

No Universally Valid Sex Standards?

A Rejoinder to Walter Wink's Views on the Bible and Homosexual Practice

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A note to the reader: My book, The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics (Abingdon Press, 2001), includes a short critique (pp. 448-51) of Walter Wink's article: "Homosexuality and the Bible," in Homosexuality and Christian Faith (ed. W. Wink; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 33-49. In its June 5-12, 2002 issue CHRISTIAN CENTURY published a long vitriolic review of my book by Wink, entitled "To hell with gays?" (32-34). In its August 14-27 issue CHRISTIAN CENTURY published my response to Wink's review ("Gays and the Bible: A Response to Walter Wink," 40-43 [the title was concocted by CHRISTIAN CENTURY]). A much fuller presentation of my response can be viewed at: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/gagnon3.pdf>. In the same issue Wink's reply to my response appeared ("A Reply by Walter Wink," 43-44). The following is my rejoinder to Wink's reply. For a copy of the exchange as it appeared in CHRISTIAN CENTURY—Wink's review, my response, his reply, and an anticipated letter by me synthesizing this rejoinder—see again: <http://www.robagnon.net/Reviews/homoWinkExchanges.pdf>. In the discussion below, the expressions "Wink's article," "my book," "Wink's review," "my response," and "Wink's reply" are used to designate the material described above.

Author's Addendum (Jan. 2, 2004): I have removed the largest section of this rejoinder, section IV (on Wink's claim that there are no universally valid sex precepts and on the weakness of Wink's list of 16 defunct biblical sex mores) because readers now have access to it in an article published in Horizons in Biblical Theology 24:1 (June 2002): 72-125, entitled "Are There Universally Valid Sex Precepts? A Critique of Walter Wink's Views on the Bible and Homosexuality," now also posted on my website at <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoWinkHBTResp.pdf>.

Introduction

Wink makes two main claims in his reply that deserve the lion's share of attention in my rejoinder. The first is Wink's claim that the "simple observation" that "only four of 20 biblical sex mores are still in place for Christians today . . . is enough to dash the notion of absolute sexual precepts universally valid in every time and place." The second is his claim that Jesus did not believe God would exclude any from his "everlasting presence." Wink labels "reprehensible" and "unworthy of the highest forms of Christian faith" the view that serial *unrepentant* sexual immorality could put at risk one's inheritance in the kingdom of God. The only acceptable Christian view, Wink tells us, is the view that all human beings will be saved; God "will see that no one is ever lost."

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Although my initial intent was to write a 5-page response, I

soon found that both the number and magnitude of errors made by Wink justified a much longer response. Indeed, the rejoinder has grown into a detailed response not only of Wink's reply in the CHRISTIAN CENTURY but also of Wink's previous article. The refutation of Wink's denial of "universally valid sexual precepts" alone takes up 19 pages (pp. 4-23), but 11 of these pages are given over to an excursus treating each of the allegedly 16 defunct biblical sex mores that we no longer follow (pp. 12-23). [Author's Note: **This material has now been relocated. See "Author's Addendum" above.**] The rebuttal of Wink's claim regarding Jesus and judgment occupies 10 pages (pp. 23-33; author's correction: now pp. 5-15), 6 of which constitute an excursus treating Synoptic sayings of Jesus on judgment (pp. 24-30; author's correction: now pp. 6-12). Readers wishing to shorten the reading load might skip or skim over this excursus as well.

The rest of the paper discusses the incivility of Wink and CHRISTIAN CENTURY (p. 2); the large number of arguments in my response that Wink avoids answering (pp. 2-3); Wink's confusion regarding the meaning of the word *change* with respect to homosexual behavior (pp. 3-4); Wink's claims to taking Scripture seriously (pp. 33-34; author's correction: now pp. 15-16); and Wink's claim that he adopts the loving position on homosexual behavior (p. 34; author's correction: now p. 16).

If there is a single main point to this rejoinder, it is this: Wink has not thought clearly through the arguments that he advances to sanction homosexual behavior.

I. On Wink's Incivility and the Role of CHRISTIAN CENTURY

I don't want to belabor the point of Wink's incivility, or the CHRISTIAN CENTURY's. My earlier response to his review treats this already. I am disappointed in Wink's conduct but I harbor no personal animosity toward him. Yet Wink makes some new comments that deserve comment.

Wink attempts to justify the uncivil rhetoric of his review by citing a single comment that I make in the course of a four-page response to his article "Homosexuality and the Bible" (pp. 448-51). There I refer to the lack of "theological sophistication" of his approach—an approach that deduces a right to override Scripture's position on homosexual behavior simply by counting up the number of "sexual mores" in the Bible that we allegedly no longer follow (16) versus the number that we do (4). (As we shall see, the numbers are inaccurate, on both sides.) My comparison of his method to a math test or football score was intended to convey the gross impropriety of substituting counting for careful theological screening of the closest analogues.

He claims that I try to make him "say the very opposite of

what [he] said." Yet this cannot be right in view of his own starkly-put statement that there are *no* "absolute sexual precepts universally valid in every time and place."

I continue to believe that his method of counting lacks theological sophistication (see below). Whether the metaphor was too vivid or warranted by Wink's deeply flawed hermeneutics I leave for others to decide. It is gratifying to have had a number of scholars whom I criticize in my book tell me that their views were fairly represented. It seems to me that a single comment within a 500-page book hardly justifies Wink's unresolved anger. He wanted revenge—interestingly, the very thing that he charges Matthew with in allegedly manufacturing judgment sayings for Jesus. Clearly, Wink was not in the proper frame of mind for writing a responsible and fair review.

I would think that if Wink wants to harp at length on his keen understanding of God's love and mercy—as he paints himself again at the end of his reply—that he would want to present himself as someone who can treat respectfully those with whom he disagrees. For his own sake, he should be careful about flying off the handle on such little provocation and so soon forgetting his own strong admonition to "transcend verbal violence and put-downs."

The other piece of new information that we get from Wink's reply is that the editors of CHRISTIAN CENTURY suggested the inflammatory title (which Wink says he likes). It is clear now—if any further evidence was needed—that they intended a hatchet job of their own.

I do not want to be ungrateful. I do appreciate the fact that they allowed me to do a response. It would have been better for them, I think, if they had insisted on civility from the very beginning, from Wink and from themselves; if they had solicited a response from me rather than have me initiate the request; and if I hadn't had to beg repeatedly for the space that I eventually received. They also carefully choreographed things in Wink's favor: allowing Wink a reply of equal length to my own response, on top of Wink's 2000-word review. Just to get a single line notation that a longer version of my response to Wink could be found on my web page was a hard-fought battle. Any additional comment that I might have would have to be buried in the letters section of a subsequent issue, with Wink once again being given the last word. Perhaps, too, it is just coincidental that in the initial version of my reply they deleted references to past calls for civility by both Wink and CHRISTIAN CENTURY—reinstated only after my strong objections to its removal.

Why is it important to mention these things? They serve as helpful reminders of the illiberal side of left-of-center appeals for respect, tolerance, and diversity. Essentially what is often meant is: respect, tolerance, and diversity for us but not for those who differ with us. We can expect to face this and worse in the future from mainline denominations that switch to endorsing homosexual unions.

weakness of Wink's overall case for homosexual behavior.

II. What Wink Does Not Say In His Reply

One of the most interesting features of Wink's reply is what he allows to stand in my reply without comment. Since he was allowed 3000 words by the editors but contributed only a 1000-word piece, he apparently did not decline comment on the grounds of space limitation. Since too the arguments that Wink does not address go to the heart of Wink's position, one must conclude that Wink either concedes them or does not know how to respond effectively:

- Wink chose not to challenge my observation about a new concession on his part; namely, that Paul was, or would have been, opposed even to committed, non-exploitative forms of same-sex intercourse.
- Wink does not rebut my argument that Wink's claim to a "new judgment" about homosexual orientation cannot stand up to historical scrutiny.
- In his review he was quite insistent, against my position, that the creation stories in Genesis 1-2 carry no implicit critique of homoerotic unions. After my rebuttal of his points, we hear not a peep from Wink.
- With the exception of one oblique reference, we do not hear Wink bringing up slavery and women's roles again as good analogies to the issue of homosexual behavior. He does not contest my arguments for why these are not good analogies.
- Wink makes no attempt to refute my suggestion that Scripture's stance toward incest is a better analogy than slavery, women, and divorce.
- Wink nowhere contests my position that Jesus' application of the love commandment to sexual issues runs 180 degrees counter to Wink's application.
- After my refutation of Wink's charges that (a) I apply a "double standard" to homosexuals and (b) books like mine are responsible for the high rate of promiscuity and disease among homosexuals, we hear nothing more from Wink on these matters.
- Wink does not address my point that more important than the question of whether any individual homosexual can change is the dominant influence that macro- and micro-cultural factors have on the incidence of homosexual desire, behavior, and self-identification.
- Wink does not demonstrate any flaw in my reasoning that a homoerotic disposition cannot be deemed moral on the basis of it being entrenched early in life.
- Wink does not counter any of my arguments debunking the notion of sexual intercourse as a God-given right.

