

OCTOBER 2013

## CHRISTIANITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY: A REVIEW OF BOOKS

BY TIM KELLER

*Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*  
by Wesley Hill  
Zondervan, 2010

*Is God Anti-Gay? Questions Christians Ask*  
by Sam Allberry  
The Good Book Co., 2013

The relationship of homosexuality to Christianity is without doubt one of the main subjects of cultural conversation today. If you are a Christian in New York City, it is nearly impossible to talk about your faith without this subject being raised. Although it is not central to the gospel message at the heart of Christianity, right now the cultural moment requires that we be prepared to address this issue whenever we are publicly identified as Christians.

A sign of this cultural moment is the wave of new books—from very divergent points of view—that have come out recently treating this topic. People who attend Redeemer will either come across the books themselves, or will have their basic arguments presented to them in shorter forms online. So over the next few months I will be reviewing several of these books. It's my way as a pastor to point people to those volumes that both fit in with biblical teaching and are pastorally wise and sensitive, as well as those books that, for all their good intentions, are mistaken and unhelpful.

The first two books I'll review are both written by authors who hold two things in common. Sam Allberry and Wesley Hill relate that they are sexually attracted to the same gender, but at the same time, in the words of Hill, they testify:

“to the truth of the position

the Christian church has held with almost total unanimity throughout the centuries—namely, that homosexuality was not God's original creative intention for humanity...and therefore that homosexual practice goes against God's express will for all human beings, especially those who trust in Christ.”

It says something about the clarity of the Bible's teaching that neither of them can find any loopholes in the traditional Christian position, but affirm it completely. Hill, who is a New Testament scholar, sums up the biblical material nicely (and briefly) in his first chapter.

Allberry's book does so as well and, though it is a shorter book overall, he gives the biblical teaching more sustained attention. There are two basic parts to it. First, every

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## HFNY CHARITY BIKE RIDE: OVER 100 RIDERS FOR NEW YORKERS IN NEED

Last month Redeemer congregants helped make Hope for New York's 11th Annual Charity Bike Ride the most successful ride to date.

This year's Team HFNY was the largest ever—100 riders!—and raised more than \$50,000 for Hope for New York's work to support the

poor and marginalized of our city.

That amount, combined with a matching \$50,000 gift from an anonymous donor, means that Team HFNY raised **\$100,000** to support our affiliate programs, enabling us to provide resources like soup kitchen meals and food pantry groceries for the hungry and homeless, ESL

and job-skills training for new immigrants, art therapy classes for the chronically ill, and mentoring and college prep for at-risk teenagers.

See photos from training rides, pre-Bike Ride pasta dinner, and the actual ride on our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/hopefornewyork](http://www.facebook.com/hopefornewyork)

# CFW CONFERENCE: *HUMANIZING WORK*

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Join the Center for Faith & Work for its 3rd annual conference, November 8-9, to explore this year's theme: Humanizing Work.

Dr. Timothy Keller, founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, will give Friday's keynote address. Dr. Keller's books, including the New York Times bestselling *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God*, have sold over 1 million copies and been translated into 15 languages.

Also speaking on Friday will be Mark C. Crowley, a leadership consultant, speaker and author whose mission is to fundamentally change how we lead and manage people in the modern workplace. He is author

of the book *Lead From the Heart: Transformational Leadership in the 21st Century* and is a regular contributor to *Fast Company Magazine*. Mark has been published in the *Seattle Times*, *Huffington Post*, *Reuters*, *CEO Magazine*, LinkedIn and the Great Place to Work Institute.

Saturday will begin with an address given by David H. Kim, Executive Director of Redeemer's Center for Faith & Work and author of *Glimpses of a Greater Glory: A Devotional through the Storyline of the Bible*. Additional presenters will include Nancy Ortberg of The Table Group, Dr. Michael Metzger of The Clapham Institute, David Miller of Princeton's Faith & Work

Initiative, corporate consultant Lourine Clark, and calligraphy artist David Chang.

