to end the life of the infant, of course. ”

Oh, so if it's not an obvious and unquestionable mercy to end the life of the infant, why... you think that's deplorable and horrible, and people who defend infanticide in such situations (or defend defenders of it) should be condemned as the monsters they are, right?

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 12, 2012 at
11:55 pm

33. d,
If you're going to call me or anyone else a liar on this blog you'd better be intentional and thorough about explaining it, and you'd better show a modicum of interpersonal respect. Otherwise your comment is out of here.

JAD wrote:
 November 13, 2012 at
 8:16 am

34

@ bigbird (#29)

“ Perhaps it is time for the Christian church to re-evaluate our opposition to SSM.

It doesn't matter what reasons we give and how good they are, we are coming across as if we hate gays.

Maybe we need to acknowledge the realities of living in a secular society and support making SSM legal if that's the way society is headed. That doesn't mean the church has to *endorse* SSM, or perform SSMs. That doesn't mean we think it is right. ”

SSM is not a live and let live proposition. To not oppose it means that not only Christians will have to surrender their human rights: freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of religion and conscience, everyone will. That's already happening. I can document it. Are gays the only people with rights? It appears that they think so. Why are they in such a rush to impose their morality on everyone else. Why are they so willing to engage in reasoned and measured discourse?

The examples that Tom gave in his OP are examples of propaganda.

What kind of ideologies use propaganda effectively? Are those ideologies in favor or against human rights? It's time for everyone to re-read Orwell's *1984*, because that's where we're headed.

John wrote:
 November 13, 2012 at
 9:56 am

35

Tom,

You ask, "But how can we listen better?"

Listening is a gift that we can give to any human being - our spouses, our children, our friends, our neighbors and even people we may disagree with, like our enemies for example. If we want to listen, we need to be trustworthy, slow to speak, a desire to be ministers of reconciliation and peacemakers. To listen well requires a God-empowered ability. It's a lot easier to condemn the behavior of others rather than listening to their hearts. Listening is about hearing the stories of the heart. It is Apologetics in action.

Holopupenko wrote: 36
 November 13, 2012 at
 11:18 am

John:

You are as clueless as those who Christ drove out of the temple. Maybe you should add the characteristic of drawing careful distinctions to your repertoire: one listens to people and loves people; one also rejects that which is evil. Speaking the truth about things is a virtue-not the vice you imply. Otherwise, you impose your own personal interpretations upon what Tom has said, and you reduce fundamental issues to simple

"disagreements"—as if we're haggling over whether it's better to purchase a Honda or a Toyota.

You want peace and love on your own personal terms. If you haven't understood that love is DANGEROUS then you have never loved... and hence you would put God in the dock the same way Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor did.

Your track record here seems to betray a lack of the ability to REALLY listen to people who differ strongly from your personal opinions... which further implies a percolating hatred masked by a thin veneer of "why can't we all just get along?" The martyrs, upon whose blood the Church is built, didn't die over group-hug "disagreements." Perhaps you should take a lesson from [Revelation 3:15-16](#).

“Safe?... Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you... He's wild, you know. Not like a tame lion.”

It's high time for you to REALLY LISTEN to Tom.

Tom Gilson wrote:
[November 13, 2012 at 11:22 am](#)

37.

Hold on a moment, Holopupenko. I don't see this at all in what John's writing. "Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger"—that's Scripture.

We have a message to share, obviously, but we share it with real people who deserve to be treated as real people.

John wrote:
[November 13, 2012 at 1:39 pm](#)

38.

Holopupenko,

I really do not understand why you make the assertion that I am clueless, that I have hatred, or that I have put God in the dock. I do not know what track record that you are referring to but somehow you can make these assumptions about me. I don't understand why you make a correlation between me and the people that Christ drove from the temple. I don't know why you gave me that quote from revelation. I don't understand why you gave me a quote from one of CS Lewis' books. You speak on behalf of of Tom writing that Tom has not been listened to – Does not the fact that I have read his blog speak to the fact that I have listened to him at least to some degree? Does not the fact that I have responded to his questions reveal that I have listen to him to some degree?

Holopupenko, I just don't get your post response to me. I am confused. Since I don't know your state of mind, I will not consider your post an offense. But if you are a Christian of sound mind, your post is offensive to me.

Holopupenko wrote: 39.
[November 13, 2012 at 3:11 pm](#)

"I do not know..."

Exactly.

Tom Gilson wrote: 40. ?
 November 13, 2012 at
 3:12 pm

Holopupenko wrote: 41.
 November 13, 2012 at
 3:48 pm

So, Tom, are you being treated as a "real person" when your position is downplayed (= suspect) because John thinks your holding to and speaking the truth about homosexuality or abortion is "not listening"? That IS the implication behind his sugary words. At the end of the day, John's position boils down to "Shhh! Don't speak the truth—it offends people. Better to '*listen*' to them [wink-wink]." How exactly are you or the way you've stated your position precluding "listening to people"?

Crude wrote: 42.
 November 13, 2012 at
 4:45 pm

I think I agree with Holo on this one. At least, to degree.

I wonder if John goes to, say, LGBT websites with people that are complaining about images accusing gays of spreading aids and being child molesters and says, "Well, isn't it possible that maybe there's some truth here that should be addressed? Do you think, perhaps, these have a ring of truth to them?" Frankly, I think he'd sooner gnaw off his fingers.

No, Tom. I think it's entirely reasonable to look at images like the ones you showed and react not only with anger and outrage, but also with the recognition that these were lies – often conscious lies – being conveyed. That they are being offered up by people who really have little interest in truth, much less 'dialogue', and that not everything is the result of a heartfelt misunderstanding.

As Holo said, you haven't railed against 'listening to people'. And yes, I will be the first to say that communication is important and key – that a very large part of modern Christian problems on these fronts is a lack of skillful communication. But part of the reason those things are a problem is precisely because they give people the opportunity to lie, to misrepresent, and to deceive the way those pictures do.

Sometimes, listening is actually inappropriate given the situation. Some people – particularly the sort who put out images like that – don't require calm, delicate, heartfelt dialogue, and frankly, many don't want it. What people sometimes need is to be spoken to. Not spoken with, not engaged in a discussion where people swap stories and maybe hug each other at the end and talk about how they feel they've really grown as people and made some real progress. Spoken to: told, 'what's being said here is wrong, utterly wrong, and here's why.'

Like with the people who think infanticide is moral, sometimes treating a person as worthy of two-sided dialogue is a mistake.

Crude wrote: 43.
 November 13, 2012 at
 4:49 pm

I'll add on that I'm not at all saying the response should be 'condemn, condemn, condemn', much less 'attack, attack, attack'. But I think many Christians have erred on the side of protracted

dialogue, lengthy responses, and keeping their cool when, frankly, they should have been angry and loud. This is one of these situations. The response to the suggestion that Christianity was supportive of racial chattel slavery should be one of those situations. There's little call for "well gosh, maybe that person felt wounded some point in the past - let's not condemn them, let's delicately inquire about them in wide-eyed innocence".

John wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
5:06 pm

44

Crude,
I did not say Tom was not listening. Tom asked me a question about listening. I think you need to re-read the posts.

I am a Christian asking sincere questions. Holo said that I have hatred, it is simply not true.

Crude, I don't understand your need to support Holo's offensive email? What's up with that?

Crude wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
5:16 pm

45

“ Crude, I don't understand your need to support Holo's offensive email? What's up with that? ”

I don't endorse everything Holo said. But I frankly agree with his sentiment.

