

Newsweek, the Bible, and Trash Journalism

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Newsweek, a once prestigious news magazine that sold for \$1 in 2010, has published as its cover feature for the New Year (Jan. 2-9; online Dec. 23) what can fairly be described as trash journalism. The article, entitled “[So Misrepresented It’s a Sin](#),” is a hit piece against evangelical/orthodox views of the Bible that offend the leftwing political sensibilities, particularly as regards homosexual relations. Its contents ironically illustrate the title, not by correcting misrepresentations of Scripture but rather by advancing them.

The author of the article is Kurt Eichenwald, who is a contributing editor of *Vanity Fair* and a former reporter for the *New York Times*. Eichenwald’s primary expertise is as an investigative reporter of business scandals, not as an interpreter of the Bible (a fact that the article makes abundantly evident). Eichenwald’s rant against orthodox views of Scripture rambles from the alleged faulty transmission and translation of the biblical text, to the presumed error of the Trinity as the stimulus for murdering others, and to the heinous act of public prayer. By the

end of the article, if not before, the careful reader will see that Eichenwald’s ultimate *bête noire* is any Christian appeal to the Bible as a basis for rejecting homosexual practice as sin. Apparently, by undermining the authority of Scripture Eichenwald hopes to undermine any appeal to a male-female requirement for sexual relations.

Already in the first sentence Eichenwald states, “They wave their Bibles at passersby, screaming their condemnations of homosexuals”; then goes on to speak of “the illiteracy of self-proclaimed Biblical literalists lead[ing] parents to banish children from their homes ... engender[ing] hate and condemnation.” The last two hysterical references are connected later in his article to the issue of homosexuality. Two large photos center on the issue of homosexuality, one showing “God hates fags” signs from the Phelps family—depicted as representative when in fact their rhetoric is repudiated by the entirety of American evangelicalism. The longest section by far of the article has to do with homosexuality (almost 200 words more than the next longest section). That’s not

counting the concluding section “Judge Not,” whose theme fits better his rant against a male-female prerequisite for sex than his rants against school prayer, creationism, and the deity of Christ.

Eichenwald’s rhetoric throughout is abrasive, clearly designed to make Christians ashamed of ever making such an appeal to the Bible again. Christians who regard homosexual practice as sin (or who—horror!—favor prayer in public school) “are God’s frauds, cafeteria Christians,” “hypocrites,” “Biblical illiterates,” “fundamentalists and political opportunists,” and “Pharisees.” Alongside Eichenwald’s abusive rhetoric is his one-sided and sparse “research.” He cites as his authorities left-of-center writers like Bart Ehrman and Jason BeDuhn (with a little bit of Richard Elliott Friedman thrown in).

With all this, Eichenwald has the temerity to say: “Newsweek’s exploration here of the

Bible’s history and meaning is not intended to advance a particular theology.” I can only imagine what the article would have looked like if Eichenwald had allowed himself to become tendentious. Not that any of this is surprising for *Newsweek*. This is not the first time that the editors at *Newsweek* have made assaulting the scriptural stance against homosexual practice their crusading issue (for example, see [here](#) and [here](#)).

There is so much error and absurd reasoning in this 7600-word article that this review can hardly cover all the nonsense within the space limit of 1000, 5000, or even 7600 words. This is especially true because it takes longer to show patiently why heresy and incompetent exegesis are what they are than to spout such. The essay that follows is divided into two main parts: (1) Eichenwald’s missteps on Scripture, Christology, the process of canonization, and public prayer; and (2) Eichenwald’s missteps on the Bible and homosexual practice.

Part I: Eichenwald’s Missteps on Scripture, Christology, Canonization, and Prayer

Eichenwald sets up his article first to undermine reliance on Scripture as a supreme authority for moral discernment and then to show how Christians, oblivious to the problems with a high view of biblical inspiration, also ignore its clear teaching in the matter of public prayer.

Playing Make-Believe with the Word of God

Eichenwald first tries to make a case that the New Testament Greek text is unreliable. The truth is the exact opposite. Eichenwald cites the number of New Testament manuscripts available to us as a negative when in reality it is a positive. The fewer and later the manuscripts for an ancient text, the more

difficult it is for scholars to be confident about the overall reliability of the manuscript base.

No ancient text has come down to us with greater reliability. For example, the oldest surviving manuscript for a significant portion of Plato's fourth-century B.C. dialogues dates to the end of the ninth century; for the *Discourses of Epictetus* the twelfth century. Contrast that with the New Testament, where we have one substantial Greek papyrus dating to around 200 (Paul, Hebrews) and another to the third century (Gospels, Acts). There are another 125 fragmentary papyri dating from the 2nd to 7th centuries. In addition, we have more than three hundred upper-case parchment (i.e. animal-skin) manuscripts of NT writings (called uncials or majuscules), dating largely from the 4th to 10th centuries, including half a dozen 4th-5th century manuscripts containing most of the New Testament. To these can be added hundreds of lower-case parchment manuscripts (called minuscules) dating from the 9th to 16th century. Then there are many manuscripts from the 4th century on that are translated into other languages (Latin, Syriac, Coptic) and thousands of citations from various Church Fathers. The manuscript base possessed by NT scholars is the envy of all other historians of ancient history.

Only a tiny fraction of the total number of variations among the NT manuscripts pose any serious problem for scholars in determining the original text. Eichenwald's reference to the lone variant in Luke 3:16 rather proves this point. Furthermore, no

major Christian doctrine hangs in the balance because of these variations.

Eichenwald makes much of two stories inserted by later scribes: the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 7:53-8:11 and the story of Jesus' resurrection appearances in Mark 16:9-20. Yet neither of these interpolations is representative of scribal alterations. In fact, they are the two largest interpolations in the NT. Moreover, there is no uncertainty in NT scholarship regarding their secondary status. (The same is true of the Trinitarian formula appearing in some later manuscripts of 1 John 5:7, likewise cited by Eichenwald.) Contemporary English translations all give readers an indication that these texts were added by a later hand.

Eichenwald asserts that the story of the woman caught in adultery "simply never happened" and that "scribes made it up sometime in the Middle Ages." As it happens, the earliest manuscript evidence dates to the fifth century and there are indications of the story's existence from third-century Christian texts. It is possible that the story in some form circulated orally at a much earlier date. Whether the event happened or not, it well epitomizes what we know elsewhere of Jesus' reaction to sexual sinners.

Eichenwald shows his lack of knowledge of text-critical issues when he states that the saying over the cup in Luke 22:20 and the statement about Jesus being "carried up into heaven" in Luke 24:51 "first appeared in manuscripts used by the translators who created the King James Bible, but are not in

the Greek copies from hundreds of years earlier.” Most of the earliest manuscripts contain these readings, as anyone who can read the textual apparatus in a modern edition of the Greek New Testament knows. Although a minority of early manuscripts lacks these texts and one can posit scribal motivation for their insertion, on the whole the evidence favors their originality.

For further discussion of Eichenwald’s failings on text-critical matters see the discussions by two other scholars, [Daniel Wallace](#) and [Michael Kruger](#).

Translating the Heaven Out of Jesus’ Divinity

Eichenwald states that no one “has ever read the Bible.... At best, we’ve all read a bad translation—a translation of translations of translations of hand-copied copies of copies of copies of copies, and on and on, hundreds of times.” Ah, Mr. Eichenwald, some of us still do read the Old Testament in ancient Hebrew and the New Testament in ancient Greek, not just in “bad translations” (and there are many good translations).

Eichenwald also charges that English NT translations are notoriously unreliable renderings of the Greek text. As a NT seminary professor who regularly teaches Greek, I emphasize to students the value of reading the NT in its original language. I think Eichenwald himself could benefit markedly from being proficient in Greek. Yet I certainly would not allege that those who are wholly dependent on modern English translations

have little hope of determining essential Christian doctrine. The King James Version is no longer “the gold standard of English Bibles” (contra Eichenwald). Of course, some modern translations are better than others; but the number of good English offerings is better today than it has ever been (including the NAB, NRSV, ESV, NET, CEB, HCSB, REB, NASB, NIV, NJB, and NLT).

Eichenwald cites as his key example of translation inaccuracy renderings of the Greek verb *proskunéō* (προσκυνέω) as “worship” when applied to Jesus. He is correct in asserting that the verb’s basic sense is “prostrate oneself (before)” (literally, “kiss toward”). He seems to prefer (erroneously) the meaning “praise God” over “worship” when applied to a deity (against the standard lexicons: LSJ and BDAG). But his main complaint is that translating the verb as “worship” when Jesus is the object constitutes “translational trickery” whereby “a fundamental tenet of Christianity—that Jesus is God—was reinforced in the Bible, even in places where it directly contradicts the rest of the verse.”

