

God, the Bible, sexuality and gender

Dr Deryn Guest discusses her research.

Title: [God, the Bible, sexuality and gender \(/schools/ptr/departments/theologyandreligion/research/videos/deryn-guest-research.aspx\)](https://schools.ptr/departments/theologyandreligion/research/videos/deryn-guest-research.aspx) Duration: 3.38 mins

Hi my name is Deryn Guest, and I've been here 8 years - and my research interests are in the big topics of God, the Bible, sexuality and gender. My research interests in particular are related to how lesbian and gay people read the Bible for themselves and academically how queer theory can be used to interpret the Bible in very new and unusual ways. The Bible turns out to be quite a surprising document in that regard - it is not the conservative document many people think it to be - but actually is quite a queer old text.

Now in terms of my actual current research project what I'm interested in is where a lesbian reading of texts belongs. I've largely been working in feminist biblical scholarship up until the last 5 years when I started developing a lesbian-identified reading of scripture - and the question I'm currently facing is, having looked at what the principles and strategies of that approach might be, where does it live? Is a lesbian approach to scripture part of the feminist biblical scholarship route? Does it expand feminist scholarship into new areas and can feminist scholarship embrace that? Actually what I find is that there's some antagonistic voices around that issue.

So then you ask yourself does it belong with queer approaches to the Bible, and moving into that domain. Well some people think there are problems with that too. So my current research project is looking at whether we can move beyond feminist biblical scholarship into an area that I would call gender criticism. I'm not sure its going to work perfectly, I'm not sure it will take all feminists with me but I'm interested in finding a space where people who identify as gay or lesbian and maybe bisexual and trans-gendered or queer can work with feminist political biblical scholarship in order to create a new space for interpreting texts.

And why do I do this? I do this because it matters. In some parts of the world to identify as gay or lesbian is actually a life or death decision. Literally. And what is of surprise - or perhaps of no surprise - is that the Bible is used as a document to wield against those who identify with these identities in these contexts. So therefore the act of interpretation is never neutral. What I'm interested in therefore is how the Bible is used and deployed in those contexts, used and deployed in the House of Commons, in the House of Lords, used and deployed generally amongst Church and Jewish organisations for their positional statements. To think about how texts are being selected, how they are being interpreted and whether we should take more ethical responsibility for our decisions on how we read the Bible.

So my research I think can make a difference - it can make a real difference to people's lives - and I would welcome anybody who was interested in these things and making a difference when one is a biblical scholar to come and work here at Birmingham with me. My details are on the website, by all means drop me an email and I'll be happy to get back to you. Thank you.

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