

## **A New Testament Professor at Fuller Seminary Promotes Views Surprisingly Open toward Homosexual Unions**

by Prof. Robert A. J. Gagnon, Ph.D.

June 3, 2014

J. R. Daniel Kirk, professor of New Testament at evangelical Fuller Seminary has a chapter on “Homosexuality under the Reign of Christ” in his book *Jesus Have I Loved, but Paul?* (Baker Academic Press, 2011), 175-92. It is a work that causes me some concern and to which I invite his response. In it Dr. Kirk presents himself as someone who (1) does not *yet* believe that homosexual practice is right but (2) could *still* be persuaded that committed homosexual unions are right. In the meantime, he already endorses state-sanctioned marriage or “something like marriage” for homosexual unions and thinks the church should keep listening to the very “stories” of “gay Christians” that erode the church’s resistance to such unions. My own experience in the past with self-professed evangelicals who say things like this is that it is only a matter of time before they switch views to an outright acceptance of homosexual unions or make public a switch previously made in private. Let us hope that it is otherwise here.

### ***Holding Open the Possibility That a Case for Homosexual Practice Can Be Made***

In a good part of the chapter (176-84) Dr. Kirk makes the case that Paul and Jesus do indeed appear to be opposed to homosexual practice *per se*. His argument could be made significantly stronger than it is and at a few points his reasoning is not what it could be, but at least he makes *a* case with *some* good arguments. According to Dr. Kirk, both Romans 1:26-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9 show that for Paul “from first creation to new creation, the primal story of male-female marriage is an inseparable part of the framework of God’s provision for human sexual expression.... Paul makes the claim that homosexual practice is not a faithful way to enact the story between inauguration of new creation and its consummation” (180). At the same time Dr. Kirk argues that the context for Rom 1:26-27 shows that no one has grounds for “moral superiority” (179-80), which appears to tie into a problematic view that he expresses elsewhere, namely, that homosexual practice is not “the great sexual sin of our day” (see below). He rightly notes that Jesus’ “silence” on homosexual practice has to be set against the backdrop of Jewish

law and the views of Jewish contemporaries. Jesus “gave his tacit consent [to] the idea that homosexual practice [was] a violation of the divine intention for sexual expression” (181). It would have been even more helpful if Dr. Kirk had recognized that Jesus’ limitation of two persons to a sexual union (whether concurrently or serially) was derived from the duality of the sexes given in creation according to Gen 1:27 and 2:24. In a section entitled “Inclusive Social Justice?” (182-84), Dr. Kirk correctly argues that analogies between homosexual unions on the one hand and Jesus’ outreach to social outcasts or our changing views on slavery and women’s roles on the other miss the mark. All this is to the good.

However, Dr. Kirk then unfortunately follows this up with a section entitled “Arguing for Homosexual Practice” (184-86) in which he contends that “for all that the biblical evidence weighs against [homosexual unions], *I do believe that a case can be made*” for committed homosexual unions (184; my emphasis). This he outlines in two steps.

First, those supporting homosexual unions in the church must affirm “the biblical standard of lifetime loyalty to one partner who is also in Christ” (184). This is what most promoters of homosexual unions in the church already do, so there is little here that would prevent anyone from recognizing the validity of homosexual unions immediately. Second, Dr. Kirk states that appeal could be made to Gal 3:28 (“there is no ‘male and female’” in Christ) and to the early church precedent in Acts 10-11, 15 of accepting uncircumcised Gentiles who exhibited the power of the Holy Spirit. Since proponents of homosexual unions already make these appeals, one wonders why Dr. Kirk is still waiting to “come out” with full support for committed homosexual unions.

I have shown in my work why both appeals are erroneous. Dr. Kirk shows no awareness of these arguments, perhaps because he shows no awareness of my work (at least not in the footnotes; he does, however, cite Richard Hays and William Webb, along with supporters of homosexual unions such as Dale Martin, Luke Timothy Johnson, and Douglas Campbell). If he knew the overwhelming arguments against his claims (see the Appendix to this article), he still didn’t bother responding to them.

