

# 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: [www.pts.edu/gagnonr.html](http://www.pts.edu/gagnonr.html). 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: [www.pts.edu/gagnonr.html](http://www.pts.edu/gagnonr.html). 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.*

### 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 there are no "absolute sexual precepts universally valid in every time and place." He bases this claim on the argument of his article: "only four of 20 biblical sex mores are still in place for Christians today." 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."

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

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(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). Readers wishing to shorten this section can skip or skim over the excursus. I would particularly highlight for readers the following from this discussion: Wink's misuse of the "Jesus" saying, "judge for yourselves what is right" (Luke 12:57) and of the saying from Augustine, "love God and do as you please" (pp. 8-10); and the sections on polygamy and pre-marital sex (pp. 15-18) and on divorce (pp. 18-22). The rebuttal of Wink's claim regarding Jesus and judgment occupies 10 pages (pp. 23-33), 6 of which constitute an excursus treating Synoptic sayings of Jesus on judgment (pp. 24-30). 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); and Wink's claim that he adopts the loving position on homosexual behavior (p. 34).

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.

## 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 weakness of Wink's overall case for homosexual behavior.

## 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? Recidivism rates 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:

- ***Am I trying to make Wink say the opposite?*** Wink alleges that “[Gagnon] tries to make me say the very opposite of what I have said” when in my book I say about his counting method: “One may half wonder why Wink does not take his logic full circle and disregard the other four ‘mores,’ particularly incest and bestiality.” Yet Wink himself goes on to affirm only two sentences later that there are no universally valid proscriptions for *any* type of sexual behavior. None. Zero. How can I be trying to make Wink say the opposite of what he is really saying?
- ***Applying Wink’s claim to biblical sexual proscriptions still in force.*** Let the reader be the judge. If there are no universally valid proscriptions for any kind of sexual intercourse, then—I repeat myself—there are no kinds of sexual intercourse that could be validly proscribed in all circumstances, including the four that Wink says we still follow (bestiality, incest, adultery, rape). So why wouldn’t Wink follow the logic of his “brave

new world” and open the door to some acceptable forms of hitherto unacceptable sexual behavior? After all, there are no “absolute sexual precepts universally valid in every time and place.” I challenge Wink to answer the following questions:

- When might a proscription of rape not be universally valid?
- Under what circumstances would sex with a pre-pubescent child be acceptable?
- Which occasions would make blessing a sexual union with one’s horse or dog an attractive option?
- When might God be pleased with a violation of the Decalogue commandment not to commit adultery?
- In what times or places would it now be good to institute marriage between a father and daughter or between two siblings?

One could extend the list of questions to include: prostitution, sadomasochistic sex and bondage, spouse swapping, “recreational sex,” and “open marriage.”

- ***A slippery slope of Wink’s own making.*** The above points are alone sufficient to demolish Wink’s “unanswerable” argument. Quite obviously there are proscriptions of certain types of sexual intercourse that carry universal validity. Indeed, even by Wink’s reckoning, if there are still four biblical “sexual mores” that we continue to accept as valid today, the most that Wink could claim is that some sex proscriptions are not universally valid while others may well be universally valid. Pro-homosex advocates charge pro-complementarity defenders (the rubric under which I prefer to place myself) with concocting a “slippery slope.” Yet the former themselves provide the grease with overarching arguments that, taken to their logical conclusion, leave the church sliding all over the slope from morality to immorality.
- ***Does Wink’s claim apply to non-sexual rules?*** One must also ask Wink whether he singles out only sexual rules as non-universal or whether he applies the same standard to non-sexual rules as well. If “yes” to the latter, then we could multiply the number of follow-up questions that we have for Wink: When is it acceptable to oppress the poor? Commit idolatry? Bear false witness against one’s neighbor? And so on. If “never”—that is, if Wink believes that some biblical non-sexual proscriptions are universally valid—then on what grounds can Wink justify the exclusion of all biblical sexual proscriptions from universal validity? What is it about sexual activity that alone among types of behavior excludes it from every kind of absolute

regulation?

- ***Wink's inconsistent application of Jesus' love commandment.*** If no absolute, universally valid moral proscriptions exist, then there can be no universally valid moral *prescriptions*. One cannot say that some things are always right if nothing is always wrong. In that event Wink cannot consistently sustain his use of “Jesus’ love commandment”—which he at any rate misapplies—as an absolute standard against which every sexual precept must be viewed as contingent.

Based on his reading of “Jesus’ love commandment”—actually Jesus refers to two such commandments and both are drawn from the Mosaic law—Wink contends that all forms of sexual behavior that are nonexploitative, non-domineering, “responsible, mutual, caring and loving” are to be allowed. By the same token all exploitative sexual behavior, such as adult-child sex, is for Wink forbidden. Yet he inconsistently tells us that the authors of Scripture, who certainly did not condone sex with pre-pubescent children, provide us with no universally valid and absolute sexual norm. If the biblical sexual “more” of not having sex with pre-pubescent children is not universally valid, how can he employ Jesus’ love commandment to prohibit all sex with pre-pubescent children? The same question can be asked of rape: are not all instances of rape inherently exploitative? If so, can we not say that the precepts against rape are universally valid? Wink can’t have it both ways. He can’t reasonably say that there are no universally valid sex proscriptions in the Bible and then apply the love commandment in ways that proscribe all types of some sexual behavior. So not even Wink himself applies consistently his own “unanswerable” claim that there are no “absolute sexual precepts universally valid in every time and place” (thankfully). The very idea of “Jesus’ love commandment” as an absolute standard against which all forms of sexual activity must be measured presupposes the absolute prohibition of various types of sexual behavior.

- ***Jesus' acceptance of universally valid sex standards.*** Since Wink frequently appeals to Jesus as the basis for his own views, it is fair game to point out that Jesus himself—to say nothing of Paul and all the rest of the authors of Scripture—firmly believed that there were from God universally valid and absolute proscriptions, including proscriptions related to sex issues. Certainly Jesus recognized that not all sex precepts in Scripture carried the same weight. This is clear enough from Jesus’ discussion of divorce in which he attributes Moses’ allowance

of divorce as a concession to human “hardness of heart.” Jesus overrode this allowance and did so not by appeal to another non-universal and non-absolute standard but by appeal to God’s original and perfect will for human sexual pairing established at creation (Mark 10:5-9). So, clearly, Jesus did not conclude from the fact of some non-universal and impermanent sex precepts in Scripture that all sex proscriptions in Scripture were non-universal and impermanent. Wink is entitled to draw such a conclusion, however illogical and untenable it may be. But he is not entitled to appeal to Jesus or any author of Scripture for his view or even to aver that he derived his view from wrestling with Scripture. In fact, Wink’s view at this point is a distinctly anti-Scripture view. In Wink’s understanding, apparently, God has no business prescribing and proscribing universally valid, absolute standards in sex ethics. Or at least God shouldn’t tell us about such standards in Scripture.

- ***Backpedaling on the claim that the Bible has no sex ethic?*** In his reply Wink backpedals the astounding remark that he makes in both his article and review that “the Bible has no sex ethic.” He now says: “*my distinction is not between a sex ethic and sex mores, but between sex mores, which change from time to time in every society, and a communal love ethic, which we must apply to whatever sexual mores are current*” (my emphasis). However, the dichotomy that he makes here is a false one. Again, let the reader be the judge. He clearly states that the Bible has no sex ethic but only sex mores. How is that not a distinction between “sex ethic” and “sex mores”? Obviously he is making a distinction here, alleging that the Bible has one and not the other. If that is not a distinction, what then is a distinction? Sure, he also makes another distinction between sex mores and a communal love ethic. The latter distinction does not cancel out the former distinction but presumes it. Consequently, Wink’s denial can only be assessed as nonsensical. Indeed, he maintains the distinction when he states categorically in his reply that the Bible does not contain any sex rules that are universally valid and absolute; that is, it does not contain a distinctive sex ethic.

Perhaps Wink is now a little embarrassed by his claim that the Bible has no sex ethic. He certainly does not attempt a response to my critique of this claim. I simply reiterate point 4 of my response: Jesus’ limitation of lifetime sex partners to one cannot be deduced solely from a communal love commandment that requires us to love all people. It requires a distinctive sex ethic, as does his acceptance of Scripture’s exclusion of sexual activity between close blood relations, humans and

animals, adults and pre-pubescent children, and paying customers and prostitutes. Nor can we claim that the views of Jesus here, as with Scripture generally, were held by Jesus to be mere sex mores as distinct from a sex ethic. Jesus did not view these standards against forbidden sexual behaviors as non-universal, ever-changing “unreflective customs.” He did not think that in the areas of incest, bestiality, adultery, adult-child sex, and prostitution one needed to take into account individual motivation and special circumstances and accordingly make exceptions. Nor do we.

- ***On the inadequacy of Wink’s tests for valid sex relationships.*** In response to my argument that Wink’s constricted tests for valid sexual relationships would not permit us to deny categorically any form of consensual relationship, Wink counters:

What has become of the community of accountability? Is the church likely to regard such behavior as upbuilding? And if the community were to lapse into promiscuity, would it not come under the kind of censure that Paul had to exercise in Corinth? I believe that the Holy Spirit in the community of believers can lead us to make responsible decisions.