I'll ask you directly, John: would you, upon seeing graphic images accusing homosexuals of having caused the spread of AIDS and being child molesters, have asked members of an LGBT website, "Is it possible that these images convey some truth?"

Rod Thomson wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
5:34 pm

46

Tom,

I've been going through a similar transformation. I spent nearly 30 years in newspaper newsrooms around the country and learned to defend my faith through the fires of a heated anti-Christian furnace. Daily. The stories I could tell! Apologetics, much of it self-developed along the way, and then more added from many wonderful apologetics teachers, was where I planted my flag and took a stand. I HAD to know what I believed and why or I had to never speak of Christ. The second wasn't really an option and it was blisteringly difficult at times. There were a few conversions over the years, and His name was declared.

I'm in the process of writing a sort of layman's apologetics from that experience. I hope it will have value. But I have already written and published a book tracing the connections of Christians from the Apostle John to Billy Graham — a long thread of influence from one to another — called Living Threads. It's in eBook form on Amazon. The agent and publisher who published a previous book I wrote on China missionary Hudson Taylor said there is just almost no interest among Christians for Christian history. The books won't sell. Alas, we know what does by checking the local Christian bookstore. That pulse-taking is

telling.

I'm including a link to the eBook here. If you feel it is inappropriate, feel free to delete it.

My eBook is at:

http://www.amazon.com/Living-Threads-unbroken-connections-ebook/dp/Boo9JMGAP4/ref=sr_1_1?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1349139317&sr=1-1

And I have just started a blog aimed at the hearts and minds, because your post and the following discussion demonstrates what I feel — both are needed. In my experience, I've found that some people need the mind to accept it before giving the heart, and some jump with the heart, but then rely on the renewed mind to help sustain. But too much of the church, I fear, is distracted by entertainment, buildings, even "ministries" and winning the hearts and minds doesn't get much priority.

Again, feel free to delete the blog link if you want. But it is The Joyful Watchman, at <http://www.thejoyfulwatchman.com>

Despite 30 years around chronically cynical newspaper people, I'm an optimistic man. I have eternity before me and I know exactly what I believe and why.

I think church itself may undergo a reformation in these days, perhaps breaking down the monoliths and building from the ground up from the family living room — back to our oldest roots.

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
6:07 pm

47.

Here's where I stand on this from Holopupenko, and the whole surrounding discussion:

“ At the end of the day, John's position boils down to “Shhh! Don't speak the truth—it offends people. Better to 'listen' to them [wink-wink].” How exactly are you or the way you've stated your position precluding “listening to people”?

I was a musician once, a trombonist. It's a trombonist's job to play with authority. I was even taught it's a musical sin to make soft mistakes. If you're going to get it wrong, get it wrong with authority. (And *never* get it wrong at all except in rehearsal, but that's another story.)

I have every intention of speaking with all the authority of God's word and of my convictions.

As a musician I also learned to listen, and if I was out of tune with the guy sitting next to me, I adjusted. I didn't just sit there and fume about how he got it wrong.

When you're in an ensemble where everyone plays that way, it works. You never get into a situation where you have to decide whether to adjust to the player on the right or the player on the left, because everyone adjusts, and everyone falls into tune. In a good ensemble it happens in microseconds, so fast that it's a

virtually unconscious process among the musicians, and absolutely undetectable for everyone else.

In a lesser kind of ensemble, on the other hand—like singing in church!—if the person next to me is out of tune I'll hold my own and let them be wrong. They probably can't tell anyway.

Here's my point: I learn by listening. I'll adjust to what there is of value to adjust to. I don't feel like my position or my authority to speak is threatened by it. I've gained a lot from listening to people I disagree with. To take the present topic as an example, I've gained a lot of insight and even maturity from listening to homosexuals telling me their stories.

Are gay men and lesbians hurt by the church? I want to know about that and understand it. I don't want to issue one ounce of offense that's not essential to bearing witness to the truth. I look at Jesus' way of connecting with sinners and I see a model there. He showed that he cared. He also said "go and sin no more."

That way of approaching people is almost impossible to exhibit on a blog, where few people come to listen to each other, and where the agreed purpose is in fact to argue toward the truth. I doubt the pro-gay contributors here would recognize that attitude of Jesus in me very clearly. The gays I've known face to face might.

The point of listening is to treat the other person as a fellow human being, first of all. Secondly it is to discover how else I might better respect that person as a fellow human being, which might include correcting some of my own ways.

The point of listening, however, is *not* to subdue the authority of God's word or the facts of nature or of government. It's not to dampen my sense of authority to speak, either. I'll still stand up and scream (in my blogger's voice) at a Dan Savage or a Phil Snider if they lie or distort the truth, because I think they ought to be held accountable for their deceits. I'll still object to images like the horrifyingly twisted versions here.

John, you ask what we can learn from those images, and I say, "We can learn that we haven't communicated clearly enough." Not that these images are the result of our failed communications: they're actually, I think, the result of misguided and malicious intent. Here's where we've failed: there are people out there who aren't laughing at these images. If we had done a good job, everyone would know how ridiculous they are, and they wouldn't show up anywhere except failblog.com.

So here I am: I'm willing to listen, and to John I'm affirming that willingness, because I think it's a crucial way to show love and to learn. As I "listen" to these images, I get a message of our strategic failure in getting our message out. I also get a message of malice from the purveyors of these messages. If they want me to treat them as human beings, I'll call on them to take a move in that same direction. Well, actually I already have called them to that.

I say let's treat each other as humans. I say these images don't do

that. I say they're offensive, malicious, and wrong. But if someone wants me to listen, and if they have something human-like to say to me, my ears are wide open.

John wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
6:35 pm

48.

Tom,

Your music metaphor is a poignant one, especially because every voice in the Body of Christ counts because it reflects Him. If our mission together is to reconcile broken people to Christ then our strategies don't need to look like the world's strategies.

People may use hatred against us, it does give us legitimacy not to demonstrate love. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

I think that your idea about stories, Tom, is about how God's love has justified us and is sanctifying us. Our story is not about the sinfulness of this world, but about the Savior and how he has redeemed us and is redeeming us from our sinful world.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
6:54 pm

49.

Thanks, John, Our story is about the sinfulness of the world, too, however. I assume you've read the prophets? *The Gulag Archipelago* was mightily effective as story. So was *Lord of the Flies*. And *1984* and *Brave New World*.

I said our strategy needs to be story, and I believe the goodness of Christianity is a story that needs to be told a whole lot more than it has been. I did not say—and I do not think—that it is the only strategic story we can tell.

Have you read the story about how homosexual activists deliberately planned the propaganda campaign to get us to think their side was right? Have you read the story about how they purposed to play victim, and to intentionally twist the images of their Christian opponents to look as bad as possible? Have you read the story of how they chose to manipulate the media?

Those would be interesting stories to tell, too. Not made-up ones, by the way. True ones.

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
7:00 pm

50.

Let me hasten to add this: if the time comes for me to tell stories like this, I will reject the ways of the world. I will take every effort to present the stories honestly. I will not knowingly distort or twist the facts, and I will take all due precautions to avoid doing so unknowingly.

Integrity would not allow me to do otherwise. Besides, I don't think it would be necessary.

Rod Thomson
wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
7:17 pm

51.

Consider also the real stories, the stories of so many of the great Christians through the centuries that have moved the faith down the road and changed the world. True stories. True results.

Fictional stories that are metaphors for Christianity can have value to leverage things toward the truth. They can also be quite enjoyable when well done, and I've used C.S. Lewis and others on many occasions as suggested readings for non-believers not really aware of their Christianity. But it seems to me they will always fall short. Some fall very short. Their real use is only when we followers of Christ will spring off from them and confidently engage the complete truth.