Dr. Kirk claims that we have a “genuinely new thing” today: “Christians who are both striving to faithfully follow God and simultaneously living within committed homosexual relationships,” a phenomenon that “must be carefully weighed when we consider whether homosexuality is [sic: Christian homosexual unions are] ... a new work of the Spirit” (186). A key point that Dr. Kirk overlooks is this: The reason why we don’t have *Christian* examples of this in the first century is because Gentiles who were still engaging in homosexual practice were not baptized into the faith; the leadership of the church recognized that such behavior was automatically incompatible with a saving profession of faith. In addition, as I have shown in my own work, there are plenty of examples for both the conception and the existence of “committed homosexual relationships” in the Greco-Roman world. It is not by a long stretch significant “new knowledge.”

## ***Charging with Violation of the Golden Rule Christians Who Don't Advocate for State Supports for Homosexual Unions***

In the next section, “Love Your Neighbor as Yourself” (186-90), Dr. Kirk then undertakes a misguided and, in my view, dangerous promotion of a homosexualist agenda for the state. He contends that the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:25-37) and the Golden Rule (Luke 6:31; Matt 7:12) suggest that Christians should give serious thought to supporting at least “something like marriage” for same-sex “consenting adults,” along with full medical insurance and inheritance benefits for one’s “stay-at-home [same-sex] partner” (p. 189). He states that “the issue of state-sanctioned marriage versus state-approved civil partnerships is complex.” Dr. Kirk does not come down on one side or the other, but what is interesting here is that he seems to present these as the only two valid options: either homosexual civil unions or “gay marriage.” In his book he presents “something like marriage” and the other benefits as “issues I wrestle with,” though the context suggests little doubt since he concludes: “It is incumbent on us to show the homosexuals in our communities that *we will work tirelessly for them to have what we would never stand to be deprived of ourselves*” (190; my emphasis). Certainly we who are married would not want to be deprived of our marriage. A remark that Dr. Kirk makes in a BakerAcademic blog post dated Feb. 7, 2013, entitled “[Homosexuality under the Reign of Christ: Responses and Further Reflections](#),” also shows little reservation: “The chapter [on homosexuality in my book] argues that we advocate for civil equality and protection to secure *the same freedoms and benefits for my neighbor who disagrees with me as I would want for myself*” (my emphasis), embracing in effect the whole panoply of “sexual orientation” laws now in place in California.

I think this is a terribly misguided interpretation both of the Good Samaritan parable and the Golden Rule. Let me begin with what should be an obvious observation: Jesus himself would have categorically rejected such a deduction from his own parable and rule—and this not only for the issue of homosexual unions. If Dr. Kirk’s application of the Good Samaritan and Golden Rule were correct, then by the same reasoning Jesus would have had to withdraw his challenge to polygamy implicit in his divorce-remarriage statements (Mark 10:2-12; Matt 19:3-9), since here he predicates a creation-based twoness of the sexual bond on the twoness of the sexes. He would also have had to embrace adult-consensual incestuous unions. To cite Dr. Kirk’s own logic: “*If the people I loved and trusted counseled me against marrying a certain person, would I want them to have the power to stop that marriage against my will and against the will of my would-be partner?*” (emphasis his).

The argument that Dr. Kirk poses, “If you don’t want someone to do this to you, then you shouldn’t do it to them,” simply doesn’t stand up to scrutiny since it throws out of the equation the question of whether the unions in question are injurious to their relationship to God, self, and the other. (Imagine teenagers throwing back such a principle to their parents!) If in fact homosexual practice is abhorrent and a gross indecency in the eyes of God, as Scripture declares it to be, then, no, it wouldn’t be loving for culture to provide supports and incentives for me to

enter into such unions. Moreover, such state actions lead inevitably to the state taking sides against Christians who do not support such unions, declaring such Christians to be bigots on the level of racists, attenuating their civil liberties accordingly, and indoctrinating their children in public schools to follow such a program. Either Dr. Kirk is naïve on this score (but how could any evangelical Christian living in California be that naïve?) or Dr. Kirk doesn't care about these consequences (which is perhaps more alarming).

The Good Samaritan parable doesn't indicate that there should be state support for building a temple in Samaria or for eliminating from the Judean canon of Scripture those texts that regard the Davidic dynasty as God's choice—all Samaritan views. The Good Samaritan parable is simply a story about not excluding a Samaritan and other heretics from the meaning of "neighbor" in the Levitical command to "love one's neighbor as oneself." The lawyer asks "Who is my neighbor?" in order to develop a narrow interpretation of neighbor that will allow him not to love others. Jesus resituates the lawyer from the vantage point of safety to a vantage point of insecurity, identifying him with the man lying half-dead by the side of the road who now wants *anyone* who might help him in his moment of need to become a neighbor to him. In short, Jesus in effect says, we can be remarkably inclusive about the meaning of neighbor in Lev 19:18 when we're facing a great crisis and need help.

