

## **An Open Letter to Dr. George Wood and the Assemblies of God Denomination - of which I was once a member**

Before responding to the biblical and theological critiques that Dr. George O. Wood (the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God denomination) made in his [News-Leader response](#) to the [clergy letter](#) signed by myself and 22 other Christian leaders in support of the LGBT community in Springfield, I would like to begin by sharing a personal note that is often lost in the public eye.

While this may come as a surprise to many, I have very deep roots in the Assemblies of God church. Not only did I grow up in Springfield, where the headquarters of the Assemblies of God denomination is located, but I was baptized into an Assemblies of God church where, surprisingly enough, Rev. John Lindell was once a youth pastor. I also had a Damascus Road conversion experience in the Assemblies of God church that changed my life forever, and the Assemblies of God church is the first place I felt a call to ministry. For these reasons and more, I continue to hold the Assemblies of God very close to my heart.

In addition to these religious experiences – and every bit as important to me – are the close friendships that I made in the Assemblies of God church, for they remain the most enduring friendships I’ve made in my lifetime, and I will forever treasure them. I simply would not be who I am without them, as those who know me on a personal level can well attest.

This personal background is important for several reasons. First, when I respond to perspectives related to representatives from the Assemblies of God, I’m not simply thinking about a group of people with a certain set of beliefs from a certain denomination – I’m thinking about a group of friends who are very close to my heart, and have been for a very long time. This underscores an important point: Unlike what was [read into](#) the clergy letter I signed, I do not for one moment believe that Rev. Lindell, or other representatives from the Assemblies of God, lack class or integrity – not for one second. In fact, in the same edition of the News-Leader in which the clergy letter appeared, [I am on record as saying](#), “We consider pastor Lindell to be a person of integrity. It’s just a matter of differing opinions.” Several of my dearest friends are pastors in and members of the Assemblies of God church, and I have the utmost amount of respect for them. While many of us have long had differing interpretations of the Bible, we’ve never found ourselves questioning one another’s integrity. Indeed, we’ve been able to have meaningful conversations with one another about controversial topics precisely because we care for one another and respect one another. And I have no reason to doubt the integrity of Rev. Lindell, especially given the fact that so many of my friends who know him well speak very highly of him. I have no reason to disagree with Rev. Don Miller, the Southern Missouri District Superintendent of the Assemblies of God, when he [says](#) that Rev. Lindell’s “character is impeccable.” I only waded into these waters to help provide an alternative approach to understanding a very

complex matter in the Bible. So, to be clear: *this is not a matter of questioning one's personal integrity, it's a matter of biblical interpretation.*

All of this is to say that, contrary to the popular misconception, having differing interpretations of the Bible is not to be equated with doubting the integrity of the one(s) with whom you disagree, for I firmly believe there are well-intentioned people at various places along the spectrum, including Dr. Wood and Rev. Lindell, as well as so many of my friends from the Assemblies of God, and I hope they think the same of me. I'm proud to be part of a [Christian denomination](#) in which we recognize that none of us necessarily view every doctrinal or social matter the same way, but even in the midst of a diversity of perspectives -- especially in the midst of a diversity of perspectives -- the love of Christ transcends our differences. We often borrow a line from the heroic civil rights activist William Sloane Coffin, who liked to say that "our unity is not based on uniformity of opinion but on mutuality of love." And the same principle applies here.

So with this disclaimer in place, I invite you to read my response to the critiques made by Dr. Wood, with the recognition that *I am not attacking his personal integrity or intentions but am simply offering a different interpretation of the Bible that I (and a rapidly growing number of Christians) experience as being (1) far more persuasive on a personal level, (2) far more credible on a scholarly level, and (3) far more helpful in the lives of individuals and communities.*

Admittedly, this is an interpretation that the Assemblies of God doesn't leave much room for, at least not yet, which is why it represents one of the primary reasons I had to leave the Assemblies of God church I loved so much – albeit with a backward wistful glance, the bittersweet effect of which I feel every time I drive by the Assemblies of God church of my youth, which remains very close to my heart to this day.

More than anything, I want my friends (as well as those who often read these kinds of posts online), to know that I didn't arrive at this place in my spiritual journey lightly. It's not because I'm trying to be controversial. It's not because I'm trying to go along with the crowd. It certainly doesn't express the way I've always felt. And it's not because I don't take the Bible seriously -- as you'll see in my full response. But my mind has changed over the course of nearly twenty years, and I am thankful to God for it.