It is surely ironic that the one example from Scripture that Wink points to as proof that his tests for a valid sexual relationship are sufficient proves the precise opposite. The primary issue in 1 Corinthians 5-6 to which Wink refers does not have to do with promiscuity. It has to do with an incestuous union, a relationship between a man and his stepmother. There is no indication in Paul’s remarks that the relationship was promiscuous, exploitative, non-mutual, or non-loving. The proscription against incest admits of no exceptions based on individual motivation or special circumstances. It rightly takes no account of whether the relationship is “responsible, mutual, caring and loving.” There may be some fuzziness in Scripture about the precise boundaries of incest; specifically, how close the blood relation—or, as here, kin through the legal mechanism of covenant—must be in order to be categorized as a case of incest. Nevertheless, there is no ambiguity about the fact that incest *per se* is to be forbidden, irrespective of individual motives or circumstances. Moreover, there is general agreement in Scripture about a core set of relationships that would constitute incest. Incest is wrong because, as Leviticus 18 and 20 state, it is “sex with one’s own flesh,” sex with someone who is too much of a familial same—just as same-sex intercourse is wrong because it sex with someone who is too

much of a sexual same. As a core value of Scripture, pervasively and strongly and absolutely proscribed, Paul did not need a specific Jesus saying to know what Jesus’ view of the matter was. He simply asserted that the incestuous man be disciplined “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor 5:3-5).

Now what became of “the community of accountability” at Corinth? Put simply, it failed. The Corinthians, like Wink, believed “that the Holy Spirit in their community of believers could lead them to make responsible decisions.” In fact, some at Corinth believed that Paul was lacking in spiritual discernment. The Corinthians believed that they relied heavily on the Holy Spirit. They simply deceived themselves. Wink asks: “And if the community were to lapse into promiscuity [read more accurately: sexual immorality], would it not come under the kind of censure that Paul had to exercise in Corinth?” No, not if one adopted Wink’s understanding of the Bible as containing only sexual mores. And how would the censure of Paul be exercised today? Precisely by paying heed to Paul’s words about sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 5-6 and elsewhere—words which rule out categorically all forms of incest, same-sex intercourse, adultery, and prostitution. Since, however, Wink appears to give little weight to a number of Pauline views on sex, it is difficult to see how a community adopting Wink’s views would “come under the kind of censure that Paul had to exercise at Corinth.”

- ***On Wink’s skewed definition of promiscuity.*** Remember, too, that it is Wink who says in his article: “We might address younger teens, not with laws and commandments whose violation is a sin, but rather with the sad experiences of so many of our own children who find *too much* early sexual intimacy overwhelming” (my emphasis). That’s right, we would not want our younger teens having “too much early sexual intimacy”—God forbid they be overwhelmed. And certainly we wouldn’t want to refer to sexual intercourse outside of marriage as sin—experimenting responsibly with a moderate number of sex partners in one’s early teens is perfectly acceptable. Also, let’s get rid of the whole notion of laws and commandments. Paul didn’t know what he was talking about when he told the Corinthians that what matters is “keeping the commandments of God” (1 Cor 7:19); or when he exhorted Christians to be subject to the law of the Spirit (Rom 8:2) or the law of Christ (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2). Forget about Jesus who, unlike Paul, never even spoke of an abrogation of the Mosaic law but at most of a prioritizing of its core values without leaving other commands undone (Matt 23:23 par.

Luke 11:42; cf. Mark 10:17, 21); and who also in many areas, including sex, intensified the law's ethical demands. So Wink's advice on sex is what passes for a Christian stance against promiscuity? This is a faithful "modulation" of the teaching of Jesus and Paul, both of whom bucked trends in their own culture to limit the number of sex partners lifetime to one? God help the church.

- **Who is missing the key point about the divorce analogy?** Wink claims that I "miss the key point" about Wink's appeal to the divorce analogy. Both Paul and Matthew, Wink correctly contends, moderated Jesus' categorical prohibition of divorce. Wink asks: "If Gagnon sanctions this modulation . . . , why shouldn't we today feel authorized . . . to 'judge for yourselves what is right' (Luke 12:57)?" The answer should be obvious, and yet it is not the answer Wink expects: because the analogy doesn't justify a complete overhaul of a pervasive, absolute, and strong core proscription in Scripture. It's as simple as that. Paul and Matthew tinker with Jesus' prohibition of divorce. They don't overhaul it. They don't say—which is what Wink and others advocate for homosexual unions—we should celebrate divorce and provide cultural incentives for people to perpetuate a cycle of divorce and remarriage. Divorce is still a sin. Paul allows for an exception in the case of a marriage to a person who does not believe in the God of Israel and of Jesus Christ. But he does so only in circumstances where the unbelieving spouse *insists* on leaving. The believer is emphatically not to initiate divorce against an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:12-14, 16). As for "Matthew," he simply reasons from Jesus' description of remarriage after divorce as adultery that a spouse who has engaged in adultery cannot be made an adulterer; and that adultery is already a betrayal of a marital bond (Matt 5:31-32; 19:9). Both Matthew and Paul, in the end, maintain strongly Jesus' radical opposition to divorce over against a broader cultural environment that is much more permissive. Consequently, there isn't present here the kind of warrant for radical deviation from a core value of Scripture that Wink needs in order to justify his stance toward homosexual unions. I doubt if anyone else would characterize the program of pro-homosex advocates like Wink as a mere "modulation" of Scripture's stance on same-sex intercourse. It is Wink who misses this key point.
- **Bad Prooftexting I: "Judge for yourselves what is right."** Wink relies heavily on two "prooftexts," one of which (Luke 12:57) he cites in his article, review, and reply, along with three times in his recent book, *The Human Being* (Fortress); the other of which (from Augustine) he cites in the review and reply.

His applications of these sayings are textbook examples of how not to appeal to traditional materials.

Luke 12:57 says: "And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?" Wink applies this saying to mean: Jesus "authorized" his followers to overturn core values of Scripture "in the light of new knowledge and the prompting of the Holy Spirit" (so his reply). The text provides absolutely no support for such a conclusion.

First, there is widespread consensus among scholars that this singly attested saying in Luke is a transitional verse created by Luke himself to introduce a "Q" saying about settling with one's accuser before going to court (Luke 12:58-59 par. Matt 5:25-26). It is perhaps ironic that as the alleged "conservative" I have to point this out to Wink. Why is the recognition of Lukan redaction important? Because the meaning of the saying then has to be set squarely within the context of Lukan theology, none of which supports Wink's application.

Second, even more ironic is that the point of the saying runs completely counter to Wink's own views about Jesus and judgment. For Luke takes the following Q saying in a parabolic sense, probably rightly; namely, that Jesus' hearers need to settle accounts with God now (i.e., repent) before the Day of Judgment arrives and makes it too late to mend one's ways. That this is so is evident from the context (12:1-13:9), which stresses the necessity of getting one's priorities straight and life right in view of God's impending judgment: fearing God who can not only kill the body but cast into hell (12:4-7); not denying Jesus lest one be denied at the judgment (12:8-9); not committing the unforgivable blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (12:10); a series of sayings about judgment for those who do not store up treasures in the life to come (12:13-34); a series of sayings about being prepared in view of the unpredictable coming of the "master" at any moment (12:35-56); and two sayings on the need to repent and bear fruit, else one will be destroyed at the judgment (13:1-9). Set within this context, Luke apparently means in 12:57: "Why don't you realize that now is the time to do everything that you can to get your life right with God, before your life is taken from you and you stand before the judgment seat of God? Can't you see that 'the present time' is the hour of decision (12:54-56)? Don't you know that unless you repent, you will perish (13:1-5)? Don't you realize that the fig tree is only being given a short time more to bear fruit or face being cut down (13:6-9)?"



Remember, Wink is the same person who finds “reprehensible” the whole idea of God excluding anyone from his presence. So what does Wink do? He selects as his key “Jesus proof text” for authorizing radical disavowals of Scripture’s core sexual values a verse that not only says nothing of the sort but also urges readers to recognize the need to repent lest they incur the kind of cataclysmic judgment from God that Wink finds utterly reprehensible to believe in. For Luke this repentance involves, among other things, conforming one’s life to the core values of Scripture (see Luke 16:14-31, especially 16:16-18, 29-31), the very thing that Wink is advocating we not do. The reckless disregard with which Wink rips this verse out of its context and applies it to mean the opposite of what it actually says provides a classic example of irresponsible hermeneutics.

- **Bad Proof texting II: “Love God and do as you please.”** The other proof text that Wink loves to cite is from Augustine: “Apparently Gagnon does not approve of Augustine’s injunction, ‘Love God and do as you please,’ but I regard it as one of the most inspired ethical statements ever penned.” I approve of the injunction—as Augustine understood it, not as Wink misappropriates it. This is another example of Wink taking a text out of context and grossly distorting its meaning. I wonder if Wink simply pulled the quote from something like Fletcher’s *Situation Ethics*, or some other secondary source, and never bothered to study the original context for the quote that he loves so much.

The saying is taken from Augustine’s *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, specifically 7.8. It reads in Latin: *Dilige, et quod vis fac* (“Love, and what you want do”). In context, the implied object of the love may be “one another” or “your neighbor” rather than “God.” Regardless, Wink’s interpretation stands in serious tension with Augustine’s application of his own words. Wink applies the words to support his contention that the Bible has no sex ethic and no universally valid sex precept but only a communal love ethic. Wink makes this application within a broader context that calls for tolerance and finds Scripture’s restriction of sex to marriage between a man and a woman to be cruel. Augustine, for his part, gives no hint that he understands his own words as a denial of universally valid moral precepts. Rather, Augustine formulates the saying to show that love cannot be watered down to mean gentleness, permissiveness, and tolerance. A father disciplines rigorously his child, while a “boy-stealer” caresses a boy. Which expresses love? The one who disciplines (7.8). So if you act out of love you can do what you want—meaning that you can implement strong disciplinary

measures for the purpose of turning someone away from sinful behavior. Conversely, if one does not act in love, actions that to the eye seem loving would in fact be cruel.