Yet reproof is not excluded from such love of neighbor. The context for the second greatest command in fact mandates rebuke, paraphrasing: "You shall not hate, take revenge against, or hold a grudge against your neighbor. And if your neighbor does wrong, you shall reprove your neighbor lest you incur guilt for failing to warn him" (Lev 19:17-18). Jesus most likely echoes this text in his injunction in Luke 17:3-4: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, even if seven times in the course of the day he sins against you and seven times turns to you saying, 'I repent.'" We should want true friends to rebuke us when we do wrong rather than to advocate that church and state sanction cultural supports for immoral sexual behavior. Not only is love not antithetical to such rebuke, it positively demands it.

### ***Dr. Kirk's Concluding Thoughts Rejecting the Bible as Rule Book and Questioning the Bible as Last Word***

In his "Concluding Thoughts" (190-92) Dr. Kirk begins by chastising any proponents of homosexual practice who argue that God is not concerned about what we do in the bedroom or that the mere existence of a biological urge is self-validating. I concur with his points. Yet then he appears to level his strongest critique against those who regard homosexual practice as sinful. He attacks on two fronts.

First, Dr. Kirk asserts that "the Bible is not a rule book but a story of God's plan of redemption" (p. 191). Unfortunately, his point is not quite accurate. The Bible comprises a series of writings ranging over a millennium, most of which contain large sections involving rules.

There are also narratives of God's work in the world and, in addition, theological ruminations drawn from such narratives. It is not all one thing or all the other but a composite of genres. His formulation, "not this but that," is a false dichotomy. The whole of the Bible may not be a rule book but it does contain rules that God expects to be obeyed. One can counter that we don't obey all the rules. But then the counter can be countered by noting that the biblical prohibition of homosexual practice is obviously a core value insofar as it is a value proclaimed *pervasively* (throughout all parts of Scripture, explicitly or implicitly, where a male-female prerequisite is everywhere assumed), *absolutely* (no exceptions anywhere within Scripture unlike even incest and polyamory), *strongly* (it is regarded in Scripture as a particularly severe sexual offense; see below), and *counter-culturally* (no society or movement in the ancient Near East or in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean basin was more strongly opposed to homosexual practice than ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity).

Even more unfortunate is Dr. Kirk's reiteration of his earlier point: "While the position against homosexuality clearly has the better of the biblical argument, *that might not mean that the church has thereby received the last word that God has to say on the subject*" (191; my emphasis). May I suggest that this is a stunningly weak posture against homosexual practice by a professor teaching seminary students at a purportedly evangelical seminary? To be sure, Dr. Kirk wrote his book a few years ago (published 2011, presumably written in the year or two preceding). But his 2013 blog makes the same point:

There have been times in the history of the church when God decided that what was unequivocally required earlier was no longer needful. Indeed, Paul depicts as enemies of the gospel those who would require gentiles to comply with the eternal, covenantal sign of circumcision.... I suggested that we should be aware of the possibility that the Spirit might make such a demonstration today. We are dealing with a genuinely new moment in the history of the church: homosexual couples openly in committed relationships and striving to faithfully follow Jesus.... Those of us from backgrounds that are not affirming need to listen to the stories of gay friends, especially Christian gay friends.

On the last point it is precisely this constant bombardment of the church (for decades!) with "the stories of gay friends, especially Christian gay friends" that has worn down the church's resistance to this immorality. These "stories" have as their intent the erosion of a male-female requirement for sexual relations insisted upon by Jesus himself. They have a desensitizing effect and we see the predictable results in the mainline denominations where the "stories" have been told for longer periods of time than in evangelical circles. If the church were to be bombarded with stories of positive, adult-consensual *polyamorous* or *incestuous* relationships (and perhaps that it is the next stage), the church would also find its stance on monogamy and exogamy, respectively, eroded over time.