*Hier stehe ich. Ich kann nicht anders. Gott helfe mir.*

## **I. Straightforward biblical marriage?**

Dr. Wood begins by stating that Rev. Lindell's "reading of Scripture is straightforward: God creates and commends marriage as the sexual union between a man and a woman (Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:18, 22, 24, 25) and prohibits extramarital unions (Exodus 20:14), including homosexual ones (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:25-27; and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11)."

But this isn't a "straightforward" reading of Scripture.

A more thorough examination of Scripture reveals that the biblical norm for marriage – throughout most of the Bible – is *not* the nuclear family of one man and one woman as we know it today, but rather is polygamy. There are examples throughout Scripture of men having more than one wife (King Solomon, who is regarded as one of the wisest people to ever live, is perhaps the most extreme example with 700 wives! cf. 1 Kings 11:1-3). Even the instructions in the pastoral epistles that exhort bishops to be a "husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2, 12) offer an implicit acknowledgment that polygamy was still a common practice among Christian men even in the New Testament.<sup>[1]</sup>

In addition to the standard norm of polygamy, other accepted forms of marriage in the Bible include:

1. A man, plus one or more wives, plus concubines (including Abraham in Genesis 16 and 25 and the aforementioned Solomon)
2. A man, plus a woman, plus a woman's property (see Genesis 16, in which a man could acquire his wife's property including her slaves)
3. Levirate marriage, which is a man plus his late brother's widow (Genesis 38:6-10)
4. A male rapist and his victim (Deuteronomy 22:28-29)
5. A male soldier and a female prisoner of war (Deuteronomy 21:11-14)
6. A male slave and a female slave under order of their masters, presumably to produce more slaves (Exodus 21:4)
7. Monogamous, heterosexual marriage as we generally think of it today and as described in Dr. Wood's letter, with the exception that arranged marriages were the standard and women were viewed as being part of a property exchange

A truly "straightforward" reading of Scripture, one that pays attention to the vastly diverse library of books we refer to as the Bible, affirms at least eight forms of marriage, with polygamy being the standard, not a monogamous marriage between a man and a woman as we understand it today. Dr. Wood is absolutely right in stating that "marriage is a major theme in the Bible" – it's just that there are a variety of forms. Not to mention the fact that if we were to institute marriage between one man and one woman precisely as it was in the Bible, even its occurrences in the New Testament, then we must also be okay with marriages being viewed as property exchanges in which women do not have a say in regard to who they marry.

Because this runs counter to contemporary approaches to marriage among Christians in the United States today, Christians must interpret the Bible and in the process pick and choose which passages still apply. But by reading the biblical writers as affirming a "definition" of marriage as "between one man and one woman," Dr. Wood is back-reading the modern preference for monogamy into a biblical world where polygamy was quite common and accepted, which included the exchange of property rights.

Which is not a "straightforward" reading of Scripture.

## II. Moral, ceremonial, and judicial law

Dr. Wood's letter also invoked "standard" categories related to the "moral law, ceremonial law, and judicial law," and this actually helps make the point I am trying to make. Besides the fact that this imposes an interpretive guide to understanding the Bible that the Bible doesn't impose on itself (which is an surprising thing to do when one claims "straightforward" readings of the Bible as the ultimate authority), it further highlights the selective hermeneutical (i.e. interpretive) framework utilized by those who continue to appeal to Scripture in order to claim that homosexuality is sinful.

But before going on, I must also confess a degree of confusion here. It is somewhat odd that Law would be invoked by the head of a denomination which prides itself on being led of and filled by the Spirit. If Christians are indeed to view the Law as a temporary measure and must now live by the Spirit (Paul's argument in Galatians, especially chapters 3 and 5), how can we return to the Law as the arbiter of meaning? If we must simply stick with "straightforward" readings of the Bible, how can we ascribe divisions to the biblical text that it does not claim for itself? Unless, of course, one is willing to concede that understanding the biblical text is always a matter of context and interpretation.

For the sake of argument, let us further examine ideas of moral, judicial, and ceremonial law, accepting the partitioning most famously invoked by Catholic philosopher Thomas Aquinas (and here by Dr. Wood), and let us examine these ideas in relationship to what is perhaps the most ubiquitous example available: Assemblies of God credit unions, which are plentiful here in Springfield.