While it is true that there are places in the Gospels where “prostrating oneself” is the better translation when Jesus is the object, it is equally true that the sense is already there sliding over into the meaning of “worship”—a double entendre where at least readers (and sometimes even the supplicants in the narrative) are expected to know the deep import of the prostration. For example, in Mark 5:6 a demoniac prostrates himself before Jesus in acknowledgement that Jesus is

“Son of the Most High God,” possessing divine power over demons. In Matt 14:33 the disciples “prostrated themselves before” Jesus after he stilled the storm, declaring “Truly you are the Son of God” (God is often depicted in the OT as a storm deity having power over the elements). In John 9:38 the blind man’s prostration before Jesus appears to be a demonstration of his recognition of Jesus’ status as the “Son of Man” of Daniel 7 who has come down from heaven “into this world for judgment.” In Luke 24:50 the disciples prostrate themselves before the risen Jesus who is being carried up to heaven, obviously indicating their belief that he is being raised to a position of divine authority by God over all things (“at his right hand”; similarly, Matt 28:9, 17). In Matt 2:2, 11 the magi prostrate themselves before a child that Matthew elsewhere explains to readers is “God with us” (1:23) born by the direct working of God.

Moreover, the verb clearly has the meaning of “worship” when applied to Jesus (the Lamb) in Rev 5:14, since the Lamb is placed alongside God as a recipient of adoration (5:13). Indeed, at the start of Revelation the risen Jesus appears before John of Patmos with features (like hair white as white wool) and titles (like “the first and the last”) that elsewhere in the OT are attributed to God (1:13-18). In Heb 1:6 the verb is used of Jesus, who is presented as superior to angels and the object of their worship.

Eichenwald’s reference to “translational trickery” is thus nothing more than an

indication of his own unawareness of contextual matters. He flubs up even worse when he claims that the same kind of “manipulation” occurs when English translations render Philippians 2:6a as Jesus “being in the *form* of God” rather than “being in the *image* of God,” as in Gen 1:27. Eichenwald is apparently picking up on the claims of a minority of scholars that Phil 2:6 is not describing Jesus’ divine pre-existence but his human role as an Adam who does not fail. As it happens, “form” or “shape” is the meaning of the Greek word *morphē* (μορφή), not “image” (for which one would expect the word *eikōn*/εἰκών; “likeness, image”; see again LSJ and BDAG). Contrary to what Eichenwald claims, translating “form” is not an instance of “publishers ... insert[ing] their beliefs into translations that had nothing to do with the Greek.” As the majority of NT scholars recognize, the context for the “Christ hymn” in Phil 2:5-11 presents Jesus as being exalted by God to the highest station over all, receiving the divine name (YHWH), precisely because he “emptied” and “lowered himself” from his heavenly station “by coming to be in the likeness of humans,” not regarding “his being equal to God” as “something to be exploited for personal gain.”

The picture in Phil 2:5-11 is similar to the depiction of Jesus as divine Word/Reason (*Lógos*) in the prologue of John’s Gospel (1:1-18; see 1:1: “the Logos was God”), or as “the radiance of God’s glory and the impress (stamp, engraving, reproduction) of his essential being” in Hebrews (1:3). New Testament scholars know that the matrix for these depictions existed in the

characterization of heavenly Wisdom in early Judaism (Proverbs, Sirach, Baruch, the Wisdom of Solomon, etc.).

Colossians 1:15 does refer to Christ as the “image” (*eikōn*/εἰκὼν) of God (also 2 Cor 4:4) but in a context that makes clear Christ’s more-than-human status: “...the image of the Invisible God, the firstborn of all creation because in him all things were created.” Paul affirms Christ’s role in creation also in 1 Corinthians 8:6 (“through whom are all things”). There can be no question of reasonably understanding Paul as denying the notion of Christ’s preexistence. For Paul, John, and the writer of Hebrews, Jesus was the transcendent thinking/acting faculty of God immanent in the world and accessible to human beings with mind and spirit.

In view of these texts and others, including some in which Jesus is called “God” (not only John 1:1 but also 1:18 and 20:28; probably also Titus 2:13; Heb 1:8; 2 Pet 1:1; possibly Rom 9:5), it is ridiculous for Eichenwald to assert: “So where does the clear declaration of God and Jesus as part of a triumvirate appear in the Greek manuscripts? Nowhere. And in that deception lies a story of mass killings.” Of course, the precise term “Trinity” does not appear in the NT. Nevertheless, there are many places in the NT where God the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit are grouped together in presentations of divine work, such as the Great Commission baptismal formula in Matt 28:19 and the benediction in 2 Cor 13:14 (“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the partnership of the Holy Spirit be with you all”; cp. 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor

1:21-22; Gal 4:6; Rom 8:3-4; Eph 4:4-6; 1 Pet 1:1-2; John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 13-15; Jude 20-21; Rev 2:7, *inter alia*).

Now Eichenwald might have argued that the construct known as “the historical Jesus” did not think of himself as God incarnate in the flesh. In order to make such a case, one would have to (1) dispense with a view of the inspiration of Scripture that looks like inerrancy; (2) view the picture of “the man from heaven” in John’s Gospel as a post-Easter way of thinking retrojected back into the mouth of the earthly Jesus; (3) emphasize that there is no clear statement by Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) of his incarnation; (4) point to such statements as Mark 10:18 (“no one is good except God”); and (5) note that the speeches in Acts do not presuppose a message about incarnation. With these presuppositions one could make a reasonable case that the earthly Jesus did not understand himself as the preexistent self-actualization of God now incarnate in the flesh. However, this is not the same as Eichenwald’s claim that *nowhere in the NT* is Jesus viewed in this manner. Incarnational Christology is the *dominant* NT witness.

Furthermore, even as a question about the self-identity of “the historical Jesus” one would have to explain certain statements or actions of the pre-resurrection Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels that imply the appropriation of divine prerogatives, such as: (1) Jesus unilaterally amending the Law of Moses (Israel’s divine constitution) in the six antitheses of Matt 5:21-48, particularly

evident in his canceling of a divorce option (see also Mark 10:2-12); (2) Jesus' self-referential statements in Mark that "the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on the earth" (2:10) and "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (2:28), alluding to the divine being in Daniel 7:13-14 who is invested with all authority by the Ancient of Days after defeating the chaos beast; (3) Jesus' reference to the exclusive mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son (the so-called "Johannine thunderbolt" found in the Q saying in Matt 11:25-27 par. Luke 10:21-22); and (4) Jesus' use of the amen-formula ("surely," "truly") at the start of his utterances rather than as a response to what others say, suggesting that Jesus needed no person's confirmation of the veracity of his utterances (extraordinary in the culture of early Judaism where veracity hinged on continuity with earlier sages).

In addition, arguing that the historical Jesus did not conceive of himself as the preexistent Son of God not only discounts the rest of the NT witness but also ignores the fact that, regardless of what the pre-resurrection Jesus consciously knew about his pre-existence, there is ample evidence from the Synoptic Gospels that Jesus viewed himself as God's supreme emissary to whom authority as judge over all creation would be given, to some extent before death but certainly fully after death in the kingdom of God (for example, Matt 12:27a par. Luke 10:22a; Mark 8:31-38; Matt 28:18). I think a strong case can also be made from Jesus' statement in Mark 10:45 ("the Son of Man came ... to give his life as a ransom for many") and at the Last Supper in Mark 14:24 ("my blood of the covenant which

is to be poured out for many") that Jesus believed that his coming martyrdom would make restitution for the sins of the world. In short, Jesus believed that he was the Savior and Lord of the world, which after all is the central confession of the Christian faith.

Strangling Jesus' Divinity to End the Violence

In one of the most jumbled pieces of logic in an article loaded with jumbled logic, Eichenwald claims that too much attention to the authority of the Bible, particularly as regards the doctrines of the incarnation and the atonement, is responsible for so much bloodshed in the world.

The fact that episodes of Christians killing others, including fellow Christians, have occurred in the past two millennia is hardly breaking news. Even so, it is absurd to argue that such episodes are directly attributable to holding too high a view of biblical inspiration or to specific orthodox doctrines such as the incarnation and the atonement. The vast preponderance of Christians throughout history have held such views and, far from using such views as justification for violence, rather were persuaded to be non-violent. This is certainly true in the past century where religious persecution by Christians of others is not to be compared to religious persecution by, say, Muslims or even non-Christians (for the latter, start with the hit parade of Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot). Were firm convictions about biblical authority, the incarnation, or the atonement the source of violence in the world, we would expect a very different

picture than the one we see today or from the one that existed in the first three centuries of Christian history. Constantine's "conversion" (a questionable one at that) would never have come about if Christians hadn't already exerted enormous influence in the Roman Empire through the nobility of non-violent martyrdom and the development of charitable infrastructures that impressed many pagans about the value of Christian faith.

At the heart of the Christian faith stands the image of a Savior crucified, an image in which love, grace, and mercy triumph over violence. The earliest followers of Jesus were not violent but rather among the persecuted. Throughout history one can find religious adherents who did not follow the tenets of their own religion. That is no argument against religious convictions but rather an argument for religious convictions to be understood and applied.

Eichenwald contends that "the sociopath emperor," Constantine, "changed the course of Christian history, ultimately influencing which books made it into the New Testament." Such a fallacious statement shows Eichenwald to be misinformed about the canonical process in Christian history. With few exceptions (disputes over Hebrews in the West, Revelation in the East, and some of the Catholic Epistles [James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2-3 John]; the occasional addition of a few texts not now in the canon), what would come to be known as the NT canon was in place before Constantine came to power (compare the evidence from Marcion,

Irenaeus, the Muratorian Canon, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hippolytus, and Eusebius; also the evidence of the earliest manuscript collections). Constantine did request Eusebius to collect fifty copies of the scriptures for use in Constantinople but Eusebius himself probably played the decisive role in determining which still questionable works would be included and which excluded.