Dr. Kirk's insistence that we "need to listen" more and more to such homosex-affirming "stories" is antithetical to the message of Ephesians that "sexual immorality and impurity of any kind . . . must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints" (5:3), by which is

probably meant not only any report of incidence but also attempts at advocacy. Apparently, Dr. Kirk supports the existence of the so-called “One Table” group on the Fuller Seminary campus as a “safe place” where “gay Christians” can tell their “stories” that advocate for church’s embrace of “committed homosexual relationships” and thereby undermine Fuller Seminary’s own stance against homosexual practice.

On his 2013 blog post Dr. Kirk also adds:

We will become increasingly aware, in the years to come, that the sexual mores of the ancient world were part of a system of assessing value, and of viewing the world more generally, that we no longer hold to. If we believe in the fundamental equality of men and women as made in the image of God, and if we believe in the equality of people across all social ranks, then we disbelieve major pillars on which ancient aversion to homosexual activity leans. There are other reasons for opposing it, such as those I outline in my book, but a growing awareness of the cultural context of the Greco-Roman world will likely create additional challenges for folks wrestling over the inclusion of homosexuals with same-sex partners.

It is true, as I have noted in my own work, that misogyny is part of some Greco-Roman indictments of homosexual practice and that this seeps into some Jewish critique as well (Philo of Alexandria is a case in point). However, as I have also shown, this aspect is not central to the Greco-Roman indictment as a whole (much less the Jewish-Christian critique), which rather depends on an argument based on anatomical and physiological complementarity. There are debates in antiquity between proponents of male-male love and proponents of male-female love. In those debates the proponents of male-female love are far more affirming of women than the advocates of male-male love.

### ***Dr. Kirk’s Concluding (But Misapplied) Thoughts on the “More Important” Tragedy of Christian Failure to Love***

Dr. Kirk’s second attack on “traditional” Christians is (to his mind) “perhaps more important” than the question as to whether homosexual unions are right or wrong: “Many of us need as much rescuing from our failure to relentlessly pursue the good of our neighbor as our neighbors need rescuing from their failure to submit their sexual desires to the reign of Christ” (192). What does Dr. Kirk mean by “our failure to relentlessly pursue the good of our [homosexual] neighbor”? Dr. Kirk is only specific at two points earlier: Negatively, we shouldn’t carry “God Hates Fags” signs (agreed!) but, positively, we should support state-sanctioned marriage or “something like marriage” for homosexual unions and the full range of “sexual orientation” laws (as noted above, a point with which I strongly disagree).

Beyond that, Dr. Kirk talks vaguely elsewhere of “rancorous, destructive, and otherwise unloving behavior” (186). What counts for Dr. Kirk as “rancorous”? Does Dr. Kirk count my

own work under this rubric (including now this very article)? In his blog post, Dr. Kirk adds this: “We who are heterosexuals in predominately non-affirming social locations need to stop treating homosexuality as though it were the great sexual sin of our day.” He seems to imply that to treat it as such is “rancorous, destructive, and ... unloving.”

If Dr. Kirk thinks that holding such a view is an indication of a lack of love toward persons engaged in homosexual practice, he is (I believe) in error. Homosexual practice is indeed “the great sexual sin of our day” in *this* specific sense: It is the worst form of consensual sexual immorality currently being promoted in our society. Our culture doesn’t yet promote bestiality, which is worse. Nor does it promote to the same degree adult-consensual incest, polyamory, or adultery, three severe offenses that are nevertheless not as severe as homosexual practice. It does, to some extent, promote the offenses of premarital sex and divorce/remarriage but there is no evidence in ancient Israel, early Judaism, or early Christianity that these offenses were viewed as equally outrageous as homosexual practice.

There are many scripturally based arguments for the view that homosexual practice was regarded in ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity as a particularly severe form of sexual immorality. For one thing, it was viewed as a direct assault on the foundation of human sexual relationships given in creation: “male and female [God] made them” (Gen 1:27) and “For this reason a man may ... become joined to his woman/wife and they [or: the two] shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). For another: The prohibitions both of incest and (in the NT) of polygamous unions appear to be predicated on the prior concept of a male-female prerequisite (for the latter see especially Jesus’ remarks in Mark 10:2-12, noted above). For another: There is the very negative description of male homosexual practice in Lev 18:22 and 20:13, where it is specially tagged, among the other sexual offenses listed, as a *to’evah* (“an abominable or abhorrent practice”; compare also the very negative description by Paul in Rom 1:24-27, noted below). For another: The Old Testament contains a series of stories in which homosexual practice factors prominently in God’s severe indictment: Sodom, the Levite at Gibeah, and the so-called “sacred ones” (*qedeshim*; feminized male cult figures who served as passive partners in male homosexual acts). For another: Extra-biblical texts in early Judaism confirm the great outrage felt by Jews toward homosexual intercourse.