Sault wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
8:46 pm

52.

“ Have you read the story about how homosexual activists deliberately planned the propaganda campaign to get us to think their side was right? ”

I, for one, would be mightily interested in reading these types of stories. I would be interested in discerning the difference between their deliberate planning and the deliberate planning that you are doing right now, for instance.

Maybe I don't understand... actually, I'll just say that I don't. I don't see shadowy gay agenda pushers cackling evilly whenever gays get rights, I see normal-looking gay couples crying over how relieved and happy they are. I don't see a Christian acting out of genuine love or sympathy when they condemn gay marriage, I see vitriol and emotional appeals and slippery slope arguments and blah blah blah. The ads that the anti-gay campaign ran here in Washington were atrociously erroneous and deceptive and smothered in appeal to emotion!

Who comes across as more reasonable – the gay couples who just want to be treated equally, or the people who say that through some intangible way society will be damaged and that those gay people are abominations who are to be blamed for natural disasters?

If this is all a PR job, then it must be the best that I've ever seen... Like, so good that it I almost can't believe that they even exist. If they do, in fact, even exist and this isn't all just a lie or wishful thinking on the part of the Christian conservatives. Who, as we all know, never ever lie.

“ Consider also the real stories, the stories of so many of the great Christians through the centuries that have moved the faith down the road and changed the world. ”

Something that comes to mind is a documentary series by Wanderlust Productions... Finger of God, Furious Love, etc. I saw the last two of the series at the church that I do sound for. They are often moving (meeting a junkie who spent his days looking for half-used needles to try and salvage some leftover drug), but

not compelling (after prayer, he just went right back to looking for more needles – what if he'd been healed?).

I'd be curious to see your response to this series, btw, if you've seen them or do see them. Their message of love before condemnation seems to be more in tune with Christian principles than the "Repent or Burn!" people I see walking around every now and then.

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
9:07 pm

53.

You want to read stories? Check [here](#) and [here](#).

The difference is not in the deliberateness; that's fine. It's in their intentional use of distortions for pure rhetorical purposes.

I don't know about the Washington ads, and I won't take responsibility for or against them.

“ Who comes across as more reasonable – the gay couples who just want to be treated equally, or the people who say that through some intangible way society will be damaged and that those gay people are abominations who are to be blamed for natural disasters? ”

The first group (1), of course, the way you've set up the comparison.

But let me split your conjunction in the second group: those (2a) who say that society will be damaged (I'll omit the tendentious term "intangible ways" and just let this group speak for themselves), and those (2b) who say that gays are responsible for natural disasters. Did you realize that groups (2a) and (2b) are not all the same people?

Group (2b) is unreasonable. I've written my opposition to that kind of thing elsewhere.

Group (2a) appears unreasonable, until they take time to explain their position and their audience takes time to listen. I mean, what do you expect: instant understanding without explanation, and without bothering to hear?

When those two conditions are in place, then I'd say (2a) makes incredibly good sense. So then we have the comparative question, who comes across as more reasonable?

- 1) Someone who expresses a desire, or
- 2a) Someone who makes a case and explains it?

Now, if you're going to say that group 1 also gets to explain their case, then I'd gladly say let them. I'd be happy to have them do it if they would refrain from using dehumanizing images and language on me (see above) in the process.

And then we'd have the opportunity to assess which one was more reasonable. Which takes a lot more mental work than you just displayed in asking the question the way you did. Not saying

you haven't done that work or can't, just saying that it wasn't displayed there.

I have no familiarity with Wanderlust Productions.

Rod Thomson
wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
9:16 pm

54.

From being a Bible-believing Christian and working in newspapers with many gay colleagues and writing about gay issues, I see a big divide: There are normal gay people who you would never suspect of it and just want to live quiet lives with the people they love. And then there are the in-your-face activists that bring out the worst in opponents.

Loving first is always the right action and reaction, and we are commanded to do so. But remember the stereotyping goes both ways. The gays I worked with always thought that I was different from other Christians because I did not hound them on their homosexuality and treated them as people. But I told them I was just like every Christian I knew in our church. They had a stereotype of Christians from that one goofball church that hates gays as doctrine to some televangelists going on a tirade. But neither are typical. And it is true that most gays are not flaming in leather talking with a lisp.

Is there an agenda? Sure. On both sides. But one agenda should be rooted in the undying truth of scripture, which includes loving everyone and praying for our enemies. Sermon on the Mount can't be reviewed enough. It's such a high bar. But speaking the truth in love at the risk for personal vitriol, for the sake of the soul of another, is a good agenda. The other agenda is somewhat more selfish. Human, perhaps, and thus the need for Christ.

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
9:20 pm

55.

Good stuff, Rod. Thanks.

Joan J wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
11:56 pm

56.

The slavery stuff doesn't come out of the blue. The defenders of slavery, right here in the U.S., only 150 years ago, took their position and defended it on Biblical grounds.

A random hit from Google Books:

Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Seminary 1859-2009*, Oxford University Press, pp. 56-57:

'Slavery was the issue that loomed largest in the secession of the southern states. Southern Baptist clergy spoke out in favor of secession and defended slavery. A month before South Carolina passed its secession ordinance, Charleston Baptist leaders unanimously adopted a resolution endorsing slavery and their duty to both God and country to resist the "encroachments of the enemies of our domestic institution." Their position was nearly universal among evangelical pastors in the South.

Georgia governor Joseph E. Brown, who after the war saved the

seminary from collapse by his gifts, persuaded the delegates at the 1863 Southern Baptist Convention to adopt Broadus's resolutions: "All must admit that the institution of slavery is one of the prime causes of the war, and that its perpetuation depends upon the success of our arms....it is neither a moral, social nor political evil. Like every other relation in life it may be, and has been abused...I believe, sir, that it is an institution of God, and that we have revealed to us in the Holy Bible clear and overwhelming evidence of its establishment by Him and of his intention to perpetuate it." Samuel Boykin, editor of Georgia Baptists' Christian Index, summarized the convictions of most Southern Baptists: "Slavery is the only issue. The United States is fighting against the Confederate States for slavery."

All four of the seminary's faculty were slaveholders. The 1860 census reported that Boyce had twenty-three slaves in Greenville, Manly had seven, Williams had five, and Broadus had two. Boyce and Manly had additional slaves on plantations elsewhere. This was not unusual. Many southern clergy, especially the educated ministers of towns and cities, were slaveholders.

The faculty, like southern evangelical clergy generally, did not believe that slavery was intrinsically evil. The Bible, they held, did not condemn slavery as a mere institution. And they believe that in God's providence, it had been productive of much good. As an unintended consequence of African slavery, several million Africans were introduced to the gospel of redemption, and a large number of them had been converted and redeemed. Basil Manly Jr. wrote that "their introduction into this country has been, in the providence of God, instrumental in saving more of their race from heathenism, than the united membership of all the churches which modern foreign missions have planted."

These were the direct theological ancestors of modern conservative evangelicals, who now use similar "the Bible says" arguments against progressive positions on women, homosexuality, etc. If the conservative evangelicals, even pastors, even seminary professors, deep and serious believers in the Bible, scholars of the same, believers in inerrancy, critics of the liberals, etc., were wrong about what the Bible said about slavery them, why should we believe similarly confident arguments from people with similar methods of Bible interpretation now?

bigbird wrote:
November 13, 2012 at
11:57 pm

57.

“ SSM is not a live and let live proposition. To not oppose it means that not only Christians will have to surrender their human rights: freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of religion and conscience, everyone will. ”

To permit SSM does not mean you have to agree with it. There is a difference between morality and law. Sometimes we pass laws to regulate practices we don't agree with, prostitution being the most obvious example.