Fourth-century councils affirmed what had already become a reality in the churches. Christian orthodoxy defeated "Christian" Gnosticism (to which Eichenwald seems to be attracted) because the latter was an elitist, anti-somatic, self-centered, individualistic, ethically vacuous, and intellectually convoluted movement that, though persisting for many centuries, never developed mass appeal. In complete opposition to Jesus' view of the God of the Old Testament, Gnostics viewed the God of Abraham, Moses, David, and Isaiah as at best inferior to themselves and at worse downright evil. Eichenwald wants to present the triumph of orthodoxy over Gnosticism as the product of a violent top-down imposition against legitimate diversity. The actual facts of the case show otherwise. Orthodox Christian faith won because it was truly catholic in its appeal, more theologically profound, and far more faithful to the witness both of the OT and the earliest traditions about Jesus.

Weaving a Tangled Web of Narrative Differences in Scripture

Eichenwald focuses on narrative “contradictions” in the biblical account in order to undermine appeals to Scripture; specifically, the Christmas story, the Easter story, the Flood narrative, and the Creation accounts. He is correct that many evangelical Christians who make appeals to these texts are unaware of the problems. Yet many others are aware and have various ways of dealing with them.

One approach is to find ways of harmonizing apparent discrepancies. For example, the creation story in Genesis 1 focuses on the creation of the world as a whole, while the creation story in Genesis 2 treats events occurring in the Garden of Eden. The “Christmas” story in Matthew 1-2 is telling the story from the vantage point of Joseph (ch. 1) and then treating events involving the magi that occur when Jesus is 1-2 years old (ch. 2), whereas Luke is telling the story from the vantage point of Mary (ch. 1) and focuses on events occurring in close proximity to the time of Jesus’ birth (the shepherds and the presentation in the temple, ch. 2).

Sometimes this method works or at least appears plausible. At other times it seems to force material in preconceived molds. For example, Matthew does seem to presuppose that Joseph and Mary have been in Bethlehem all along. When they return from Egypt to escape persecution, Joseph’s inclination is to return to Judea. They end up

in Nazareth only because the Herodian line is still in place in Judea after Herod’s death (2:19-23). In Luke’s version Joseph and Mary are originally from Nazareth and go to Bethlehem only because of the census. So there are tensions between the two accounts. Even so, both agree on the ‘that-ness’ of a virgin birth.

Similarly for the resurrection appearances, Matthew seems to presuppose a one-time resurrection appearance in Galilee, whereas Luke apparently knows only resurrection appearances in the vicinity of Jerusalem in Judea. Again, the ‘that-ness’ of Jesus’ resurrection is never in question (not even in Mark’s Gospel, which probably ended without resurrection narratives). Paul provides further confirmation of the point in his listing of witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection in an early traditional piece noted in 1 Cor 15:3-7. The specifics of his source should be given greater historical weight than the Gospel narratives because his account can be traced to the earliest years of the Jerusalem and Antioch churches.

Another approach is to view inspiration of Scripture differently for the genre of narrative than for the genre of, say, letters. Whatever inspiration means for narrative, it does not always require the reporting of events precisely as they happened. Rather it entails the deeper meaning of events. The writers of Scripture sought to be faithful to available tradition, given the limitations of oral culture, and were not necessarily averse to adjusting narrative to OT prophecy, iconic stories of their culture, and theological proclamation.

This view of things fits with the way the earliest Christians handled traditions about Jesus' sayings and deeds. There was no Gospel canon in place in the first century. Sayings and stories circulated by word of mouth, often independently of surrounding contexts and sometimes collected according to genre similarity (e.g., miracle stories and parables). Christian visitors to a given community would be asked what sayings or stories they had heard and from whom they heard it (ideally from someone who knew one of the apostles or Jesus' family). In circumstances where there were conflicting details between the stories of outsiders and their own, decisions had to be made based on various criteria (and not always by the single criterion of "what really happened?"). Thus when Luke describes how he went about the process of telling a narrative of Jesus' life, he does not appeal to supernaturally-induced inerrancy. He rather states that he did his best to give a reliable account given the limitations of his sources (1:1-4).

Certainly the ongoing role in the church of Jesus' closest followers for the first few decades of the church's existence, and after their death the availability of others who knew this first generation, would have exercised some restraint on wild retellings. Yet even such a network could not have checked every excess, given the state of delivery systems for information in the first century. Nor perhaps was it desirable in all cases to exert a tight rein, since the risen Christ was very much of an ongoing living presence in Christian communities.

Since the creation accounts are clearly dealing with transcendent realities (primeval history), evangelicals will disagree on how much of the stories are symbolic (from all to none). (The descriptions of creation in the Psalms, Isaiah, and Job as a battle with Leviathan or Rahab, made much of by Eichenwald, are obviously intentional poetic-archaic imagery on the part of the writers, not to be taken literally.) There is no one evangelical response to the relationship of the creation stories to the scientific theory of evolution, although Eichenwald argues as if there were a univocal response. Yet evangelicals are agreed (and right) to see certain theological principles communicated in the creation texts: the demythologizing of deified nature; God's deliberate design manifested in the material structures of creation; and the importance of the creation of male and female as sexual counterparts. Even story and myth can contain important (and inspired) theological truth. At least Jesus thought so.

As an aside, Eichenwald takes an unwarranted swipe at evangelical emphasis on "family values," noting that Jesus spoke of his followers forsaking family for him. It seems to escape Eichenwald's notice that Jesus emphasized family values in teaching on the permanence and duality of marriage, the value of human life (e.g., justifying healing on the Sabbath), and the image of children as models of discipleship ("unless you become like this little child..."). What Jesus chastises is the positioning of family *above* the calling of God as an *excuse* for not following Jesus. A case in point is the anecdote about the man

who says that burying his father is more important than heeding Jesus' call to discipleship (Matt 8:21-22).

On the timing of Jesus' return, Eichenwald argues that Paul and Mark both appeared to believe that Jesus would return in their lifetime (I would add John of Patmos in Revelation and others). He rejects the application of the principle from 2 Peter that "with the Lord ... a thousand years is like a day" (3:8), on the small-minded grounds that most scholars regard 2 Peter as pseudepigraphal (i.e., not written by Peter himself but by someone in Peter's name in deference to Peter's assumed views). Eichenwald overlooks an even more important principle in 2 Peter in the immediately following verse: "The Lord is not slow about his promise ... but is patient to you (scoffers), not wanting some to perish but rather that all may make progress toward repentance." Delay is a byproduct of God's grace, not a mistake on God's part. Is a word to the wise sufficient for Eichenwald?

As we shall see, maintaining the Bible's consistent and strong witness for a male-female prerequisite for sexual relations does not require a simplistic or rigid view of inspiration. It rather requires merely the realization on the part of Christians that what is viewed in Scripture from creation to Christ as foundational for sexual ethics ought to be maintained by those who call Jesus Lord.

Casting the First Stone against Those Who Pray in Public

Eichenwald rails against school prayer and conservative prayer rallies that have the nation's moral condition in view. His argument is drawn from Jesus' remarks about prayer in the Sermon the Mount, warning followers not to parade their piety publicly but to pray in secret (Matt 6:5-15; cp. Mark 12:39-40), and from Jesus' consistent example of praying in private. Certainly we should guard against praying for the express purpose of soliciting praise from others and have our spiritual antennas up for hollow political manipulation of prayer.

Yet Eichenwald has once again failed to consider adequately the broader context. Jesus' own instructed prayer, "the Lord's Prayer," is riddled with first-person plurals that indicate Jesus' intention that this be a *communal* prayer. Jesus attended synagogues and one of the main functions of synagogues was to facilitate corporate prayer. In fact, synagogues in the Diaspora were called "prayer houses" (cp. Acts 16:13, 16). The Old Testament contains many stories of national prayer, including Solomon's long prayer dedicating the temple before the assembly of Israel (1 Kgs 8:22-61) and Ezra's lengthy prayer at the ceremony marking the return of the exiles to the land of Israel (Neh 9:6-37). Jesus himself introduced meals with prayer, including at the feeding of the 5000 and at the Last Supper. When people brought their children to Jesus so that he could lay hands on them and pray publicly, Jesus did not rebuke

them. He rather rebuked the disciples for trying to prevent it (Matt 19:13).

Communal prayers were daily offered in the Temple. While the priest Zechariah was going into the temple to offer incense, “the whole assembly of the people was praying outside” (Luke 1:10). Jesus told a parable about a Pharisee and tax collector, each of whom went to the Temple to pray out loud (Luke 18:10-14). According to Mark, Jesus at the end of his ministry entered the temple citing the words of Isa 56:7, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (Mark 11:17). Luke in Acts reports that the earliest followers of Jesus visited the temple to pray (3:1), in addition to praying in their own communities (1:14, 24; 2:42; 4:24-31; 6:6; 8:15; 12:5, 12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 28:8). Paul enjoined communal prayers

(1 Cor 11:4-5, 13; 14:13-15). Not only did he mention the contents of his prayers on behalf of the letter’s recipients (see the thanksgiving recitals in 1 Thess 1:2-3; 1 Cor 1:4-7; Phil 1:3-5; Phlm 4-6; Rom 1:8-10, etc.) but he also sometimes wrote new prayers for them in his letter, which along with the rest of the letter were read out in a community setting (Phil 1:9-11; cp. Eph 3:14-19).