Why does Dr. Kirk feel the need to reduce the severity of homosexual practice? Perhaps he is laboring under the misapprehension that in order to love an offender one must first reduce the severity of the offense. This is certainly not how Jesus operated in his outreach to “(sexual) sinners and tax collectors.” Rather, Jesus taught that the greater the offense, the greater the sense of gratitude on the part of the offender who repents and is forgiven (Luke 7:40-47).

Dr. Kirk is right to read Rom 1:18-32 as setting a trap for the Jewish interlocutor but wrong to conclude from this that Paul wanted his readers to think that homosexual practice was no worse a sin than any other sin, sexual or otherwise. All sin may be equal in one respect: Any sin can get one excluded from God’s kingdom if personal merit is the basis for entering God’s kingdom.

That does not mean, however, that for Paul all sin was equally severe in all respects (a completely untenable position so far as the total witness of Scripture is concerned). Paul singled out homosexual practice in Rom 1:24-27 from among other sexual offenses as a horizontal complement to his vertical attack on idolatry. Both idolatry and same-sex intercourse were particularly profound examples of suppression of the truth about God and the way God made us, transparently obvious in the material structures of creation. For Paul, as for Jews generally, homosexual practice was that form of consensual human sexual relations most clearly “contrary to nature.” Indeed, as the intertextual echo in Rom 1:23-27 to Gen 1:26-27 indicates, Paul viewed homosexual practice as an extreme self-“dishonoring” or self-degrading, “indecent” or “shameful” act, one that threatened to mar the creation stamp of God’s image on “male and female.”

I am fully in agreement with Dr. Kirk that Christians must love those who engage in homosexual practice. Yet I get the impression from reading Dr. Kirk’s chapter that love for him would preclude the kind of response that Paul gave regarding the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5: As a remedial (not punitive) measure, remove temporarily from the life of the community the unrepentant offender, who is in danger of being excluded from the kingdom of God (6:9-10). For which one of us, applying the Golden Rule in the truncated way that Dr. Kirk does, would want to be put on church discipline, even though it would be for our own good? One can hardly argue that Paul misunderstood the meaning of love here. Not long after his intense indictment of Corinthian toleration of the incestuous man, Paul gave his encomium on love (ch. 13). Surely he does not so blatantly contradict himself in such short compass? As Paul insists at the end of ch. 5 in a rhetorical question, “Is it not those inside the church that we are to judge?”

### ***Conclusion***

Dr. Kirk’s views on homosexuality should raise concerns for an evangelical seminary that is supposed to be committed to the authority of Scripture in its designated core values.

On the positive side, Dr. Kirk recognizes that “the position against homosexuality clearly has the better of the biblical argument.” Moreover, he appears at present to regard homosexual unions as sinful. On the negative side:

- 1) Dr. Kirk presents himself as someone who believes that a good “case can be made” for accepting homosexual unions as a work of the Holy Spirit and that Scripture “might not” be “the last word.”
- 2) He believes that such a case could be made by holding homosexual unions to the same standards for longevity and monogamy to which heterosexual unions are held (or, better, elevating the standard for both groups) and by appealing both to the “no ‘male and female’” comment in Gal 3:28 and to the precedent of including uncircumcised Gentiles

in Acts 15—erroneous arguments that have already been employed by proponents of homosexual unions in mainline denominations (for a rebuttal see the Appendix below).

- 3) He thinks, accordingly, that patient display of otherwise good Christian lives by persons engaged in homosexual practice could demonstrate “a new work of the Spirit”—actions that have already happened (obviously, engaging in homosexual practice doesn’t turn a person into a complete moral werewolf!).
- 4) Dr. Kirk further believes that the church should spend more time hearing “gay”-affirming “stories” so that the church can spend more energy calling into question the validity of its stance on a male-female requirement for sexual activity. This suggests that he is a strong supporter of the homosexualist group “One Table” at Fuller Seminary, which basically functions as “fifth column” against the seminary’s stance on homosexual practice.
- 5) He also thinks that it is likely a violation of the Golden Rule for Christians not to support state-sanctioned marriages or “something like marriage” for same-sex couples and not to support the full array of “sexual orientation” laws.
- 6) He appears to be more worried about the church taking too strong a stance against homosexual practice than he does about the negative effects of homosexualist advocacy on church and society.