All in all, these omissions are telling indicators of the

III. Wink's Confusion on Change

On the question of "change" for homosexuals, Wink conveniently ignores the three main points of my response (first and second columns of p. 42). He says:

A gay person cannot be asked to repent for being gay unless one holds that sexual changes are really possible. I showed in my review that only people in the middle of the continuum from hetero to homo have any real chance of change. Gagnon's case depends heavily on the possibility of change, and much of the data he uses are from the conservative InterVarsity Press.

Let's take each of these sentences in order:

- 1) Wink: "A gay person cannot be asked to repent for being gay unless one holds that sexual changes are really possible."

There are at least three problems with this assertion.

First, who said anything about a "gay person" needing to repent for "being gay"? Nowhere in Scripture is a person required to repent merely for feeling various sinful impulses in their body. If a married man happens to see a gorgeous woman scantily clothed and feels as a consequence intense erotic desire for that woman, the mere experience of such a desire does not necessitate repentance. It depends what he does with that desire. If he decides to nurture that desire mentally or, even more to the point, act on the desire by trying to finagle sex with that woman, then repentance would be in order. Likewise, the mere fact of experiencing sinful homoerotic impulses is not a culpable act for which repentance is required. So Wink does not even need a qualifying "unless" in his remark. He can simply say: "A gay person cannot be asked to repent for being gay." And I would essentially agree. So Wink is beating a straw dummy of his own making.

I would only word his assertion slightly differently. I usually do not use the term "gay" because: (a) I regard it as a ridiculous description of those homosexually inclined, whose lives are often anything but "gay"; and (b) "gay" is a term that denotes a political identity with which no person beset by homoerotic impulses need be associated. Moreover, the expression "being gay" falsely suggests that a person is locked into a box or that the whole of one's existence is defined by homosexual urges. I would prefer the following wording: "A person who experiences homoerotic urges cannot be asked to repent merely for experiencing such urges." Amen to that.

What Wink might have said if he wanted to point out a

difference between our respective views is: “A person who experiences homoerotic urges cannot be asked to repent for engaging in homosexual behavior.” This would be a genuine point of disagreement with us, so in my subsequent comments I will respond to this point rather than Wink’s distortion of my views.

Second, pedophiles and rapists will be thrilled with Wink’s statement—to say nothing of serial adulterers, kleptomaniacs, people with anger management problems, and so on. Wink ignores my point that the church normally does not, and cannot, approve of impulses on the basis that they are entrenched and/or not consciously chosen. Does Wink realize that most people who walk into a psychologist’s office are not “cured,” if by “cured” one means—as Wink apparently does with respect to homosexuals—to be rid of all undesirable impulses? The recidivism rate for paroled rapists is high; some are never able to control impulses to commit rape, let alone be rid of all such impulses. Using Wink’s logic, no one experiencing undesirable impulses could be held responsible for the behavior arising from such impulses—a preposterous proposition. People are not robots. They are not required to act on impulse. They may or may not share some responsibility for the origin and/or strength of the impulse; but they are certainly responsible for how they choose to act on such impulses. Even alcoholics are responsible for their actions, despite having a predisposition toward alcohol that is probably more genetically based than homosexual proclivities (so identical twin studies suggest). In sum, Wink’s remark is just another example of an argument to support homosexual behavior, which—if carried to its logical conclusion—leads to illogical and destructive stances elsewhere.

Third, Wink’s qualifier, “unless one holds that sexual changes are really possible,” fails to take into account my point about the variegated meaning of *change*. As I note in my response, there are multiple meanings for *change* as applied to persons with homosexual proclivities: (a) a reduction or elimination of homosexual behavior; (b) a reduction in the intensity and frequency of homosexual impulses; (c) an experience of some heterosexual arousal; and (d) reorientation to predominant or even exclusive heterosexuality. Genuine change is possible at one or more of the above levels for *all* believers who experience homoerotic impulses.

- 2) Wink: “I showed in my review that only people in the middle of the continuum from hetero to homo have any real chance of change.”

I have three points here.

First, Wink never “showed” the claim above in his review; he simply asserted it. His whole argument is circular: some people cannot change; therefore, there exists a “continuum from hetero to homo” where only those “in the middle of the continuum” can change; this in turn allegedly establishes that

some on the spectrum have no “real chance of change.”

Second, he ignores my point that the continuum is itself fluid. Evidence suggests (see pp. 403-420 of my book) that macro- and microcultural influences play the dominant role in determining to what extent people in a given population group will develop homoerotic impulses. Wink cites no evidence to the contrary. *No one* is predestined at birth to develop a lifelong, intractable homosexual orientation. In the same way, no one is predestined at birth to develop a lifelong, intractable desire for sex with children. Parents and vital institutions of the broader society, including the church, can play a significant role in radically curtailing and reducing homosexual proclivities in the population, and thus in expanding greatly Wink’s “middle.” If Wink wants to argue that there will always be some people homosexually inclined, however small the number, one can respond that this is true of all, or virtually all, undesirable conditions. Yet such realities do not induce society to accept every behavior imaginable, consensual or otherwise.

Third, all the problems of the first statement are carried over into the second statement. Wink presumes a very constricted definition of *change*. He also ignores the fact that a similar kind of spectrum can be brought forward for a whole range of undesirable conditions in the population. So what if such a spectrum exists?

- 3) “Gagnon’s case depends heavily on the possibility of change, and much of the data he uses are from the conservative InterVarsity Press.”

On the first half of his statement, yes, “Gagnon’s case depends heavily on the possibility of change”—but only if one understands *change* in the way I define it. If by *change* Wink remains eradication of every last vestige of homoerotic impulses, then he has clearly not read my book carefully (see pp. 420-29), or even followed the arguments in my response to Wink’s review. *Change* is also not limited to changes made after the onset of homoerotic impulses, but includes macro- and microcultural adjustments that inhibit the development of homosexuality in the first instance.

As regards the second half of his statement, Wink once more distorts the record. Among the pile of resources on socio-scientific literature that I consult in my book, only two, I believe, come from InterVarsity. Both of them are very well done: Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Moral Debate*; and Thomas Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate*. I challenge Wink to read these works and not ignore them simply because they come from a “conservative” press. In addition, I read for myself the scientific journal literature that I cite. Much of it comes from sources favorable to cultural acceptance of homosexual behavior; the same is true for a number of monographs I use.

It is quite clear what Wink is doing. He lacks the expertise to challenge even so much as a single specific point that I make regarding the socio-scientific evidence. For, if he had the evidence, he would supply it. So he attempts to smear the whole by falsely attributing the bulk of sources to “conservative” circles. This simply underscores how weak Wink’s case is on the matter of *change*. He is sure that he is right in his views. Unfortunately, he gives us no indication that he knows the field of research.

IV. Wink’s Claim That There Are No Universally Valid Sex Precepts

Wink insists that his “simple observation” that (by his counting, not mine) “only four of 20 biblical sex mores are still in place for Christians today” is “enough to dash the notion of absolute sexual precepts universally valid in every time and place. Gagnon makes no attempt to deal with my argument, which is, I believe, unanswerable.”

This is an extraordinary claim on Wink’s part—and in my view utterly untenable. It underscores the extreme positions that Wink must take to maintain his support for homosexual practice.