It should be fairly obvious from these references that Jesus did not intend by his remarks to outlaw all corporate prayer for his followers. All that Eichenwald needed to do was pick up a concordance and check out references to “pray” and “prayer” but he couldn’t (or wouldn’t) do even that before charging evangelicals with ignorance and distortion of the Bible.

Part II: Eichenwald’s Missteps on the Bible and Homosexual Practice

Perhaps the worst section of all in Eichenwald’s article is the main point: It is hypocritical to pay attention to three places in the Pauline corpus that speak negatively about homosexual practice (1 Tim 1:10; 1 Cor 6:9; Rom 1:24-27) because you don’t do all the things commanded in these letters anyway. His argument partly misreads contextual matters and partly presumes the fallacious assumption that everything in the biblical text carries the same weight.

The reasoning is embarrassingly poor and takes no account of the enormous amount of

literature critiquing homosexualist readings of Paul (Eichenwald doesn’t get beyond Paul). If one’s article is going to be featured by *Newsweek* as the cover article, is it defensible not to do even the most minimal responsible research?

Mugging 1 Timothy 1:10

Eichenwald starts with the term “men who lie with a male” (*arsenokoítai/ἀρσενokoίται*) in 1 Tim 1:10, the *least* significant of the three direct references to homosexual practice in

Pauline literature. Before he gets to his main point he offers two subsidiary ones. First, he states that there has been dishonesty in translating the term into English by the NIV, NASB, the LB, and others, for they had rendered the Greek as “those who practice homosexuality” (actually, the NASB has “homosexuals”). Why dishonesty? Because “the word *homosexual* didn’t even exist until more than 1,800 years after when 1 Timothy was supposed to have been written.” Oddly enough, when Eichenwald speaks of the same term in 1 Cor 6:9, he says that “the translation is good” even though the translations are the same or similar to those for 1 Tim 1:10. (Note to Eichenwald: You need to update from the 1971 Living Bible to its successor since 1996, the New Living Translation.)

To call the translation “those who practice homosexuality” “manipulative” and “made up” is to misconstrue the art of translation, which sometimes necessitates “dynamic equivalence” for the sake of clarity with modern readers. For example, it is often necessary to replace terms for Roman coinage with comparable dollar amounts. Few will understand what Jesus means when he says “Aren’t two sparrows sold for an *assarion*?” (Matt 10:29; i.e., a Roman copper coin equivalent to a half hour of a day laborers work). So English translations translate by a term that modern readers will understand (a penny or a small coin, though “penny” is too low a denomination).

To be sure, “homosexuals” (NASB) is an inaccurate translation since it implies that the mere experience of homoerotic attractions

makes one liable to exclusion from God’s kingdom when the Greek word clearly focuses on behavior. However, the translation “practice homosexuality” doesn’t have that problem (though it might better be worded “engage in homosexual practice”). The term “homosexual” simply means “same” sex (from Greek *hómoios*/ὅμοιος). Granted, that expression takes in not just male homosexual practice but lesbian behavior as well. Yet the objection is not decisive since Paul clearly paired in his own thinking female same-sex practice with male same-sex practice (Rom 1:26-27).

Still, it is better to translate “men who lie with a male” not only because this is a more literal rendering of the Greek compound but also because it gets across the deliberate intertextual echo to the Greek translation (LXX) of the Levitical prohibitions in 18:22 (“a man shall not sleep with a *male* [*ársēn*/ἄρσεν] [as though] *lying* [*koítē*/κοίτη] with a woman”; cp. 20:13). The connection between the term and the Law of Moses is highlighted here since at least the last half of the offender list in 1 Tim 1:8-10 (and possibly the whole) corresponds to the Decalogue. In early Judaism and Christianity the seventh commandment against adultery, which was aimed at guarding the institution of marriage, served as a summary of all biblical sex laws, including the prohibition of man-male intercourse.

Unfortunately, Eichenwald doesn’t seem to be aware of this basic meaning of the word. He prefers the King James translation, “them that defile themselves with mankind.” That is

actually a much worse translation than “those who practice homosexuality” because it implies an ambiguity not present in the Greek word. That is just how Eichenwald wants it: “Perhaps that means men who engage in sex with other men, perhaps not.” His motive is different from that of the KJV translators, which, as a friend and fellow scholar (Jim Keener) aptly commented to me, “almost certainly has more to do with the blushing sensibilities of the day than with any ambiguity in the translators’ understanding of what the term meant.”

Eichenwald then attempts to dismiss 1 Tim 1:10 by telling readers that 1 Timothy is a “forgery.” There is indeed credible (though not certain) evidence for regarding the Pastoral Epistles as written by someone other than Paul within a few decades after his death, perhaps with access to genuine Pauline traditions (travelogues, creedal formulations). Even if that were the case, it doesn’t follow that the text should be dismissed, for it provides evidence that Paul’s views about homosexual practice in 1 Cor 6:9 and Rom 1:26-27 continued in churches that aligned themselves with his memory.

Eichenwald’s key argument—and the one that he repeats also for his treatment of 1 Cor 6:9 and Rom 1:26-27—is to combine an “all sins are equal” canard with a comparison to sins that evangelicals accommodate at some level; then charge evangelicals with hypocrisy. Eichenwald alleges: “Contrary to what so many fundamentalists believe, outside of the emphasis on the Ten Commandments, sins aren’t ranked. The New Testament doesn’t

proclaim homosexuality the most heinous of all sins. No, every sin is equal in its significance to God.” Notice the logical contradiction: “every sin is equal” follows “*outside of the emphasis on the Ten Commandments*, sins aren’t ranked.” Well, then, Eichenwald’s “every sin” statement can’t be taken seriously.

Moreover, it is not just a matter of the Decalogue delineating particularly serious offenses. The Decalogue is not an *exclusive* list of the most serious offenses. It is rather a *representative* list of serious offenses, explicitly specifying only those that occur fairly frequently in the population but implying a number of others. No one who has any competent knowledge of sexual ethics in ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity could seriously contend that adultery was viewed as *more* heinous than especially unnatural sexual acts like incestuous sex with one’s parent or bestiality. The same applies to homosexual practice. The reason these sexual offenses are not mentioned in the Ten Commandments has to do with their relative infrequency in ancient Israel, not relative insignificance.

As noted above, early Judaism and Christianity construed the Ten Commandments as a template for many other commandments, with prohibitions of homosexual practice, incest, and bestiality coming under the heading of the adultery interdiction. Since the vice list in 1 Tim 1:8-10 is organized at least in part along the lines of the Decalogue, it is hardly surprising that the prohibition of adultery is taken up in a more

generalizing way, referring to the “sexually immoral” (Gk. *πόρνοι/πόρνοι*). It is then followed by an extreme offense, “men who lie with a male,” which, while not common in ancient Israel, was common enough in the Gentile world of the Roman Imperial Age and such an extreme offense to Jews and Christians as to justify its singling out in 1 Tim 1:10 (in agreement with Rom 1:24-27 and 1 Cor 6:9, which likewise single out homosexual practice alongside a general reference to sexual immorality).

Another inconsistency in Eichenwald’s reasoning is his comparison of opposition to homosexual practice only to biblical offenses that he thinks evangelicals will have a difficult time opposing consistently. Not surprisingly, he doesn’t compare opposition to homosexual practice with universally agreed serious vices like murder, kidnapping, and perjury (all listed in 1 Tim 1:9-10, with kidnapping not explicitly cited in the Decalogue). If he had made such a comparison two things would immediately have become apparent—if not to him, at least to his readers. First, sins are of varying degrees of severity. Second, Christians would be just as much hypocrites if they opposed severe sins while tolerating homosexual practice (if severe) as they would be if they tolerated less severe sins while opposing homosexual practice (if less severe).

The Canard that Homosexual Practice Is No Worse than Any Other Sin

The truth is that not even Eichenwald believes that “every sin is equal in its significance to God.” Does he believe that genocide is no more severe a sin than taking home a company pen? Or sleeping with one’s mother (consensual or not) than speaking in an angry tone? Or rape than gluttony? Or robbing a person at knifepoint than lying about whether the dishes have been washed? Or beating a man because he’s a racial minority than cheating while playing Scrabble? Or kidnapping a child than not sharing one’s candy bar?

No, of course he doesn’t believe that. He couldn’t believe that and maintain any moral credibility. Indeed, it is apparent from Eichenwald’s article that he is particularly upset with what he regards as great sins, like “parents banishing their kids” for “being gay” (which he twice refers to in the article). So at this point Eichenwald is being either duplicitous or obtuse. Either way, Eichenwald’s intellectual and moral gaffe is notable, considering his condescending tone toward others.

