

CLOBBER THE

PASSAGES

SEVEN DEADLY VERSES



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Stranger at the Gate: to be Gay and Christian in America

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PART ONE:



THE CLOBBER PASSAGES

HOW THEY ALMOST KILLED ME

p. 15

THE CLOBBER PASSAGES ALMOST KILLED ME

THE CLOBBER PASSAGES SEVEN DEADLY VERSES THEY USE TO CONDEMN US

The story of Noah and Ham
(Genesis 9:20-27)

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah
(Genesis 19:1-11)

Levitical laws - laws set by priests for the tribes of Israel.
(Leviticus 18:22, 20:13)

Paul's List of Vices
(1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10) & (Romans 1:26-27).

"Mel White is a gay Christian who for a large portion of his life was abused by a fundamentalist Christian Church using verses in a literally understood Christian Bible. Now Mel White strikes back at those who quoted holy things to carry out their attacks. It is a daring and brilliant book of scholarship and freedom!"

John Shelby Spong, Episcopal Bishop (ret.),
Author: *Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks
Human Sexuality*

What follows is the true story of the verses, how they clobbered me and what we can and must do to clobber them.

MY STORY

You can only take so many valiums before the calming buzz wears off and you're left with the reoccurring depression that threatens your will to live. I had been surviving on valium for at least six months, letting the little yellow pill get me through each new flight, each new speaking engagement, and each new night alone.

Between trips, I returned to my home and family in Pasadena. I had spent the morning at a recording session in a studio near Glendale and was driving to our little bit of paradise on Sierra Madre Blvd high above Pasadena. The day was California perfect with a view of the Los Angeles skyline and the Pacific Ocean twenty-five miles away. There were few cars on the 210 and on a long almost empty stretch of highway, I pressed the gas pedal to the floorboard and for the first time in my life watched the speedometer hit 100 miles per hour.

There was an overpass at Hill Blvd held up by cement pillars wrapped in steel to keep the highway from collapsing during an earthquake. I aimed our new Toyota at the closest pillar and hoped my death would not be painful. For those few seconds, I really wanted to die, to end the struggle, to stop the pain. But I couldn't do it. Unable to follow through, I took my foot off the gas, pushed hard on the brakes, and somehow managed to swerve by the pillar and continue my drive home. At eighty, I can hardly remember what I had for breakfast, but I still remember clearly that moment almost fifty years ago and the panic I felt as I swerved off and then back onto the 210 to continue my drive to the Sierra Madre exit.

At the time I was thirty-five-years old and earning several hundred thousand dollars a year speaking at universities, writing scripts, making films, and writing books. I had a wonderful wife, two great kids, and a ranch style home with a swimming pool in an old avocado orchard in the San Gabriel foothills. I took my family to China shortly after Nixon's visit on points I had earned from United Airlines. We vacationed in Hawaii almost every year as a family. My wife and I had traveled around the world scouting locations for films. I was making for World Vision and World Literature Crusade. I was well-known and respected in the evangelical world and loved by family and friends alike. And still, I wanted to die.

Here's why I was a near-fatal victim of those seven verses, four from the Old Testament, and three from the New. They were nicknamed the clobber passages because they were used by evangelical Christians to clobber (condemn, denounce, attack) lesbian, gay, bi, and trans persons. For centuries the clobber passages have been misused to convince us "queers" that our longings are sinful, to keep us in our closets, and to condemn us to hell if we ever dared to accept our sexual orientation or gender identity as another of God's mysterious gifts.

Stranger at the Gate is the title of the first half of my autobiography. You might wonder what "gate" I was talking about. If you've read *Stranger*, you know how many miserable decades it took for me to escape the power of the clobber passages over my life (let alone to accept my sexual orientation as a gift from God). The "gate" in *Stranger at the Gate* was not made of steel bars or sharp wooden stakes or barb-wire-topped-fencing. The gate that kept me from living the life God

intended me to live was made entirely of the clobber passages, seven verses from the Bible's 31,000 verses that hang over my life like the sword of Damocles, freezing me into place, afraid to accept and yet unable to reject what God had given me.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN FOR ME

To my horror, I discovered at an early age that I liked boys instead of girls. The horror continued while I served my time as a junior high student, especially after gym class or track meets when I undressed and entered the shower room praying that my body would not respond spontaneously to the sight of naked boys. The horror was always present while I served my four-year sentence in high school. I liked girls. I enjoyed being with them, but I wanted to hold hands and make out with my male classmates. The horror persisted through college and grad school where my friends were falling in love, buying rings, and getting engaged while I wanted to fall in love, buy a ring and get engaged to a young man.

Of course, in those days, homosexuality was not just condemned by the clobber passages; it was also considered a mental illness by the country's health professionals. In the next chapters, I'm going to show you how I finally realized that my sexual orientation is not a sin and not a mental illness. I was a victim of the clobber passages for almost 40 years, but when I knew for certain that my sexual orientation was one of God's mysterious gifts, I quit trying to return it.