If any of you perhaps wish to maintain love, brethren, above all things do not imagine it to be an abject and sluggish thing; nor that love is to be preserved by a sort of gentleness, nay not gentleness, but tameness and listlessness. Not so is it preserved. Do not imagine that . . . you then love your son when you do not give him discipline, or that you then love your neighbor when you do not rebuke him. This is not love, but mere feebleness. Let love be fervent to correct, to amend. . . . Love not in the person his error, but the person; for the person God made, the error the person himself made. (7.11; *NPNF*, slightly modified)

There is a certain irony here: Wink argues in his review that restricting sex to heterosexual marriage is necessarily a “cruel abuse of religious power.” Yet a proper application of Augustine’s saying would suggest the opposite conclusion; namely, that this restriction, however hard it may seem to some, is an act of love. How so? Because it has in view things better than the mere satisfaction of sinful erotic impulses: conformity to God’s life-giving will, transformation into the image of Christ by taking up one’s cross, and, ultimately, inheritance of the kingdom of God. This is at least the perspective taken by Jesus and Scripture generally, which Augustine certainly shared. For Augustine “incorruption of chastity” fell under the rubric of love (8.1). To be sure, any restriction or discipline can be cruel if it is not motivated by love and correction. Thus: “Even if you are severe at any time, let it be because of love, for correction” (7.11). By the same token, tolerance of behavior that Scripture pervasively deems egregious sin is by definition unloving. God “loved the unrighteous, but he did away with the unrighteousness . . . [and] did not gather them together into (or: for) unrighteousness” (7.7). In another context Augustine states: “The one who loves God loves his precepts” (10.3). So to “love and do what you want” means, in Augustine’s view, that it is entirely within the purview of love to apply strong measures to persons when the intent is correction and the goal is salvation. Undoubtedly, Augustine would have been appalled by Wink’s reverse application of the saying in order to excuse behavior that Scripture abhors.

Reading on in the same work we can see an additional irony. Wink finds the notion of a God who might exclude anyone from his kingdom, on any grounds, to be utterly “reprehensible.” What

would Augustine have said about this? We have an answer in Augustine's comments on 1 John 4:17: "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment." Augustine refers to people "who do not believe in a day of judgment; these cannot have boldness in a day which they do not believe will come." However, persons who correct themselves, who put to death sinful desires and deeds, including sexual "uncleanness" (Col 3:5), learn to desire what they once feared: the day of judgment (9.2). This is a message from Augustine that Wink should consider adding to his repertoire.

There is a third irony: Wink himself does not take the approach that those who regard same-sex intercourse as sinful can "do as they please"—which in Augustine's understanding would include the application of ecclesiastical discipline and correction. In fact, Wink goes ballistic over such thinking, no matter how motivated by love. Based on Wink's emotional response to my book, it is evident that he (mis)applies "do as one pleases" only to himself and to those who agree with him.

- ***Paul against Wink on Christian Freedom.*** In his article Wink asserts: "The last thing Paul would want is for people to respond to his ethical advice as a new law engraved on tablets of stone" (p. 46). For Paul, however, the main problem with the "letter" or written text of the law was its incapacity to empower moral behavior, not the fact that it put forward universally binding norms (Rom 7:5-8:4). Wink fails to grasp that Paul continued to subscribe to the notion of commandments and universally valid standards of behavior. Wink overlooks the fact that Paul believed in a binding "law of Christ" and "law of the Spirit of life," engraved on the human heart, whose broad categories of sexual immorality were essentially the same as those in the Old Covenant. How does God effect the freedom of Christians from the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law over "adamic" fleshly existence? According to Paul, God does so not only by means of Christ's atoning death but also by means of Spirit's work in the lives of believers, through faith. Faith in Pauline usage means an unmeritorious "yes" to God and "no" to self. It means dying to self and letting the Spirit reign in oneself. So long as one's primary identity is found "in the flesh," in the old creation, rather than "in the Spirit," one's citizenship remains on earth, subject to the law's condemning jurisdiction. There is no sin-transfer to Christ apart from self-transfer to Christ, in Paul's view. The last thing Paul would want is for believers to respond to his proclamation of freedom in Christ with the notion that there are no universally valid sex precepts, or with a relaxed attitude toward

transgressions of core sex standards (Gal 5:13-6:10). [Note: For further discussion of the interrelationship of grace and law in Pauline thought, see point four in my essay, "The Authority of Scripture in the 'Homosex' Debate," also found at [www.pts.edu/gagnonr.html](http://www.pts.edu/gagnonr.html).]

Paul in 1 Cor 6:12-20 told the Corinthians that the slogan "all things are within my authority and power" may apply to matters of indifference such as food; but the slogan did not apply to sex, at least not without serious qualification. "The body is not for *porneia* (sexual immorality) but for the Lord." The believers at Corinth claimed that they loved God and, accordingly, did as they pleased: they boasted in their ability to accept a union that Scripture categorized as incestuous (1 Cor 5:1-8). Paul, however, regarded Scripture's core sex standards as binding. That Paul had Scripture in mind is evident in the phrase "his father's wife" (Deut 22:30; Lev 18:7-8); and in the fact that the vice list in 1 Cor 5:11 was constructed largely on the basis of the contexts for the fivefold Deuteronomic refrain, "Drive out the wicked person from among yourselves" (quoted in 1 Cor 5:13). Paul could assert that by the standards of Scripture the Corinthians were not acting in conformity with a love for God when they condoned a case of adult consensual incest, irrespective of what the Corinthians claimed they were doing. Paul would have asserted the same thing had the Corinthians affirmed a case of adult consensual homosexual. So should we.

In Paul's view, Christians did have some flexibility in discerning the will of God. Scripture cannot cover every circumstance of life that a believer may encounter. Thus Paul could pray that believers' "love might abound still more and more in a deeper knowledge and with all insight, with a view to [their] determining what matters, in order that [they] might be pure and blameless in preparation for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness" (Phil 1:9-11; similarly, Phlm 6). Likewise, Paul regarded the "renewal of the mind" as essential to "determining what the will of God is" (Rom 12:2). Moreover, believers have freedom in matters of indifference—as with the diet and calendar concerns in Rom 14:1-15:13. However, in Paul's view, believers had no freedom or flexibility to transgress core biblical standards, including those for sexual behavior. If Christians think that the Spirit is telling them that it is okay, contrary to Scripture, to engage in incest, same-sex intercourse, bestiality, adultery, premarital sex, or commercial sexual activity, they are wrong. They have mistaken the impulses of the flesh for the urgings of the Spirit. Of course, they can receive God's

forgiveness, but only in connection with genuine repentance.

- ***Sloppy hermeneutics: the death penalty argument.*** Further evidence of Wink's sloppy hermeneutical method is the following contention in his article: "anyone who wishes to base his or her beliefs on the witness of the Old Testament must be completely consistent and demand the death penalty for everyone who performs homosexual acts." Most Christians recognize that the movement from old covenant to new covenant represents a movement from a theocratic state in this age to the proclamation of a transcendent kingdom of God in the age to come. In such a movement, the assumption of a ready transfer of all civil penalties into the new covenant is out of place. At the same time it is irresponsible to argue, as Wink apparently does, that the Old Testament provides us with no insight into God's views on any matter to which a now disused civil penalty was attached.

Adultery is a classic example. The Old Testament regards adultery as a capital offense; our civil jurisprudence does not. By Wink's reasoning, then, we cannot base any part of our theological views about adultery on anything that the Old Testament says. Who would argue this? Jesus certainly based his strong views on adultery at least in part on the Hebrew Bible. Yet, if we are to give any credence to the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 7:53-8:11, Jesus did not demand the death penalty for adultery. Why did Jesus skirt the death penalty? Was it because he did not regard adultery to be a severe infraction of God's will? Obviously not. In fact, Jesus expanded and deepened the injunction against adultery and warned people of the risk of being sent to hell for serial unrepentant acts of sexual immorality. No, Jesus suspended the imposition of the law's capital penalty in the hope of encouraging repentance (dead people don't repent), thereby averting a fate much worse on the Day of the Lord. By analogy one can take the same stance toward same-sex intercourse: even though we do not apply the death penalty, the strong Old Testament censure of male-male intercourse is a good indication of God's abhorrence of such behavior.

- ***Who is dodging the hermeneutical task?*** Wink tries to cast me as someone who holds to "a putative orthodoxy that dodges the hermeneutical task." If I were trying to "dodge the hermeneutical task," why would I have devoted 150 pages of my book, and numerous other pages, to just such a task? Why does he think I gave my book the subtitle *Texts and Hermeneutics*? Given the fact that Wink has done significantly less exploration of the hermeneutical

issues surrounding homosexuality than I have, his charge that I "dodge the hermeneutical task" while he engages in it is ludicrous. He can only make such an assertion on the erroneous assumption that someone who engages in the hermeneutical task must ultimately arrive at a position antithetical to Scripture's core values. Conversely, arriving at a position antithetical to Scripture's core values does not prove that one has engaged in the hermeneutical task of appropriating Scripture for a contemporary context; in fact, it more likely means the opposite. The reality is that Wink provides little or no counterevidence to a host of hermeneutical arguments that I make (as noted in II. above). If Wink thinks he understands the hermeneutical aspect of this issue so much better than I, then I have an offer that is sure to give him pleasure. Anytime Wink wants to debate or dialogue with me in a fair and civil forum the hermeneutical issues surrounding the acceptance of homosexual behavior by the church—biblical, historical, theological, or social-scientific aspects—I would be happy to oblige. We can tape it and circulate it around the churches.