To end the conference, participants will be led in Glimpses throughout New York City. Glimpses are cultural events that point toward evidence of God's glory and sovereignty over both the brokenness and beauty of the culture we inhabit. Glimpses will cover NYC's cultural landscape with a variety of experiences, including the Midtown Financial tour, Humanizing Transit, an Experimental Music Concert and many more.

Register online today at [www.cfuconference.com](http://www.cfuconference.com). Early registration ends October 19!

## CHRISTIANITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

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place the Bible directly addresses sexual relations between people of the same gender, it is always unambiguously forbidden. This is not only true in the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:22) but also in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 6:9,10; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; Romans 1:18-32).

Allberry says the more he looks at the Bible the more he is convinced that what it says about homosexuality "makes most sense in light of what it says in general about sex and marriage." I would add that the Bible's prohibitions are not motivated by animosity toward people with same sex attraction. Rather, they are there because homosexual practice doesn't fit with God's wonderful purposeful design

for sexuality in our lives. Even the design of male and female bodies testifies to this design.

This purposeful design is made clear in at least three ways. First, sex was given to men and women to enable *whole life covenant bonding*. God made sex to be a commitment-deepener—a way to say to someone else "I belong completely to you." Therefore it is only for use inside marriage, where it is designed to operate as a way to constantly renew, remake and re-energize your covenant with love and joy so it does not grow old or cold.

Second, the purpose of sex and marriage is the reunion of the complementary but separate genders. Men and women each have distinct glories and we need one

another. Marriage is the primary (though not only) place where those glories are blended and we are profoundly enriched.

The third purpose of sex is the participation in life creation. Because of the brokenness of creation, not every couple can have children, but only heterosexual marriage holds the possibility of creating life. It also provides children with the close, life-long exposure to both male and female humanity that they need to be fully integrated.

While homosexuality is not mentioned all that often, the biblical vision for the union of the different genders in marriage is one of its main themes. It is everywhere. The book of Genesis (1-3) along  
*(Continued on page 3)*

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### REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller  
Heather Klein

Hunter College Auditorium  
East 69th St.  
(between Park & Lexington)  
Services at  
10:30AM & 6PM

W83rd Ministry Center  
150 W. 83rd St.  
(between Columbus & Amsterdam)  
Services at  
9:30AM, 11:30AM, 5PM, 7PM

Salvation Army Auditorium  
120 W. 14th St.  
(between 6th & 7th Aves.)  
Services at  
9:30AM & 5PM

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# DOWNTOWN CONGREGATION'S FIRST ANNIVERSARY

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BY JOHN LIN

On October 20 we will celebrate the first of what we hope to be many more to come—the anniversary of the launch of the Downtown congregation! In some ways, the Downtown congregation had existed even prior to that day, through the vision of people who had served, given, prayed and built community life Downtown. And yet our first public worship service represented a new level of opportunity for people to gather, commune and worship together as a congregation that serves Downtown.

As with any new endeavor, much less a new congregation, the first year was not without its unique challenges. Eight days after our first service, New York was hit by Hurricane Sandy, which forced us to cancel services just two weeks after our launch. The hurricane prompted countless volunteers from our congregation to respond to the needs generated by the storm, both in our congregation and throughout Downtown, many of which we are still working to alleviate.

Before settling into our current venue at the Salvation Army in January, we worshipped in three different venues (one of which moved us through three different meeting spaces while we were there!) over the span of three months. That

was operationally challenging! And yet this past year is full of stories of how God sustained us through uncertainty about worship space, constant moving from venue to venue and even a natural disaster!

This year has also been full of stories of changed lives, renewed hearts, stronger community, rising leaders, and people who are newly committed to the flourishing of Downtown, whether through community groups, family life, the workplace, or friends sharing the Gospel with friends. I've met people throughout the year who have come to faith, had a renewed sense of God's presence in their lives, opened up their homes more generously than before, or have found a new purpose to serve the city, all as a result of experiencing God in the Downtown congregation.