Some will say, "It's not a sin to be a homosexual but it is a sin to 'practice' your homosexuality." By the way, I don't practice my homosexuality! I don't need any practice. I've gotten particularly good at it. Once I realized that I was created a gay man, I began to enjoy all the benefits of that gift. This "not practicing" option is not really a compromise because

the clobber people think homosexuality is about sex. They're wrong.

Homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is far more basic than the way we express ourselves sexually. That's why I suffer quietly when people call homosexuality a sexual preference or a of a sexual choice. Homosexuality was not something I preferred. It wasn't something I chose. It was an orientation that from the beginning of my life influenced my feelings, my interests, and my beliefs. Sincere well-meaning Christians think homosexuality is just something I do when the lights go out. And because they imagine that what I do in the dark is unnatural at best, disgusting at worst, they condemn me, see me as inferior, less than human, sinful.

When I claim to be a gay Christian, some people ignore me. Some hate me. Some even want me dead. Many suggest that I haven't tried hard enough to overcome, to change, to repent of my sin and be born again. For almost forty years I tried to change by prayer and fasting, by cold showers and nasty tasting pills, by counseling, electric shock, and exorcism (after being told that homosexuality was a demon that had invaded my life).

Finally, I realized that my homosexuality, like their heterosexuality, is my alignment with the world. I could not change it any more than I could change the color of my skin or the shape of my hands. And yet because the clobber passages have them convinced that I am an unrepentant sinner they refuse to welcome or affirm me, to ordain or to marry me, let alone to love me as their brother in Christ.

Worse, somewhere along the way, their confusion about homosexual orientation led to their fear and hatred

of homosexuals. Since burning queer people at the stake or hanging us from the gallows is no longer in style, they needed biblical texts to quote that would help them control or even eliminate us. Over the centuries, the Bible has been misused many times to defend bloody crusades and tragic inquisitions; to support slavery, apartheid and segregation; to persecute Jews and other non-Christian people of faith; to support Hitler's Third Reich and the Holocaust; to oppose medical science; to condemn inter-racial marriage; to execute women as witches, and to support the Ku Klux Klan. And now, the Bible is being misused again to support the fear and hatred of God's LGBTQ+ children. Shakespeare said it this way: "Even the devil can cite scripture for his purpose." The clobber passages are just one more example.

Those seven verses didn't kill me, but they tried. There were many people who helped me survive the clobber passages but there was one person who stood beside me through it all. Without my former wife, Lyla, my name would be on that memorial list of innocent people killed by the clobbers. I thank God that I met Lyla Lee Loehr in the seventh grade where we became great friends. I thank God again that she was willing to date me in high school even though her parents were taking bets about how long it would take for me to kiss their beautiful daughter. And I am especially thankful that despite everything, Lyla agreed to marry me. It is true that my sexual orientation caused both of us much pain but marrying her and being her husband for 24 years turned out to be another of God's unexpected gifts. Thanks to those years with Lyla, I have a daughter, Erin, a son, Mike, a son-in-law Terry, a granddaughter Katie, a grandson Sean, and in

some strange way, even my husband, Gary. Together we are a splendid extended family that makes me grateful and proud. I was clobbered by those seven verses but thanks to God and so many guardian angels along the way, I am clobbered no more.

PART TWO:

A CLOSER LOOK AT THOSE
7 DEADLY VERSES

THE LIES THEY TELL

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p. 26 = blank)

the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10) & (Romans 1:26-27).

Unfortunately, those who would use the clobber passages, read, and understand them in English. They forgot that the original authors didn't write or speak in English. They forgot that the verses were written thousands of years ago in either Hebrew or Greek and that over the centuries they were translated into hundreds of languages by men who had their own ideas about what each word meant. They forgot that these passages make no reference to or show no understanding of homosexual relationships between two free, adult, and loving individuals. They even forgot to consider seriously what those Hebrew and Greek verses meant in ancient times to ancient peoples.

For example, they forgot that originally, the clobber passages describe rape or attempted rape (Genesis 9:20-27, 19:1-11), female prostitution (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13), male prostitution and pedophilia (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10) and the sexual practices of the Isis cult in Rome (Romans 1:26-27).¹

They also forgot that the Bible also condemns eating bacon (or pork in general), getting tattooed, getting remarried after getting divorces, gossip, gluttony, having intercourse with a woman who is menstruating, wearing polyester or any other fabric blends, eating assorted seafood, lying about your virginity, women speaking in church, premarital sex, eating fat, being a male who is not circumcised, working on Saturday, practicing magic, using God's name in vain.

Let's be frank. The clobber fathers could understand and forgive those rather common everyday sins. After all, who

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENED?

I've tried to trace the source of the clobber passages, to discover who turned those 7 verses into law? Unfortunately, I wasn't in the room where it happened, but I can picture it clearly. The men who gathered to give birth to the clobber passages on that day of infamy were fundamentalist Christian men (probably dressed in black suits with matching black Bibles) who read the Bible literally. Of course, they didn't read the whole Bible literally, not all 31,102 verses. They picked just 7 or so to read literally, the seven clobber passages. It's called selective literalism. They opened the Bible looking for texts that refer in any way to men sleeping with men, texts that supported their prejudice, proof texts they used to condemn homosexuality and homosexuals, and they ignored the rest. In that way, the clobber passages were born.