The SSM battle is already lost, and we are simply perpetuating

the view that the church hates gays by refusing to allow SSM.

Crude wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
12:27 am

58.

“ The SSM battle is already lost, and we are simply perpetuating the view that the church hates gays by refusing to allow SSM. ”

You may as well have said the LGBT groups lost the SSM battle 10-20 years ago. Back then, public sentiment was massively against such a thing. Things changed. They wouldn't have changed if the LGBT back then said, 'This battle is lost, why even fight it.'

The view that 'the church hates gays, they don't support SSM!' isn't going to go away if SSM is passed. It will simply shift to the next battleground: 'the church hates gays, they won't perform SSM services!'

It's a battle that has to be fought, and which can be won. If there's one thing the LGBT has shown, it's that the culture can turn around fast if the right message gets out and the right pressure is applied.

Joan J wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
12:46 am

59.

I wonder if readers would also consider it unfair for a skeptic to quote Jefferson Davis:

"I do not propose to discuss the justice or injustice of slavery as an abstract proposition; I occupy this seat for no such purpose. It is enough for me to know that here we are not called upon to legislate, either for its amelioration, or to fix the places in which it shall be held, and certainly have no power to abolish it. It is enough for me elsewhere to know, that it was established by decree of Almighty God, that it is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelations; that it has existed in all ages; has been found among the people of the highest civilization, and in nations of the highest proficiency in the arts."

<http://history.furman.edu/benson/docs/davis13feb1850.html>

Sault wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
4:50 am

60.

That was rather sloppy in how I stated it, but I have to emphasize to you that Group 2a is in the minority, and has been from the beginning. Those who are trying to argue from a reasonable position are almost a footnote in the larger cultural context, I think. I was trying to convey that from how I stated my very-much-binary statement. Well, sometimes editing for brevity doesn't quite work out the way you'd like it too...

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
5:35 am

61.

Joan,

We know about the old South and slavery, of course. The short answer to your question is that there is no short answer. There is definitely an answer, but it requires seeing historical context, and

especially the difference between slavery permitted in the Bible and slavery in the old South. Without that information we're likely to equate two things that are not equal, which is obviously a wrong place to begin.

So here are some places for you to peruse:

<http://thepoint.breakpoint.org/features-columns/breakpoint-columns/entry/2/17244>

<http://www.thinkingchristian.net/2009/08/christianity-and-the-abolitionist-movement/>; and three links from there. The fourth link from there seems to have gone dark.

<http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2008/02/slavery-christianity-and-islam>

<http://www.thinkingchristian.net/2011/04/the-bible-god-and-genocide-slavery-misogyny-and-other-strange-stuff/>

<http://www.thinkingchristian.net/2011/09/non-persons-yesterday-and-today/>

http://www.americanthinker.com/2012/05/what_dan_savage_doesnt_know_about_the_bible_and_slavery.html

The Bible clearly prohibits kidnapping to enslave. The slaveowners in the South who claimed the Bible supported their ways were simply wrong.

So how can we be sure that our interpretations today are better than their misinterpretations yesterday? By studying what the Bible says in its historical and grammatical context. You see, it is possible to understand what the Bible says on these topics that are under discussion.

Could we still be wrong? Anything's possible, but I think this topic is pretty clear.

Tom Gilson wrote: 62.
November 14, 2012 at 5:39 am

Sault:

If group 2a is in the minority, then so what? Does that make group 1 more reasonable? Or do we judge it according to which one actually reasons more clearly, more legitimately from evidences through inferences to conclusions?

Crude wrote: 63.
November 14, 2012 at 5:49 am

Tom,

“ The short answer to your question is that there is no short answer. ”

But there is: Jefferson Davis was wrong. In fact, he was clearly wrong. There is no way – none – to justify the institution of slavery that existed in the south on biblical terms.

That Jefferson Davis said 'It's justified' changes nothing. So again, there's a short answer: Davis was wrong. The slaveowners were wrong. You even say as much, so yeah, there's a short answer.

“ So how can we be sure that our interpretations today are better than their misinterpretations yesterday? By studying what the Bible says in its historical and grammatical context. ”

Why suggest this is the operating factor? Was the problem that Davis and company read the New Testament and became very confused?

Or did they succumb to a weakness, and suddenly both the Bible and Christian teaching generally didn't mean a damn thing because slavery was important to them for various reasons, especially - dare I say it - for entirely secular reasons?

There's a good example - a GREAT example - of secular interests and secular morality overriding the Christian view. It's not for nothing that that quote by Davis not only refers to the bible, but secular reasons ('Look at these civilized countries! Look at these advanced nations! THEY use slavery!') as well.

That's the thing which always gets me about this topic. There's this suggestion, so popular, that implies the slaveholders were going out and getting slaves because they thought there was some biblical call to do so and, darn it, this is what their faith demanded. That's a complete load of nonsense. What's obvious to anyone is that there were entirely secular (notice how that word never shows up for bad decisions) reasons driving their interpretation and their practice. They liked money. They liked 'progress'. And they liked it enough to twist the Bible in whatever direction they needed to justify what they damn well intended to do anyway.

Sault wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
7:24 am

64

“ There's this suggestion, so popular, that implies the slaveholders were going out and getting slaves because they thought there was some biblical call to do so and, darn it, this is what their faith demanded. That's a complete load of nonsense. ”

Huh. I always thought that the popular suggestion was that they saw an economic benefit and rationalized it by taking various verses out of the Bible. There is unfortunately no commandment that says "Thou Shalt Not Own Slaves", and a lot of press is given to what ways that slavery could be legitimate, so it's not like its a clear-cut issue, and it's not like every person who believed that the Bible condoned Southern slavery was a white slave-owner with a vested financial interest involved...

“ If group 2a is in the minority, then so what? Does that make group 1 more reasonable? ”

No... but there is no narrative coming from group 2a that comes close to competing with group 1. For instance - it is damn hard to say on one hand that the highest Christian virtues are to love God

and love your fellow man, then to turn around and say that two men can't legitimately love each other, or at least that their love isn't the right type of love to qualify as a marriage. I haven't seen a Christian narrative that threads that needle convincingly at all.

Is gay marriage going to tangibly damage our society? How will I know if it does? This is going to have to be part of the narrative as well – if there is no evidence and the concepts can't be clearly defined (or at least expressed by a sociologist, perhaps?) then I think that most people are going to be inclined to (probably without even knowing it) apply Hitchens' Razor ("What can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence").

You've got a lot of work ahead of you, Tom. I hope that you're able to present your Christian views as accurately and compellingly as possible, and I hope that you don't end up drifting off into just "spin". I'm interested in hearing a narrative that can compete with the narrative that I've seen – couples who are crying happily because they finally feel like society is willing to see them as equals, for instance. Should be interesting.

Crude wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
7:51 am

65.

“ I always thought that the popular suggestion was that they saw an economic benefit and rationalized it by taking various verses out of the Bible. ”

You think it's popular? Funny – whenever I see the subject brought up, particular by anti-theists, the mention of monetary gain goes utterly unstated. 'Economic benefit', to say nothing of other benefits, precisely because to bring those up is to start hinting broadly towards what was happening with the biblical justifications: they were being read in to justify otherwise secularly motivated acts. When's the last time you heard the word 'secular' used to describe slavery, much less 'secular morality' in its justification?

