

[How I Went From Non-Affirming to Affirming](#)

Fred Harrell

I am asked again and again, how I came to change my position on LGBTQ+inclusion, specifically regarding the biblical text. Here is the outline of my process: (HT: Stan Mitchell who gave these words)

1. Through the years, both professionally and personally, I met and was acquainted with a large number of LGBTQ+ people.
2. I started listening to them instead of just talking at them or outright dismissing them.
3. I began to actually know them.
4. My experience of them and the fruit of their lives stood in direct contradiction with what I thought I knew.
5. The accumulation of these incarnational/human/personal experiences was not congruent with my received doctrine or understanding of scripture.
6. I did not choose to reject scripture and what I had been taught because of this dissonance.
7. Also, I did not choose to dismiss these experiences.
8. I realized this tension between experience and doctrine was not a new tension but one that has always been a part of Christian history.
9. I remembered that Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, said multiple times, “You have HEARD it was said BUT I say unto you.” So, I followed the Christian hermeneutic or interpretive tradition of allowing new experiences and information to drive me back to the text asking the faithful question, “Have I read and interpreted this text properly?”
10. After a significant period of studying scripture, reading more books than I can recall (from both sides) and a lot of prayerful soul-searching, I came to believe that my understanding on this matter had been wrong.
11. I changed my position and treatment of LGBTQ+ people, first personally and then professionally.
12. Because I think the traditional position is deeply hurting people, I now feel called to advocate on behalf of those who are being hurt in an effort to end the religiously produced wounds they are experiencing.
13. In good conscience, I can't not do 12.
14. I am still open and learning.
15. I am admittedly and obviously a flawed human who wrestles with the frailty of mixed motives, pride, fear and insecurity. And yet on this matter and these dear people, to the best of my ability, my heart is clean and conscience clear.
16. For me to try to compress the details of all of my study and introspection into Social Media posts or emails etc. is absolutely impossible. To inspire others to do their own work on this is my hope.

Some Christians fear disobeying God when it comes to LGBTQ issues. Because of what the Bible says, they fear that they are compromising the gospel. Well, what we do is to pick and choose things out of the Bible that conform to our fears. It's not a matter of obeying the Bible — it's about obeying the gospel. The gospel is about God's saving love that wants to restore all of humanity to full communion. To reach back to an ancient text that has now been corrected by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is simply a bad maneuver and poor methodology and theologically irresponsible. Those texts are not the determinative texts. The texts that are determinative are those that talk about the love of God that has been shown to us in Jesus. We can't compromise that.

Walter Brueggeman

The final and full Word of God is that spiritual authority lies not just in ancient texts but in the living Christ of history, church, community, creation, and our own experience confirming its truth. The mystery is “Christ among you, your hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27)—this is the living Bible! Keep one foot in both camps—the historical text and the present moment—and in your fullest moments you will find yourself also saying “it is like... .” Words are fingers pointing to the moon, but words are never the moon itself. Not knowing this has kept much religion infantile, arrogant, and even dangerous.

– Richard Rohr

What if Christians were called to bear in their bodies the truth of God's sharing their life in the incarnate Christ, the goodness of Christ's laying-down of his life for their sake, and the beauty of the Holy Spirit's raising Christ to life for evermore? What if Christianity were to mean the recognition of one's own participation in deceit and cruelty and the calling of all people to name complicity in oppression and falsehood? What if discipleship meant individually and corporately letting one's life be transformed into a parable of faith, a poem of hope, a paean of love, that exchanges the world's habits of scarcity for the kingdom's assumptions of abundance? What if piety meant leaving aside the things the world offers a tantalizing shortage of and embracing the things God gives in plenty? And the moment that starts to sound too ambitious is the very moment of renewal, because that's when the church for the first time perhaps ever realizes it doesn't have the luxury of prejudice, it doesn't get to include just one kind of person, it really and truly needs everyone who is willing to be part of this great adventure, and is at last surrounded by all the kinds of people who thronged round Jesus, and whom the church should have regarded as its best friends all along. And is there a place for LGBT persons in this model? Absolutely. They're in the front seat of the truck. Why? I'll give you three reasons. One is a terrifying, murderous and persecuted history, which has left LGBT persons so marginalized, scapegoated, and diminished in the church it's astonishing they're still here, makes LGBT persons almost uniquely qualified to identify with those people closest to Jesus' heart, Jesus' company, and Jesus' ministry. After hundreds of years of seeing LGBT persons as living in Babylon, in an exile of their own making, the church is finally beginning to realize that they're not in Babylon—they're in Egypt, in a captivity imposed upon them by others. Of course LGBT persons are sinners—everyone is; but at last the church is beginning to recognize that this is a people incalculably more sinned against than sinning, with an inexhaustible store of wisdom and grace to teach their brothers and sisters.

Samuel Wells, How Then Shall We Live