As I said earlier, after these next paragraphs I will never again discuss, dialogue, or debate the seven texts. I've spent the last 40 years trying to change minds and hearts about the clobber passages. In fact, fundamentalists can't listen, let alone allow their hearts and minds to be changed. Given this reality, debating the meaning of those passages is a diversion, a way of avoiding the real issues. So, here we go one last time. These are the passages the clobber fathers selected. You remember them. The story of Noah and Ham (Genesis 9:20-27). The story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1-11); Levitical laws - laws set by priests for the tribes of Israel - (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13); and two words included in the long lists of vices described by

the Apostle Paul: (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10) & (Romans 1:26-27).

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Let's be frank. The clobber fathers could understand and forgive those rather common everyday sins. After all who

hadn't eaten a bit of bacon or had premarital sex or used God's name in vain? Those sins made sense. Unfortunately, there was nothing about men sleeping with men that made sense to the clobber fathers. That act disgusted them, threatened them, and even frightened them more than any other sin.

For the fathers, the clobber passages meant: "Homosexuality is a sin (a sin that needs to be eliminated) and homosexuals are sinners (who should be cured of or at least banned from homosexual acts)." Besides being an unnatural act ("the parts just don't fit"), men who sleep with other men can't have babies and therefore homosexuals jeopardize the future of civilization. What fun it must have been for the clobber fathers to create, make up, imagine all kinds of horrors they could blame on men who sleep with men. Here are examples of lies linked to the verses:

Homosexuals were pedophiles, they whispered, and a threat to the young, especially to boys and young men. (A lie.) Since they can't make babies, they recruit other people's children and therefore should not be allowed to adopt or provide foster care for children. (A lie.) Homosexuals can't control their lust after other men and therefore are a threat to military preparedness. (A lie.) Homosexuals are unrepentant sinners who should not be trusted for ordination. (A lie.) Homosexual relationships are short-lived; therefore, they should never be given the rites or the rights of marriage. (A lie.) Homosexuals are a threat to the nation's values and should never be granted federal or state protections in employment or housing. (A lie.)

Believing their own tower of lies, the clobber fathers were convinced that those 7 verses were so important to the future

of humankind that they should be elevated into law, right up there with the 610 laws in the Hebrew text and the 1,052 laws in the Greek. They didn't stop long enough to remember that Jesus had already selected two biblical laws by which all laws, ancient and clobber, should be judged. "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. These two commands are the essence of all the laws and the prophets."²

The Apostle Paul simplified those two most important laws in just five words, "The entire law," Paul wrote, "is fulfilled in keeping this one command: **Love your neighbor** as yourself."³

We may never agree on what really happened in Sodom, almost 4,000 years ago.⁴ We may not fully understand what the Christians were doing in Rome that so infuriated Paul, 2,000 years later, but we can be sure of this. The clobber fathers were not loving God or their neighbor when they constructed their tower of lies and those church folk who still use the those lies to support their attack LGBTQ+ should ask themselves: "When I vote to condemn and exclude my LGBTQ+ sisters and brothers from the rights God has given all of us, am I showing my love for God and my neighbor or am I revealing that my determination to stop homosexuality and homosexuals is more important to me than Christ's law of love?"

There is a sign that one day love may conquer homophobia. I admit that there is a long road ahead, but a slight very encouraging change has been noted. In the past few years those who would clobber us have stopped saying "it's a sin to be a homosexual." Somehow, they have learned that homosexuality like heterosexuality is an orientation,

not a choice. It is a mysterious combination of nature and nurture that informs every part of our humanity that can't and shouldn't be exorcised or prayed away.

However, unlike most heterosexuals, homosexuals dare not accept their orientation as another of God's mysterious gifts. They must fight "to overcome" their orientation for the rest of their lives. Christian leaders who know that you are a homosexual by orientation but also understand that you are in the process of "overcoming" will welcome you to full unqualified membership in their churches. But the moment you quit trying to "overcome," when you "practice" your sexual orientation then you are no longer welcome.

When gay presidential candidate, Pete Buttigieg, spoke honestly about his sexual orientation and just as honestly about his Christian faith, Billy Graham's errant son, Franklin, scolded Mayor Pete for practicing his homosexuality "when it is something to be repentant of, and not be flaunted."⁵ It seems that Mayor Pete's homosexual orientation didn't bother Graham. But when the Mayor practiced or flaunted it, Graham went berserk. It's interesting to note that Graham goes equally bonkers when he sees a Christian show love and not judgement to a "practicing" homosexual. Here's the irony. When a heterosexual Christian shows love and acceptance to a "practicing" homosexual, that good Samaritan is also condemned. The trials of Jimmy Creech is a painful example of good Samaritans being condemned for their righteous acts.

For twenty-nine years this well-known and much-loved heterosexual minister served the United Methodist Church. As a reward for his service, Jimmy Creech was tried before an ecclesiastical court, found guilty, defrocked, and dismissed

from his life calling. Jimmy wasn't a homosexual, but he was willing to marry two gay men who were happily flaunting their love for each other. Now it seems that we who flaunt our homosexual orientation endanger those who love and accept us.