As to his chastisement of evangelicals for “banishing their kids” for “being gay,” I don’t know *any* evangelicals who would “banish” their underage child from the house simply for *experiencing* same-sex attractions. Yet I can understand parents setting rules for appropriate sexual *conduct*. When I was a minor some four decades ago in a non-evangelical household, my parents made clear

to us that, if we children were to live under their roof and eat their food, we would have to abide by their rules, which undoubtedly included not being a serial-unrepentant fornicator or thief. I'm sure that we would have been forgiven had we succumbed to temptation. However, were we to have persisted in such behavior "with a high hand and a stiff neck," there might have been repercussions. I never tested my parents' resolve to see if they would actually carry out the threat. I didn't view their standard as harsh then, nor do I now. Did Eichenwald's parents let him as a minor do whatever he wanted to do, when he wanted to do it, and with whom he wanted to do it with? *All* parents set some standards with their children, which is another indication of the obvious: Some offenses are more severe than others.

It is easy enough to prove this point from Scripture, though Eichenwald ironically mocks those who think otherwise, referring to them as demonstrating "that they know next to nothing about the New Testament." Consider the following:

(1) Leviticus 20 reorders the sexual offenses in ch. 18 according to severity of offense (penalty). The most severe sexual offenses are grouped first (20:10-16: adultery, the worst forms of incest, same-sex intercourse, bestiality). Of course, different penalties for different sins can be found throughout the legal material in the Old Testament. (2) After the Golden Calf episode Moses told the Israelites, "You have sinned a *great sin*" (Exod 32:30), a point confirmed by

the severity of God's judgment. (3) Numbers 15:30 refers to offenses done with a "high hand" (deliberately and perhaps defiantly) as more grievous in nature than relatively unintentional sins (15:22, 24, 27, 29).

Moreover, (4) Jesus referred to "the *weightier* matters of the law" (Matt 23:23), adding: "Blind guides, those who strain out the gnat but who swallow the camel" (23:24). What's the difference between a gnat and a camel if all commands and all violations are equal? (5) Jesus famously pinpointed the two greatest commandments (Mark 12:28-31) and spoke of "the least of these commandments" (Matt 5:19). To have greater and lesser commandments is to have greater and lesser violations. (6) Jesus' special outreach to economic exploiters (tax-collectors) and sexual sinners was not so much a reaction to their abandonment by society as an indication of the special severity of these sins and the extreme spiritual danger faced by such perpetrators. This is the apparent in the story of the sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50: The one who is forgiven more, loves more. (7) Then there is Jesus' characterization of "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" as an "eternal sin" from which one "never has forgiveness"—in context referring to the Pharisees' attribution of Jesus' exorcisms to demonic power (Mark 3:28-30).

In addition, (8) Paul talks about different grades of actions in 1 Cor 3:10-17: One can construct poorly on the foundation of Christ and suffer loss while still inheriting the kingdom. However, the one who "destroys the temple of God" (viz., the church) over

matters of indifference would incur destruction from God. (9) If all sin is equally severe to God then why did Paul single out the offense of the incestuous man in 1 Corinthians 5 among all the Corinthians' sins as requiring removal from the community? Furthermore, if there were no ranking of commands, how could Paul have rejected out of hand a case of incest that was adult-consensual, monogamous, and committed? The answer to the latter question is that Paul knew the incest prohibition was more foundational than the commands to monogamy and permanence. For further discussion of these and other examples, see pp. 5-8 of [this article](#).

If it is obvious that Jesus and the writers of Scripture believed that some sins by their nature were more serious than others, then what remains of Eichenwald's claim that "the New Testament doesn't proclaim homosexuality the most heinous of all sins"? First of all, I don't know anyone who claims that homosexual practice is the worst of *all* sins. Eichenwald's wording is designed to obfuscate the issue. What Scripture does indicate clearly is that homosexual practice is a severe sexual violation. Here are eight good reasons for rendering that verdict (largely reproduced verbatim from pp. 8-10 of [this article](#), with alterations).

(1) The first human differentiation at creation is the differentiation between male and female. In Gen 2:21-24 the creation of woman is depicted as the extraction of a "rib" or (better) "side" from the human so that man and woman are parts of a single integrated

whole. Woman is depicted as man's sexual "counterpart" or "complement" (Heb. *negdo*). A male-female prerequisite is thus grounded in the earliest act of creation. Contrast the situation with incest prohibitions which are not grounded in creation. Incest prohibitions cannot be implemented until after the human family spreads out and becomes numerous.

(2) Although in the concluding summary of the sex laws in Leviticus 18 all the sexual offenses are collectively labeled "abominations," "abhorrent" or "detestable acts" (*to'evoth*; vv. 26-30), only man-male intercourse is specifically tagged with the singular *to'evah* (v. 22; also 20:13). Outside the Holiness Code in Lev 17-24 the term is normally used for various severe *moral* offenses (not merely acts of ritual uncleanness), including occasionally homosexual practice (Deut 23:18; 1 Kgs 14:24; Ezek 16:50; 18:12; probably also Ezek 33:26). As noted earlier, in Lev 20 the sexual offenses of Lev 18 are reordered according to two tiers of severity, with homosexual practice being included in the first tier of capital offenses.

(3) A triad of stories about extreme depravity feature a real or attempted act of man-male intercourse as an integral element of the depravity: Ham's offense against his father Noah (Gen 9:20-27; compare the phrase "see the nakedness of" in Gen 9:22 with the same phrase in Lev 20:17 of sexual intercourse); the attempted sexual assault of male visitors by the men of Sodom (Gen 19:4-11); and the attempted sexual assault of the Levite passing through Gibeah (Judg 19:22-25). Some have argued that only coercive

homosexual practice is in view in these stories. Given the generally negative view of homosexual practice in the ancient Near East, that makes as much sense as saying that a story about a man raping his parent (so the Ham story) indicts only coercive forms of incest. Obviously these are “kitchen sink” narratives targeting multiple heinous offenses.

(4) Jesus’ appeal to Gen 1:27 (“male and female he made them”) and Gen 2:24 (“for this reason a man shall ... be joined to his woman/wife and the two will become one flesh”) in his remarks on divorce-and-remarriage in Mark 10:6-9 (par. Matt 19:4-6) show how important a male-female prerequisite for marriage was. Jesus argued that the twoness of the sexes ordained by God at creation was the foundation for limiting the number of persons in a sexual bond to two, whether concurrently (no polygamy) or serially (no divorce/remarriage, at least not for any cause). If Jesus regarded a male-female prerequisite as foundational for extrapolating other sexual ethics principles (here marital monogamy and indissolubility), wouldn’t a direct violation of the foundation (homosexual practice) be more severe than a violation of principles built on that foundation (polygamy, adultery, remarriage-after-divorce)?

We know that Jesus was using the duality or binary character of the sexes as the basis for limiting the number of persons in a sexual union to two because the Essenes, a sectarian Jewish group of the time, likewise used the same one third of Gen 1:27 to prohibit men

from “taking two wives in their lives,” noting also that even animals entered the ark “two by two” (*Damascus Covenant* 4.20-5.1).

Jesus didn’t have to argue explicitly against homosexual practice in first-century Judaism because engaging in such behavior was unthinkable for Jews. We have no evidence of Jews advocating such behavior, let alone engaging in it, within centuries of the life of Jesus. Jesus set out to close the remaining loopholes in Judaism’s sexual ethics (another was “adultery of the heart”), not to repeat more severe prohibitions already universally accepted by Jews. For example, the fact that Jesus said nothing about incest is an indication that he *accepted* the strong strictures against it in Levitical law. It is not an indication that he regarded remarriage-after-divorce as an equally serious or more serious offense than incest.

(5) Eichenwald also claims that Paul didn’t give any indication in Romans 1:24-27 for regarding homosexual practice as a particularly severe sin. “There is no bold print or underlining for the section dealing with homosexuality—Paul treats it as something as sinful as pride or debate.” Yet the highly pejorative description in conjunction with the extended attention surely suggests that Paul regarded homosexual practice as an especially serious infraction of God’s will, in line with all Jewish perspectives of the time. It makes little sense to argue that Paul took extra space in Rom 1:24-27 to talk about how homosexual practice is “dishonorable” or “degrading,” “contrary to nature,” an “indecency” or “shameful/ obscene behavior,” and a fit

“payback” for their straying from God in order to show that homosexual practice was *no* worse than any other sin.

As a complement to idolatry on the vertical vector of divine-human relations, Paul chose the offense of homosexual practice to be his lead-off example on the horizontal vector of intra-human relations. Like idolatry, homosexual practice involved a suppression of truth accessible in the material structures of creation still intact in nature. “Humans ... in unrighteousness are suppressing the truth, because the knowable aspect of God is transparent to them, for God made it transparent to them. For his invisible attributes, ever since the creation of the world, are being clearly seen, mentally apprehended by means of the things made ... so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:18b-20). In order to engage in homosexual practice, humans would first have to suppress the self-evident sexual complementarity of male and female (anatomically, physiologically, psychologically). Romans 1:18-32 is an extended vice or offender list. Like most other Pauline vice or offender lists, idolatry and sexual immorality are listed one-two (in some lists sexual immorality appears first); and this not because they are merely equal to other offenses (cp. 1 Thess 4:1-8 with 1:9; and Gal 5:19-21; 2 Cor 12:21; Col 3:5; Eph 4:19; 5:3, 5).