The "moral law" of the Old Testament, which Dr. Wood says still "applies directly to Christians today," explicitly condemns the practice of usury (lending with interest) several more times than it condemns homosexuality (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35-37; Deuteronomy 23:19-20; Psalm 15:1, 5; Ezekiel 18:7-9, 13, 17). And lest one argue that such condemnations be interpreted as part of the "judicial law" that no longer applies, let us remember that Jesus himself affirmed this ethical injunction (Luke 6:34-35), which for Christians trumps any other interpretive approach, whether dependent on a tripartite division of Old Testament law or not.

All of this begs the obvious question: If Dr. Wood is quick to condemn homosexuality in the name of the Bible, then how does he begin to justify the lending practices of the denominational credit unions, which are rooted in practices that are explicitly condemned in the Bible far more times than homosexuality is condemned in the Bible (not to mention the fact that it is Jesus, not Paul, who condemns it!)? Allow me to also turn to the "standard" and "traditional" voice of Thomas Aquinas, who in addition to reflecting on the moral, judicial and ceremonial law also found time to write this: "Making a charge for lending money is unjust in itself, for one part sells the other something non-existent, and this obviously sets up an inequality which is contrary to justice... It follows that it is in principle

wrong to make a charge for money lent, which is what usury consists in" (*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae.78, 1).

Of course it's possible to appeal to John Calvin, who was the first major theologian to say it's okay for Christians to move past the New Testament injunction against lending with interest, but to do so is to move away from the biblical text by acknowledging that we are appropriating the text according to contemporary standards that are dependent upon placing the Bible in its proper context (or at least admitting that some of its moral laws no longer apply as they once did). But if Dr. Wood admits to this, then the house of cards he uses to condemn homosexuality quickly comes crashing down, and there is simply no way around it.

All of which means I will begin taking his protests against homosexuality seriously when he publicly declares that the Assemblies of God credit unions should no longer engage in the explicitly *unbiblical* practice of usury.

Dr. Wood writes: "It is significant that Snider and his colleagues offer no biblical references that affirm homosexual behavior. There are none."

Well, I think "it is significant that [the Assemblies of God Credit Unions] can offer no biblical references that affirm [the practice of lending money with interest to non-foreigners]. Because there are none."

The next time that Dr. Wood says that my colleagues and I "ignore what the Bible actually says," as he did in his letter, I would ask him to take out the log in his own eye.

### **III. Reading the Bible in context, both Old Testament and New**

I cannot emphasize enough how essential it is to read the Bible in context. As modern day people, we must recognize that the purpose of marriage has fundamentally changed -- largely because our economic system has changed. For the ancients, economic survival depended on large families. This is related both to agrarian culture and the need to have a lot of children in order to build a strong self-defense. Sexual ethics in the Bible reflected that reality, and such ethics make a certain amount of sense when understood in their original context.

In sum, the ancient Israelites believed that sexual intercourse among men kept Israel from fortifying itself against its enemies. Israel was a small, fragile nation, and it needed as strong of a defense as possible. In order to survive it believed in procreating as much as possible as rapidly as possible in order to increase its self-defense. So men were not to "waste" their seed whatsoever, whether with other men or by themselves, because the purpose of sexuality was for procreation. Hence the strict prohibitions. This is also much of the reason why brothers of those who died without children were supposed to have

relations with their late brother's widow, in order to bear children, which is yet another biblical practice that none of us heed today (the law of Levirate marriage described above).

It may well be that the writers of Leviticus would be horrified by men wasting their procreative potential on self-gratification or on "non-productive" sexual encounters with men. They would be equally horrified, however, by the vast majority of heterosexual sex in monogamous American marriages today -- sexual encounters that occur with no intention of conception and, in fact, often occur with active interventions to prevent conception (which is very unbiblical! cf. Genesis 1:28; 16:1-2; 19:30-38). We simply live in a different world than the authors of the biblical texts did, and we need to acknowledge this is the case when we try to understand how the Bible still carries meaning in today's world.

In addition, the whole idea of "homosexual orientation" as we understand it today is not a concept that the ancients would be familiar with. When the Bible refers to a person having sex with a person of the same gender (which the Bible only refers to a half-dozen times), it is not within the context of monogamous relationships shared by mutually consenting adults, as we understand to be the case today among, for instance, same-sex couples seeking the right to legally marry.