“ There is unfortunately no commandment that says "Thou Shalt Not Own Slaves", and a lot of press is given to what ways that slavery could be legitimate, so it's not like its a clear-cut issue, ”

Incorrect. We're talking about slavery as practiced in the American south, and yes, it was clear cut in terms of biblical and Christian teaching there. You have to turn a blind eye to many fundamental teachings of Christianity to pull off a justification of 'there's nothing wrong with paying kidnappers for boatloads of men who are basically cattle and forcing them and their offspring to work for you because that rum isn't going to make itself.'

The issue was clear cut. People's willingness to admit it was clear cut wasn't there. People are willing to BS mightily when they have a stake in things – what else is new? Is this even specific to religion?

and it's not like every person who believed that the

“ Bible condoned Southern slavery was a white slave-owner with a vested financial interest involved... ”

No, some were merely friends of them. Some were merely racists. Some simply aspired to own slaves one day. Not a one of them could justify what they were doing given Christian teaching, and none of them believed that owning slaves was some kind of biblically mandated act. The motivations are clear here. The failings are clear.

“ or instance – it is damn hard to say on one hand that the highest Christian virtues are to love God and love your fellow man, then to turn around and say that two men can't legitimately love each other, or at least that their love isn't the right type of love to qualify as a marriage. I haven't seen a Christian narrative that threads that needle convincingly at all. ”

Because the Christian objection isn't centered around the inability of two people of the same sex to love each other. It centers around sexual morality, and the purpose of the institution of marriage – which has already taken a beating, since people don't even associate it children as integral to it anymore, even in principal.

So no, right away you're equivocating. The problem has never been the love. It's been the sex, and contexts (such as marriage) where sex is a primary element. Please tell me that sex has nothing to do with marriage, and that two straight guys who plan on having sex with women can both marry each other if they feel a strong bond.

Are there any sexual appetites – any at all – that are disordered, unhealthy, or should be discouraged? Rape fantasies? Incest fantasies? Even granting that those with them won't go out and commit acts of rape. Are they automatically 'okay, no problem here' in that case? Are some relationships healthier than others, even if they're mutually consensual?

And Hitchens' Razor dismisses itself.

G. Rodrigues wrote: 66.
November 14, 2012 at
10:49 am

@Sault:

“ Those who are trying to argue from a reasonable position are almost a footnote in the larger cultural context, I think. ”

Well, I think it is fairly uncontroversial that you are not trying to “argue from a reasonable position”, so if it is a footnote you are not in it.

Now, maybe you will protest that I am not arguing anything myself. Well, you can surely do it, but you are wrong. I am

pointing two things:

1. You make various claims with *nothing* to back it up except your own personal, anecdotal impressions. Here are some choice quotes:

“ I don't see a Christian acting out of genuine love or sympathy when they condemn gay marriage, I see vitriol and emotional appeals and slippery slope arguments and blah blah blah. ”

If this is literally true, what are you doing here? If you insist that we are in the minority, where is the proof that we are in the minority? Have you run a tally through the world's Christianity? Of course not. The only thing you have to offer is your parochial view, with its parochial impressions and anecdotes. Now, your claim may well be factually right, but you just claim and claim and claim, without presenting a single shred of evidence or mounting the semblance of an argument. And even if you are right, so what? If you want to address a position, you address it at its strongest. The common-view of Evolutionary theory or QM is riddled with mistakes, and yet if one wants to debunk them one addresses not what the common man in the street tells but what the knowledgeable people tell.

2. You continuously complain, as in the above quoted paragraph, about “emotional appeals and slippery slope arguments and blah blah blah”. Your lack of self-awareness is simply astounding. Because this is *ALL* you do. Let us look at some choice wordings you use:

“ Who comes across as more reasonable – the gay couples who just want to be treated equally, or the people who say that through some intangible way society will be damaged and that those gay people are abominations who are to be blamed for natural disasters? ”

Gays “just want to be treated equally” and presumably in your mind, this settles the whole issue. And in the way you poison the well with “gay people are abominations who are to be blamed for natural disasters?” You are doing *exactly* what the images displayed in the OP do.

“ I'm interested in hearing a narrative that can compete with the narrative that I've seen – couples who are crying happily because they finally feel like society is willing to see them as equals, for instance. Should be interesting. ”

Aww....

SSM couples cry “happily because they finally feel like society is willing to see them as equals” and that is all there is to it.

Emotional appeals from you? Your whole post is a giant freakin

emotional appeal with nary a rational thought put into it. vitriol: It is just paying attention to what you say, as when you need to make some rhetorical point you will use the fallacy of guilt-by-association: you deliberately pick the examples of WBC and Pat Buchanan and Pat Roberts (whoever these two latter are, excuse my ignorance). This is called stereotyping and the worse part is that commenters here even dignified you with a response when the only decent response you deserve is to ask if you have already apologized for the massive body count of Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao and all your atheist pals. Slippery slope arguments? For Heaven's sake it is you that admits to being a utilitarian and a consequentialist! It is you who holds that denying the "right" of marriage will have such and such horrible consequences — presumably, the bitter tears of said couples.

“ For instance – it is damn hard to say on one hand that the highest Christian virtues are to love God and love your fellow man, then to turn around and say that two men can't legitimately love each other, or at least that their love isn't the right type of love to qualify as a marriage. I haven't seen a Christian narrative that threads that needle convincingly at all. ”

Crude already dealt with this; I will only take it as reinforcing my point. Interested in hearing? Well you do have a strange way of showing it. If I were in a less charitable mood I would even follow your example and go on an ad hominem about your motivations and psychological make up. How long have you been commenting in this blog? And yet you do not show a lick of understanding. Why this is is somewhat puzzling since you are not a complete idiot. Be that as it may, I am not inventing anything, for you yourself *admit* that you do not understand the arguments. You do not understand and yet you presume to qualify them, tell Tom that he "has a long way to go", etc.

In you it truly applies what Jesus said: you complain about the mote in your brother's eye, but are unaware of the beam blocking your own. Physician, heal thyself.

Holopupenko wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
11:42 am

67.

“ it is damn hard to say on one hand that the highest Christian virtues are to love God and love your fellow man, then to turn around and say that two men can't legitimately love each other, or at least that their love isn't the right type of love to qualify as a marriage. I haven't seen a Christian narrative that threads that needle convincingly at all... You've got a lot of work ahead of you, Tom. ”

You've got a lot of removing of ignorance and imposition of personal opinion ahead of you, Sault... like starting with what you mean by "love" and "marriage." It's always easy to attack others' conceptions of love and marriage (nota bene: the onus is on you)

when, conveniently, you offer none of your own definitions... or offer something so all-encompassing and flowery and sugary and "group-huggish" that it's useless... That is, of course, unless you're doing so intentionally because you have an emotional need to fulfill by viewing it as "marriage *sans frontières*"... as if all limitations are inherently evil. Tell us, where does your personal and subjective opinion about what marriage is, end? Three people? Four people and a dog? A pencil and a pen? Dogs lying with cats?

Again, it's easy to be wobbly and uncommitted to the truth of what things are because it then permits you to interpret reality to serve your personal power grab... by criticizing others who get in your way.

Tom Gilson wrote: 68
November 14, 2012 at
12:16 pm

Sault, just because it's hard to compose a narrative that accomplishes what you seek doesn't mean a thing. It's hard for several reasons:

1. It has to push against all the emotionalism from the other side. Look at your own reasons for SSM: they're all about people crying, for Pete's sake.
2. You disregard the fact that there's no solid research whatever that shows children raised by same-sex couples do as well as children raised by a mom and dad. (All the supposed research showing such a thing is methodologically flawed: small, non-representative samples, mostly.)
3. You probably wouldn't accept Mark Regnerus's two peer-reviewed articles as evidence that SSM won't help children.
4. Most damningly, you require sociological proof that SSM would be harmful. In other words, we can't give you the answer you demand unless we run the experiment first. That's irresponsible science by any measure. It's foolish for other reasons, but I'll let you think about that one for now.

