

Email Exchanges on the Topic of Sexuality
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Letter 4

Hi *****,

Hope you're doing well. Thank you for those kind words in the closing paragraph of your last email...I hope I can reward the energy it takes you to read these lengthy email letters.

You suggest that some Christians have changed their opinion about women in church leadership, therefore Christians should also revisit their position on same-sex marriage. Maybe it would be helpful for me to answer a few points about the question of women teaching first. We need to take 1 Timothy 2 and 3 together because the case for male-only eldership straddles both chapters. Chapter 2 is taken as the negative prohibition against women teaching men. Chapter 3 is taken as the positive prescription for men teaching as elders. The first consideration is that Greek is a gendered language with gendered pronouns, like Spanish but unlike English. Greek does not have a generic non-gendered pronoun, and the masculine singular pronoun 'he' or 'him' is used when referring to a person of either gender. This is like the Spanish pronoun 'el'. There is an 'ella' for 'her', but 'el' is used when the gender of the person is unknown or unspecified. Here are some examples of this in the New Testament: Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman and yet spoke to her using masculine pronouns, 'Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give *him* will become in *him* a well of water springing up to eternal life' (Jn.4:14); and Paul in 1 Timothy spoke of female widows being responsible to care for their families, yet he used masculine pronouns to describe them, 'But if anyone does not provide for *his* own, and especially for those of *his* household, *he* has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever' (1 Tim.5:8). Even in the Old Testament, when the divorce legislation of Deuteronomy 24:1 – 4 is phrased in the masculine sense, as a husband divorcing his wife, the rabbis viewed this as applicable to wives who wanted to divorce their husbands; moreover, Jesus affirmed that interpretation in Mark 10:12 when he was discussing the Sinaitic Law and exploring whether wives could divorce their husbands for infidelity (a historical note, however: starting from the 5th century BC, rabbinical interpretation started to deny wives that right because of the influence of Greek culture, which was very negative towards women). This is shown supremely in the fact that Jesus became man (*anthropos*) in a way that undeniably includes women. The stress there falls on Jesus as the divine-human being who redeems human nature in himself and offers a cleansed human nature back to men and women. Significantly, Jesus is never spoken of, and must never be spoken of, as the divine-male being who redeems male nature. So when you find a masculine pronoun like 'he' or 'him' or 'his', you need to determine from both the immediate and wider context whether the writer is speaking exclusively about men or inclusively about both genders. Likewise, the masculine plural pronoun 'they (men)' or 'them (men)' are used when referring to a group of people of both genders. That's like the Spanish pronoun 'ellos'. Note also that the Greek words for 'male' (*arsesin*) and 'female' (*theleiai*) are specific and leave no ambiguity about what the writer intends to say, unlike the use of gendered pronouns or the use of the man as the example that includes women. When we look at the role women played in Paul's letters as leaders of house churches, including Junia, who was most likely an apostle (Rom.16:7), and Phoebe the deaconess of the church of Cenchrea who delivered Romans itself (Rom.16:1), there is decent reason to read 1 Timothy 3 as Paul speaking inclusively of both men and women, if we didn't have 1 Timothy 2. Though Paul describes eldership using male pronouns and the example of a man, we can consider this andro-centric language, but not strictly an andro-centric institution. I'm thankful to Gordon Hugenberger, pastor of Park Street Church and professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, for introducing this point to me.

But we do have 1 Timothy 2, so that deserves comment, and more than I'm providing here. There are difficult translational issues here. To summarize them quickly: There is a question of whether 'teach or exercise authority over' is a literary hendyadis describing one thing with two words, or whether it is two separate concepts meant to be read as two separate things. Moreover, the word *autentein* (not *exousia*) which is translated 'exercise authority over' is difficult to pin down with surety; 67% of the time the word appears in the extant Greek literature, there are significant negative connotations connected to it, including the sense of 'instigating or perpetuating a crime'. The word sometimes translated 'silence' in v.12 is the same word which is given the more measured translation 'quietness' in 1 Timothy 2:2 and 11. The verb 'will be saved' refers to a single female, but the verb 'to continue' refers to women in the plural. The word 'childbearing' has the definite article before it in Greek, thus reading 'the childbearing' and perhaps referring to Jesus' birth. The word 'if' in v.11 is better translated 'when' or 'when and if'.

All told, it is very possible to translate this passage: ¹¹ A wife must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹² But I do not allow a wife to ‘*lead a husband into error*’, but to remain quiet. ¹³ For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. ¹⁴ And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. [implied: *And Adam was in knowing rebellion against God through his own participation.*] ¹⁵ But ‘she’ [i.e. *Eve*] will be saved through ‘the Childbearing’ ‘when and if’ they [i.e. *the women referred to in 2:9*] continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.’