- ***The necessity of determining the closest sex analogues.*** Wink writes as if the notion of some development in sexual standards in the lengthy period over which Scripture was written is a radically new concept. To argue that there have been no changes would not only be stupid but patently unbiblical (as the example of Jesus on divorce indicates). I certainly acknowledge and work with this obvious point throughout my book (see, for example, my discussion of the authority of Levitical law on pp. 120-22; my treatment of the image of women in Judges 19-21 on pp. 97-100; and my handling of chauvinism in biblical texts on pp. 140-41, 301-302 *passim*). Wink seems to be tone deaf to my point, for he has yet to respond to it. The issue is not whether there has been any change in sexual standards but whether the kinds of changes we do see warrant the radical revision of Scripture's posture toward all same-sex intercourse. What Wink has failed to do is develop any set of workable principles for evaluating whether the church has ever overturned a Scriptural value of comparable content and magnitude. This is precisely what I have developed and which Wink repeatedly ignores: (1) a form of sexual intercourse that is (2) proscribed (3) by both Testaments and (4) pervasively within each Testament, at least implicitly, and proscribed (5) severely and (6) absolutely, with (7) the proscribed intercourse making sense. Not a single one of Wink's alleged 16 sexual mores that we now disagree with passes muster under these principles. What sexual standards do pass muster? The ones that Wink says

“virtually all modern readers would agree with the Bible in rejecting: incest, rape, adultery, intercourse with animals.” As I noted in my response to Wink, the proscription of incest constitutes the closest analogue to the proscription of same-sex intercourse in terms of both content (sex with someone who is too much of a same or like) and magnitude (intercourse that is proscribed absolutely, pervasively, and strongly)—a point that Wink, incidentally, does not contest in his reply.

There remains only the task of assessing how good of an analogy to the Bible’s proscription of same-sex intercourse is each of the 16 defunct sexual mores pinpointed by Wink. The assessment is twelve pages long, three-quarters of which is devoted to discussing Levirate marriage, the proscription of intercourse during menstruation, polygamy, and especially divorce. Readers wishing to skip over this material can move directly to section IV.

#### *Excursus: The Weakness of Wink’s List of 16 Defunct Biblical Sexual Mores*

A scan of the elements listed in Wink’s list of 16 defunct biblical sex mores shows how weak are the analogies to the proscription of same-sex intercourse in the Bible. Wink adopts a “spray method”: everything that has anything to do with sex in the Bible, so long as it differs from current practice, is thrown into the mix with absolutely no care for delineating between strong and weak analogues.

- In the case of (1) *prostitution*, Wink simply misreads the data: there is no endorsement of prostitution in the Old Testament (neither the story of Tamar nor the story of Rahab condone prostitution), to say nothing of the strong condemnation of prostitution in the New Testament. Prostitution actually belongs to the list of proscribed sexual activities in the Bible that we maintain today.
- Many alleged analogues on the list are just plain silly such as (2) *the reluctance to name sexual organs* or (3) *the special concerns about public nudity* expressed by some biblical authors. Modesty in sexual expression remains a contemporary Christian virtue and the graphic sexual character of many biblical texts still has the power to make us blush. As a side note, Ham in Gen 9:20-27 is not cursed merely for “seeing” his father’s nakedness any more than the prohibition in Lev 20:17 against a man “seeing” his sister’s nakedness refers merely to sight (cf. the parallel phrase “uncover the nakedness of” in Lev 18:9 and “lie with” in 20:11-20). Ham is cursed for having sex with his father (see the discussion in my book on pp. 63-70).

Another specious analogy is (4) the OT view that *contact with semen or menstrual blood renders one unclean*. Even in the Old Testament, such contact was not in and of itself sinful—except in the case sex during menstruation, which Wink lists separately and will be treated below. Another obvious point is that ritual uncleanness of this sort was treated as passé already by NT authors.

As regards (5) *celibacy*, while there is generally a strong expectation of marriage in the Old Testament (with exceptions), there is neither an explicit proscription against nor penalty imposed for celibacy. The New Testament witness is indeed more affirming of celibacy but is so in view of the urgency of the eschatological moment and the pragmatic consideration of having greater freedom in service to God. There is no radical overhauling of a pointed Old Testament proscription and what shift there is, manifested already in the New Testament, exists partially as a result of the change of covenantal dispensations: the shift to Gentile mission and conversion makes physical procreation less vital for the preservation of God’s people.

The concern about (6) *exogamy* (marriage to non-Israelites) in the Old Testament, especially in the post-exilic period, also shifts in the new covenant dispensation with the new program of God for active mission to Gentiles. Again, this shift is firmly ensconced already in the New Testament. In addition, the concern for exogamy is in the first instance a concern about exclusive religious allegiance to the God of Israel; a strong reservation about marriage to unbelievers continues in the New Testament (1 Cor 7:12-16; 2 Cor 6:14-18). There are also plenty of positive instances of marriages to Gentile women in the Old Testament, of which the story of Ruth is the prime example.

- Wink’s listing of (7) the “*treatment of women as property*” is also a bad analogy to the Bible’s proscription of same-sex intercourse, for many reasons. (a) This is not a proscription of a type of sexual intercourse. (b) There is no biblical proscription against the obverse. (c) “Property” has to be seriously qualified in the same way that treatment of children as property in the Old Testament has to be qualified (i.e., there are numerous ways in which their treatment differs from the treatment of inanimate property or animals). (d) There are many examples of a more liberating dynamic to women within the Bible itself, particularly the New Testament but also in the Old (e.g., beginning with the Yahwist’s attribution of a husband’s rule over his wife to the fall rather than to pre-fall structures [Gen 3:16]). (e) The biblical view of women looks good in comparison to the broader

cultural environments out of which this view emerged. Finally, (f) we do not in Christian circles today do away entirely with a sense of belongingness and obligation in marriage; rather we equalize it mutually between husband and wife in a manner already foreshadowed in 1 Cor 7:2-5 and other texts.

- (8) **Masturbation** is another weak analogy. (a) There is nothing about masturbation in the Old Testament (the story about Onan “spilling his semen” in Gen 38:8-10 is not about masturbation) so its degree of significance is highly questionable. (b) The one who broadens the law’s sphere to include “adultery of the heart” is none other than Jesus (Matt 5:27-28), certainly relevant to the issue of masturbation. Jesus’ reference to the cutting off of the hand in Matt 5:30 (cf. Mark 9:43) *may* have to do with masturbation, based on later rabbinic parallels. Contemporary ecclesiastical approval of masturbation, then, would be inappropriate. (c) Consistent with this understanding is the fact there is no “masturbation lobby” in the church today advocating that we should celebrate masturbation as part of a broad diversity of sexual expression that God allegedly gives us in Christ. (d) The church’s response to masturbation is of one piece with its response to “adultery (or fornication) of the heart”: the church recognizes it as an ongoing problem—like any attempt to deal with sin in one’s thought life. The church does not encourage it or endorse it. However, the fact that it is normally done in private without any direct involvement of, knowledge by, or impact on another does not make it a suitable issue for church discipline. (e) Most Christians (including Wink, I suppose) rightly recognize that, so far as church action is concerned, there is a significant difference between the public effects of someone committing concrete acts of adultery with other persons and the public effects of someone stimulating him- or herself through mental fantasies.
- Wink lists (9) **very early marriage**, especially among girls, as another analogue. It is questionable how widespread this practice may have been in ancient Israel (and Wink supplies no evidence). I suspect it was not widely practiced in early Christian circles, if at all. Regardless, in ancient cultures a significantly shorter lifespan and a significantly higher infant mortality rate perhaps necessitated some compromises in minimum age requirements for marriage in order to increase the chances for childbearing. Most importantly, since the Bible nowhere mandates marriage at an early age, we do not override any strong biblical proscription when we prohibit marriage to those under the ages of 16, 17, or 18. Even in our own culture we would have to admit that these are not

“magic numbers”: within any given culture some people above the minimum age limit may exhibit less maturity than some a few years below that age limit. Different social mechanisms across cultures, ancient and modern, can also affect maturity levels. For example, the minimum age to marry set in our culture is partly conditioned by a relatively lengthy period of schooling. Furthermore, there is no evidence that sexual relationships with pre-pubescent girls were ever allowed in ancient Israel or early Christianity—one more element that Wink could add to a list of biblical sexual mores that we would agree in rejecting.

- (10) **Birth control** is not comparable to same-sex intercourse. There are no pointed prohibitions of birth control in the Bible, let alone any of a severe, pervasive, and absolute nature. Some would construe the creation command to be fruitful and multiply as necessarily precluding all birth control but this is not a necessary inference. Scripture does not forbid sex with infertile spouses and in various places celebrates sexual pleasure in marriage in its own right. There is considerably more ambiguity concerning the Bible’s posture on this issue than on same-sex intercourse. The degree of abhorrence expressed for same-sex intercourse is a world away.

The discussion of the remaining elements in Wink’s list of 16 defunct biblical sex mores requires somewhat more detailed treatment.