Tom Gilson wrote: 69
November 14, 2012 at
12:28 pm

Continuing:

You want us to prove sociologically that SSM would produce harm. That proof can't be produced without trying SSM. Therefore you think we should agree with you that SSM doesn't produce harm.

You want us to think that love is inhibited if a contracted sexual relationship is prohibited. If that's your view of love, I say it's terribly one-dimensional. Sex is not all there is to life.

You want us to think that the witness of the gay community since about 1980 is enough evidence to overturn all of humanity's prior wisdom. That's utter foolishness.

Rampant approval of homosexuality actually inhibits free and genuine friendship. I'll have a lot more to say about that in coming days, in case it isn't obvious enough for you right on the

surface.

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
12:31 pm

70.

And finally: you imply that because it's hard for us to produce the narrative you want, therefore it can't be done.

Sorry, but sometimes good and true things are not easy things. You should know that. You probably went to college; you probably studied some things that weren't obvious on the surface.

bigbird wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
6:03 pm

71.

“ Rampant approval of homosexuality actually inhibits free and genuine friendship. ”

It is this kind of emotive nonsense that makes Christians look stupid. We are not going to prevail against the legalization of SSM by these kind of arguments.

We don't live in a theocracy. Laws are for everyone's benefit, not just Christians. And society has reached a point where most people seem to think they should not stand in the way of SSM.

Justice is something Christianity has always been vitally interested in. I think there are far more pressing issues of justice than opposing SSM, especially when our opposition looks unjust to most.

I personally am opposed to SSM, and I would strongly oppose any move to force churches to act against conscience by having to perform SSMs. But I also believe that SSM is not the big deal we think it is, and that we are damaging society's view of the church by opposing it for those who want it.

Crude wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
6:32 pm

72.

“ It is this kind of emotive nonsense that makes Christians look stupid. We are not going to prevail against the legalization of SSM by these kind of arguments. ”

Tom wasn't talking about SSM in that case - it seems he's talking about a cultural issue, and he hasn't even explained what he meant.

Crude wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
6:35 pm

73.

“ I personally am opposed to SSM, and I would strongly oppose any move to force churches to act against conscience by having to perform SSMs. ”

Why? What if they say that it's no better than churches refusing to marry interracial couples? What if most of society starts to think that churches are wrong, unjust, and hateful for not performing same-sex marriages?

G. Rougier wrote: 74.
 November 14, 2012 at
 6:49 pm

@bigbird:

“ And society has reached a point where most people seem to think they should not stand in the way of SSM. ”

How is that an argument to roll along and play dead?

“ I think there are far more pressing issues of justice than opposing SSM, especially when our opposition looks unjust to most. ”

So especially because our opposition “looks” unjust (your choice of words is telling), we should roll along and play dead. Does the same justification apply to abortion? What if tomorrow, infanticide is on the table just as SSM is?

“ But I also believe that SSM is not the big deal we think it is, and that we are damaging society’s view of the church by opposing it for those who want it. ”

First the “we” is misplaced, because obviously you do not think it is a big deal. A typo surely. So we should roll along and play dead because in opposing SSM we are “damaging society’s view of the church”? In other words, we should roll along and play dead because otherwise we might, just might be villified, abused and persecuted. That is indeed something every Christian should avoid like the plague. I bet it is in the Bible even. Maybe Jesus even explicitly said as much. Yup, it must be.

You started your post by saying and I quote

“ It is this kind of emotive nonsense that makes Christians look stupid. ”

Making stupid arguments as yours demonstrably are make you look what?

Tom Gilson wrote: 75.
 November 14, 2012 at
 6:49 pm

bigbird,

You rushed to dismiss a statement that I had qualified with “I’ll have a lot more to say about that in coming days, in case it isn’t obvious enough for you right on the surface”—in other words, an introductory opening to something that I hadn’t really even said yet.

I have two things to say to you: One, that was hasty on your part, and you will see that there actually is a strong argument to be made there. Two, it was *incredibly* rude for you to jump in on a preliminary statement like that and call it “emotive nonsense that makes [us] look stupid.”

I’ll add a third: I don’t see any sign in that response of yours to indicate an argument, a case, a *reason*. I do see emoting. When

you discover I have an argument to present you’ll find that you

you discover I have an argument to present you'll find that your rush to judgment was nonsensical.

And so was your reference to a theocracy. Who on earth brought that up? What does it mean—that Christians aren't welcome in the public square? *Everyone* knows we don't live in a theocracy. We live in a civil democratic society where people disagree in discussions and at the polls. Should I pull out of that because I disagree with some people? That's nuts.

As for damaging society's view of the church, if Jesus Christ had intended us to make ourselves likable to every person, you'd think he would have set a different example.

You saw my interaction with John. I care about whether I genuinely listen and genuinely love. I care about whether I stand for truth at the same time. I don't make it my goal, however, to love people so that they like the way I love them, if it means giving up important truths.

This one *is* important, by the way.

bigbird wrote:
November 14, 2012 at 6:50 pm 76.

“ I personally am opposed to SSM, and I would strongly oppose any move to force churches to act against conscience by having to perform SSMs. ”

“ Why? What if they say that it's no better than churches refusing to marry interracial couples? What if most of society starts to think that churches are wrong, unjust, and hateful for not performing same-sex marriages? ”

That's too bad – at that point we have to cop the flak.

What I am saying is that we are trying to draw the line in the wrong place.

It is a much stronger position to say “while we don't support SSM and will not perform SSMs, we recognize that it is an important issue to many, and that we will not oppose the legalization of SSM” compared to “we don't support SSM and we will not support its legalization under any circumstances”.

The time has passed when the church could dictate to society. We don't seem to have recognized it. We need to choose our battles more carefully.

We also need to realize that laws are often pragmatic, and don't necessarily correspond to moral approval. I don't support prostitution in any shape or form, but I do support its legalization because the evidence shows that it makes it far safer for women who are prostitutes. Prohibition is usually not a successful strategy – we've seen that for alcohol, and one day we'll probably accept that for other substance abuse.

Tom Gilson wrote: | Oh for giving out loud

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
6:52 pm

77.

Oh for crying out loud.

Who's dictating to society?

This is a democracy. If we lose at the polls or at the courts, we're not going to pull guns on anyone. We'll go along with the requirements of the law. Or if we engage in civil disobedience we'll do it according to the standards of civil disobedience: we'll take our punishments as meted out, protesting as we go.

In the meantime we're not dictating, we're advocating. Which is (did you learn this in Civics?) a very democratic thing to do.

Get a life.

Holopupenko wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
6:59 pm

78.

“ I don't support prostitution in any shape or form, but I do support its legalization because the evidence shows that it makes it far safer for women who are prostitutes. ”

Spoken like a true Biden minion. (ref: VP debate)

“Far safer”? Really? Would that include moral and spiritual considerations as well? What effect does selling one's body for profit have on one's personhood, i.e., the state of one's soul... or is that not as important a consideration as one's physical “safety.” Why the (implied... if missed) false dichotomy? Did Christ tell the harlot to “legalize to make safe” or “sin no more”?

Mark 8:36

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
7:02 pm

79.

Scientism strikes again. “Evidence” is statistically circumscribed.

bigbird wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
7:08 pm

80.