All of this makes one wonder how much of Dr. Kirk’s current reluctance for expressing outright support for homosexual practice is based on his reading of Scripture and how much is based on the fact that he teaches at an institution that would not allow such outright support. It is, at least, a reasonable question (to which I do not presuppose to know the answer). Yet, whatever the answer to that question, Dr. Kirk’s views strike me as already in tension, indeed in actual conflict, with Fuller Seminary’s own stated mission. On Fuller Seminary’s own website, there are several documents that speak to the issues raised in this paper.

- In a statement called “[Mission Beyond the Mission](#),” adopted by the trustees and faculty in 1983, under “Imperative Three: Work for the moral health of the society,” sub-heading G, it states that **faculty, administrators, and trustees will work against** (*inter alia*) “abortions, ... pornography ..., **the promotion of homosexuality as an acceptable alternative lifestyle.**” It seems to me that inviting readers to consider the possibility that committed homosexual unions may be a new work of the Spirit and encouraging readers to support state recognition of such unions as a marriage or at least “something like marriage” satisfies neither the spirit nor the letter of this statement.
- Fuller Seminary’s “[Statement of Faith](#)” is doctrinally oriented and contains nothing on beliefs about sexual ethics. However, it does contain a statement about the authority of Scripture: “All the books of **the Old and New Testaments**, given by divine inspiration, **are** the written word of God, **the only infallible rule of faith and practice.**” It is not clear to me how a faculty member can sign on to this statement and then write, “For all that the biblical evidence weighs against [homosexual unions], I do believe that a case can be made” for committed homosexual unions; or “While the position against homosexuality clearly has the better of the biblical argument, that might not mean that the church has thereby received the last word that God has to say on the subject.” If the Bible is “the *only infallible* rule of ... *practice*,” how can Dr. Kirk at one and the

same time acknowledge the weight of the Bible against homosexual unions while adding that this is not necessarily the last word on the subject and that a case can still be made for such unions? Dr. Kirk himself acknowledges that the analogy to women's ordination and slavery doesn't work for various reasons (being a woman is never defined as sinful, the biblical view of homosexual practice is countercultural, there are significant texts challenging slavery and the subservience of women but none that question the rejection of homosexual practice). His tentative appeals to Gal 3:28 and Acts 10-11, 15 are completely untenable (see Appendix).

- Within Fuller Seminary's "[Community Standards](#)" is this statement of its "[Sexual Standards](#)":

**Fuller Theological Seminary believes that sexual union must be reserved for marriage, which is the covenant union between one man and one woman, and that sexual abstinence is required for the unmarried. The seminary believes premarital, extramarital, and homosexual forms of explicit sexual conduct to be inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture.** Consequently, the seminary expects all members of its community—students, faculty, administrators/managers, staff, and trustees—to abstain from what it holds to be unbiblical sexual practices.

To be sure, the focus is on abstaining from immoral sexual behavior, including homosexual practice, rather than on personal beliefs. Nevertheless, belief is not excluded, for the statement begins: "Fuller Theological Seminary *believes* that sexual union must be reserved for marriage ... between one man and one woman" and "the seminary *believes* ... homosexual forms of explicit sexual conduct to be inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture." Certainly, "Fuller Theological Seminary" includes faculty, if it includes anybody. A reasonable interpretation here is that the espousal of the position that homosexual sexual conduct *might* be acceptable is outside the bounds of what is permissible for faculty. More to the point, any other interpretation of this statement strikes me as rather unreasonable.

I hope these things will matter to Fuller Seminary's President, Dr. Mark Labberton. My concern, though, is that Dr. Labberton gave the book a glowing endorsement at the time that he was an associate professor of preaching at Fuller (I did not realize this till I was nearing completion of the first draft of this article). Included in that endorsement was the following: "What makes this book exceptional is that Kirk.... addresses a complex and commonly felt set of controversies about Jesus, Paul, women, sexuality and homosexuality and does so in particularly careful, unflinching ways.... demonstrating an interpretive manner that both honors Scripture and wrestles with it." Whatever the merit of the other chapters, I don't see Dr. Kirk's openness to rejecting the biblical view of a male-female requirement as "honoring Scripture" or even "wrestling with it" adequately; nor do I see it as reflecting "particularly careful" scholarship. I can only hope that somehow Dr. Labberton had not looked over carefully the second half of the chapter on homosexuality when he provided the endorsement. At any rate, it seems to me that the matters raised in this essay are worthy of discussion both within and outside the walls of Fuller.