That he can allege that I “make no attempt to deal with [his] argument” confirms the lack of care with which he has read both my book and my response. For in both places I deal with Wink’s claim by showing that the closest analogues to Scripture’s opposition to same-sex intercourse involve proscriptions of types of sexual intercourse that we still consider to be valid today. The reality is the precise opposite of what Wink claims: Wink makes no attempt to deal with my arguments.

Consider the following . . .

Note to readers: *The material in Section IV has been removed to my article, “Are There Universally Valid Sex Precepts? A Critique of Walter Wink’s Views on the Bible and Homosexuality,” Horizons in Biblical Theology 24:1 (June 2002): 72-125, now online, with original pagination: <http://www.robgagnon.net/articles/homoWinkHBTResp.pdf>.*

Section V on the “Saving Theme of Judgment,” originally pp. 23-33, has become pp. 5-15. Section VI, originally pp. 33-34, has become pp. 15-16. Section VII, originally p. 34, has become p. 16.

V. Wink’s Distortion of the Saving Theme of Judgment

On Wink volunteering for hell. Wink contends that the idea that God would exclude anyone from inheriting his kingdom, including serial unrepentant participants in sexual

immorality, “is unworthy of the highest forms of Christian faith” and, indeed, “reprehensible.” The “God of love and mercy . . . will see that no one is ever lost.” The last-mentioned comment is part of a fuller statement reeking with arrogance and internal contradiction: if, says Wink, serial unrepentant participants in homosexual behavior

are to be sent to hell, true Christianity requires, I believe, that we join them there, on the principle that the God we worship is a God of love and mercy who will see that no one is ever lost.

The last statement is nonsensical. If in fact serial unrepentant participants in sexual immorality were “sent to hell” by God, then wouldn’t Wink have to revise his notion of what “a God of love and mercy” might do? Or shall Wink presume—even at the final eschatological moment when God’s will is being executed—to tell God how to run the cosmos? Is it Wink’s self-understanding that he has grown spiritually to a point where he has become God’s own tutor on love? It seems that Wink thinks that he not only understands love and mercy better than Paul and all the other authors of Scripture, and better than the earthly Jesus too; he also understands love and mercy better than *God* does. So Wink claims that if anyone were actually sent to hell, he would insist on himself going there as well, in order to shame God into recognizing the true meaning of love and mercy. Astounding. His remark is obviously rhetorical hot air. He has no intention of joining anyone in hell, which at any rate he doesn’t think exists. Applicable here are the words of God to Job “out of the whirlwind”:

Will you even put me in the wrong?
Will you condemn me that you may be justified?
Have you an arm like God,
And can you thunder with a voice like his? (40:8-9; NRSV)

And Paul’s words to the Roman believers:

Let God be shown true, but “every human being a liar” (Ps 116:11), just as it is written:

“so that you should be justified in your words and shall prevail when you make your case for judgment.” (Ps 51:4)

But if our unrighteousness confirms God’s righteousness, what shall we say? God who brings wrath on us is not unrighteous, is he? . . . May it not happen! (3:4-6)

Pinning the tail on the Gospel of Matthew. For all of Wink’s arrogance in thinking that he understands love and mercy better than God, he nonetheless felt cornered to answer my argument that Jesus himself believed serial unrepentant immoral behavior puts at risk inheritance of God’s kingdom. I knew Wink would have to argue that Jesus did not hold such a view; otherwise, Wink would have to charge Jesus himself with the same “cruel abuse of religious power” that

he charges me with for advancing Jesus' view. So in order to cover his tracks, Wink argues that Matthew, not Jesus, is the author of the vivid judgment language that Wink abhors. "Apparently Matthew had some unresolved anger at the persecutors of his church, and he wanted revenge." We will come back to this point in a moment.

Is it "reprehensible" to believe that Jesus linked sexual immorality to hell? Wink says that what is "reprehensible" is not just the view that some, including serial unrepentant sexual sinners, will be excluded "from God's everlasting presence" but also the view that Jesus himself would do the excluding. Since I nowhere specifically say that Jesus will do the excluding—there are Gospel traditions to this effect but the eschatological judge in Jesus' sayings is usually God, with Jesus himself acting as God's representative—I assume that Wink must be contesting the following statement in my response: "It was Jesus who, with a primary reference to sex, spoke of removing body parts that threaten one's downfall lest one be thrown into hell (Matt 5:29-30)." So is it "reprehensible" to believe that Jesus said such a thing? This seems to be what Wink is saying. Yet how can it be "reprehensible" to draw an historical conclusion about what Jesus believed when one has credible evidence from Jesus tradition that Jesus believed it? It is important to note that Matthew cannot be made the scapegoat here. The saying about removing body parts was not created by Matthew. There is a doublet tradition in Mark 9:43-48, which is picked up in Matt 18:8-9; and later rabbinic parallels apply the saying to sex issues, as does Matthew. What does Wink do when he can't pin the blame on Matthew for making up Jesus sayings about hell? Certainly, too, the seriousness with which Jesus took sexual purity is amply illustrated by the divorce-and-remarriage sayings, which pass all the major criteria for determining the authenticity of alleged sayings of Jesus.

A Wink waffle: did Jesus speak about hell or didn't he? I have serious doubts about whether Wink himself has thought through his argument in any kind of consistent or logical fashion. For while he appears to be saying that it is reprehensible to think Jesus proclaimed that some will not inherit God's kingdom, he pulls back from saying categorically that Jesus did not speak about hell. He claims only: "most such passages [where Jesus speaks of hell] have been added by Matthew" (my emphasis). Most? What about the rest? Wink is noncommittal, assigning what remains either to Jesus or to "the early churches in his name." Indeed, he starts the next paragraph by saying "*More to the point*, belief in a place of eternal torments is unworthy of the highest forms of Christian faith" (my emphasis). What could be "more to the point" than establishing what Jesus believed about divine judgment? How does Wink know such a belief is "unworthy"? On what basis can Wink claim that it is "reprehensible" to believe that Jesus held such views apart from establishing what the Jesus of history believed? I cannot make sense of what Wink is saying unless (1) Wink is conceding that some Jesus sayings about hell and judgment may indeed be authentic; and (2) Wink is asserting that,

regardless of whether Jesus believed in the exclusion of some from God's kingdom, it is still an idea "unworthy of the highest forms of Christian faith."

Is it "reprehensible" to link the "Jesus we worship" with the Jesus of history on judgment? Yet if this is what Wink is saying, why even bother to make the point about Matthew? If Wink cannot establish the inauthenticity of all Jesus sayings referring to judgment, hell, and exclusion from God's kingdom, then his point about Matthew is, well, beside the point. It is of one piece with other "scatter" arguments that he makes in his article, review, and reply. It is as if he is fighting a mere rearguard action to slow down an opposing position, throwing out various arguments but knowing that none of them have the kind of persuasive support that might turn aside a vigorous counter-response. If Wink cannot establish that Jesus did not believe in a coming judgment that would separate the "sheep" from the "goats," so to speak, then on what basis can he claim that it is reprehensible to believe that "the Jesus we worship" will one day perform such a separation as God's representative? I don't get it. Wink would have to be asserting that it is reprehensible to believe that the post-Easter Christ would act in a manner consonant with the key theological views of the pre-Easter Jesus. Surely this is absurd. If there is no significant linkage between the theology of the Jesus of history and the Christ we worship; if Jesus was this wrong about the nature of God; if, additionally, a united witness by every single writer of Scripture on the matter counts for nothing, then there is nothing to prevent people like Wink from making up whatever they want to believe about Jesus. Perhaps that is precisely the place where Wink now finds himself. "Jesus" has become merely a cipher for his own pet theological views. He uses "Jesus" to give his own views legitimacy but he appeals to a Jesus of his own theological making, without any necessary relation to the Jesus of history.