If you were to take a course in Old Testament literature at virtually any accredited institution of higher learning, you would learn that scholars point out that, generally speaking, the passages in Leviticus that condemn men having sex with men are likely related to (1) ritualistic temple prostitution associated with the worship of pagan gods or (2) purity codes that state that such intercourse, like certain types of heterosexual intercourse (between a man and a menstruating woman, for instance) made one impure according to the laws of ancient Israel, and so the issue actually has to do with ritual purity rather than ethical responsibility. Ironically enough, if we were to adopt Dr. Wood's criteria, both of these cases would then point to these ethical injunctions not as part of the moral law but rather the ceremonial or judicial law, and by his reasoning would no longer apply to Christians today any more than all the other Old Testament commandments concerning ritual purity or kosher food.[2]

There are still, of course, passages in the New Testament that Dr. Wood and others highlight as being authoritative, but none of these passages contains a word that refers to homosexual orientation as we understand it today – in fact, there is no such word in ancient Greek. In 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1, two Greek words appear: *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, which are combined in the New International Version of the Bible as "men who have sex with men," but their exact meaning is also dependent upon context and interpretation. There is simply no "straightforward" reading of the Bible.

For example, in Hellenistic culture—the context in which St. Paul (the author of these letters) was situated—same-sex activity was quite common. Often, as a rite of passage, adolescent boys were subjected as passive partners to older men of power and prestige. The older men would display their power by relegating these adolescent boys to the passive role of women—further establishing the social hierarchies of Greco-Roman culture.

When the boy became an adult, he would switch roles, and then he would marry a woman and have children. This practice was so common that the Greek philosopher Plato took all of this for granted and praised the virtues of courage and honor that resulted from such relationships (in fact, “*malokoi*” is slang for boys who played the passive role in sexual intercourse, hence the reason it is associated with this practice, while the meaning of “*arsenokoitai*” is more difficult to isolate, for Paul’s writings represent the first time the word appears in all of Greek literature, though it seems to have been formed from a phrase that meant “lying with a male”).

While these practices were common, they are in stark contrast to the kinds of relationships that are shared today among mutually consenting adults in a loving relationship. One Presbyterian scholar puts it this way:

In the Hellenistic world Paul witnessed (how closely and how often we have no idea) particular culturally shaped forms of homosexual activity. The behavior may well have been mostly homosexual activities in one social context, by people who also engaged in heterosexual activities and who were not culturally defined as “homosexuals.” At least among men these relationships were about power as well as (or sometimes instead of) love: the active male partner’s superiority to the passive partner in the sexual act was crucial to how people understood the activity. Much of it involved boys young enough that we would classify them as children...

Would [Paul] have felt differently if everyone involved had been an adult? If the relation had been understood as between equals? If “homosexuality” had defined some people throughout their lives, rather being part of the lives of lots of people who also had other forms of sex? For him, in a culture where men and women had hierarchically defined roles, was the issue that homosexual activity disrupted the social order? Would the issue therefore be different in a society like ours whose ideal is to treat men and women as equals?”<sup>[3]</sup>

#### **IV. On the Natural Order**

The last biblical passage referenced by Dr. Wood is from Romans 1, also written by Paul. It states that “women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another...”

Here Paul says that such activity is unnatural -- that it goes against the created order -- and this is one of the strongest arguments still made today. But, as I mentioned in the clergy letter, appealing to natural law is a dangerous path to tread. After all, Paul’s writings have been used to argue that slavery and patriarchal structures are natural, and when it comes to such situations today, don’t we gladly admit that Paul reflected an ancient bias that no longer holds? If Paul got the “natural law” wrong when it came to slavery and patriarchy, who’s to say he got it right when it comes to homosexuality?

Dr. Wood attempts to vindicate Paul on this matter by appealing to the time when Paul “urged a Christian master to emancipate his slave,” yet we must still ask why Paul never overtly criticized the social custom of slavery. While I too like to think favorably of Paul’s intentions, if Christians intend to use passages such as Romans 1 as an explicit reference for what constitutes ethical norms for all times and all places, then we must also view the following words attributed to Paul as ethical norms for all times and all places: “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling... Render service with enthusiasm (Ephesians 6:5-7) and “Slaves, obey your earthly masters” (Colossians 3:22). Or, from a patriarchal perspective: “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing...” (1 Timothy 2:11-15).

In case you missed it, naming the order of creation (“Adam was formed first, then Eve”) is a direct appeal to natural order, and at this point along the way we’d do well to recall the words of the theologian John Caputo: “Natural law theory is notorious for serving the interests of the natural law theorists, for starting with a conclusion and then working back to the idea of ‘nature’ that provides them with a suitable cover.” And I won’t even open up the can of worms related to “women being saved through childbearing” – even though I once learned it was through faith in Christ, I guess I’m mistaken!