I close by saying that I welcome Dr. Kirk's response. If I have misunderstood Dr. Kirk at some point, either because I have not read Dr. Kirk's remarks correctly or because Dr. Kirk has

expressed himself badly, I am willing to make corrections. If, in response to this piece, Dr. Kirk wishes to pull back to a degree on what he has written or qualify it further, I am willing to note that too. I believe that further discussion, civilly engaged in, can only be for the ultimate good of Fuller Theological Seminary in particular and of American Evangelicalism generally.

## Appendix: Why Gal 3:28 and Acts 15 Provide No Justification for Homosexual Unions

**Gal 3:28.** According to Dr. Kirk, the fact “that in this new world order there is no longer ... ‘male and female’ (Gal 3:28), may provide an avenue for reconsidering the finality of the biblical depiction of heterosexual marriage as the only Christian option” (185). In my view, Gal 3:28, interpreted in its historical context, certainly does not provide the possibility for embracing homosexual unions. While it is true that Gal 3:28 alludes to Gen 1:27 (“male and female he [= God] created them”), this does *not* mean that Paul believed that sexual differentiation no longer had relevance for sexual relations by Christians. On the contrary, applying this statement to sexual relations would spell the end of such relations altogether, not provide justification for homosexual behavior. How do we know this? All Christian interpreters who applied Gal 3:28 to sexual activity understood it as a reference to celibacy. For example, the Corinthians apparently understood this Pauline formulation to mean not only greater openness to women’s roles but also a celibacy requirement (1 Cor 7; cp. 12:13 where Paul mentions the Jew/Gentile and slave/free antinomies but leaves out “male and female” because the Corinthians were prematurely applying this to sexual activity). Proto-gnostic circles similarly interpreted an alleged saying of Jesus about making two sexes one so that there is no longer any male and female (*Gospel of Thomas* 22:1-4; *Gospel of the Egyptians* 5b; 2 Clement 12:2-3). Gregory of Nyssa, a Cappadocian Church Father, understood the application of Gal 3:28 to sexual activity as an ascetic life of abstinence.

Paul *agreed* that, applied to sexual relations, “no ‘male and female’” would mean no sexual intercourse (hence his own celibacy). Where he disagreed was over the *mandatory* application of the saying to sexual relations this side of the End, prior to receiving sexually undifferentiated resurrection bodies. For Paul allowance of marriage and of sexual relations within marriage represented an abeyance or temporary suspension of “no ‘male and female’” in the sphere of sexual relations. Even NT scholar William Loader, who supports homosexual unions, acknowledges that Gal 3:28 “is not a negation of either gender or sexuality [in the present age], but a statement of equal worth before God in Christ.” “When marriage and sexual relations ... pass away ..., maleness and femaleness ... will also cease to play a role” (*Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition* [Eerdmans, 2005], 201, 196-97). In short, Gal 3:28 provides absolutely no support for the view that sexual differentiation in marriage does not matter. Rather, sexual differentiation ceases to have relevance *only* when sexual intercourse ceases in the Kingdom of God, subsumed by the much greater intimacy of full communion with God.

**Acts 10-11, 15.** According to Dr. Kirk, “there is precedent for the church’s overturning of the biblical requirements for full inclusion and affirmation within God’s people: the idea that gentiles did not have to be circumcised to become part of the people of God flies in the face of a huge swath of Old Testament teaching. But the Spirit of God gave divine testimony to God’s approval of these gentiles without their becoming circumcised Jews ... (see Acts 10-11, 15, and all of Galatians)” (185). Dr. Kirk’s use of the oft-cited, alleged analogy is just as far-fetched as the one from Gal 3:28, if not more so. There are at least *seven* reasons why the alleged analogy is unworkable.

(1) *Ignores creation grounding.* Jesus grounded the two-sexes prerequisite for marriage in the will of God established at creation—a fact that gave it preeminent significance for him. Circumcision was not grounded in creation structures. Paul correctly understood this, alluding to Gen 1-2 as background for his remarks against homosexual practice in Rom 1:24-27 and 1 Cor 6:9 while contending that circumcision was nonessential (Rom 2:25-29; ch. 4; 6:19; 1 Cor 6:9; 7:18-19).