Excursus: Jesus and Judgment: Wink's Making a Molehill Out of a Mountain

As regards Jesus' belief in divine judgment, the evidence is overwhelming. As two liberal scholars, Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, argue in their seminal work, *The Historical Jesus* (Fortress, 264-69): "There is no reason to deny that Jesus preached judgment. The tradition of this is too broad." They also refer to "Jesus' eschatological ethic" as "an ethic of repentance" (p. 377). Dale Allison (*Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* [Fortress], 95-171) and Marius Reiser (*Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context* [Fortress]) are two more scholars who have recently mounted strong cases for Jesus' expectation of a final future judgment of reward and punishment. Reiser notes that the judgment sayings and parables of Jesus account for a quarter or more of all the sayings and parables of Jesus in Q (parallel sayings found in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark), Mark, and Lukan special material each. In Matthean special material the percentage rises to two-thirds of Jesus'

sayings and parables. So it is true that judgment material appears more than twice as often in Matthean special material than in each of the other three sources. Nevertheless, the fact that in Mark, in Q, and in Lukan special material the theme of final judgment comprises a quarter or more of all Jesus said is ample testimony to the fact that this theme not only appeared in Jesus' teachings but was a major element in those teachings. Even in my book I do not talk about the theme of the final judgment one quarter of the time or anything close to it. So far from overemphasizing this theme, I downplay it in relation to Jesus' own emphases.

It might be helpful here to cite the judgment sayings in Q, Mark, and Lukan special material. Although it would be ridiculous to argue that Matthew or his community created every singly-attested judgment saying that appears in his Gospel—indeed, the very idea of “special material” presupposes that Matthew is drawing on a prior source or sources—I will tie one hand behind my back and voluntarily exclude material in Matthew for which there is no parallel in other independent Jesus sources. The only exception will be instances where the special material in Matthew merely makes explicit what is implicit in other sources. The list goes on for five pages.

(Note well: I count the *Gospel of Thomas* as an independent source; the sign “//” denotes parallel material; for “Q” reconstructions I primarily rely on *The Critical Edition of Q* (eds. J. M. Robinson et al.; Fortress, 2000); and I do not normally cite sayings in Matthew and Luke that are drawn from Mark.)

- We have already referred to the saying about removing body parts in order to avert going to hell (a doublet tradition: Matt 5:29-30; Mark 9:43-48) and the parabolic warning about reconciling before one goes to court (Luke 12:58-59 // Matt 5:25-26 [Q]).
- The Beatitudes assure the poor and hungry, and those who are reviled on account of Jesus, that the kingdom of God belongs to them and that their reward in heaven will be great (Luke 6:20-23 // Matt 5:3, 6, 11-12 [Q]; cf. *Gosp. Thom.* 68.1; 69.1-2). The inference is clear: those who oppress the poor and hungry, or who revile the followers of Jesus will not have a place in God's coming kingdom. This is confirmed both by the Q allusion to the persecution of the OT prophets (Luke 6:23 // Matt 5:12) and by the subsequent “woes” in Luke 6:24-26. The parable of the unjust judge in Luke 18:1-8 also presupposes a granting of “justice” to the oppressed who retain their faith in God.
- The petition in the Lord's Prayer (Q) that asks God to “forgive us our debts, to the extent that we forgive our debtors” (Matt 6:12 // Luke 11:4a; cf. *Didache* 8.2) puts an important qualifier on divine

forgiveness: the ongoing application of God's forgiveness hinges on our forgiveness of those who offend us. It is not accidental, then, that this petition is followed by the very real request that God “not bring us into a time of trial and temptation,” as punitive judgment for our sins, to a degree that might lead to our succumbing to sin and being blotted out from God's people (Matt 6:13 // Luke 11:4b; cf. *Did.* 8.2). The inextricable connection between human forgiveness and the retention of God's antecedent forgiveness is confirmed by the saying in Mark 11:25:

Forgive if you have anything against someone, in order that your Father who is in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

Similarly, Luke 6:37b says: “Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Matthew 6:15 makes explicit the implicit flip side of the coin: “if you do not forgive people [their trespasses], neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” The message is well illustrated in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matt 18:23-35, where the king retracts his unmerited act of prior forgiveness. Forgiveness of others must be lavish, even when an extraordinary number of offenses is committed; but there is also a sense in which forgiveness presupposes the repentance of the person who sins (Luke 17:3-4 // Matt 18:15, 21-22 [Q]).

- A similar principle appears in Mark 4:24 and in Q (Luke 6:38b // Matt 7:2b): “by what measure you measure (to others) it will be measured to you”—by God. For example, judgment of others brings judgment on oneself (Luke 6:37 // Matt 7:1-2a). As the subsequent Q illustration about the speck and log suggests (Luke 6:41-42 // Matt 7:3-5; cf. *Gosp. Thom.* 26.1-2)—to say nothing of Jesus' own ministry to tax collectors and sexual sinners—this saying does not preclude recognizing instances of egregious sin in others and working toward the restoration of the lost. It is about not nitpicking the minor offenses of others (“the speck”) and about humble self-examination before engaging in the necessary task of helping to restore others.
- To the “measure principle” cited above Mark 4:25 adds:

For the one who has, it will be given to him; and the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

The Markan saying is picked up in Matt 13:12 and Luke 8:18 (cf. the parallel in *Gosp. Thom.* 41.1-2). That taking away the little that one has is no minor matter is evident from the parallel that appears in

the Q (?) parable of the “pounds” (*minas*, each of which amounted to 3-months of wages for a day laborer) found in Luke 19:11-27 and Matt 25:14-30 (there “talents”). In the parable the master returns—an obvious allusion to coming of God’s eschatological kingdom—and the slave who does not multiply the money entrusted to him is referred to as “wicked” and has the money taken from him.

To everyone who has, it will be given; but from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. (Luke 19:26 // Matt 25:29)

Matthew interprets this action, probably rightly, as signifying in parabolic form exclusion from God’s kingdom (25:30).

- The one who hears Jesus’ words but does not act on them is like the person who builds a house on sand, which is destroyed when a flood comes (Luke 6:47-49 // Matt 7:24-27 [Q]). The point is clear: it is not enough to hear Jesus’ words; one must actually carry them out to avoid destruction.
- Jesus’ declaration, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35), establishes that a relationship with Jesus and thus entrance into God’s kingdom, hinges on doing the will of God as enunciated in Jesus’ teachings (cf. *Gosp. Thom.* 99.1-3, which adds: “They are the ones who will enter the kingdom of my Father”). A parallel saying appears in Lukan special material (some say Q). When a woman in the crowd shouts out, “Blessed is the womb that bore you,” Jesus responds: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:27-28; *Gosp. Thom.* 79.1-2). Again, with the Beatitudes, blessedness refers to inheritance in God’s kingdom. Since many do not hear the word of God and obey it, many are not labeled “blessed”; that is, they do not inherit God’s kingdom.
- The parable of the sower with its image of most seed not falling on good soil indicates that most people do not “hear the word and accept it and bear fruit.” Only some belong to the eschatological harvest (Mark 4:1-9, 13-20). The similitude of the seed growing by itself refers to harvesting the ripe grain with a sickle (Mark 4:26-29). The emphasis is on salvation but the motif of judgment is at least implicit since only those who receive the good news about the kingdom of God are equated with ripe grain. In the same way, the Q saying about the need for more laborers to harvest the ripe crop presumes a gathering in of those who receive the good news, not of all people (Luke 10:2 // Matt 9:37-38).
- Jesus’ message to John the Baptist contains an implicit rebuke of those who do not recognize that he, Jesus, is the long-awaited “Coming One”: “Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me” (lit., is not made to stumble [to one’s ruin] in, or because of, me; Luke 7:23 // Matt 11:6 [Q]). As with the Beatitudes, the state of blessedness is pronounced exclusively to those who are to inherit God’s kingdom.
- Jesus gave the following mission instructions to his disciples for their proclamation of the kingdom of God:

Whatever place does not welcome you, and does not hear you, go out from there and shake off the dust that is under your feet to serve as a testimony against them. (Mark 6:11; also in Q: Luke 9:5; 10:10-11 // Matt 10:14)

The significance of the symbol of shaking the dust from one’s feet is conveyed by Q:

I tell you: For Sodom it shall be more bearable on that Day (i.e., the final judgment) than for that town. (Luke 10:12 // Matt 10:15; cf. the woes against the towns, cited below)

The peace from God that the messengers brought is to return back to them (Luke 10:6 // Matt 10:13). In Acts Luke interprets the shaking off of dust as a sign to the inhabitants that they are responsible for shutting themselves out from an opportunity to receive eternal life; their blood is on their own heads (13:48-51; 18:5-6). All association is ended; the place is consigned to destruction.
- Jesus considered the reception of his messengers to be determinative for reception of himself and ultimately of God:

The one who receives (or: welcomes) you receives me, and the one who receives me receives the one who sent me (Matt 10:40 // Luke 10:16 [Q]; also John 13:20; cf. Mark 9:37).