Even if one concedes that Paul didn’t view the social custom of slavery as a “permanent part” of the natural order, as Dr. Wood maintains, it’s only possible to do so by recognizing that social context plays an important role in our understanding and application of the Bible today (e.g., Ephesians 6:5-7, Colossians 3:22, and 1 Timothy 2:11-15), and that some passages from Scripture that might have made sense in one context are not intended to be viewed as ethical exhortations for all times and all places. This is precisely the same thing that modern interpreters of the Bible are doing in relationship to homosexuality -- yet this is precisely what Dr. Wood and others are saying they are forbidden from doing! At some point along the way, it’s important to play by the same set of rules demanded of others, instead of arbitrarily choosing which hermeneutical method to employ in order to reinforce one’s assumptions, all depending on the particular exegetical situation one encounters.

Allow me to briefly note that one might object and say that the only way to populate the species is intercourse between a man and a woman, so the natural law is clear. But if the only purpose for sexual activity is the procreation of the human race, should we then condemn sexual activity between married senior citizens past the child-bearing stage (Abraham and Sara notwithstanding) or younger couples who are infertile? And if science ends up showing us that a person doesn’t choose one’s sexual orientation, that it is natural to be gay, then would Paul’s argument still hold?

## V. On love as the fulfillment of the law (or, Why I actually agree with Dr. Wood)

According to Dr. Wood, since “love is the fulfillment of the law’ (Romans 13:10), it’s hard to see how ‘a more thematic view of the Bible can ever legitimately overturn specific prohibitions of the moral law.” My response to this is so simple that it borders on obvious: If love is the fulfillment of the law, which I (along with St. Paul and Dr. Wood) believe it to be, then it is precisely because of love that I am compelled to reject specific prohibitions in the Bible that fall short of love.

I agree with Dr. Wood in stating that love is the fulfillment of the law -- it’s just that he and I differ on what the most loving response is to same sex relationships shared among consenting adults, and this is an honest interpretive difference. As I’ve stated several times, it is less healthy for individuals who are LGBT to repress their sexuality (how God created them to be), which is a point that is well-known and well-established in the medical and psychological community. To love another person is to wish for their well-being and their flourishing, their health and their wellness, not their captivity and oppression. Contrary to the view offered by Rev. Lindell and supported by Dr. Wood (in which homosexual orientation and practice is equated with “anger, chemical addiction, gambling, slander, stealing, pride, lying, etc.”), what actually hurts individuals who are LGBT (and our communities) is repression of their sexuality. Allow me to quote from a sermon I preached last summer:

My mind has changed a lot on this topic over the years. Throughout the course of my own ministry I started meeting more and more people who came to me in pastoral confidence and talked to me about their struggles growing up as a gay person in our society in general and in the church in particular (feelings of hurt, rejection, and depression, often feeling suicidal).

I used to kind of think about homosexuality as a sin along the same lines of alcoholism or adultery (and I should “love the sinner but hate the sin”), but after a while even that didn’t add up in my mind. For instance, if one is an alcoholic, and gives up drinking, one’s life improves, it gets better. And if in a relationship neither partner cheats on the other, well, obviously, that’s much healthier for the relationship. But throughout the course of my pastoral ministry, I started to notice that people who are gay don’t tend to get better over time when they try to renounce their sexuality. I know several people who have gone to counseling to try to become straight, or have literally had people pray in exorcism fashion for their “gay” demons to leave them, but none of it worked. Then I started to notice that the gay people I knew who were most healthy were actually the ones who had come to terms with their sexuality and didn’t try to repress or ask God to change it, but had accepted it as part of who God created them to be. And I started to think that people don’t choose to be gay any more than I chose to be straight. Why in the world would someone choose to go through such heartache and pain?

All of these experiences changed my mind in pretty significant ways, so much so that I now view things much differently than I did when I first started ministry...

This is also why it's easy for me to respond to the following comment from Dr. Wood: "Leviticus 18 prohibits incest, adultery, child sacrifice, and bestiality. I sincerely doubt that Snider and his colleagues would fault anyone who opposed those behaviors on the basis of this passage. So why criticize Lindell's opposition to homosexuality on the basis of this passage?"

