

# Repaving the Romans Road

**A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
LGBTQ-AFFIRMING &  
EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN COUNSELING**

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Presentation for the Virginia Association for Counselor Education and Supervision 2018  
Counseling Graduate Student Conference  
Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia

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## About Me



- Progressive Southern Baptist (birth to 18)
- Conservative charismatic (18 to 27)
- Reformed academic (27-32)
- Evolving evangelical (32 to present)

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## Learning objectives

- Become more aware of the controversy surrounding religiously informed counselors and the 2014 ACA Code of Ethics.
- Learn lesser known, but nonetheless well founded interpretations of the Bible and how they inform the debate.
- Be able to apply Biblical interpretation to a discussion on how religiously informed counselors can maintain loyalty to their system of belief while practicing in a way that aligns with the profession.

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### Why this issue matters

- Suicidality (Gibbs & Goldbach, 2015)
  - LGB young adults 5x more likely to report previous suicide attempt as compared to non-LGBT peers
  - 25% to 35% of transgender late adolescents and young adults have had a previous suicide attempt
- Religion and risk (Gibbs & Goldbach, 2015; Kralovec, Fartacek, & Ploderl, 2012)
  - Negative events (e.g., discrimination, victimization), negative attitudes toward homosexuality, internalized discomfort with sexual or gender identity, and emotional distress related to acceptance.
  - Religion typically considered a protective factor, but ...
  - LGBT persons who mature in a religious community context report increased discrimination and internalized homophobia

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### Why this issue matters

- Historical significance
  - Science vs. Religion
  - Homosexuality depathologized 40+ years ago
- Presently relevant
  - Impact on mental and physical health
  - Government involvement & "conscience" (Dailey, 2017)
- Future trajectory
  - Solving ethical dilemmas
  - Providing quality care
  - Advocacy

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**My journey**

- Early Christian education
  - Adultery: Homosexual behavior falls outside the bounds of marriage between one man and one woman
  - Romans 1: 21-32

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**Romans 1:21-32**

➤ <sup>21</sup>For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Claiming to be wise, they became fools; <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ...

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**Romans 1:21-32**

➤ <sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

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**Romans 1:21-32**

➤ <sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; <sup>27</sup> and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

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**Romans 1:21-32**

➤ <sup>28</sup> And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. <sup>29</sup> They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

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**Romans 1:21-32**

➤ <sup>32</sup> Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

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**My journey**

- Kevin:
  - First-year students at University of Georgia
  - Involvement in Wesley Foundation (United Methodist student union)
  - Became roommates with two other guys for sophomore year

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**My journey**

- Kevin:
  - Came out to me between third and fourth years at UGA
  - First inclination into the struggle of a person whose sexuality and spiritual practice seem at odds
  - Introduced me to Randall

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**My journey**

- Randall:
  - A man in his mid-40s at the time
  - Worshipped together
  - Persistent distress: Multiple affairs, anonymous sex, persistent suicidal thoughts, deep shame
  - Introduced me to "ex-gay ministries"
  - Attempted a support group for men with "same-sex attraction"

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**My journey**



Jones • Wheaton College



Yarhouse • Regent U.

- Graduate school • Reformed Theological Seminary:
  - Integrationist model for relating science and religion
  - Three modes (Jones, as cited in Yarhouse, 2011)
    - Critical-evaluative
    - Constructive: Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity
    - Dialogical

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**My journey**



I Am Sorry



- 2011-2013:
  - Read Jones-Yarhouse study results (2007)
    - 38% "success"
    - Only 15% claimed conversion from gay to straight
  - Became familiar with suicide rates for LGBTQ persons, among other forms of suffering
  - Saw For the Bible Tells Me So (2007)
  - Exodus International folded

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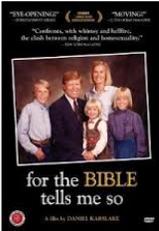
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**My journey**



- For the Bible Tells Me So and Romans 1:21-32:
  - The author's (Apostle Paul) "reference, of course, is to exploitive same-sex relationships among pagan Romans and Greeks. Paul certainly never contemplated the kind of monogamous, long-term relationships that are very much normal among homosexual people today" — Rev. Peter Gomes

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**My journey**

- Gotta, et al:
  - Monogamy, among other religiously endorsed traits, was trending up between 1975 and 2000 for straight, lesbian, and gay-male couples alike (2011).

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**The Dialogical Mode and Romans**

- Context is key:
  - <sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For *what can be known about God is plain* to them, because *God has shown it* to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, *ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made*. So they are without excuse.
  - What is *science* if not *the study of what has been made*?

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**The Dialogical Mode and Romans**

- Therefore, a proposal for LGBTQ-affirming Christian counseling:
  - The divine intention of Romans 1 was not to demonstrate that homosexuality is sinful—or pathological—in and of itself, but rather to forbid any type of sexual behavior—gay or straight—that puts people at undue risk of harmful side effects (e.g., exploitation, trauma, spread of disease, and unwanted pregnancy).
  - This proposal appears to be well supported by previous scholarship and to align with the message embedded in the larger Biblical narrative: God’s dream for his creation to experience abundant life.

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### Implications for ethics

- The American Counseling Association (ACA) ethical code specifically states that **counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination** based on a variety of factors—notably gender identity or sexual orientation—**nor do they refer based solely on personally held beliefs** (ACA, 2014).

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### Implications for practice

- Such a perspective could allow counselors of faith to maintain alliance to their system of belief while developing clinical and multicultural competencies.
- It could help ease the suffering of more clients, students, and supervisees.
- "... If you accept the conservative view about the Bible's content and its relation to God, either you'll need to stifle the lessons of compassion and empathy, or you'll need to refuse to listen with compassion and empathy in the first place" (Reitan, 2011).

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### Implications for advocacy

- Federal policy on conflicts of conscience and healthcare providers
- Recently, three southern states—Kentucky, Tennessee, and Arkansas (Dailey, 2017)—have passed so-called conscience-clause legislation that allows legal protection for mental healthcare providers to refuse services to clients with requests for help in ways that conflict with particular religious beliefs
- Assist the evangelical church to deal with its poor track record on social justice issues.

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## My friend SMASH



The Rev. Brittany Caine-Conley (seen above in a New York Times photo following the events of A12 in Charlottesville, is a lead organizer for Congregate Cville. (<https://congregatecville.com>))

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## Implications for future work

➤ Questions?



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## Implications for future work

➤ Contact me:

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