The obverse follows, as Luke’s interpretation of the Q saying shows:

The one who listens to you listens to me, and the one who rejects you rejects me; and the one who rejects me rejects the one who sent me. (Luke 10:16)

Taking into consideration the larger scope of Jesus’ teachings, the train of thought is transparent: the one who rejects God will be rejected by God. Confirmation for this reading comes from the next

two Q sayings, which emphasize that God can only be truly known through Jesus. Jesus thanks—yes, thanks—God for hiding the long-anticipated nearness of the kingdom from “the wise and intelligent” and revealing it instead to “infants.” “All things”—not some, but all—“have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows . . . who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Luke 10:21-22 // Matt 11:25-27). Kings and prophets desired to see what eyes now see in the person of Jesus (Luke 10:23-24 // Matt 13:16-17). Later in Q one reads:

The one who is not with me is against me, and the one who does not gather with me scatters. (Luke 11:23 // Matt 12:30)

Again, this does not sound like a figure who proclaimed that all will be saved.

- Jesus himself condemned in the strongest possible terms several towns near the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee for refusing to accept his message:

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the miracles that had been performed in you had occurred in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless, it will be more bearable at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up as far as heaven? As far as Hades you shall come down! (Luke 10:13-15 // Matt 11:22-24)

The image of ascension to heaven and the descent to Sheol for Tyre and Sidon stems from Isa 14:13-15. In Jesus’ interpretation this refers to eschatological punishment.

- Not only did Jesus pronounce judgment on a few Galilean towns; he pronounced judgment on his entire generation of Israelites.

This generation is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and a sign will not be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be a sign to this generation. The queen of the South will be raised at the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something more than Solomon is here! Ninevite men will rise at the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and see, something more than Jonah is here! (Luke 11:29-32 // Matt 12:39-41 [Q]).

This saying makes clear here that Jesus regarded repentance as an essential response to his

proclamation of the kingdom of God. The greatness of Jesus’ mission did not reduce the level of human culpability for failure to respond; it raised that level. Moreover, far from having a fairly optimistic view about the potential of humanity, Jesus’ assessment appears quite negative. The reference to the “evil generation” is also picked up in Mark 8:38, wherein Jesus refers to “this adulterous and sinful generation.” The series of “woes” that Jesus pronounced against the Pharisees—it doesn’t sound like Jesus believed God would never lose so much as one Pharisee—also includes a remark about the blood of all the prophets who had gone before being charged to “this generation” (Luke 11:49-51 // Matt 23:34-36 [Q]).

- Jesus told his followers that saving their lives or losing them depended on their denying themselves and following him:

If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it benefit a person to gain the whole world and to forfeit his life? For what can a person give as an exchange for his life? (Mark 8:34-37)

The message about losing one’s life in this world in order to gain it in the next is reiterated in both Q and John:

The one who finds his life will lose it, and the one who loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matt 10:39 // Luke 17:33)

The one who loves his life loses it, and the one who hates his life in this world will guard it for eternal life. (John 12:25)

Taking up one’s cross as a metaphor for dying to one’s own desires and aspirations in this life appears also in Q:

The one who does not take up his cross and follow after me cannot be my disciple (or: is not worthy of me). (Luke 14:27 // Matt 10:38; cf. *Gosp. Thom.* 55.2)

These sayings about losing one’s life and taking up one’s cross to follow Jesus are extraordinarily well attested. Their authenticity cannot be denied. Yet they clearly presuppose radical obedience to Jesus’ teachings as a condition for inheriting eternal life. Those who don’t lose their life, deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow in obedience Jesus’ teachings will lose the world to come. By Wink’s standards this view is a completely reprehensible—a cruel abuse of religious power. Wink too is

incredulous that God could close off sexual satisfaction outside a monogamous marital union of one man and one woman because it would impose “sexual starvation” on both homosexuals and many heterosexuals. How does Wink harmonize this understanding (the “we’ve got to have it our way” view) with the vision of radical self-renunciation expounded by Jesus here? No wonder Jesus was able to tighten further the Scripture’s demands on human sexuality in his teaching on divorce and remarriage.

- In Q, just before the saying about taking up one’s cross, appears the following saying:

The one who does not hate father and mother cannot be my disciple (or: is not worthy of me), and the one who does not hate his son and daughter cannot be my disciple (or: is not worthy of me). (Matt 10:37 // Luke 14:26; cf. *Gosp. Thom.* 55.1-2; 101.1-2)

Matthew interprets “hate” to mean “love more than me.” A related saying appears in Mark 10:29: there is no one who has left family

for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time . . . , with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

This is another example of Jesus hinging eternal life on radical discipleship, self-renunciation, and complete devotion to himself and his teaching. Moreover, rather than uniting all under some generic soteriology, Jesus came not to bring peace on earth but fire and a sword, even to the point of dividing family members (Matt 10:34-35 // Luke 12:49, 51, 53 [Q]).

- Immediately following the sayings in Mark about losing one’s life for Jesus’ sake comes this warning to those who deny Jesus:

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. (Mark 8:38)

A parallel exists in Q:

Everyone who acknowledges a connection to me before human beings the Son of Man (or: I) will also acknowledge a connection to him before the angels of God. But whoever denies me before human beings will be denied (or: I also will deny him) before the angels of God. (Luke 12:8-9 // Matt 10:32-33)

- One statement that Jesus makes gives us a particularly revealing window into his view of those not attuned to God’s workings in him. To the person who wanted to first go and bury his father before following Jesus, Jesus said:

Follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead. (Luke 9:59-60a // Matt 8:21-22 [Q])

People who are not receptive to the working of God in Jesus and are not oriented toward God’s kingdom but to the affairs of this world, are the spiritual equivalent of dead people. By implication, if they remain in this state of deadness, they will not experience the eternal life of the coming kingdom of God. This is evident from additional material appended to this saying that might go back to Q:

. . . but as for you go away and spread the proclamation of the kingdom of God.” And also another said: “I will follow you, Lord; but first permit me to say goodbye to those at my home.” And Jesus said to him: “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:60b-61)

Those who, once having begun the spiritual journey of following Jesus, return to worldly ways are not fit for God’s kingdom. What else can this imply but exclusion from that kingdom based on an inability to fulfill Jesus’ rigorous demand?

- Jesus exhorts his audience to fear God rather than humans:

Stop being afraid of those who kill the body but who cannot kill the soul. But fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna (hell). (Matt 10:28 // Luke 12:4-5 [Q])

It is hard to reconcile this view of God with the one put forward by Wink; namely, that belief in a hell is “unworthy of the highest forms of Christian faith” and that the “God of love and mercy . . . will see that no one is ever lost.” Here Jesus clearly expresses belief in a hell—we have seen this in other sayings—and seeks to impress on his hearers God’s capacity and will for sending there those who do not do his will.

- According to Jesus, whoever speaks against or blasphemes the Holy Spirit—that is, attributing Jesus’ miraculous power to Satanic influence—will never be forgiven (Mark 3:28-30; Luke 10:12 // Matt 12:32; *Gosp. Thom.* 44).
- A number of sayings and parables indicate that attraction to material goods can put one at enmity

with God and exclude one from God's kingdom: the warning that one cannot serve both God and Mammon (wealth) (Luke 16:13 // Matt 6:24 [Q]); the exhortation to store up treasures in heaven (Matt 6:19-21 // Luke 12:32-34 [Q]; *Gosp. Thom.* 76.3); the parable of the rich fool, which shows what happens to those who "are not rich toward God" (Luke 12:15-21; *Gosp. Thom.* 63); the parable of the callous rich man and poor Lazarus, which depicts the deceased rich man as being "in agony in these flames" in Hades (Luke 16:19-31; reference to an intermediate state preceding final judgment?); the parable of the dishonest manager, which emphasizes the need to use money to make friends with God and so be welcomed "into the eternal tents" when this life ends (Luke 16:1-8, with commentary in 16:9-12); and the saying about it being "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:23-27). In order to "inherit eternal life," the rich man not only had to obey the Decalogue commandments but also sell all his possessions, give the money to the poor to obtain "treasure in heaven," and then follow Jesus (Mark 10:17-22; cf. Luke 12:33; 14:33). Scribes who parade their righteousness in public while secretly devouring widows' houses "will receive greater condemnation" (Mark 12:38-40).