An important note here: Adam in Genesis seems to have added ‘and you shall not touch it’ to God’s command, even though the ban was on *eating*, not *touching*, the fruit. Hence, when Eve touched the fruit and did not die, her doubts about God’s truthfulness would have been compounded. Her deception was partly the result of Adam providing her with misinformation. Adam made God appear stricter than He really was, perhaps to be extra sure that Eve did not go near the Tree. But this supplied Eve with doubts about God when she touched the fruit and did not die immediately. Interestingly enough, this bears some resemblance to the issues surrounding the Ephesians Christians that were under Timothy’s charge; under the impact of ancient Greek culture and philosophy, they too were wrestling the physical creation including their bodies, marriage, and sexuality.

The particular sins or errors that some women – and surely some men as well – were falling into are discussed throughout 1 Timothy. One location is this: ‘But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.’ (1 Tim.4:1 – 3) This is very typical of the conflict between the Greek worldview which opposed spirit and matter, soul and body, and the Jewish and Christian worldview which affirms the goodness of God’s creation, and the union of spirit and matter, where, ‘Everything created by God is good, and nothing [i.e. food, sex within marriage] is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer’ (1 Tim.4:4 – 5). If one modern observation can be brought in here, women are more able than men to restrain their own sexuality. It is a short step from there to gravitate towards a dualistic framework where the body and the creation are demeaned, although men had their own reasons for doing so in the Greek landscape, which alternatively led to strict abstinence (Stoicism) or promiscuity (Epicureanism) because both branches of thought grew from the same root, the idea that the body was irrelevant. Notice that Paul mentions certain psychologically vulnerable women in 2 Timothy 3:6 as being susceptible to bad teaching. Against this cultural and intellectual backdrop, Paul is reminding Timothy about his charge to teach faithfully the Jewish-Christian implications of creation theology. Far from being an absolute prohibition against women teaching, this is a mandate to help women learn. It is also a mandate to help anyone learn who is less educated and more vulnerable to incorrect ideas arising from one’s cultural context. Paul enlists the story of Adam and Eve, not as a paradigm for a husband’s sheer authority over his wife, but as a paradigm for how theological error creeps into even a marriage relationship. In fact, the use of Adam and Eve as an illustration is an apt counter to the Greek dualism and the denigration of the body, marriage, and childbearing, since in Jewish creation theology, the body, marriage, and childbearing are actually at quite at the center of what it means to be human. Referring to Adam and Eve invokes all that, and referring to ‘the Childbearing’ reminds us of the messianic promise connected to childbearing, that Jesus was the promised deliverer of Genesis 3:15 who was born ‘the seed of the woman.’ Far from being the curse or a stain as it was in Greek culture, where it was held that the immortal and pure soul was imprisoned for a while in a decaying body, childbearing was fundamentally positive in Jewish-Christian thought.

This translation commends itself, first of all, by the fact that it has no forced Greek. It fits with the literary context of 1 Timothy and the historical situation of the ideological conflict between Greek dualism and Jewish-Christian creation theology. It fits the historical evidence I highlighted in my last email, concerning Priscilla’s role as a church elder in Rome, and the early church circulating *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* celebrating a female teacher. It fits with my exegesis of both 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, wherein Paul tells women to pray and prophesy in the congregation, and then goes on to say that prophecy is the highest gift available to the common Christian (apostleship alone being higher). It fits with the presence of apparently influential female leaders in the churches throughout the New Testament. It fits with the practice of Jesus to teach women, enlist women as disciples, and send women as the first witnesses to his incarnation and his resurrection. It fits with the very important prophecy of Joel 2, that God will pour out His Spirit on both men and women so they both will prophesy, quoted by Simon Peter as inaugurated at Pentecost. It fits with the hints moving towards this reality in Mosaic Israel, with its female

leaders, prophetesses, and judges. And it fits with the most natural understanding of what God intended from creation for men and women as His image-bearers.