We began the year with plans to begin a morning service followed by an evening service months later and were hoping that attendance would grow from 300-500 to 1000 by the end of the year. Instead, on our first day, we were thrilled that attendance began over 1000 and remained at that level for much of the rest of the year. We began the year with about 25 Community Groups and ended with over 50, involving close to 150 leaders and

hosts. Along the way, God raised up leaders in our prayer ministry, Sunday Service Team, Seeker and Community Groups, and children's ministry. Through a several weeks long intensive about compassion and justice (led by Jeff White) there was a renewed commitment to embodying those ideals.

One of the animating values for our Downtown staff team was that our congregation be "marked by beauty" in a way that would be inexplicable apart from the Gospel, and demonstrated by how we live our lives together, serve those in need and work towards a flourishing city. As lead pastor of this congregation, I have had a very unique vantage point from which I've witnessed, prayed and cared for a community that has become just that—a congregation marked by remarkable beauty. It is my hope that for many anniversaries to come, the Downtown congregation would be known as a joy and beauty to the city.

In October, the Downtown congregation will be releasing two recordings of songs that were part of its worship life this year. We'll also be calling people to a day of service in the city on the weekend of its first anniversary. Find out more, at [www.redeemer.com/downtown](http://www.redeemer.com/downtown).

## CHRISTIANITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 2)

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with Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce (e.g. Matthew 19:3-9) presents marriage between a man and a woman as the only divinely designed place for sexual relations. And throughout the Bible heterosexual marriage is the human construct most often used to reveal truths about God's relationship to his people. (As in Ephesians 5:23-32.) The Bible begins with a wedding between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:22-25) and ends

with one (Revelation 19:9; 21:1-9).

I said Hill and Allberry's books have two things in common. The first is that they accept that this biblical evidence is overwhelming that homosexual practice is not God's will. The second is that they, as men attracted to other males, believe that the biblical view of homosexuality makes great sense and is even liberating when viewed from *within* joyful belief of the gospel story. Hill uses this example.

He observes how a parent's warning ("be home before 11:00 p.m.") can seem confining and senseless if the child fails to see the bigger picture of reality within which the rule makes perfect sense. It is only much later, perhaps when they are parents themselves, that they are able to see that a prohibition that looked senseless was actually quite reasonable.

Because our culture teaches us  
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that the meaning of life is found primarily in sexual fulfillment and satisfaction, within that view of life the biblical prohibitions on homosexuality may seem harsh and cruel. Indeed, God's will in Scripture often seems to frustrate many of our deepest longings (not just sexual ones). But if we are faithful to his Word, we find that each divine demand is really a summons into a transformative process in which we discover deeper levels of peace, joy, and fulfillment in God and in Christian love than we could otherwise have known. As Allberry says, despite the difficulty of living according to the Bible in the short run, as time goes on we get a "sense of living along the grain of who we really are."

I have only pointed out the ways in which the two authors agree because I think they are the most important messages from the

books. I should note that there is disagreement in one area. Wes Hill will call himself a "gay Christian" while Sam Allberry would refrain from that and say only that he's a Christian with same-sex attraction. Despite the fact that both men interpret the Bible the same way and call Christians to the same path, they differ here and each makes a credible case why they speak about themselves as they do. Allberry thinks that calling oneself "gay" hints that homosexual desires are one's essential identity, rather than who you are in Christ. Hill, I think, doesn't want to give the impression to either people inside or outside the church that the feelings are superficial or will just go away on their own. Both make good points, though ultimately I think Allberry's approach is probably better.

But even with this disagreement, I'm glad to see the beginning of

something crucial here. These two writers are beginning to describe a particular pathway of Christian discipleship. A literature is going to get started. Others who share their experience and stance are beginning to write about it, too. But this 'movement' is still very embryonic. Ironically, we live in a time in which it takes more courage for authors to publicly take this position than it is now to embrace homosexual practice as compatible with Christianity.

These are books written by men who are not experiencing their lives as impoverished or sub-human. Their commitment to chastity within the lives God has given them is one of finding fulfillment and identity in their relationship to Christ.

As you can tell, I'm quite glad to recommend both these books.