- A series of sayings and parables warn hearers of dire consequences if they are not ready when the day of judgment arrives suddenly: the saying about being ready at any time, like a homeowner anticipating a thief, "for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour" (Luke 12:39-40 // Matt 24:43-44 [Q]; cf. *Gosp. Thom.* 21.5; 103; Rev 3:3b; 1 Thess 5:2); the parable about the faithful or unfaithful slave put in charge of the master's household during the master's absence, which refers to the unfaithful slave being "cut to pieces" and given "an inheritance with the faithless" (Luke 12:42-46 // Matt 24:45-51 [Q], with appended statement in Luke 12:47-48); the exhortation to keep awake and the parable about slaves awaiting a master's return (Mark 13:32-37; cf. Luke 21:34-36); and the parable about the slaves awaiting their master's return from a wedding banquet (Luke 12:35-38). The parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids in Matt 25:1-13 belongs here as well.
- The coming of the Son of Man will precipitate cataclysmic destruction of the wicked as in the days of Noah and Lot (Luke 17:26-27 // Matt 24:37-39a [Q]; Luke 17:28-29 [Q?]). One will be taken, one will be left (Luke 17:34-35 // Matt 24:40-41; *Gosp. Thom.* 61:1).
- Far from proclaiming a broad entrance into the path

of salvation, with all or even many entering, Jesus proclaimed the exact opposite:

Enter through the narrow door (or: gate), for many will seek to enter and few are those who enter through it. (Matt 7:13-14 // Luke 13:23-34 [Q])

- Not only will those who make no pretense to following Jesus be in difficult straits, but so also will be many who claim to know Jesus:

When the master of the house gets up and shuts/locks the door and you begin to stand outside and to knock on the door, saying, "Lord, open for us," and in reply he will say to you, "I do not know you," then you will begin to say, "We ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets." And he will say, speaking to you: "I do not know you; stand away from me, you who work doing lawlessness." (Luke 13:25-27 // Matt 7:13-14, 22; 25:10-12 [Q]).

- A reversal of expected roles will take place:

And many shall come from east and west and will recline at table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God, but the sons of the kingdom (or: you) will be thrown out into the outer darkness (or: thrown outside). In that place there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. (Matt 8:11-12 // Luke 13:28-29 [Q])

Although Matthew frequently appends the last sentence to other Jesus sayings (13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30), it is clear here that the description of wailing and teeth grinding—vivid metaphors for the anguish of those who see their unexpected exclusion from the eschatological banquet—does not originate with Matthew. The issue is not whether Jesus is willing to save but whether Jesus is willing to save under terms other than those proposed by God. Jesus' lament over the judgment of Jerusalem is a case in point (Luke 13:34-35 // Matt 23:37-39 [Q]).

- The parable of the (great) supper communicates a similar point (Luke 14:15-24 // Matt 22:1-14 [probably Q]; *Gosp. Thom.* 64). Those who do not respond to the invitation to feast will be replaced by others.
- The parable of the leased vineyard suggests too a transfer of the vineyard to others (Mark 12:1-12; *Gosp. Thom.* 65; 66:1).
- The twelve will "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt 19:28 // Luke 22:28-30 [Q]).

- Those who do not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will not enter it (Mark 10:15; *Gosp. Thom.* 22). “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 14:11; 18:14). “The last will be first and the first last” (Luke 13:30 // Matt 20:16 [Q?]; Mark 10:31; *Gosp. Thom.* 4.2).
- Those who do not exhibit transformed lives are like salt which, when it loses its taste, is good for nothing and gets thrown out (Luke 14:34-35 // Matt 5:13 [Q]; cf. Mark 9:49-50).
- Similarly, the weeds will be separated from the wheat and thrown into the fire (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43; *Gosp. Thom.* 57:1-4); and the bad fish in the net will be thrown out (Matt 13:47-50; *Gosp. Thom.* 8). A similar type of saying is the parabolic story of the separation of the sheep and goats in Matt 25:31-46.
- In the time of coming tribulation only those “who endure to the end will be saved” (Mark 13:13). If the Lord had not cut short the time of tribulation, “no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days. . . False messiahs and false prophets will appear . . . to lead astray, if possible, the elect” (13:20, 22). Implied here is the existence of a non-elect that will not be saved. When the Son of Man comes on the clouds “he will send out his angels and gather his elect” (13:26-27; cf. 14:62).
- Jesus pronounces a special “woe” against those who cause believers to stumble from the faith and fall to their ruin:

It would be better for him (or: you) if a millstone were placed around his (or: your) neck and he (or: you) be thrown into the sea. (Luke 17:1-2 // Matt 18:6-7 [Q?]; Mark 9:42)

Whatever this is describing, it doesn’t sound very pretty. A similar point is made about Judas’ betrayal of Jesus:

For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born. (Mark 14:21)
- According to Luke’s special source, Jesus alluded to two events in the recent memory of his hearers—Pilate’s slaughter of some Galileans and the 18 killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—and drew the moral: “unless you repent, you will all perish as they did” (13:1-5).
- The parable of the fig tree speaks of the limited time

remaining to “bear fruit”; if none is borne, the tree is to be cut down (Luke 13:6-9).

- The saying about counting the cost (Luke 14:28-33) presupposes that inheriting God’s kingdom is far from being automatic. It requires a sober assessment of one’s own commitment to stay with a difficult task. Lacking this resolve and ‘stick-to-it-ness,’ one does not inherit the kingdom.
- The parable of the lost (prodigal) son presupposes that “finding” and bringing back to life requires the repentance of the lost/dead and an end to the straying life (Luke 15:11-32). Apart from this restoration, one remains lost and dead.
- Jesus announced to the “lost” exploitative tax collector Zacchaeus, “Today salvation has come to this house,” but only after Zacchaeus vowed to give half of his possessions to the poor and to pay back fourfold any amount that he “might” have defrauded others of (Luke 19:1-10).

Jesus as a figure sandwiched between John the Baptist and the church. On top of this mountain of evidence is the fact that John the Baptist, whom Jesus respected enough to be baptized by, placed a conviction about coming judgment at the forefront of his proclamation. In addition, the early church, which desired to implement Jesus’ teaching, also had a strong conviction that without acceptance of the gospel and an accompanying transformed life people would perish. There is not a single dissenting opinion in the entire New Testament. Not one. To believe that Jesus did not share this conviction, we have to assume that he did not merely modify but categorically rejected the main theological motif of the man who baptized him. Then we have to assume that the earliest followers of Jesus, including the Twelve, all grossly and hopelessly misconstrued Jesus’ message regarding the kingdom of God. Jesus was incapable of communicating this most basic of points in his message; namely, that God’s love would insure that no human being would ever be lost—universal salvation for every last man, woman, and child on the planet. We also have to believe that Jesus had utterly divorced himself from the judgment oracles appearing throughout the Hebrew Bible—despite the fact that Jesus’ sayings are chock full of intertextual echoes to Old Testament themes and images. And we have to make all these assumptions in the face of extremely strong evidence to the contrary in the Jesus tradition. What is the historical likelihood of all these assumptions being true? Nil.

The cumulative weight of evidence. Wink might be able to quibble about certain sayings not going back to the historical Jesus. I myself would not give to every saying the same high probability for authenticity. Nevertheless, the cumulative weight of the tradition, much of it multiply attested in independent sources, is overwhelming—even when we omit sayings in Matthew not paralleled in Mark, Luke, or *Thomas*.

As Dale Allison has rightly pointed out, the theme of God's coming judgment "is so much a part of the tradition that, were one to deny it to Jesus, the very possibility of the modern quest would fall into disrepute for the reason that the sources are too untrustworthy" (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 103).