The integration of the theme of speech into Jewish-Christian creation theology is a support to my point about gender and sexuality. It seems to me that God’s command to rule and subdue was associated with human beings speaking and verbalizing their rule over the creation. Just as God brought forth life in creation by speaking, humans were to tend life primarily by speaking. This once again ties the first and second creation accounts closer to each other, since God’s commission to humanity to rule the creation finds one specific expression as Adam names the animals. The ontology of being in the divine image suggests some ability to act in a parallel way to God, who works by speaking. Logic also requires it: Adam and subsequently, Eve, had to verbally repeat God’s blessing and prohibition to all their descendants. This sustaining of God’s word through the word of humanity captures the essence of what it means to be God’s true humanity. Perhaps the animals even spoke back to humanity, which may have been the case since no one was surprised that the serpent could speak; the world of Adam and Eve may have been very close to C.S. Lewis’ Narnia, where some creatures understood the human tongue and could respond in turn. Regardless, the power of human speech is further reinforced by the Babel narrative, where humanity speaks like the creator God (‘Come, let us make’) and God Himself makes a cautionary remark, ‘nothing will be impossible for them’ (Gen.11:6), because humanity will weave a story together about themselves that does not include God. Thus, speech was an integral part of God’s work in creation, and humanity’s partnership with God in creation by virtue of God making them in His image. Mosaic Israel saw men and some women anointed by the Holy Spirit to speak in their midst, but this anointing was for leadership in Israel and not for the average person in their relationship with God. However, the prophet Joel expected God to restore both men and women to Spirit-empowered, right speech (Joel 2:28 – 32) because that is the way God intended men and women to operate from the creation. Jesus’ practice in the Gospels, as well as the subsequent apostolic witness in the New Testament, affirms that in Christ, God intentions from creation for both men and women are being restored.

The literary structure and content of Luke – Acts, in my mind, seals the deal. Luke uses a ‘thesis statement’ format in both his Gospel and in Acts. At the beginning of each work, a major leader – Jesus in the Gospel, Simon Peter in Acts – quotes from the Old Testament to summarize how the Holy Spirit will empower human proclamation of the word of God. Jesus quotes Isaiah 61, adding some ties to Isaiah 42 for good measure; Simon Peter quotes Joel 2. Then, the rest of the narrative substantiates the truth of what was just spoken. This table helps me see Luke’s stylistic format better:

| | At the Beginning of the Story, | A Major Leader | Quotes from the OT | To Summarize How the Spirit Will Empower Proclamation | And then it Happens! |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|---|--|
| Luke | Luke 4 | Jesus | Isaiah 61 | ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to preach...to proclaim... ’ (Luke 4:18 – 19) | Jesus preaches and proclaims. (Luke 4:20ff.) |
| Acts | Acts 2 | Simon Peter | Joel 2 | ‘And it shall be in the last days that I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind and your sons and daughters shall prophesy ...I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy. ’ (Acts 2:17 – 18) | The apostles and other leaders proclaim and prophesy. (Acts 2:19ff.) |

The lynchpin here is Luke highlighting women in the ministry of the Spirit to speak through people. Luke effectively begins not with Zacharias, who is silenced for his lack of faith, but with his wife Elizabeth, and then the young Mary of Nazareth. Luke’s narrative begins by inverting an Old Testament archetype of ‘the elderly couple’ in which Abraham was faithful but Sarah doubted. That archetype was already used playfully in the book of Samuel when describing Elkanah and Hannah, since Elkanah was not only faithless but careless, while Hannah was quite faithful. Now, Luke perceives that archetype at work here, as he narrates an elderly husband silenced by God while his elderly wife gives praise to God and proclaims His doing. Then, Mary of Nazareth is given pride of place with her poetic Magnificat celebrating the conception of Jesus. This literary treatment of women is important because it corresponds thematically to Jesus undoing the fall, where a wife Eve brought a word of sin and death to her husband Adam, who then followed her into that sin and death. The redemption wrought by Jesus undoes the fall wrought by humanity. And in this redemption and renewal, women are the bearers of God’s word of life to men. Luke

dramatizes this by his literary style of pairing people and events together in juxtaposition. In Luke 2:25 – 38, the remarkable faithful prophetess Anna matches the gracefully eloquent Simeon in the Temple. In Luke 7:1 – 17, Jesus provides two people with stories containing insight into his power over death, but the humble Jewish widow of Nain has a greater insight and clarity than the powerful Roman centurion with whom Luke pairs her. As noted in Luke 8:1 – 3, Jesus traveled with female along with male disciples, which was unprecedented and controversial for any rabbi. In Luke 10:38 – 42, the Jewish ideal of a man studying Torah in the Temple is replaced by the picture of Mary of Bethany listening to Jesus' teaching at his feet; and so on. This remarkable pattern continues through Jesus' resurrection, where some of Jesus' female disciples are the first to proclaim the empty tomb despite disbelief among the male disciples. Then in Acts, women play significant speaking roles: Lydia (Acts 16), Priscilla (Acts 18 – 19), and Philip's daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21). It affirms that indeed, God's word through Joel is now coming to pass through Jesus, which in turn invites us to reflect back upon God's original intentions for humanity from the beginning: for male and female to bear His word and speak it forth in creation.