(2) *Confuses a Jewish ritual prescription having minimal effect on the body with a universal sexual proscription having maximal bodily effect.* The alleged analogy treats as comparable distinctively Jewish ritual requirements that affect the body superficially and universal moral standards for sexual ethics that affect the body holistically. The comparison is especially problematic in view of the fact that both Jesus and Paul rejected it. While Jesus gave diminished significance to diet and Sabbath regulations, he intensified God’s demands in sexual ethics (adultery of the heart, divorce/remarriage) and specifically rejected an equation between food entering the body and desires for prohibited sexual conduct proceeding from the body (Mark 7:14-23). Paul likewise contended that immoral sexual

behavior—unlike food, days, and circumcision—could not come unreservedly under the slogan “all things are permitted me,” for the former alone affected the body holistically and could lead to not inheriting God’s kingdom (1 Cor 6:9-20; 7:18-19; cp. Rom 13:13-14:23).

(3) *Confuses welcoming persons with accepting behaviors.* The Apostolic Decree forbade continued participation in sexual immorality (15:20, 29; 21:25) and did so with the sex laws in Lev 18 in view. Paul similarly *welcomed Gentiles* into the household of faith while commanding them *not to live like Gentiles*, especially as regards engaging in sexual behavior that Scripture categorically forbids (1 Thess 4:3-8; Rom 6:19; cf. Eph 4:17-24; 5:3-5). Although Gentile life was viewed as *typically*, but still only *incidentally*, sinful, same-sex intercourse (like incest) was treated as intrinsically sinful.

(4) *Confuses very different degrees of scriptural support.* Embrace of uncircumcised Gentiles has some significant OT precedents and uniform NT support, whereas embrace of homosexual practice constitutes a radical departure from Scripture in both Testaments. Given how far affirmation of homosexual practice would have to override Scripture, claims to the Spirit’s authenticating role must be considered highly dubious from the start.

(5) *Overlooks limitations of a Spirit-possession /fruit-bearing test.* The premise of the alleged analogy is that evidence of the Spirit’s outworking in one area of a person’s life necessarily validates other areas, even if the latter entails a severe violation of Scripture’s core standards in sexual ethics. But the premise is naïve. Obviously, a person can both give generously to the poor and engage in immoral sexual behavior, without impugning the former or validating the latter in God’s sight. People are very good at separating off or compartmentalizing various aspects of their lives, bearing moral fruit in some areas while having moral difficulties in others. It is possible to have the Holy Spirit and even to live in the Spirit’s power at points while doing things that do not honor the Spirit. The incestuous man at Corinth appears to be a case in point, whether or not the incestuous bond was committed and loving (1 Cor 5). The fruit-bearing test, which appears often in the New Testament, worked for overriding circumcision only because, even for many first-century Jews, uncircumcision did not automatically disqualify a Gentile from being considered “righteous.” However, engaging in same-sex intercourse or any other sexually immoral act would have had precisely that effect.

(6) *Sidesteps the reason for the proscription.* The alleged analogy sidesteps completely the reason why Scripture regards same-sex intercourse as wrong: a dishonoring of the integrity of the sexual self through attempted completion with what one already is as a sexual being. It implicitly treats the very notion of a formal or structural prerequisite for sexual activity as obsolete.

(7) *Confuses ethnicity and “sexual orientation.”* It is a mistake to equate a sexual impulse with ethnicity. On the one hand, ethnicity is a feature of human existence that is (a) entirely heritable, (b) absolutely immutable, (c) primarily non-behavioral, and (d) inherently benign. On the other hand, same-sex attraction as an impulse may be (a) only partly and indirectly heritable (as, for instance, pedosexual attraction or alcoholism); (b) susceptible to some change (at least reduction in intensity, if not redirection) given cultural variables, incremental choices, and therapeutic intervention; (c) primarily behaviorally directed (an impulse to *do* something), requiring an assessment of the behavior; and (d) not inherently benign (many impulses of a deeply ingrained sort are sinful).

The Gentile inclusion analogy would only be a strong analogy if one ignored the seven problems with the analogy cited above. But one cannot ignore these problems. Homosexual unions are not the circumcision issue of today. They are more like the polyamory and adult incest issue of today.