Why Wink can't admit the obvious about Jesus and judgment. Wink says: "Once again, the issue is hermeneutical." It would have been more accurate for him to say that the issue—for him—is ideological. His ideology forces him to deny the obvious in Scripture, particularly with respect to the teachings of Jesus. A more candid statement would have been: "Once again, the issue is my personal and visceral ideological bias against core values of Jesus and Scripture." Despite the massive amount of historical evidence, he cannot bring himself to admit that Jesus not only expected that many would not enter the kingdom of God, but Jesus also pronounced this fate on many as a consequence of the rejection of his message. Why can't Wink admit this?

To do so would place Wink in an inescapable theological contradiction. For Wink insists that the notion that God could exclude any from his everlasting presence is both "reprehensible" and "unworthy of the highest forms of Christian faith." Yet what can Wink say when the Christ himself, the paragon of love, made this theological idea a major element of his proclamation? So Jesus the Christ held firmly to, and quite frequently proclaimed, a view about God and salvation that is "unworthy of the highest forms of Christian faith"? Come again? Jesus the Christ is sub-Christian? Jesus, whose life of compassion and message of love Wink holds up as the standard, devotes a fourth of his message or more to a theological view that is "reprehensible"? Doesn't that make Jesus himself reprehensible? Why won't Wink say about Jesus what he has said about me and about anyone in the church who takes the message of Jesus seriously: "Jesus was welcome to such beliefs, but I find them reprehensible"? The reason is transparent: it would be lunacy, or theological suicide. It would expose to all the fact that Jesus' teaching does not have normative value for Wink. He would no longer be able to appeal to Jesus for support of his views. Then he would have only his own opinions, including the claim that he understands the nature of love much better than Jesus ever did. I doubt that he would get much support for his claim.

True love is caring enough to warn someone of the eternal consequences of bad behavior. Jesus wasn't trying to send people to hell. He was trying to prevent them from getting there. That's why he spent so much time with economic exploiters (tax collectors) and sexual sinners. He wasn't telling them: "Keep right on doing what you're doing because it won't have any eternal effect on your relationship with God." He was communicating to them: "God is doing an amazing and wonderful work. You don't want to continue in behavior that will get you excluded from this joyous celebration. You mean everything to God. You're like the lost son. Come back to God. Forgiveness and restoration is

just a 'yes' away." *That* is love—not the message that Wink promotes. Love is caring enough for someone else to warn them of the eternal repercussions of serial unrepentant immoral behavior. And same-sex intercourse of every conceivable kind—like incest—is so regarded by Scripture and was so regarded by Jesus who is the centerpiece of Christian faith.

What I am saying and not saying about Jesus and judgment. Because Wink has shown a propensity for distorting what I say—as when he misquotes me as saying that "'change or be destroyed' was *the* staple of Jesus' teaching" when in fact I said it was "*a* staple"—it is important to be precise about what I am saying and *not* saying:

- I am not saying that Jesus only, or even primarily, proclaimed judgment. More so than John the Baptist, Jesus put the accent on the salvation side of the coin. As Marius Reiser puts it:

The dialectic of salvation and judgment, or damnation, is inescapable; but it can be approached from different directions. The Baptizer says: Whoever escapes judgment will achieve salvation. Jesus says: Whoever rejects salvation will be subject to judgment (*Jesus and Judgment*, 315).

Oftentimes Jesus stressed the positive motivation for repentance and change: what is coming is so good that you don't want to miss out on it. Even so, his talk about salvation generally carried an implicit overtone of judgment for those who did not repent and change their ways. Jesus also spoke about judgment in explicit terms often enough to demonstrate conclusively that he was not merely giving lip service to an antiquated idea about which he retained no strong personal convictions. Jesus frequently warned people of the consequences of failing to receive him and carry out his teachings. While the theme of judgment was not the sole or even the most important component of Jesus' message, the weight of evidence from the Jesus tradition strongly indicates that the motif of eschatological judgment was a very significant element. Wink offers only a truncated Jesus of his own making.

- The purpose of Jesus' judgment sayings was to effect change in behavior, not to announce a *fait accompli*. Jesus' message to those engaged in homosexual intercourse would not have been "you are consigned to hell" but rather: "you have an opportunity to experience eternal life so that exclusion from God's kingdom does not have to be your lot." This is precisely the point that I try to get across in my book.
- I do not give special attention to torments of

judgment—contrary to Wink’s framing of the issue—for the same reason that Jesus does not spend much time on the subject: because there is no joy or glee obtained in talking about it. The hope is always that people might inherit and enter God’s kingdom rather than experience the unpleasant consequences of being excluded from it. Nevertheless, there are ample indications in Jesus’ teaching—traditions that do not originate with Matthew—that the alternative to the blessed existence in God’s presence is both real and highly undesirable: references to the destruction of the house built on sand; shaking dust off of one’s feet; the more bearable condition for Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon on the day of judgment than for those who reject the gospel; the sending down to Hades; the throwing of the whole body into Gehenna; the destruction of the soul and body in Gehenna; the losing of life; being denied before the angels of God; being tormented in the flames of Hades; being “cut to pieces” and given “an inheritance with the faithless”; not being allowed in the master’s house; not being able to pass through the narrow door; being told to depart from the master; the destruction of the wicked as in the days of the flood and Sodom; withdrawing the invitation to the supper; not entering the kingdom; the throwing out of salt; the throwing of weeds into the fire; the cutting down of the non-fruitbearing tree; perishing; and being thrown into the darkness where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. There is room for speculation about whether the anguish experienced is eternal or for a limited period of time preceding extinction. Regardless, inclusion in God’s kingdom is vastly to be preferred. My presentations on judgment are, if anything, squeamish in relation to those given by Jesus himself. In my book I only describe judgment as an exclusion from or non-inheritance of something positive: the kingdom of God.

A brief word about the rest of the New Testament, especially Paul. It would require a book to adequately discuss the New Testament texts outside of Mark and Luke that refer to people not inheriting salvation. Every single New Testament author—bar none—presupposes this “reprehensible” point of view scorned by Wink. The whole of Christian mission in the first century (and for almost 19 centuries thereafter) was predicated on the assumption that without faith in Christ, and the transformed life that accompanies such faith, people would perish. What was the point of Paul taking the gospel west to Asia Minor (Turkey), then Greece, with hopes of reaching Spain—all the while risking his life—if no one would ever be lost to God? Paul knew a great deal about love. He not only authored texts like 1 Corinthians 13 that sing the praises of love, but also he daily put his life on the line to share the good news about God’s offer of salvation in Christ, and was “under daily pressure

because of [his] anxiety for all the churches” (2 Cor 11:23-29). Yet Wink—a person who has not experienced anything remotely close to the kind of exertions and cruciform existence on behalf of others that Paul experienced—thinks that when it comes to the issue of divine judgment and mercy, he understands the God of love and mercy better than Paul, to say nothing of all other NT authors. I think it is highly unlikely that this is the case.

As I noted, it is not possible here to cover all the NT texts addressing the issue of exclusion from salvation. It will have to suffice here to cite a few select texts from Pauline literature that link non-inheritance of the kingdom of God with serial unrepentant *porneia* (sexual immorality, including incest, same-sex intercourse, bestiality, adultery, prostitution, and solicitation of prostitutes) by both unbelievers and those who call themselves believers. (Note well: the reference to (sexual) “uncleanness” in most of the passages below connects up with, among other things, the description of same-sex intercourse as “uncleanness” in Rom 1:24-27.)