Simply put, the first four items Dr. Wood mentioned in Leviticus 18 are harmful. They are exploitive. They are not reflective of relationships built on mutuality, respect, and love for all parties involved. In short, they diminish human flourishing and well-being. *But the same principle doesn't hold for those in same sex monogamous partnerships built on respect and love.*

As such, my perspective can best be summarized in the following quote from John Caputo: "My own view is that the outcome of a careful debate about these matters would be to show that there simply are no arguments to show that homosexual love is of itself anything else than love, and that therefore, since the essence of the Torah is love, it hardly falls afoul of the law. To be sure, when it is not love, when it is promiscuity, or infidelity to a sworn partner, or rape, or the sexual abuse of minors, or in any way violent, then it is indeed not love, but that is no less true of heterosexuality."<sup>[4]</sup>

"Love is the fulfillment of the law." Because of this, "positive values" such as "justice, love, and compassion" that both Dr. Wood and I mutually affirm need to be reflected not simply in interpersonal exchanges among individuals, but in the structures and ordinances that govern our society, which is one of the primary reasons I hope City Council will add protections for LGBT citizens to Springfield's non-discrimination ordinance.

### **Epilogue: Why yes, I am biased!**

I don't interpret biblical passages simply by proof-texting (which is the practice of citing a few verses here and there to make one's case). As Shakespeare once said, "Even the devil can cite Scripture for his own purpose." Instead, I interpret Scripture through the lens of love – love as reflected and embodied in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who I refer to as Lord. As I've often stated, I believe the Bible to be the Word of God insofar as it conforms to the image of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Anytime it falls short of love, which is the heart of the Torah, or anytime it falls short of the image of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, then I choose to go with the spirit of the law over the letter of the law.

Contrary to the popular misconception, this is hardly a reductionistic, anything goes approach to Scripture, for it reflects the highest standard that can be placed on Scripture. As St. Augustine once said, "If love is the only measure, then the only measure of love is love without measure."

Dr. Wood is absolutely right in saying that I interpret the Scriptures with bias. Indeed, anytime verses from the Bible go against the law of love, or against the image of God as

revealed in Jesus Christ, I am biased against them (whether in the Old or New Testament), and I believe that organizations and Christians that hold fast to the notion that “God is Love” should be biased against them too. And all the while I recognize that Christians of good will have differing interpretations on the definition of love and what that means for our society – which, when it boils down to it, is basically the case between Dr. Wood and myself. Once again we see that it’s not a matter of personal integrity, but a matter of differing interpretations.

I began this admittedly long letter by referencing my friends from the Assemblies of God. So it is only proper that I close with a quote from one of them:

“The Bible is everything Paul told Timothy it was—God-breathed, useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness. The challenge is that it is also complicated, and despite our desire to the contrary, committed Christ followers will often come to different, even opposing, conclusions when reading it. The way forward with regard to the topic of homosexuality or any other divisive issue in the Church is not to create conflict in hopes of obliterating all opposing opinions. It is, instead, to honor one another in love. Can we trust the Holy Spirit to speak to anyone who has a sincerely open heart and mind? Can we each commit to responding with obedience to the Spirit and a willingness to change our positions when God speaks to us? Can we admit that people who disagree with us can still be people of integrity and dedication to Christ? Can we allow ourselves to love others even when we disagree with them? We can and we must if we are serious about following Jesus.”

That is the challenge. For me, and for all of us who identify as Christians.

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[1] Which is all the more reason to note that when Jesus responded to divorce by saying that a man should not cast off his wife, there is nothing in the text that implies the man only has \*one\* wife. As one Old Testament summarizes: “Jesus's response to the question about divorce, where he draws from Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 to say that a man should not cast off his (economically dependent) wife because they are "one flesh" is often read as an affirmation of monogamy, but it's not. My arm is "one flesh" with the rest of my body. But I have two arms. Jesus is not arguing for monogamy here. He's arguing against men divorcing their wives. Don't get me wrong. I think monogamy is a superior form of marriage and I think that it would be preferable for marriages not to end in divorce, but it's not because the Bible offers a clear teaching in this regard. There are fundamental biblical values that give us guidance as we seek to live in faithful relationships. Those values lead me to reject the biblical marriage norm -- one man contracting with one or more other men to procure a wife or as many wives as he could afford. I think that in our world, marriage is best when it's mutually agreed to by partners who choose to commit themselves to one another.”

Additionally, just to be clear, Solomon was condemned in the verses cited because he took wives from other nations who led him astray, *not* because to took multiple wives.

[2] See especially Placher, *Jesus the Savior*, 98.

[3] *Ibid.*, 100.

[4] Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 110.