(6) Apart from ruling out sex between humans and animals, the male-female requirement for sexual relations is the only sexual requirement held absolutely for the people of God from creation to Christ. While

we see a limited allowance for polygyny in the OT (multiple wives for men, though never polyandry, multiple husbands for women), subsequently revoked by Jesus, and some limited allowance in earliest Israel for what will later be termed incest in Levitical law (e.g., Abraham’s marriage to his half-sister Sarah; Jacob’s marriage to two sisters while both were alive), there is never any allowance whatsoever for homosexual practice in the history of Israel. Every single law, narrative, poetry, proverb, moral exhortation, and metaphor dealing with sexual matters in the Old Testament presupposes a male-female prerequisite. The only exceptions are periods of apostasy in ancient Israel (e.g., the existence of homosexual cult prostitutes, which narrators still label an abomination). Polygamy is a violation of the monogamy principle that is only *secondarily* extrapolated from a male-female prerequisite. Incest is a violation of a requirement of embodied otherness that is only *secondarily* extrapolated from the foundational analogy of embodied otherness established at creation. Homosexual practice is thus viewed as worse than incest and polyamory.

(7) The severe character of homosexual practice is amply confirmed in Jewish texts of the Second Temple period and beyond (for texts, especially Philo and Josephus, see my *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 159-83). Jews in the Greco-Roman period regarded man-male intercourse as the prime example, or at least one of the top examples, of Gentile impiety (e.g., *Sibylline Oracles* 3; *Letter of Aristeeas* 152). Only bestiality appears to rank as a greater sexual offense, at least among

“consensual” acts. There is some disagreement in early Judaism over whether sex with one’s mother is worse, comparable, or less severe. The absence of a specific recorded case of same-sex intercourse in early Judaism from the fifth century B.C. to ca. A.D. 300 also speaks to the severity of the offense. Regarding the possibility of Jews engaging in this abhorrent behavior, a text from the rabbinic *Tosefta* comments simply: “Israel is not suspected” (*Qiddushin* 5:10).

(8) The historic position of the church over the centuries is that the Bible understands homosexual practice as an extreme sexual offense. For example, among the Church Fathers Cyprian (200-258) called it “an indignity even to see.” John Chrysostom (344-407) referred to it as “monstrous insanity,” “clear proof of the ultimate degree of corruption,” and “lusts after monstrous things.” Theodoret of Cyr (393-457) called it “extreme ungodliness.” John Calvin, no slouch when it came to emphasizing universal depravity, nonetheless labeled homosexual practice “the fearful crime of unnatural lust,” worse than “bestial desires since [it reverses] the whole order of nature,” “vicious corruption,” “monstrous deeds,” and “this abominable act.”

In short, the claim that homosexual practice in the Bible is viewed no more severely than any other sin is unsupportable. Yet it is the lynchpin for Eichenwald’s case against Christian opposition to homosexual practice. Eichenwald simply hasn’t done his homework on the issue and yet he and the

editors of *Newsweek* thought that his views merited cover-article treatment.

Comparing Homosexual Practice in 1 Tim 1:10 to Heavy Drinking & the Role of Women

Instead of comparing homosexual practice with severe sins to which the church has not accommodated, Eichenwald prejudices the case by making comparisons *only* with lesser sins on which he feels the church has already compromised itself. With regard to the context for 1 Tim 1:10, he cites drunkards (actually this doesn’t appear in the vice list in 1 Tim 1:8-10 but only in discussions of church leadership positions; but it does appear in the offender list in 1 Cor 6:9-10). He gushes: “Most frat boys in America are committing sins on par with being gay. But you rarely hear about parents banishing their kids for getting trashed on Saturday night.”

Yet a more careful reading of Scripture’s view of drunkenness doesn’t get Eichenwald where he wants to go. Drunkenness in Scripture is frowned upon because of that to which it might lead: sexual immorality, violence, verbal abuse, and the like. The story of a one-time drunken Noah passed out in his tent doesn’t receive the severe moral disapprobation that Ham receives for emasculating his father by having sex with him. Furthermore, evangelical families would generally seek help for children who are repeatedly and impenitently getting drunk. They certainly wouldn’t be affirming drunkenness, which is what Eichenwald is

demanding in the case of homosexual practice.

Eichenwald's next lame comparison is with female politicians who speak in public. Eichenwald lampoons 1 Timothy as "one of the most virulently anti-woman books of the New Testament," referring to remarks in 2:8-15 about women wearing modest dress, learning in silence, and not teaching or having authority over men. However, the writer of 1 Timothy (whether Paul or a later Paulinist in Paul's name) is not talking about female politicians. It is dubious at best that he has in view anything other than Christian assemblies when talking about teaching and exercising authority. Based on remarks elsewhere in the letter, it is apparent that the author's views are conditioned at least in part by concern that the persecuted nascent Christian movement not give offense to outsiders so that the maximum number may be won over to the faith (2:2-4; 3:7; 5:14; 6:1; cp. Titus 2:5, 8); in part also by concern for naïve and uneducated Christian women being taken in by ascetic itinerant preachers with strange myths and high fees (4:1-3, 7; 5:13-15; cp. esp. 2 Tim 3:5-7; 4:3-4; Titus 1:10-14; 3:9-10).

When Eichenwald puts these injunctions on the same level as those against homosexual practice, he shows all the hermeneutical (i.e., interpretive) sensitivity of using a meat cleaver to deal with a pimple. Not even in the Pastoral Epistles are "uppity women" put in vice or offender lists and pegged for exclusion from the kingdom of God (unlike serial-unrepentant participants in homosexual behavior). While the Bible's proscription

against homosexual practice is unremittingly negative (pervasive, absolute, penalized to the maximum extent) even in relation to the cultural context, the Bible's view of women, taken as a whole, shows considerable openness for female liberation relative to that of some other cultures.

This openness takes many forms. The creation story in Gen 2:4b-3:24 relegates a husband's rule over his wife to the Fall (3:16). In Gen 1:26-28 male and female combined express God's image and both are called on to manage God's creation. Elsewhere in the OT, even within a broader patriarchal context significant women figures appear throughout Israel's history: for example, Miriam, Tamar, Rahab, prophetess/judge Deborah, Jael, Ruth, the prophetess Huldah, and Esther. Occasionally an inequitable old law is revised to provide greater parity between men and women, as with the law governing the release of slaves (cf. Exod 21:2-11 with Deut 15:12-18). Feminine metaphors are occasionally applied to Yahweh's actions toward his people Israel alongside dominant male metaphors (e.g., Num 11:12; Deut 32:11, 18; Ps 22:9-10; Isa 42:14; 49:14-15; 66:13).

In New Testament texts, there is an increased affirmation of women's roles. Jesus was known to have women followers, who also played an important part in the empty tomb stories (Luke 8:1-3; 23:55-24:11), and to have encouraged women to give priority to learning from him over their own domestic duties (Luke 10:38-42). Jesus healed women (e.g., Mark 1:29-31; 5:24-34, 35-43; 7:24-30) and praised them for exemplary acts (Mark

12:41-44; 14:3-9). He also revoked special male privileges with respect to divorce and polygyny and declared the taking of another wife to be an act of adultery, not just against another man, but against his own first wife (i.e., fidelity in marriage as a two-way street).

Paul continued this teaching on divorce and remarriage in his churches (1 Cor 7:10-11). Although he believed in a husband's authority over his wife, albeit conceived largely in terms of self-emptying service (cp. Eph 5:22-33), he also did much to undermine conventional, subordinate roles for women: laboring alongside numerous women co-workers (cf. Rom 16; Phil 4:2-3); insisting on the mutuality of conjugal rights (1 Cor 7:3-4); maintaining that there is "neither male and female" (Gal 3:28) in the new creation in Christ; and affirming women's prophetic roles, but in such a way that women did not need to become androgynes to be spiritual beings (1 Cor 11:3-16; contrast the spurious saying of Jesus in *Gospel of Thomas* 114: "Every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven"). Even as he interpreted Genesis 2-3 as establishing male headship, he could still add a "nevertheless" of interdependence: "Nevertheless, neither woman without man nor man without woman in the Lord. For just as the woman is from the man, so also the man is through the woman. And all things are from God" (1 Cor 11:11-12).

Hence, in the context of a relatively affirming posture toward women, Jesus and Paul nonetheless maintained vigorous opposition to homosexual practice. Paul's gesture toward female equality as regards

homosexual unions was not to excuse homosexual practice for both women and men but rather to make explicit the implications of the Levitical prohibition of male homosexual practice for prohibiting female homosexual practice as well (Rom 1:26). A better analogy to the Bible's prohibition of homosexual practice is its prohibition of incest of even an adult-consensual form: both strong prohibitions of a form of sexual immorality that can be conducted by consensual adults, involving too much embodied identity and not enough otherness. Note to Eichenwald: The best analogies share the most substantive points of correspondence with the thing to which they are being compared.

Comparing Homosexual Practice in Rom 1:26-27 to Criticizing the Obama Administration

Even more ridiculous is Eichenwald's claim that those who cite Paul's condemnation of homosexual practice in Rom 1:24-27 while criticizing the Obama administration are hypocrites. According to Eichenwald,

There is a much longer series of verses about how the righteous are supposed to behave toward people in government authority. It shows up in Romans 13:1-2.... So yes, there is one verse in Romans about homosexuality...and there are eight verses condemning those who criticize the government. In other words, all fundamentalist Christians who decry Obama have sinned as much as they believe gay people have.