In his earliest extant NT document Paul could say to the beloved Thessalonian believers:

For you know what commands we gave to you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God: your holiness, that you abstain from *porneia* . . . [and not live] like the Gentiles who do not know God. . . . because the Lord is an avenger regarding all these things. . . . For God called us not to (sexual) uncleanness but in holiness. Therefore the one who rejects [these commands] rejects not humans but the God who gives his Holy Spirit to us. (1 Thess 4:2-8)

And to the Galatian Christians:

The works of the flesh are obvious, which are: *porneia*, (sexual) uncleanness, licentiousness . . . , which I am warning you about, just as I warned you before, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. . . . Stop deceiving yourselves; God is not to be mocked, for whatever one sows this one will also reap. For the one who casts seed into one's flesh will reap a harvest of destruction and decay from the flesh, but the one who casts seed into the Spirit will reap a harvest of eternal life from the Spirit. And let us not grow tired of doing what is right for in due time we will reap, *if* we do not relax our efforts. (Gal 5:19-21; 6:7-9)

And again to the Corinthians, in the context of how to deal with a practicing, self-affirming Christian participant in an incestuous adult union:

Or do you not realize that unrighteous people will not inherit God's kingdom? Stop deceiving yourselves. Neither the sexually immoral (the *pornoï*), nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate males who play the sexual role of females, nor men who lie with males . . . will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor 6:9-10)

In 2 Corinthians Paul expresses deep concern that

I may have to mourn over many who have continued in their former sinning and did not repent of the (sexual) uncleanness, *porneia*, and licentiousness that they practiced. (12:21)

The message of Ephesians is identical:

“*Porneia* and (sexual) uncleanness of any kind . . . must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. . . . Be sure of this, that no sexually immoral person (*pornos*) or (sexually) unclean person . . . has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you . . . , for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. (5:3-5; similarly, Col 3:5-6)

Surely Wink must say: How reprehensible and sub-Christian of Paul. What a monumental abuser of religious power.

Conclusion. The bottom line of all this: if Wink wants to characterize my views on judgment as “reprehensible,” “a cruel abuse of religious power,” and “unworthy of the highest forms of Christian faith”—when I actually do less with the motif of judgment than Jesus and the NT generally, and speak in less graphic terms—then he must apply such verdicts all the more to Jesus himself, not to mention every NT author. This is just one more absurdity to which Wink is driven in order to maintain his position on homosexual behavior and trash my views.

VI. On Wink’s “Wrestling” with Scripture

Wink protests that he really does “wrestle” with Scripture:

Missing in Gagnon’s remarks is any sense of what it might have cost slaves, divorcees and women to be ground under foot by the thought police of Christianity. We can no longer simply submit to scripture without asking whether new light is needed to interpret it. I for one do not abandon scripture, but neither do I acquiesce. I wrestle with it. I challenge it. I am broken and wounded by it, and in that defeat sometimes encounter the living God. I will not concede the field, therefore, to a putative orthodoxy that dodges the hermeneutical task.

This would be a lovely little statement if not for the fact that it loses touch with reality. Of course, Scripture has been misused and abused throughout the ages to promote bad ideologies and bad causes. That is the fault not of Scripture but of those who misuse and abuse it. And, yes, not everything in Scripture carries equal weight or has the same

enduring relevance. All that Wink has to do is to read my book to see such points acknowledged. It has always been a question for me of core biblical values, none of which were jeopardized by eliminating slavery or extending genuine equality to women. True, the church has at times acted harshly to those victimized by divorce. Yet it should not be overlooked by Wink that it was Jesus himself who intensified Scripture’s standards on divorce and remarriage. Missing in Wink’s remarks is any sense of what lax sexual standards have done to children: high divorce rates and family breakups; a higher incidence of forms of sexual behavior that increase disease and lower life spans; and sexual identity confusion. As for his reference to “thought police,” one would be hard pressed to top the increasingly oppressive quality of homosexual lobby in the academy and many school systems, in the field of psychology, in much of the media, at various political levels, in some corporations, and within many mainline denominations. Freedom of thought and civil discourse is being trampled upon by the homosexual agenda, not promoted. Wink’s abusive tone in his treatment of my book is a case in point.

Wink tries to talk a good game with respect to “asking whether new light is needed to interpret” Scripture and with respect to accusing me of “dodging the hermeneutical task.” However, the reality is quite different, at least on the issue of Scripture and homosexual practice. As we have shown, the problem with Wink’s views is not just that Wink shirks his responsibility to delineate between marginal and core values of Scripture. He also stops short of applying hermeneutical considerations rigorously enough: failing to adequately think through methodological issues in his “list hermeneutics”; lacking a clear grasp of what biblical authors found offensive about homosexual practice; and operating out of insufficient information both about ancient theories and practices and about contemporary socio-scientific data.

Wink wants to assure readers that he still takes Scripture seriously, that he is “broken and wounded,” even defeated, in his wrestling matches with it. I’m glad to hear it. I would just like to see more concrete evidence of this. Wink’s disregard of Scripture’s core values isn’t limited to his cavalier dismissal of Scripture’s stance against homosexual behavior. For him Scripture has no distinctive sex ethic. There are no universally valid sex precepts. The idea that God would exclude even one person from his kingdom is utterly reprehensible to him, even though Jesus and the entire weight of Scripture strongly assert otherwise. He even concludes that, were God to exclude any, he, Wink, would be compelled to shame God into recognizing the true meaning of love and mercy by sending himself to hell. In his latest book, *The Human Being*, we are told that placing Jesus in the Godhead was all a mistake. Jesus called on people to “discover the Messiah within themselves.” For him Jesus is not the living cosmic Lord to whom every knee will bow.

If Wink did indeed arrive at these positions after “wrestling” with Scripture, there is no alternative but to suppose that

Wink, in his own mind, has become the Incredible Hulk to an image of Scripture as a 98-pound weakling. Whatever wounds he has received from his battle with Scripture appear not to have been severe. Perhaps Scripture bit him before he knocked Scripture's teeth out. I do not know the exact circumstances of his wrestling matches; but I do see the consistent outcome.

VII. Are Wink's Views More Loving?

For all Wink's pretense to being loving on the homosexuality question, and his claim that my views are "heartless and cruel," the complaint that I have with Wink's profession of love is the same complaint that I have with his profession to being concerned about hermeneutics: not that he gives it too much attention but rather too little. Wink does not love more than those who withhold cultural incentives for homosexual behavior. He simply starts with different premises. For him there are no universally valid sex precepts so opposition to homosexual practice *per se* is completely out of place. For him there is no possibility of someone not inheriting God's kingdom—if indeed Wink even acknowledges such a thing beyond "intrapsychic transformation" in this life—so the idea that anyone could risk something eternal by sexual behavior is reprehensible to him. For him "sexual starvation," not sexual impurity, is the great evil; so restricting sex to heterosexual marriage has to be untenable. For him the authority of Scripture, and even of Jesus, is not decisive, so overriding a core biblical value in sexual ethics is not problematic. However, if one started with a different set of premises—namely, that God does ordain universally valid sex standards, that what one does sexually can have eternal consequences, and that the core values of Jesus and of Scripture generally should carry decisive weight—then the shape of love might look very different from what Wink prescribes for the church.

Wink says: "The homosexual Christians I know are indistinguishable from heterosexual Christians"—except, of course, for the fact that they are erotically attracted to sexual sames. This includes attraction to the body parts and other features that they share in common with members of the same sex. Then, too, there is the problem of disproportionately high ancillary problems often attending sex with non-complementary sexual sames: disease, shorter life spans, mental illness issues, multiple sex partners, short-term relationships, and gender-identity confusion—even in homosex-affirming areas. Then, too, there is the unfortunate consequence of a culture providing incentives for same-sex intercourse: a higher incidence in the development of homosexual proclivities and behavior in the population, which in turn further increases the incidence of the ancillary problems cited above. Then, too, there is the problem that one cannot demonstrate scientifically measurable harm to all participants and in all circumstances for any type of consensual sexual intercourse. So why not expand the list of approved sexual unions to include at least some forms of

incest, polygamy, and even bestiality, pedophilia, and prostitution? In particular, why is incest wrong when it is done between two consenting and committed adults—but not same-sex intercourse? None of these points Wink bothers to answer, perhaps because there isn't a good answer available.

Although his intent may be to love more, the reality may be that he loves less, insofar as his understanding of love is misguided. For him the burners on the stove are not hot so, on his own authority and no other (certainly not Jesus'), he tells others that it is okay to touch the burners. If his perception is wrong, and the burners are in fact hot, then his exhortation of freedom (remember the Corinthians?) must be viewed as, at best, negligent and, at worst, abusive. Christians who love those beset by homoerotic urges yet refrain from supporting cultural incentives for homosexual behavior should not relinquish the moral high ground to his bullying tactics. They need not cower in the face of ruthless charges that their position is "heartless and cruel." On the contrary, their stance is the one that leads to true life and manifests true love. Their example is Jesus. As Augustine said—properly understood—"Love and do what you want": withhold approval of same-sex intercourse and reach out to those who are sexually broken.