- (11) What of **Levirate marriage**—the obligation to impregnate a deceased brother’s childless wife so that his inheritance rights might be maintained (Deut 25:5-10; cf. Gen 38:8-14; Ruth 2:20; 3:9-13; 4:1-12)? Although not as far-fetched an analogy as the previous nine mores discussed, it too cannot be considered a close parallel to Scripture’s proscription of same-sex intercourse.
  - a. This is a prescription, not a proscription. Proscriptions as a rule are less demanding than positive prescriptions and therefore more doable (or, better, “non-doable”) and fundamental. Sins of commission are normally more grave than sins of omission.
  - b. The severity of the civil penalty for non-compliance in Israel’s theocracy (public humiliation) does not approach the severity of the penalty for engaging in same-sex intercourse, adultery, incest, or bestiality.
  - c. Because this regulation is primarily designed to protect patrimony within the theocratic state of Israel, and indeed the property rights of the husband, it is not surprising that no New Testament author calls for its enforcement. There is no

- reference to a violation of this rule in NT vice lists, or even (to my knowledge) in vice lists in early Jewish and rabbinic texts; nor is there reference to violation of this rule as a prime indicator of human depravity. The NT vision of inheriting the kingdom of God is not about maintaining property rights in this world-age. This is precisely the kind of OT sex precept that one would expect to pass away with the change of covenantal dispensations. So the silence of the New Testament is not likely to point to a universally presumed adherence to this command.
- d. Although a social justice component on behalf of the dead man's childless wife comes across in the Tamar episode, the Deuteronomic legislation actually limits the wife's choices by prohibiting the wife from marrying "outside the family to a stranger" (Deut 25:5). The dead man's wife is arguably more obligated than the dead man's brother, at least in some circumstances.
  - e. The silence of the NT on the prescription of Levirate marriage has to be qualified somewhat since reference is made to the practice in a snide question about the resurrection put to Jesus by the Sadducees (Mark 12:18-23). Wink states: "Jesus mentions this custom without criticism." However, that Jesus would have had much vested interest in the strict enforcement of this prescription is not likely given the story in Luke 12:13-21. There someone asks Jesus to help him in securing his family inheritance, only to have Jesus rebuke the man for his greed and this-worldly interests. Wink himself admits that by Jesus' day the practice had fallen into substantial disuse in Judaism, replaced by a legal device that absolved the woman of this obligation.
  - f. Not only is there no meaningful carryover of this prescription into the New Testament, but also even within the Old Testament there is considerable question as to the pervasiveness of this rule. Already it stands in tension with Levitical legislation that treats as incest any sex between a man and his brother's wife (18:16; 20:21).
  - g. Finally, the principle of Levirate marriage, unlike the proscription of same-sex intercourse, is not grounded in creation structures. And there is nothing "unnatural" about not impregnating a dead brother's childless wife.
  - h. Simply put, by all counts Levirate marriage does not satisfy the tests that I outlined above for determining a core biblical value in sex ethics—quite unlike Scripture's vested interest in preserving the sex-complementarity of sexual unions.
- (12) A better analogy than Levirate marriage but still a far cry from the analogies of incest, bestiality, adultery, prostitution, and pedophilia, is *the proscription of sexual intercourse during menstruation* in Lev 18:19; 20:18 (cf. Ezek 18:6; 22:10).
    - a. This at least is a proscription of a type of sexual intercourse. It is listed among the forbidden sexual relations in Leviticus 18 and 20, along with the prohibition of male-male intercourse (18:22; 20:13). The offense was regarded as serious by the circles that produced the Holiness Code, though apparently not as serious as male-male intercourse. Leviticus 20 reorders the list of sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 according to penalty: those that were punishable by death imposed by the state (adultery, some types of incest, and bestiality) in vv. 10-16 and those that merited "cutting off" from the people (the *kareth* penalty) or divinely-imposed sterility (some types of incest, sex with a menstruating woman) in vv. 17-21. The *kareth* penalty was probably a penalty imposed by God alone, not the community. In the community's understanding it could take many different forms: premature death, a blotting out of the offender's name by terminating the family line, or (possibly) not permitting the offender to rejoin his or her ancestors in the afterlife (so Jacob Milgrom in his commentary on Leviticus for the Anchor Bible series). We might say that the framers of the Holiness Code regarded intercourse during menstruation as a second-order severe offense, one not requiring immediate action by the community of God, and so at a rung below same-sex intercourse.
    - b. Elsewhere in Leviticus, outside the block of laws that scholars refer to as the Holiness Code (chs. 17-26), even this divinely-imposed penalty is not mentioned. Leviticus 15, a section of material dealing with bodily discharges, states only that the man who lies with a menstruating woman shares her seven-day state of impurity (v. 24)—perhaps in recognition of the fact that a woman's period could commence in the midst of sexual intercourse with her husband. Being in a temporary state of ritual uncleanness is not *per se* a sin. People in Israel contracted ritual impurity all the time from a host of things that were not sinful: childbirth, contact with semen in sexual intercourse, contact with a dead person, bodily discharges owing to disease, and so on. Repentance was not an issue. So even within the book of Leviticus there may be different perspectives on the matter.
    - c. In other parts of the Old Testament—outside Ezekiel who has strong affinities with the Holiness Code—we hear not a word about the problem of sex with a menstruating woman.

- d. Consequently, it is not surprising that explicit mention of it does not appear in the New Testament. The best explanation for this omission is simply that NT authors lumped the proscription of sex during menstruation with other OT legislation regarding ritual purity that had been abrogated by the new covenant in Christ. But adultery, incest, same-sex intercourse, bestiality, prostitution, and premarital sex were not lumped together with defunct purity regulations; rather they were retained under the rubric of *porneia*, “sexual immorality.”
- e. There was probably some residual revulsion in some early Christian circles for sex during menstruation (note the requirement to “abstain from blood” in the Apostolic Decree cited in Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). Yet classification of it under the rubric of *porneia* appears unlikely (even the Apostolic Decree distinguishes abstention from *porneia* from abstention from blood). Today most people would be queasy and turned off by the thought of deliberate intercourse during menstruation and wonder why a man couldn’t exercise restraint in view of a woman’s discomfort.
- f. To be sure, blood is no longer as numinous and sacred to us as it was to the ancients. (Not surprisingly, the sacral quality of blood is particularly highlighted in the Holiness Code, Lev 17:10-16, where the prohibition of sex during menstruation is found.) But most people rightly recognize that the scientific evidence here is on an entirely different plane than the scientific case for approving homosexual behavior.
- g. As noted in (b) above, sex with a menstruating woman does not carry with it quite the “unnatural” quality of having sex with one’s parent, or another of the same sex, or an animal. It happens inadvertently, in the course of normal sexual activity. The notion of “inadvertent” incest, same-sex intercourse or bestiality makes no sense.
- h. So, in the end, are there sufficient grounds for considering sex during menstruation as a close analogue to same-sex intercourse? No—it is not a core value of Scripture that is pervasively held, either within or across Testaments. Wink writes as if it is all the same whether a particular proscription exists only in a small part of the Old Testament or is pervasively and strongly upheld throughout Scripture, particularly the New Testament.
- (13) The allowance of *polygamy*—more precisely *polygyny* (having more than one female mate at one time) since polyandry (more than one male mate at one time) was not allowed in ancient Israel—raises

some interesting issues but ultimately falls short as a close analogue to the proscriptions of same-sex intercourse. Wink also lists (14) *concubinage* and (15) *sex with slaves* separately but these really constitute different aspects of polygyny. The system of concubinage permitted men to have secondary wives, or sex with female slaves, without undermining the status of a primary wife. The category of sex with slaves simply adds the dimension of slavery; I have already explained in my previous response why the Bible’s stance on slavery does not constitute a good analogue to its stance on same-sex intercourse. So how should one address the matter of polygyny?

- a. Polygyny in ancient Israelite society is to be distinguished from fornication (sex without marital or quasi-marital attachment). A man who seduced or seized a virgin who was not engaged to be married was obligated to marry her (Exod 22:16-17; Deut 22:28-29). Sex with an engaged or married woman was a capital offense, punishable by stoning. The importance placed on a woman’s virginity prior to marriage would have placed severe restrictions on male promiscuity, at least indirectly (cf. Deut 22:13-21, which refers to a woman who has had sex with another man prior to marriage as one who has “prostituted herself in her father’s house”).
- b. Even with the option of polygyny, one wife at any one time remained the norm in Israelite society. Most treatments of marriage in the Old Testament—law, poetry, or narrative—presume this norm; for example, the exhortation in Proverbs to forsake an adulteress and “rejoice in the wife of your youth” (5:18); or the admonition in Malachi not to “be faithless to the wife of [one’s] youth” (2:15); or the law pertaining to Levirate marriage in Deuteronomy, which starts out with “the wife of the deceased . . .” (25:5). According to the Yahwist, the model in creation is that of two sexually complementary human beings becoming one flesh (Gen 2:20-24). Moreover, when polygyny did occur in the family unit, the norm was just two wives at one time. This is presumed, for example, in the law about the legal rights of the first-born son in Deut 21:15-17 (“If a man has two wives . . .”). It is the introduction of kingship that brings the phenomenon of “many wives” prohibited by Deuteronomic law (17:17). In the main polygyny in ancient Israelite society was an occasional concession to the need for progeny to insure survival and to carry on the family name—so the use of slave concubines by Abraham and Jacob, at the urging of the primary wives. The rivalry and jealousy recounted between wives or between a primary wife and a concubine underscores the

problems with polygyny. And, of course, women never had more than one husband.