“ One, that was hasty on your part, and you will see that there actually is a strong argument to be made there. ”

Well, I'll wait and see. I doubt you have any arguments I haven't heard before over the last thirty years in the church, but we'll see.

“ Two, it was incredibly rude for you to jump in on a preliminary statement like that and call it “emotive nonsense that makes [us] look stupid.” ”

Sorry. The word “rampant” is an emotive one, and I don't see why you used it in this context. Maybe you'll clear that up.

“ As for damaging society's view of the church, if Jesus Christ had intended us to make ourselves likable to every person, you'd think he would have set a different example. ”

set a different example. ”

Let's see, did Jesus condemn slavery, infanticide, homosexuality, or any other number of social ills at the time? I don't think so. Jesus has almost universal respect even today because instead of condemning, he served. The only condemning he did was to religious leaders.

“ I don't make it my goal, however, to love people so that they like the way I love them, if it means giving up important truths. ”

Sometimes loving people means allowing them to do things you don't approve of. And allowing things you don't approve of does not mean you are giving up an important truth - but simply a recognition that an important truth for **you** is not an important truth to them.

“ This one is important, by the way. ”

I predict that in a few years you'll change your mind. SSM will be legalized and you'll realize that society has changed very little because of it (apart from the damage the church has suffered because the gay community thinks we hate them).

I spent many years arguing your position. But somewhere along the way I realized that the gay community doesn't care about our sophisticated arguments, our quotations of studies showing this and that. They can't see why the church is trying to control their lives when they don't want anything to do with the church. They just think we hate and fear them, and I fear they are largely correct.

bigbird wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
7:15 pm

81.

“ In the meantime we're not dictating, we're advocating. Which is (did you learn this in Civics?) a very democratic thing to do. ”

Of course we are advocating. But my point is that our advocating is conveying a message to the gay community that we hate them. As well as being futile.

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
7:15 pm

82.

I don't really feel a need to "clear up" why I used a word like "rampant." As emotive terms go, it's rather down the scale from "nonsense" and "stupid." It's also easier for me to justify than your dismissing me the way you did just because you're quite sure I won't have anything new to say. Who were you calling stupid, me or all the other people whose arguments you didn't like? It couldn't have been me-I hadn't said anything yet. So you stereotyped me as being just like all those other people you think are haters, fear-ers, controllers.

And your argument: is it based on anything more solid than your prediction that someday I'll change my mind?

prediction that someday I'll change my mind:

Jesus did not only condemn religious leaders. Read the Bible. He condemned sin. Even among sinners.

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
7:18 pm

83

Their identity politics has made them unable to separate their behaviors from their selves. So they tell us we cannot "hate the sin and love the sinner." Nice of them to tell us what we can't do, isn't it?

So they tell us our disagreement with them is hate; but their disagreement with us is not hate. Convenient, no?

Jeremiah's ministry was futile. I guess that means God was mad at him for doing it. Bonhoeffer? A wasted life. All the martyrs? How unchristian of them not to cause everyone to like them more!

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
7:19 pm

84

Meanwhile I'm requesting an apology for your earlier insult.

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
7:27 pm

85

... and if someone says, "Tom, don't get all excited and call yourself Jeremiah, Bonhoeffer, or a martyr," I didn't do that. It's an *a fortiori* case I'm making.

bigbird wrote:
November 14, 2012 at
7:28 pm

86

“ Really? Would that include moral and spiritual considerations as well? What effect does selling one's body for profit have on one's personhood, i.e., the state of one's soul... or is that not as important a consideration as one's physical "safety." ”

If I thought we could eliminate prostitution, I'd be all for it. Human history it makes it very clear we cannot. There will always be women involved in prostitution, and men willing to pay for it.

That being the case, I believe that protection of the most vulnerable party in prostitution, the women, is the only just thing to do. Regulation is the only possible way to do that, and evidence is in my country, Australia, that it is reasonably successful.

That doesn't mean I think prostitution is harmless - far from it. But regulation offers some measure of protection for the women involved, and is far better than nothing.

What do you think should be done about prostitution? Women are enslaved, exploited, raped and murdered in the illegal prostitution "industry". What's your plan?

“ Why the (implied... if missed) false dichotomy? Did Christ tell the harlot to "legalize to make safe" or

“... or not?”

sin no more :

You should probably chose a story about a harlot if you want to make a point here.

Tom Gilson wrote: 87.
November 14, 2012 at 7:29 pm

Do you have a case in mind where Jesus told a harlot her sins were okay?

bigbird wrote: 88.
November 14, 2012 at 8:05 pm

“ Jesus did not only condemn religious leaders. Read the Bible. He condemned sin. Even among sinners. ”

I've read the Bible in its entirety. What particular portion were you referring to?

“ Meanwhile I'm requesting an apology for your earlier insult. ”

You must have missed the “sorry”. Again, sorry - I should have worded it more gently.

“ they tell us we cannot “hate the sin and love the sinner.” ”

This is a cute Christian saying that I think gay groups are largely right to call out as false. Maybe some Christians can. But I don't see much evidence of it.

“ Jeremiah's ministry was futile. I guess that means God was mad at him for doing it. ”

Given that God commanded Jeremiah to do his ministry, that seems unlikely.

“ Bonhoeffer? A wasted life. ”

To compare Bonhoeffer's fight against the Nazis to Christianity's opposition to SSM (which in itself is hurting no-one), is, I think, trivializing Bonhoeffer's life.

“ All the martyrs? How unchristian of them not to cause everyone to like them more! ”

Why are you comparing Christian martyrs to the fight against SSM? Do you really know anyone willing to die so that SSM is not legalized? It just isn't that important an issue.

Tom Gilson wrote: 89.
November 14, 2012 at 8:12 pm

bigbird,
The reason I'm comparing Christian martyrs to the stand against

The reason I'm comparing Christian martyrs to the stand against SSM is because it's an *a fortiori* argument. Please see above.

Further: your point was essentially that we ought not continue because it's (a) annoying to people and (b) futile. Jeremiah, Bonhoeffer, and the martyrs are relevant in context of that complaint. Modus Tollens:

- A. If being annoying and futile makes it wrong to pursue a point, then they were wrong.
- B. But they were not wrong.
- C. Therefore being annoying and futile does not make it wrong to pursue a point.

P.S. The portion of the Bible I was referring to was pretty much anywhere Jesus mentioned sin. You could start with Matthew 5. Have you read it?

bigbird wrote:
November 14, 2012 at 8:13 pm

90.

“ Do you have a case in mind where Jesus told a harlot her sins were okay? ”

This is not about saying sin is okay. I am sure there are many people Jesus spoke to who continued in their sin.

I'll say it again – supporting a particular law is not necessarily a moral endorsement of the behavior that the law is regulating.

It is a matter of justice to ensure protection for the vulnerable whether or not they choose to follow the behavior that you prefer.

Prostitution is a difficult issue. The evidence is that it cannot be eliminated. When it is an underground industry, women are hideously exploited. If regulating it reduces that exploitation, I regard that as a good thing. If you disagree, I'd like to know you think would be a better alternative.

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 14, 2012 at 8:21 pm

91.

I'm calling a moratorium on discussions of prostitution in this thread. It's off topic and not advancing the discussion of the real topic. See the comment guidelines.

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 14, 2012 at 8:25 pm

92.

I didn't miss your "sorry" above. I didn't consider it an apology, either. This more recent one doesn't exactly—I know, I know, I'm overstating it—it doesn't exactly come across as effusive. I'm glad you're solicitous for the feelings of SSM advocates, anyway.

bigbird wrote:
November 14, 2012 at 8:29 pm

93.