The context makes clear that what Paul meant by “resisting” or “opposing” the government authorities was outright refusal to submit to any and all government laws, including the payment of taxes, which would have resulted in massive state persecution of the new Christian movement. (According to the Roman historian Tacitus, there was considerable public unrest in Rome in the mid-50s because of heavy and unfair indirect taxes that finally forced Nero to enact some reforms in 58.) Jesus’ remark about “rendering unto Caesar” makes a similar point; yet obviously Jesus said and did things (like cleansing the temple) that eventually got him crucified by the state (note also the martyrs of the early church). There is zero correlation between Paul’s concern in Rom 13:1-8 on the one hand and exercising one’s right in a democratic system to criticize bad government policies (while still paying taxes) on the other. The Old Testament witness shows Jews both endeavoring to be respectful of the foreign powers that ruled over them and, at times when the government became a major threat to religious practices, engaging in resistance of government orders.

In his attempts to draw analogies both with Paul’s injunction about submitting to government authorities in Rom 13:1-8 and with the treatment of women in 1 Tim 2:9-15, Eichenwald pathetically determines significance by counting the number of verses devoted to an issue.

In fact, while 1 Timothy has just one parenthetical clause that can be interpreted as being about homosexuality, it contains six verses on the shortcomings of women and

the limitations on what they are allowed to do.

... So yes, there is one verse in Romans about homosexuality [can’t Eichenwald even count without prejudice? 1:26-27 constitute two verses; and another two verses, 1:24-25, sets up the discussion] ...and there are eight verses condemning those who criticize the government. In other words, all fundamentalist Christians who decry Obama have sinned as much as they believe gay people have.

Eichenwald never stops to think that some issues receive *less* attention precisely because they are so beyond the pale of acceptability that talking about the issue at all is already a defeat; and/or because the incidence of violation or advocacy thereof is so negligible that it mentioning the offense is unnecessary. By way of contemporary example, I have never heard a pastor give a sermon on why parishioners shouldn’t have sex with close kin. Yet I have never drawn the conclusion that these pastors held some secret acceptance of incest. We would have no mention of incest in the New Testament were it not for the immoral relationship at Corinth between a man and his stepmother. Yet Paul’s description of incest in 1 Cor 5 leaves no doubt about how repugnant Paul viewed incest to be. Bestiality receives less attention than most other sexual offenses in the Bible. The reason for that has nothing to do with it being a matter of moral insignificance.

Not satisfied with the overreach to Rom 13:1-8, Eichenwald tries another. He points to the rest of the vice list in Rom 1:29-31 and claims that homosexual practice is no worse

than debating (which actually is not proscribed here), pride, disobedience of parents, and deceit. Predictably, Eichenwald leaves out the listing of murder in 1:29: Is homosexual practice as bad as murder? Paul is not saying that all these vices are equal in all respects. He is asserting that any sin can get one excluded from God's kingdom if personal merit, rather than faith in the atoning blood of Christ, is the means by which salvation is sought.

Comparing Homosexual Practice in 1 Cor 6:9 to Other Offenses in Context

With regard to the mention of "men who lie with a male" (Gk. *arsenokoítai/ἀρσενοκοῖται*) in 1 Cor 6:9 (the same term appearing in 1 Tim 1:10, cited above), Eichenwald charges "fundamentalists" with being hypocrites if they take other Christians to court or are greedy or lie. "All of these are declared as sins on par with homosexuality" (for the record: lying is not mentioned here). Yet the discussion of lawsuits among believers in 6:1-8 is limited to believers in the same congregation, where matters should be adjudicated internally within the community of faith, if adjudicated at all. The reference to the "greedy" (Gk. *pleonéktai/πλεονέκται*) does not have in mind anyone who ever experiences a greedy impulse (which would be all of us). It often connotes someone who exploits, defrauds, cheats, extorts, or generally takes advantage of another for personal gain, including unjust seizure of the property of others. It is not simply a desire

for a little more money. The reference to the "sexually immoral" (Gk. pl. *πόρνοι/πόρνοι*) includes the incestuous man in ch. 5 who is called a "sexually immoral person" (Gk. sg. *πόρνος/πόρνος*; 5:11). The list has to do with serial-unrepentant activity. Evangelicals would be hypocrites if they continued to oppose serial-unrepentant incest and adultery while approving homosexual practice.

Do Those Who Follow Paul's Lawfree Gospel Have to Give Up All Levitical Prohibitions?

Perhaps Eichenwald's greatest folly (not all follies are equal) is in arguing that anyone who adopts Paul's view that faith in Christ abrogates the Law of Moses must give up on the prohibitions of Leviticus against homosexual practice.

Orthodox Jews who follow Mosaic Law can use Leviticus to condemn homosexuality without being hypocrites. But fundamentalist Christians must choose: They can either follow Mosaic Law by keeping kosher, being circumcised, never wearing clothes made of two types of thread and the like. Or they can accept that finding salvation in the Resurrection of Christ means that Leviticus is off the table.... If [fundamentalists eager to condemn homosexuals or anyone else] accept the writings of Paul and believe all people are sinners, then salvation is found in belief in Christ and the Resurrection. For everyone. There are no exceptions in the Bible for sins that evangelicals really don't like.

Eichenwald exhibits here a gross distortion and impoverished understanding of Pauline theology and ethics. While Paul contended

that those who were in Christ were no longer under the Law's jurisdiction, he also maintained continuity in core moral standards since the God who gave the Law to Moses and the God who raised Jesus from the dead were one and the same God.

Christians, whose citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20), were not without law entirely but rather were under "the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 9:21). By way of analogy, an American who renounces U.S. citizenship and becomes a Canadian citizen and then commits a murder will not be prosecuted under American law. Yet he will be prosecuted because it just so happens that there is considerably continuity between American law and Canadian law on the matter of murder. Likewise, Christians who commit murder will not be prosecuted under the Mosaic law because he has been freed from that jurisdiction. Yet they will stand before the bar of God's judgment because in the jurisdiction of Christ murder remains sinful.

Eichenwald pretends that *every* command in the Law of Moses had relevance only for the particular circumstances of ancient Israel. Is Eichenwald not aware that Jesus' first and second greatest commandments are drawn from Deuteronomy and Leviticus respectively? Many commandments carried transcultural significance. This included continuity in basic categories of sexual ethics, where the demand was actually intensified by the teaching of Jesus.

Hence Paul vigorously retained the rejection of homosexual practice (does

Eichenwald not remember this from his own discussion of Rom 1:24-27, 1 Cor 6:9, and 1 Tim 1:10?), incest, adultery, and fornication given to him in the Old Testament, as well as Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage (and, implicitly, polygamy) predicated on a male-female foundation for all sexual activity. So when he expressed horror at the case of adult-consensual incest going on at Corinth he used a description of the behavior, "someone has (his) father's wife" drawn from the prohibitions of man-stepmother intercourse in OT law (1 Cor 5:1; cp. "(the) woman/wife of his/your father" in Deut 22:30; 27:20; Lev 18:8, 11; 20:11). We already noted that the term for "men who lie with a male," *arsenokoítai* (ἀρσενοκοῖται), was formulated from the prohibitions of male homosexual practice in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

Were Eichenwald to apply his absurd reasoning to other forms of sexual immorality besides homosexual practice, he would have to say that "fundamentalists" should likewise give up their "condemnation" of incest, adultery, and bestiality (to say nothing of murder, theft, and slander) and stop viewing such practices as threats to salvation. This is exactly what Paul did not do. Paul lambasted the Corinthian believers for not "mourning" over the potential exclusion from the kingdom of God of the incestuous man who "called himself a brother," demanded that they stop eating and fellowshiping with such a one until he repented, and warned that such persons will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 5; 6:9-10). An exasperated Paul posed the following rhetorical question to the Corinthians: "Is it not those inside the church

that you are to judge?” (5:12). Eichenwald answers with an emphatic “no” but the Greek sentence starts with an interrogative particle that presupposes a “yes” answer. Ironically, Eichenwald’s answer places him squarely with the deluded Corinthian believers, not with Paul.

In our first extant letter of Paul’s, 1 Thessalonians, we see that Paul’s first order of business after giving thanks for the faith of the Gentile believers amidst persecution was to remind them that continuance in sexual impurity was tantamount to rejecting the God who gave his Holy Spirit to them and would incur God’s vengeance (4:1-8). Paul made it a priority to remind his Gentile converts repeatedly that serial-unrepentant sexually immoral behavior on the part of self-professed Christians would mark them out for not inheriting the kingdom of God and eternal life. Sexually immoral persons should not deceive themselves into thinking that it was otherwise (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21 with 6:7-9; 2 Cor 12:21; Col 3:5; Eph 4:19; 5:3, 5). Faith for Paul was not a mere intellectual assent to the truth but a holistic life reorientation and transformation into a life lived for God. For Paul, self-professed converts who lived immoral lives were not in fact exhibiting justifying faith. Only those who “no longer live” but rather have Christ “live in” them, convinced that Christ loved them enough to hand himself over to death on their behalf, actually operate out of saving faith (Gal 2:19-20; cp. 5:).