- c. What this means is that already in the Old Testament a consistent case for monogamy was developing: the precedent in the creation story of Genesis 2, the norm of one wife in Israelite society, internal disputes in polygynous households, and female monogamy. In addition, as the notion of a meaningful existence in an afterlife gained prominence in the Second Temple period, the primary motivation for polygyny—the necessity of progeny as a means to preserving one’s memory after death—took on less significance.
- d. It is important to keep in mind, too, that, on the one hand, there is no OT proscription against polygyny. Nowhere does the Old Testament require that men have multiple wives. As with divorce, eradicating polygyny does not overturn a core value of the Old Testament. It simply removes a concession to human hardness of heart. On the other hand, there are pointed proscriptions against women having more than one sex partner at one time and against having premarital sex. This was a core value for women; eradicating it, even in the alleged interests of equality for women, would have required a massive overhauling of biblical standards for acceptable sexual intercourse.
- e. Contrary to Wink’s understanding, Jesus’ prohibition of divorce presumes a prohibition of polygyny. For the divorce sayings in Luke 16:18 (par. Matt 5:31-32), Mark 10:11-12 (par. Matt 19:9), and 1 Cor 7:10-11 all express concern about a person having sex with another person while one’s former sex partner was still alive. The first marriage is valid until the spouse dies, regardless of whether a divorce has taken place. Accordingly, Jesus refers to remarriage after divorce as adultery. To accept Wink’s view that Jesus did not call into question polygyny is to believe that serial monogamy was a problem for Jesus but polygyny was not. Preposterous. Jesus’ teaching on divorce clearly pushed in the direction of one lifetime sex partner—at least “until death do us part.” This is an argument from the lesser to the greater: if even serial monogamy is problematic, how much more polygyny? Furthermore, if one of the main incentives for polygyny was to produce progeny for perpetuating one’s identity after death, then Jesus’ view of an afterlife subverted such an incentive. This comes across in Jesus’ own celibacy and in sayings such as Mark 3:33-35 (Jesus’ true family); 10:29-30 (a hundredfold children); 12:25 (no marriage in heaven); and Matt 19:10-12 (eunuchs for the kingdom). Also, with Jesus’ outreach to women came perhaps recognition of male-female inequity in the matter of plural mates. Jesus to a large extent resolved the inequity—but not by allowing women the same sexual freedom that men had. Instead, he placed on men the same high standards for sexual purity that were already imposed on women and ensconced in strong biblical proscriptions, and then further intensified God’s demand on both.
- f. Paul’s entire discussion of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, where he cites Jesus’ divorce saying, also presupposes monogamous marriage structures. For example, he assumes that to be deprived of sex with one’s spouse (singular, husband or wife) is to be deprived of all sex, leaving one with no other options to satisfy sexual temptation apart from committing sexual immorality (*porneia*; 7:1-7). Indeed, as with Jesus, the equal claim to conjugal rights by wife and husband (7:2-4) suggests that monogamy is now as binding on men as it always was on women. Marriage for the sake of progeny also recedes; Paul’s emphasis is on marriage as the one and only legitimate arena for acting on sexual desires (7:2). Later, in the Pastoral Epistles, one of the requirements for the offices of bishop, deacon, and elder is that the man be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Tit 1:6). Probably this is a reference to not remarrying, even after the death of the first wife (this as an expression of supreme fidelity to one’s spouse). Certainly this presumes that polygyny is also wrong—indeed, a far greater wrong that would probably be prohibited not only to office holders but also to all other believers as well.
- g. Added to all this is the fact that there is not a single New Testament text—narrative, metaphor, or exhortation—that hints that polygyny might be acceptable. Forbidding polygyny today does not require us to overturn the New Testament witness. It requires us to affirm that witness.
- h. It has become customary in contemporary debate about homosexual practice to assert that there is nothing wrong with homoerotic relationships so long as they remain monogamous. Monogamy for many has become the higher-order value. From a biblical perspective the ranking is skewed. It is the equivalent of arguing that a sexual relationship between two siblings is not so bad so long as the relationship remains monogamous. Most people would recognize immediately the flaw of such an argument: the non-incestuous quality of sexual relationships is a higher priority than their monogamous character. In fact, a faithful or lifelong incestuous union is worse than a short-term incestuous union because it perpetuates what is abhorrent to God. And to assert, as Corinthians might have (1 Cor 5), that a committed incestuous



union is better than having one engage in promiscuous non-incestuous relationships, would surely be a perverse form of reasoning. The same applies, and even more so, to homoerotic relationships. For the authors of Scripture and undoubtedly for Jesus, the sex-complementarity of sexual unions was much more of an essential feature of human sexual expression than monogamy. Only the non-bestial quality of sexual relationships would have been treated as more bedrock. Now I am by no means arguing that we should be more open to non-monogamous unions. May it not be so! The New Testament is quite clear on this in my view. My point is rather that, as high as our view of monogamy may be (at least, limited serial monogamy), our view on the limitation of sexual unions to males and females should be higher still. Conversely, if homoerotic unions are to be sanctioned, on what grounds would we hold the line on serial monogamy against “threesomes” or other “plural unions”? Indeed, today we have the unusual circumstance that polygyny is sometimes prosecuted while many who have indiscriminate, short-term, and irresponsible sex with far more sex partners are not prosecuted. The church has a much stronger case for endorsing various types of polygamous unions than it does for endorsing homoerotic unions, or even for endorsing the rather limited definition of “promiscuity” adopted by Wink.

- i. An additional word on *premarital sex* is in order. Wink does not include it in his list of 16 but he does mention it in an earlier part of his article (p. 39). Wink argues that “the Old Testament nowhere explicitly prohibits sexual relations between unmarried consenting heterosexual adults, as long as the woman’s economic value (bride price) is not compromised.” He cites the poems in the Song of Songs which “eulogize a love affair between two unmarried persons.” “Today,” he says, “many . . . are reverting to ‘biblical’ practice, while others believe that sexual intercourse belongs only within marriage.” How does one respond to these claims?
  1. The last formulation by Wink, which refers to the acceptance of premarital sex as the “biblical practice,” conveniently ignores the univocal witness of the New Testament against all premarital sex. At points where one detects a double standard in the Old Testament concerning the degree of cultural disapproval for premarital sex—inevitable in a culture that permitted polygyny, the purchase of women for concubinage, and the exclusive right of husbands to divorce—one is obligated to ask how this double standard is to be resolved in Christ. The New Testament is clear: it is to be

resolved by proscribing all premarital sex not only for men but also for women.

2. It misreads or at least overrides the complexity of the Old Testament witness. I have already cited legal texts in (a) above that obligate a man to marry a virgin that he has seduced and that place a high premium on a woman’s virginity at the time of marriage. The linkage between bridal price and virginity in actual practice itself speaks to the cultural “devaluing” of a woman who has previously had sex with another man.
3. The Song of Solomon raises more questions than answers. It is far too ambiguous a text on which to promote a doctrine of legitimate premarital sex. (a) As it stands, the Song is attributed to and/or is sung with reference to King Solomon (1:1; mention is made of “Solomon” six other times, along with three references to the male lover as a “king”). The male lover addresses his beloved as “my bride” (4:8-12; 5:1) and she alludes to Solomon’s wedding (3:11). Whatever the original meaning of the poems, arguably the work was accepted into the canon on the assumption that it described the love between a husband and wife. This is its canonical context, which domesticates any earlier meaning. (b) It is far from clear how far the lovers may actually have gone in their love and how much of what is said expresses no more than lovers’ fantasies (note the references to dreams in 3:1-5 and 4:2-8). At one point the male lover likens his beloved to a garden that no one has yet entered (4:12). The young woman is described as facially veiled (4:1, 3), suggesting modesty on her part and imagination on the part of the male lover in describing her erotic attractiveness. The Song also contains a thrice-repeated adjuration to the daughters of Jerusalem that could be read as a warning not to kindle erotic passion until the day of one’s wedding (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). (c) Even if the poems did originally refer to “a love affair between two unmarried persons,” they would not constitute a ringing endorsement of premarital sex. The obstacle to marriage apparently comes not from the young lovers themselves but from the young woman’s brothers who insist that she is too young to be married (1:6; 8:8-9), while she insists that she is ready for marriage (8:10). The two lovers yearn to celebrate their lifelong commitment to one another in public (8:1-4). In fact, they already regard themselves as married: note again the address “my bride” and the young woman’s comparison of her lover to King

Solomon “on the day of his wedding” (3:6-11). (d) The Song of Solomon may represent an honest and open depiction of frustrated youthful erotic passion (similarly, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*), just as Ecclesiastes represents an honest and open depiction of human despair amidst the injustices of the world. Endorsement is another matter altogether.

- I have already briefly touched on why (16) *divorce* is not a good analogue for the Bible’s stance on same-sex intercourse, both in my earlier response and in my discussion above. A more complete discussion is warranted here.
- a. Unlike the OT position on same-sex intercourse, the OT position on divorce is mixed. On the one hand, the Old Testament allows it for men (Deut 24:1-4; cf. Lev 21:7, 14; Deut 21:14). On the other hand, there are currents against divorce already in the Old Testament. First, the Old Testament—consistent with a strong concern for a woman’s sexual purity and a wife’s fidelity to her husband—makes no provision for divorce initiated by wives. Second, the Old Testament puts some restrictions on a husband’s right to divorce his wife, although the extent of those restrictions was subject to debate in Second Temple Judaism and beyond. The pivotal text in Deut 24:1-4 gives as grounds for divorce, “because he found in her a nakedness of a thing”—that is, a sexual indecency of some sort. Moreover, Deut 22:19 and 22:29 take away entirely a husband’s right to divorce under certain limited circumstances. Third, Malachi 2:14-16 chastises husbands for being “faithless to the wife of [your] youth” and emphatically declares, “I (Yahweh) hate divorce.” Fourth, the vision of marriage in Gen 1:27 and 2:24, at least as understood by Jesus, is in tension with an allowance for divorce: “What therefore God joined together, let no man (or: human, *anthropos*) separate” (Mark 10:9).

So the Old Testament itself is not of one mind about divorce. Contrast this with the fact that there is no lack of uniformity in the Old Testament’s vigorous opposition to same-sex intercourse. The case for regarding the proscription against same-sex intercourse as a core value in the Old Testament is significantly stronger.

