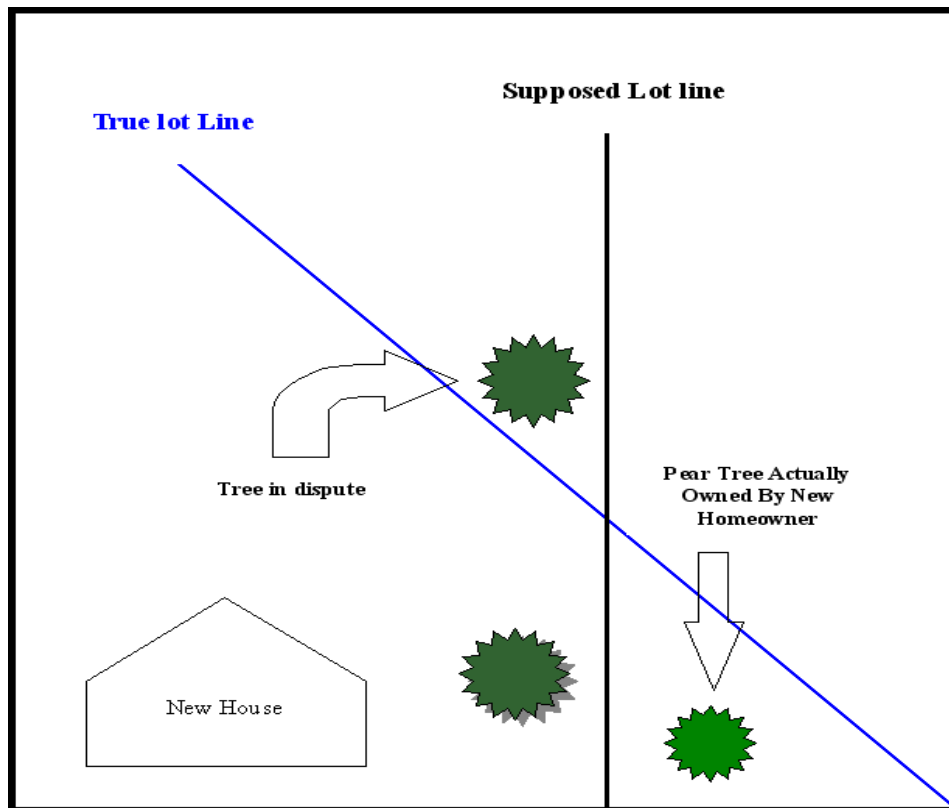


Sin in the Wesleyan Tradition

It is helpful to understand how sin is defined in the Wesleyan tradition. Sin, per Wesley, is a **willful violation** of a **known** law of God. This is confirmed in [James 4:17](#). Sin, properly so called, per Wesley, is not honest mistakes, misunderstandings, or shortcomings. It involves an act of the will. The following diagram will help to clarify this (from volume 3 of *Profiles In Wesleyan Theology*, Leslie D. Wilcox, 3:166, Schmul Publishing Company, Inc., Salem, OH. 1985).



Situation #1

"A man buys a house and property. According to his understanding, the property line goes straight back from his house. On what he believes to be his land is a fruit tree (the tree in dispute), so he picks and takes the fruit. The neighbor sees this, and comes out of his house furious and screaming, accusing his new neighbor of being a thief for stealing his fruit! Unbeknownst to the new neighbor, the property line goes at an angle, and the fruit tree is clearly in the neighbor's yard. The question is: **Did he sin?**

According to Wesley's definition *he did not* (in the sense of an act of rebellion), for it did not carry the essential elements. First, *he did not know* he was doing wrong. Secondly, *he did not willfully* violate his neighbor, but yet, to all rights and appearances, the new neighbor broke the law and stole what was rightfully his neighbor's. Now, once he was informed of the fact that he violated the law, then he owed his neighbor restitution for his loss.

Situation #2

But what if the new neighbor was sneaking around and taking pears from the tree that was on his property (bottom right tree), but *he thought* they were on his neighbor's property? **Did he sin by taking fruit that was already his property?**

Yes! Sin is a matter of the heart and intent, not necessarily the result of what occurred. If he thought that he was stealing his neighbor's pears, he was committing a sin in his own heart, a willful transgression of a known law of God. This illustration helps us to rightfully differentiate between a mistake, an act of ignorance, and a willful act of sin ."