In Rom 1:24 Paul characterized homosexual practice and other sexual offenses as

“impurity” or “uncleanness” (*akatharsía/ἀκαθαρσία*), a term that he used elsewhere in Romans only in 6:19, in direct address to the Roman believers. He reminded them that believers in Christ are *no longer* “slaves to impurity,” for to continue in such behavior was to engage in acts of which they should now be “ashamed” (echoing the shame language that dominates Rom 1:24-27 regarding homosexual practice). Such acts, he says, lead to death and the loss of eternal life (6:19-23; cp. 1:32). Indeed, Paul’s entire argument around the question “Why not sin?” since we are “under grace and not under the law” (6:15; cp. 6:1) culminates in 8:12-14 with the response: “If you continue to live in conformity to (the sinful desires operating in) the flesh you are going to die. But if by means of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For only those who are being *led* by the Spirit of God are children of God.” Thus, in Paul’s view, mouthing a few words of confession that Christ is Lord does not exempt Christians from leading a life consonant with that confession, nor even from the dire eternal consequences that would arise from failing to do so. For Paul the outcome for a *believer* who lives under the primary sway of sin in the flesh is no different from the outcome for an unbeliever who so lives. Both alike face the prospect of exclusion from God’s eternal rule.

Again in Romans 13, shortly *after* his discussion of submission to government authorities, Paul makes clear that sexual impurity is definitely *not* one of the matters of ethical indifference (Gk. *adiaphora*), like diet and calendar issues, that later in 14:1-15:13

Paul will warn believers against judging fellow believers for. Paul insists in 13:13-14 that, in view of the coming day of salvation and judgment, believers “lay aside works of darkness” such as “sexual misbehaviors and licentious acts” and thereby to “not be giving prior thought to the flesh for (gratifying its) desires.” The Greek word for “sexual misbehaviors” is *koítai* (κοίται), which literally means, “lyings” or “beds,” a term that obviously links up with *arsenokoítai* (ἀρσενokoίται), “men *lying* with a male,” in 1 Cor 6:9 as a particular instance of an immoral “lying.” The Greek word for “licentious acts” is *asélgēiai* (ἀσέλγειαι), which refers to a lack of self-restraint with respect to refraining from prohibited sexual behaviors. This takes us back to the discussion in Rom 6:19-22 where Paul insists that believers stop putting their bodily members at the disposal of the kind of “sexual impurity” cited in 1:24-27, which makes them slaves of sin and lacking in sexual self-restraint. If Paul had wanted his converts to stop passing judgment on fellow converts who were engaged in unrepentant sexual immorality then he would have been a monumental hypocrite, inasmuch as he himself regularly made such judgments.

In short, Eichenwald’s notion that Paul believed that faith in Christ meant no longer holding on to sexual purity standards like abstaining from homosexual practice, incest, adultery, bestiality, and fornication would have been of greatest surprise to Paul himself. Eichenwald is simply clueless about Pauline ethics and yet he mocks “fundamentalists” for their alleged ignorance.

When the One Who “Judges Not” Judges Most

Eichenwald’s final argument for why Christians should give up on their opposition to homosexual practice is all too predictable. He cites Jesus’ warning about judging others, the last refuge for hypocrites who specialize in pronouncing all sorts of harsh judgments on others. “Jesus cautioned his followers against judging others while ignoring their own sins. In fact, he had a specific word for people obsessed with the sins of others. He called them hypocrites.” He repeats this argument in the concluding section of his article entitled, “Judge Not.” “Jesus said, Don’t judge. He condemned those who pointed out the faults of others while ignoring their own. And he proclaimed, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.’” Ironically, Eichenwald is exceedingly judgmental of orthodox Christians throughout his article, even abusive.

Jesus did speak against judging others (e.g., Matt 7:1-5; parallel in Luke 6:37, 41-42). However, the context for such sayings makes it obvious that Jesus was not advocating that his followers cease making moral distinctions between good and bad behavior. The very next saying after Matt 7:1-5 is about not giving what is holy to dogs or throwing pearls before swine (7:6)—certainly a statement that presupposes the necessity of making judgments about immorality. The very section within which Matt 7:1-5 occurs, the Sermon on the Mount, closes just a few verses later

with a series of judgments about the disastrous fate of those who merely hear Jesus' words but do not do them: the narrow gate to life that few enter; the destruction of trees that don't bear good fruit; the "I never knew you" response to those who address him as Lord but don't do what he says; and the parable about building one's house on sand (7:13-27). The same Sermon opens with a series of antitheses that in essence state: You used to be able to get away with the following but I now say "No longer." Two of the six antitheses intensify (not soften) God's demand for sexual purity: adultery of the heart and divorce/remarriage. In between them appears a warning that it is better to cut off body parts that threaten one's downfall than for one's "whole body to be thrown into hell" (5:27-32).

It is a shame that Eichenwald never bothered to consider these things. Indeed, roughly half of all sayings of Jesus contain pronouncements of judgments (for a listing of Synoptic sayings not unique to Matthew, see pp. 6-12 of [this article](#)). I wonder whether Eichenwald ever stopped to think that the highest concentration of judgment sayings of Jesus in all the Gospels occurs in the very Gospel from which the "judge not" saying is usually cited. For example, teaching about church discipline of members who don't repent of their sin appears in Matt 18:15-20 (cp. Luke 17:3-4). Surely discipline requires making judgments about the wrongness of certain behaviors and then correcting the offenders?

It is no accident that Mark opens the narrative of Jesus' ministry with this saying of Jesus as a summary of his entire message: "The kingdom of God has come near: Repent and believe in the gospel" (1:15). Does Eichenwald want to charge Jesus with being "obsessed with the sins of others" insofar as he was always going around and calling people to repent of their sins? A case in point: Jesus 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)

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]).

The reference to the “evil generation” is also picked up in Mark 8:38, wherein Jesus refers to “this adulterous and sinful generation.” Judgment sayings are such a major part of Jesus’ teaching that it raises the question of whether Eichenwald has ever actually bothered to read the whole of the Gospels. If he has, then how could he be so blind as not to see? Jesus did reach out to offenders, in particular, sexual sinners and economic exploiters (i.e., the tax collectors who had a justly deserved reputation for extorting several times more than what was owed). Yet he did so in order to call them to the repentance that would make possible inheritance of the very kingdom that he proclaimed.

When Jesus’ anti-judgment saying is taken in context (something that Eichenwald manifestly does not do), it becomes quickly evident that his point was not to reject all judgment absolutely but rather to caution against judgment that (1) lacks self-inspection, (2) majors in minors, and (3) rejoices in the damnation of offenders instead of seeking recovery of the lost. Moreover, when Jesus lifted up as the first and second greatest commandments preeminent love for God and love for neighbor respectively, he was not urging people to dissolve the very foundational male-female matrix for sexual union on which he predicated his whole sexual ethics. As the themes of the Lord’s Prayer indicate, Jesus was rather calling

people to seek first God’s kingdom, to do the will of God, and to encourage others graciously to do the same.

It is not loving to affirm homosexual practice when it is so obvious (anatomically, physiologically, and even psychologically) that the appropriate sexual counterpart to a man is a woman and to a woman a man. It is not loving to encourage the self-dishonoring of the participants in a homosexual act who, in viewing a person of the same-sex as their “other half,” regard themselves as only half intact in relation to their own sex rather than in relation to the only other sex. It is not loving to further relationships where, owing to the absence of a true sexual complement, the extremes of their own sex are ratcheted up and the gaps left unfilled, resulting in disproportionately high rates of measurable harm regarding numbers of sex partners lifetime and sexually transmitted infections (both especially for homosexual males) and in relationships characterized by lower longevity and higher rates of mental health issues (both especially for homosexual females). It is not loving to disregard the will of God manifested in the overwhelming witness of Scripture for God’s intentional design of “male and female” sexual pairing. At least that is what Jesus thought. Since Eichenwald likes to criticize “fundamentalists,” evangelicals, and the mainstream orthodox for allegedly failing to heed the teaching of Jesus (which, he says, contains “the true sections of the New Testament”), he would do well to profit from his own advice.

Concluding Response

Although Eichenwald in a self-aggrandizing way characterized his article as “an attempt to save the Bible from the ignorance, hatred and bias that has been heaped upon it,” Eichenwald has rather contributed to that ignorance, hatred, and bias in a big way. While he is right in saying that Christians on the whole should take great care to understand “the book they consider to be the most important document in the world,” he is wrong in thinking that he has contributed to its accurate understanding. In stating that “the actual words of the Bible can’t be ignored just to line it up with what people *want* to believe,” he has unwittingly offered us a picture of how the Bible is all too often

misrepresented by those on the theological left who simply don’t like what it says.

One can only urge Eichenwald to put aside his ideological prejudices and let Jesus be Jesus, not some cardboard caricature of what he would like Jesus to be. In short, he can allow himself to be made in the image of Jesus rather than remaking Jesus in his own image.

That, Mr. Eichenwald, is a truly good place to start.

As for *Newsweek*, discard it and go for something with a bit less bias, say, the *National Enquirer*?