- b. Jesus did away with the tension in the Old Testament by coming down solidly against divorce, for men and not just for women. Part of his motivation may have been a resolve to further equality between men and women in God’s eyes. Yet had this been Jesus’ sole or even primary motivation, he could just as easily have allowed

wives the same rights to divorce that husbands had under Mosaic law. Obviously, then, sexual purity was the main concern. He saw that “Moses” had made a concession to human—primarily male—“hardness of heart” in the domain of sexual fidelity and monogamy, and removed the concession. Then he went even further than the OT restrictions on women by declaring that both the person who divorces and remarries and the person who remarries a divorced person commit adultery. So Jesus’ stance on limiting the number of lifetime sex partners to one appears to be clear. Most pro-homosex advocates then contend that the deviation of current church doctrine and practice from Jesus’ teaching on divorce provides a precedent for deviating from the strong New Testament view against same-sex intercourse. However, as the following remarks indicate, there are multiple problems with such a contention.

- c. Wink goes so far as to suggest, both in his article and in his review, that Jesus was *more* staunchly opposed to divorce than to homoerotic intercourse, if indeed he was opposed to the latter at all: “What makes [homosexual intercourse] so much greater a sin than [divorce], especially considering the fact that Jesus never even mentioned homosexuality but explicitly condemned divorce?” Wink has not adequately thought through the matter. Shall we claim that Jesus felt less strongly about bestiality and incest on the grounds that he said not a word about these subjects? Jesus said nothing directly about such extreme forms of sexual immorality simply because the position of the Hebrew Bible on such matters was so unequivocal and visceral, and the stance of early Judaism (Palestinian and Diaspora) so undivided, with the incidence of concrete violations so rare, that nothing needed to be said—unless, of course, he had a different view, which he clearly did not have. There was no reason for him to spend time addressing issues that were not points of contention in his own cultural context and on which he had no dissenting view. Jesus could turn his attention to a sexual issue that was a problem in his society: the threat posed by divorce to the indissolubility of the one valid form of sexual union—the matrimony of one man and one woman. Jesus did not loosen the restrictions on sexual freedom; he tightened them, albeit in the context of an aggressive outreach to the lost.

When Jesus cited back-to-back Gen 1:27 (“*male and female* he made them”) and Gen 2:24 (“*For this reason a man . . . will be joined to his woman [wife], and the two will become one flesh*”) he obviously understood—with all other Jews of his day—that an absolutely essential prerequisite to any valid marital union was that the two participants be

male and female, man and woman. That Jesus used these two Scripture texts to focus on the “God made” and the “will be joined”—thereby emphasizing the divinely intended indissolubility of the union of male and female, husband and wife—in no way suggests that he regarded the gender of the participants as nonessential. Indeed, the precise opposite conclusion is the only logical and historically reasonable option. Both the Scriptures that Jesus cited with approval and the audience that Jesus addressed presumed the complementary male and female genders of the two participants as an essential prerequisite.

It is also evident, by comparison with bestiality and incest, that Jesus did not regard the monogamous permanence of a given sexual union to be more important than the intra-human, non-incestuous, and heterosexual prerequisites. If the longevity and fidelity of a sexual union had been the most important components for Jesus, then Jesus could not have been absolutely opposed to any form of sexual union, so long as it showed evidence of endurance. But as it is, longevity and fidelity would not have constituted for Jesus sufficient reason to validate incest and bestiality. The same would have held for same-sex intercourse. Bestiality, same-sex intercourse, and incest—in that order—were more severe infractions of God’s will for human sexuality than short-term relationships. Only after these prerequisites were met—and others, such as the non-paying, non-coercive, and adult dimensions—would issues such as longevity and fidelity have come into play.

- d. As we saw earlier, both Matthew and Paul interpreted Jesus’ general prohibition of divorce in such a way that it did not rule out divorce in certain narrow circumstances: for Matthew, in cases where the spouse had committed adultery; for Paul, in cases where an unbelieving spouse was adamant about leaving the marriage after the believing partner’s conversion. Whether Jesus would have accepted such exceptions is a matter of historical conjecture. Regardless, Matthew and Paul did not see themselves as radically overhauling Jesus’ teaching on divorce; and, in fact and not just in perception, neither of them were radically overhauling it. Their views against divorce remained more, not less, rigorous than those prevailing in the Mosaic law.

The hermeneutical significance of this is that we have some justification in Scripture itself for discerning very limited exceptions to the general prohibition of divorce by Jesus (e.g., when a spouse’s life is in danger). Let me stress three caveats that arise from this last sentence: (1)

Scripture itself provides the precedent; (2) the precedent does not apply to all of Jesus’ sayings but only to this particular ruling; and (3) the precedent is not to be applied in such a way that it nullifies, for all intents and purposes, the general ruling. In the case of same-sex intercourse, much like incest and bestiality and unlike divorce, we have no Scriptural precedent for making exceptions. In addition, Matthew’s and Paul’s “modulation” of Jesus’ divorce saying (to use Wink’s term) provide no basis whatsoever for a radical departure from Scripture’s core values for sexual ethics, including its absolute, pervasive, and strong rejection of bestiality, same-sex intercourse, and incest.

- e. Even though the case against divorce in Scripture is not nearly as airtight as the case against same-sex intercourse, the mainline churches today—for all their permissive bents—do not make a radical departure from the teaching of Jesus, Matthew, and Paul on divorce. Mainline churches, to say nothing of more populous churches not designated “mainline,” do not regard divorce as an act to be celebrated and repeated. They regard divorce as a sin to be repented of and not repeated. If it is repeated, repentance rather than self-affirmation is again expected. Serial unrepentant divorce is viewed as a grave problem that has serious consequences at least for holding ordained office—and by “serial” I mean something as few as three or four instances of divorce. Divorce and remarriage are not normally *frequentative acts*. If they happen, they normally happen once or twice, and usually after an interval of many years. Same-sex intercourse, however, is normally a frequentative act. Those pushing for the acceptance of homoerotic unions are pushing for the acceptance of unions constituted—I state the obvious—by the regularly practiced homosexual behavior that Scripture strongly forbids. Whereas divorce and remarriage might occur at most a few times in one’s life, same-sex intercourse often occurs many times in a single week, sometimes in a single day.

Moreover, the church is being asked to bless—nay, is being bludgeoned into blessing—*unrepentant* homosexual unions. The thought of repenting of the sexual activity that bonds the participants is utterly repugnant to those demanding ecclesiastical blessing. In this instance we have candidates for ordination who not only have made a mistake or two in the past and want to move on but candidates who want to perpetuate the very behavior that Scripture pervasively deems to be abhorrent to God.

So when Wink asks why we consider divorced people for ordination “but exclude gays and lesbians” the answer is obvious: (1) divorced people

are accepted for ordination only on the understanding that they not be serial and unrepentant practitioners of divorce; and (2) those who experience homoerotic impulses can also be ordained so long as they likewise do not affirm, and engage unrepentantly in, the practice of same-sex intercourse. The parallel to a divorced person being ordained, then, is not the ordination of a homosexual person in a “loving” homoerotic union. Rather, the appropriate parallel is the ordination of a homosexual person who may have engaged in same-sex intercourse in the past but who in a spirit of repentance does not intend to repeat such behavior in the future. Conversely, the appropriate parallel to a practicing, self-affirming homosexual person is that of a person who celebrates the act of divorce and hopes for a revolving door of marital partners, who will probably be repeating the cycle in the next few days, and will continue to do more of the same on a long-term basis. Even the most liberal mainline churches would not contemplate for a moment the ordination of the latter type of person; yet we have ardent pro-homosex lobbies in the church pushing for the former.

- f. Divorce differs from same-sex intercourse in another way. Divorce is about the rupture of a union sanctified by God. Some spouses are divorced more or less against their will: they do not initiate divorce, may even fight it for a time, and ultimately have to relent to a partner determined to leave the marriage. In certain circumstances they may be as much the victims of divorce, or nearly so, as the children of divorced parents. Involvement in homoerotic intercourse, on the other hand, is about active participation in an act of egregious sin—unless, of course, one is the victim of homosexual rape, in which case the victim shares no guilt. For all the talk about involuntary homoerotic impulses, homosexual intercourse is ultimately a voluntary and active form of behavior—more like succumbing to the temptation to commit adultery or fornication or, for some, incest or pedophilia. Because in some circumstances it is possible to maintain a perpetrator vs. victim distinction among participants in divorce, but not among participants in consensual homoerotic behavior, a one-to-one correspondence between the proscription of divorce and the proscription of same-sex intercourse breaks down.
- g. We should not always assume that contemporary church deviations from scriptural standards provide adequate warrant for deviations in other areas. Consistency is not always a virtue: there is no virtue in being more consistently disobedient to the will of God. Within the sexual domain, this observation is perhaps nowhere more pertinent than in the case of current ecclesiastical practice regarding divorce and

remarriage. Quite apart from the obvious incongruities in comparing current church practice on divorce with the pro-homosex line on same-sex intercourse (cited in i-vi above), I shudder at such cavalier remarks as, “We don’t adopt Jesus’ position on divorce so why should we uphold Scripture’s witness against same-sex intercourse?” Does it no longer trouble us that the church has become all too lax in its willingness to permit divorce when our Lord and Savior, the epitome of God’s love, took a different approach? That divorce in America is now as common (or more so) among Christians as among non-Christians? That we compromise too easily a position to which Jesus had to give careful thought, bucking as he did not only prevailing cultural trends but also the permissiveness of the Mosaic law? Something has gone dreadfully wrong in the Western church. Essentially we have arrived at, and even expanded upon, the OT allowance for divorce that precipitated Jesus’ criticism in the first place. I would much rather see a renewed vision of the utter gravity of the marriage vow than a capitulation to a standard more akin to an anything-consensual-goes attitude. However, even if mainline churches just maintained current standards on divorce and remarriage, such maintenance would still be a far cry from the kind of hemorrhaging departure from Scripture that accepting same-sex intercourse would require.