In the example above it might take time and study to determine if sin had occurred re: just where the property line was. Likewise, for Christians seeking to follow Christ, we must learn through prayer and bible study what God's will is for our lives. Once we become aware that we are falling short in some area either through sin of omission or commission we are then morally accountable for it. Even here it may take time for us to either learn to act in new ways or learn how to stop acting in old ways.

Some clarifications here...

When we make mistakes due to lack of knowledge .. (*'sin properly so called'*) it still needs to be covered by the grace of God . Since none of us are perfect, we need to realize that God's grace is covering us for those times that we fail . I am simply making distinction here between willfully shaking my fist at God and acting out of ignorance or a lack of knowledge.

The doctrine above is not a license to keep on sinning by pretending we don't know what God wants ... remember .. God knows our hearts ... if our hearts do not condemn us we have confidence before God.

Conclusion...

Now let's relate this to what we have been talking about. The property line(s) reflect where one might biblically draw the boundary line for sexual activity between people of the same sex.

Many on Side A have studied the scriptures and believe that same sex sex is affirmed by God. Thus they believe that same sex sex between people who have made a lifelong commitment (marriage) is within the boundaries of God's will. Thus they are not willfully sinning. (This would look like situation #1 from the viewpoint of those who are Side B)

Now there may be others who are Side A that know that same sex sex is out of bounds but do it anyway. This would be **willfull** sin and rebellion **regardless** of where the true boundary line is. Sin is a matter of the heart. (Those who are Side A would view this as situation #2.)

Side B on the other hand believes that ALL same sex sex is out of bounds. Thus for Side B to cross this boundary line is sin according to their heart convictions. It is important to understand here that in this case it is sin **regardless** of where someone else may believe the boundary line actually lies. Sin is a matter of the heart. (This also would look like situation #2 to those who are Side A.)

This is why it is wrong to coerce someone into crossing a boundary line that they, in their heart of hearts, believe exists. To do so is to wound their conscience and encourage them to ignore their inner voice of right and wrong, (See [1 Corinthians 8:1-13](#) and [10:25-32](#)) Instead we must allow God to work in their lives and let them be led by the Holy Spirit.

On the other side of this I personally believe it is not helpful to accuse people who are sincerely following their Side A beliefs of sinning. In their heart of hearts they are not sinning. I have good friendships with people who do not believe as I do on many issues .. not just this one. It would not do either of us any good to point to the other and call them a sinner. We do not do that in those situations and I see no

reason to do this here. All that does is put up defensive barriers with an '*I'm right .. your wrong*' type of attitude. The issue here is knowledge, interpretation and mutual respect.

Now before I get accused of moral relativism here let me say that God is the one who ultimately knows where the boundary line is. But God is also the **ONLY** one that knows where an individual's heart is on this issue. So we leave judgment to God (See [Romans 14](#) and the earlier Corinthians reference) A basic summary of these passages is that we are not to judge another man's (God's) servant. God will do the judging. (Also note that I interpret *weak conscience* in the passage as a '*different conscience*'. Paul's concern is that we do not tempt someone to go against their conscience (or their faith). The specific situation Paul was referring to had to do with O.T. food restrictions. But our issue has two theological arguments (Side A and Side B) about which even scholars disagree.

The heart of the matter is not my list versus your list. The heart of the matter is the heart itself. The question all of us need to ask is: Is my heart right with God? Is my heart completely submitted to His will and His way in my life. This is a call to all Christians no matter what the issue. This understanding of sin moves us away from arguing about who is right and instead focuses us on being completely submitted to the move of God's Holy Spirit in our lives.

Note: For further study see this page ... http://biblical-theology.net/what_is_sin.htm (Note .. I am **not** recommending the entire content of this website .. only this page) This discussion is also found on GCN at the following address...<http://www.gaychristian.net/community/showtopic.php?tid/13862304/> and also on my website ..

Contact info: website: www.comingout4christians.net , Email: Dave@comingout4christians.net