“ I'm still waiting for an apology for your rudeness. ”

Given I've said sorry twice, you'll have to provide some further advice on that please.

“ The reason I'm comparing Christian martyrs to the stand against SSM is because it's an a fortiori argument. Please see above. Your point was essentially that we ought not continue because it's (a) annoying to people and (b) futile. ”

Not exactly. Let me clarify.

- a) It is interpreted as hate. If it was merely annoying, it wouldn't bother me. And given the church's past treatment of homosexuals, it merely endorses existing views of the church.
- b) it is futile. Yes, I really believe it is.
- c) There is little evidence that SSM will harm anyone. It will formalize existing relationships. True, same sex relationships may not be optimal for children. That concerns me. But the facts are that these relationships exist right now. It is doubtful that SSM will increase the number of these relationships.

I don't believe a), b) and c) are applicable to the martyrs I'm aware of. Certainly not to Bonhoeffer.

SteveK wrote:
November 14, 2012 at 8:33 pm

94

“ This is a cute Christian saying that I think gay groups are largely right to call out as false. Maybe some Christians can. But I don't see much evidence of it. ”

A cute saying? No evidence? Christ himself is a living example of this. [Romans 5:8](#)

Do you hate your children (or wife or best friend) when they sin against you, or do you continue loving them? I think it's the latter - at least I hope it is. There's your evidence. And that goes for non-Christian's alike. They would answer the same as you and I.

Tom Gilson wrote:
November 14, 2012 at 8:34 pm

95

You don't think Jeremiah's ministry was interpreted as hate? Which Bible did you read?

And your timeline for judgments of futility is pretty skewed, too. Jeremiah's words were futile in their effect for decades, from any human perspective. Do you think SSM is an eternal verity from this point on?

bigbird, you haven't read the Bible as well as you think you have. You had to ask (!!) where Jesus condemned sin. You don't understand the prophets. You're not speaking with the authority you think you are, because you're not as well versed in the Source as you think you are.

John wrote:
November 14, 2012 at 8:35 pm

96

Tom,
I hope you don't mind me inserting myself here. I have been reading the interaction between you and bigbird - I like the interaction even though you may not see eye to eye

interaction even though you may not see eye to eye.

I want to add some thoughts but the apology thing might be interfering. I did see bigbird's "apology" when he said, "You must have missed the "sorry". Again, sorry – I should have worded it more gently."

Sault wrote:

November 14, 2012 at
8:36 pm

97.

“ Please tell me that sex has nothing to do with marriage, and that two straight guys who plan on having sex with women can both marry each other if they feel a strong bond. ”

Is the desire for sex a prerequisite for marriage? Is the ability to have sex a prerequisite for marriage? Neither is required. Heterosexual couples have been married before who didn't desire each other or were unable to consummate, and it didn't stop them. If two consenting adults want to get married, then let them. I don't care what their genders or sexual orientations are.

So "it doesn't always have to" and "yes".

“ Are there any sexual appetites – any at all – that are disordered, unhealthy, or should be discouraged? ”

What consenting adults do amongst themselves in the privacy of their own bedroom is none of my business.

“ the Christian objection [...] centers around sexual morality, and the purpose of the institution of marriage [...] The problem has never been the love. It's been the sex, and contexts (such as marriage) where sex is a primary element. ”

...and maybe it's none of your business, either.

@ G

“ You make various claims with *nothing* to back it up except your own personal, anecdotal impressions. ”

Many of my observations are personal, anecdotal impressions because this is exactly what Tom is addressing this post about – if the signs in the OP are turning hearts away from Christianity, then Tom is stating that he wants to try and turn the tide. In other words, emotional appeals and the truth-based, compelling narrative that supports it. I've heard the narrative from the other side, and I'm relaying it as I've heard it, and trying to provide some commentary and my reaction to it. I'm not trying to prove anything by saying these things, other than that's how this has all come across to me personally.

Should I be supplying evidence that my reactions are common to

a certain swathe of the population? I suppose that I could. My

a certain swathe of the population. I suppose that I could. My intent was to convey what an Everyman's take on all of this might be. I know that you don't live in the United States, so maybe what I'm saying might be in some way informative. Perhaps the narrative where you live is different, perhaps not. If any of the emotional statements or narrative that I've said isn't useful to you, then ignore it - I won't be offended.

@Tom

“ You want us to prove sociologically that SSM would produce harm. ”

Well, you have a chance to do so by pointing to the countries who have legalized SSM... but that wasn't the point that I was trying to make. If the claim is that SSM causes harm or damage or whatever, then I want the anti-SSM crowd to be specific. If it takes a sociological approach to explain, then I would welcome that - I'm trying to figure out what the real world negative impact of SSM would be. G Rodriguez had a phrase that he used the other day - "filiation thrown into the trash heap of irrelevancy". What does that mean in the real world? I have no idea. I'm not demanding an answer to that, but if terms like that are going to be thrown around, then perhaps this narrative that you're creating should include and define them. I would certainly appreciate it.

“ You want us to think that love is inhibited if a contracted sexual relationship is prohibited. If that's your view of love, I say it's terribly one-dimensional. Sex is not all there is to life. ”

I wasn't aware that same-sex couples were only together for the sex. I daresay that they are together for the same reasons that hetero couples are. Love is complex and varied and difficult to describe (we're both parents, you know what I mean). I'm not sure where that remark came from, but hopefully that answers it?

“ Rampant approval of homosexuality actually inhibits free and genuine friendship. ”

A controversial statement. I'll be interested to hear your reasoning.

“ And finally: you imply that because it's hard for us to produce the narrative you want, therefore it can't be done. ”

No, no, no, no, no! If I've come across that way, egads, I didn't mean to! The central theme that I've been trying to portray this whole time, with all the emotional language I've used and the appeals to emotion and all of that has been for the purpose of trying to illustrate just how hard it's going to be for you to win over your audience, not that it can't be done!!!

Well, this wouldn't be the first time that I've filed in

When this wouldn't be the first time that I've failed in communicating an idea properly...

“ You probably went to college; you probably studied some things that weren't obvious on the surface. ”

I did, and it's not been until participating on your blog that I have regretted not taking Philosophy. My lack of education and knowledge in that area has opened me up to a fair bit of abrasive language and ridicule here.... but it is what it is. I do my best to keep an open mind and stay inquisitive and try to research and understand what I can as I go along, and let the cards fall where they may. Thankfully I've debated enough that I've got a pretty thick skin. I try not to come across as a troll, I've learned a few things along the way, and there are indeed Christians that do think... that's pretty sweet.

I feel like I'm missing something, but this post is already too long, so I'll just stop here.

Tom Gilson wrote: 98.
November 14, 2012 at
8:48 pm

This thread is already too long.

I wrote a post for the apologetics community on the topic of strategy in communication. But like clockwork, all I have to do is make a sidewise reference to SSM and it's the only thing anyone cares about.

We've had this discussion often enough on this blog. I was trying to kick off a different one. It happened in a Facebook group that was commenting on it, but here it went the same old direction as always. It has been as rancorous as always. There have been accusations of Christians not believing in the Bible. There has been at least one self-proclaimed believer, bigbird, whose handling of the Bible shows he understands it less than he thinks.

I have participated in the whole mess. I slopped myself with some of the same mud I'm complaining about others flinging. I regret it. I apologize for it to all of you.

I'm closing this thread now, and I'm going to delete most of it tomorrow morning. If you want a record of our conversation you have time now to copy and paste, or print to PDF, or whatever you care to do. But there's nothing good to be gained by keeping it here.

Comments are closed after 120 days, and may be disabled by the author on other posts.

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