- h. Finally, some might argue—though Wink himself does not—that, by Jesus’ definition, remaining in a second marriage while the divorced spouse is still alive perpetuates an adulterous relationship. If the church does not require the dissolution of marriages that follow divorce and are adulterous according to Jesus, why should we require the dissolution of homosexual unions? My initial response would be to reiterate points (a) through (g) above to underscore the significant differences between same-sex intercourse and divorce/remarriage from a biblical and contemporary perspective. Beyond that, I would answer that it is not clear to me that Jesus, or Paul, would have regarded post-divorce marriages as perpetuating adultery for the duration of their existence; nor is it evident to me that they would have required the dissolution of such marriages *after the fact*. I read matters as follows.
  1. I do think that Jesus and Paul would have warned those who contemplated taking divorce action against a spouse that they would be committing adultery if they remarried. Mark 10:11-12 speaks only of the potential adultery for those who initiate divorce proceedings, whether husband or wife. (Note: Although Mosaic law speaks only of a husband’s right to divorce, even in Palestinian Judaism there

appears to have existed indirect judicial means for a wife to initiate divorce—possibly even direct opportunities in some places or circumstances. Outside Palestine, in the broader Greco-Roman world, women often did exercise a right to divorce.)

2. I have some doubts about what Jesus and Paul would have said to persons being divorced against their will. To be sure, the second half of the saying in Luke 16:18 and Matt 5:31-32 (Q) states that the man who “marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” Is this something Jesus would have stressed to the husband (but not the wife) to deter the husband further from initiating a divorce, making him responsible not only for his own adultery but for the adultery of his wife’s next husband? Did this saying apply only to divorced women who were not divorced against their wills? Paul, after giving the Lord’s command that “a wife not be separated from her husband,” parenthetically adds: “but if in fact she is separated, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband” (1 Cor 7:10-11). The wording suggests that the wife’s own alienated affections have played a role in the separation and/or that she has some capacity to restore her marriage. Here the message is clear: she should not be remarried. But what if the wife was divorced against her will and remains reconciled in her heart toward her former husband? What if she can no longer be reconciled to her husband because her husband has remarried? It might not have made a difference given 7:39 (“A wife has been bound for as long a time as her husband lives”). Yet I think there is some ambiguity here.
3. I think that it is very unlikely that Paul would have required a person who came to faith while in a second marriage to dissolve that marriage. Later in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul tells his readers that they should remain in the condition or state that they were in at the time of their calling and not seek to change those circumstances (vv. 17-24). Thus, even a believer who came to faith as a person married to an unbeliever should not seek to dissolve that relationship (vv. 12-16), although ordinarily a believer should only be married to another believer (7:39; cf. 2 Cor 6:14). Now if it is unlikely that Paul would have required that a new believer dissolve a second marriage entered into before conversion, might he not also have extended the same grace to believers who remarried in ignorance of the teaching of Jesus and Paul? We can push the matter further still: what

would Paul have commanded if a believer knowingly went against the teaching of Jesus and Paul by remarrying after divorce? We noted that he added his own parenthetical remark to Jesus’ command that a wife not be separated from her husband: “but if in fact she is separated. . . .” Might another parenthetical remark be inferred: “but if in fact she remarries, she should not get divorced any longer”? Demanding divorce as a solution to the problem of divorce is problematic. And remarriage after divorce is not explicitly listed on Paul’s vice lists as a form of sexual behavior that could get one excluded from God’s kingdom. Complicating matters further: What would Paul recommend once children are produced from a second or third marriage?

4. Similar questions arise with respect to Jesus’ views. Did Jesus really intend all his divorced-and-remarried hearers to dissolve immediately their current marriages and return to their original spouses, irrespective of the families created in the interim? It does not seem likely. In the Johannine story of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, Jesus does not tell the woman to return to her first of five husbands—who at any rate would probably no longer have accepted her. First she had to recognize that Jesus was the true Well out of whom flowed the living water of the Spirit. Presumably, from that point on she would begin the sanctified life where she was: marrying the man she was currently living with. Prostitutes, too, would get a fresh start when they returned, like the lost son, to their heavenly Father—despite the fact that they had become “one flesh” with quite a number of men in their past (cf. 1 Cor 6:16). Of course, they would not return to the business of prostitution; but neither would they be made to ‘pay’ for every past wrong. What, then, would have happened if a follower of Jesus had “backslidden” into divorce and remarriage? Perhaps the “new slate” would begin again, once an acknowledgement of the sin committed had been made.
5. Both Jesus and Paul would probably have exhorted divorced followers not to get remarried and all followers not to marry persons already divorced. I suspect—though I cannot prove it—that the exhortation would have been softened to advice for those who were divorced against their will or whose spouse had committed adultery against them or otherwise abandoned them. For those followers who went ahead and remarried anyway I

suspect too that no dissolution of the marriage would have been required; nor would the relationship have been forever regarded as an adulterous union. Depending on the circumstances of the previous divorce, there might have been a call for repentance; that is, for an acknowledgement of the wrong committed in entering the union, particularly from those who had initiated divorce against their former spouse. Possibly, too, for the latter there may have been a limited liminal or probationary period during which the relationship was regarded as adulterous but after which the union would be treated as sanctified by the Lord.

6. Marriage, and the renewed commitment to fidelity and permanence to one person demonstrated in it, has a way of wringing God's approval after the fact, so long as it does not violate one of the essential prerequisites for a married union (e.g., that it be non-bestial, non-incestuous, non-homoerotic, and non-pedophilic). Where marriage is concerned, what may not have been in God's intended will ultimately becomes the will of God (cf. the story of David and Bathsheba). Even though the mainline churches are more lax toward divorce and remarriage than the scenario suggested above, they at least are not at the opposite end of the spectrum. They continue to recognize divorce as a sin and work towards ending the cycle of divorce and remarriage.
7. However, the church can never accept a sexual union that does not even satisfy the basic biblical prerequisites for marriage. We know exactly what policy Paul would have adopted for those engaged in homoerotic unions because the case of incest in 1 Corinthians 5 provides the closest parallel (compare the parallel vice lists in 1 Cor 5:10-11 and 6:9-10). The problem of promiscuity and infidelity is substantially addressed and corrected in a remarriage that abides by standards of permanence and fidelity. But the main problems with incest and homoerotic behavior are not in any way addressed or corrected by marriage; for incest and same-sex intercourse are not in the first instance wrong because of a lack of permanence, commitment, or fidelity. Therefore, the appropriate analogy for the church's response to homosexual unions is not the church's acceptance of second or third marriages for those previously divorced but rather the church's rejection of all incestuous unions. In the end the divorce-and-remarriage analogy is a bridge too far for pro-homosex

advocates like Wink.

### ***Concluding Observations on the List of 16:***

- ***A possible dodge by Wink.*** Possibly Wink would respond to my analysis of his 16 biblical sexual mores by saying something like: I agree with many of Gagnon's observations; but that just underscores the importance of hermeneutics that I have been raising for same-sex intercourse. Such a response by Wink, however, would be skirting the real issue since I never deny the need for hermeneutical engagement. Indeed, I have done far more of this than Wink has on this issue of homosexuality. The real issue here has been, and remains, what constitutes the best parallels to the Bible's utter rejection of all same-sex intercourse.
- ***Wink's padding of the results.*** Whenever different positions exist within the Bible on a given sex issue—usually as a result of moving from the old covenant to the new—Wink always and only counts current practice against the Bible. For example, there is no condemnation in the New Testament of intercourse during menstruation, celibacy, and exogamy. The New Testament does not permit or prescribe prostitution, polygamy, levirate marriage, sex with slaves, or concubinage. So why not include these stances on a list of biblical sexual mores with which contemporary church views and practice are in agreement? Apparently because for Wink to do so would make the list of sexual mores from the Bible that we do follow more numerous than the list that we do not follow (oops). For every valid element in the list of defunct biblical sexual mores has a counterpart within Scripture itself that could be added to the list of mores that we still follow.
- ***Recapping the 16 bad parallels.*** So after going through the list of sixteen "sex mores" that Wink says we no longer follow, we find nothing on the list that provides a close parallel to Scripture's opposition to same-sex intercourse. Only the four that he says we still follow, plus a few more that he leaves out, provide close parallels. The results of our analysis suggest the opposite of what Wink argues; namely, that we should still be following the Bible's strong, absolute, and pervasive opposition to same-sex intercourse. It is now clear why Wink does not bother to develop criteria for distinguishing between good and bad parallels to Scripture's rejection of same-sex intercourse: to do so would demonstrate the weakness of his list. Here's a case in point: Not a single element on the list can be characterized as a New Testament sexual standard from which the contemporary church has substantially departed. Not one. In Wink's "spray

method” it matters not to him whether the example at hand was:

- Carried over from the Old Testament to the New;
- Treated by the Bible as a sin or not;
- Merely a permitted act, an act preferably avoided, or a pointed proscription;
- Pervasively maintained in each of the Testaments or not;
- Categorized by Scripture as a marginal concern or major offense;
- Essentially carried over into our contemporary context or completely rejected.

In short, I would contend that my comment about the lack of theological sophistication in Wink’s “list hermeneutics” is accurate. Wink is desperate to pad his case for change as much as possible. The result is sloppy hermeneutical work.

## 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 *pornoi*), 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.