Well, that was a long digression, and one very much worth discussing in its own right. But it has bearing on the topic of gender and sexuality because it illustrates how the biblical storyline passes from creation to new creation. For the sake of continuity and hopefully simplicity, I'll move directly to the biblical data, and try to weave back our other points of discussion into the treatment of that data.

(1) Thank you for expanding your treatment of Scripture to include Matthew 19:1 – 12. You accept the relevance of Matthew 19:1 – 12 for heterosexual divorce, but not more broadly than that. Here, as you said, we begin to part ways. You believe we should take what we today call 'sexual orientation' as an established, unquestioned factual category before we read the biblical texts. In effect, you make sexual orientation a hermeneutical lens by which we read Scripture, and you do this to mitigate and qualify what exegesis would, without a doubt, conclude. I lump this issue under Matthew 19:1 – 12 because this passage is the best starting point from which to engage it.

The question involved with this style of reading and interpretation is that there are many occasions in which the discipline of exegesis actually challenges the hermeneutical lens itself. For example, if I start with a patriotic commitment to the nation-state as an unquestioned, factual, hermeneutical lens, then this hermeneutic will eventually bump up against the actual teaching of Jesus in Scripture. Now there are certain areas of commonality and overlap, such as love for neighbor in a near sense. But Jesus teaches about loving aliens and enemies afar off, turning the other cheek to evil doers, disinheriting one's self from land and material wealth, living within the transnational nature of the church as a distinct polity with real ties of allegiance, and so on. So then there are those who try to limit Jesus' teaching on these things by applying it only to a person's 'private life' while leaving the 'public life' or 'political life' governed by *realpolitik*. But in reality, the teaching of Jesus qualifies and mitigates any prior commitment to the nation-state. We cannot remain fundamentally committed to a geo-political territory defended by war and governed by force. So the exegesis overturns the hermeneutical lens, which seeks a privileged position by refusing to be evaluated by the biblical story, but claiming to evaluate the biblical story instead.

Similarly, many liberation theologians (much as I respect some of them) tend to start with a Marxist paradigm of class struggle on behalf of the poor as an unquestioned, factual hermeneutical lens. And, as with the example above, there are certain areas of commonality and overlap with Christian ethics. But then they bump up against Jesus' teaching about greed being a sin even among the poor, his rejection of violence even in defense of property and sometimes life, forgiving enemies, reconciling with opponents, and even evangelistic mission which introduces a new basis for personal sacrifice, often resulting in people becoming poor for the sake of others, and then seeing the world according to metaphysical beliefs and not just economic class. This does not fit within the lens of the Marxist class struggle paradigm. Once again, the teaching of Jesus qualifies and mitigates any prior commitments. The hermeneutical lens seeks a privileged position by refusing to be evaluated by the biblical story, but claiming to evaluate the biblical story instead. But again, the exegesis overturns it.

If we use 'sexual orientation' as such a hermeneutical lens, what happens? I will continue deepening the exegesis to see if that lens can be sustained. You are correct in assessing my position that, in the original creation, Adam and Eve are not just chronologically the first human couple, but the *paradigmatic* human couple. That is, to the extent that any human marriage occurs, the relationship that Adam and Eve had before the fall is the paradigm and pattern for it. The author of Genesis treats them that way, and Jesus affirms it.

You believe we should make an exception for a same-sex marriage, asserting that it is only the type of love and commitment between Adam and Eve that makes them paradigmatic. However, both the author of Genesis in Genesis 1:1 – 4:26 and Jesus in Matthew 19:1 – 12 also make clear that humanity's identity (as God's image-bearers), as well as responsibility (as God's commissioned agents to reflect Him in the creation), were for each and every human being, not just humanity at large while some exceptions were acceptable. This is important because part of the argument in favor of same-sex marriage is the presumption that not every married couple had to participate in the creation commission in the same way that Adam and Eve did, both in terms of identity (gender) and responsibility (childbearing and physically spreading the garden over the earth).

Backing up and first taking a wider look at the literary unit of Genesis 2:4 – 4:26, as well as its function in Israel, supports this position. Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 serves as the first genealogy in the book of Genesis, a 'genealogy of heaven and earth' according to Genesis 2:4 (since Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 is an introduction to ten genealogical sections in Genesis; and Genesis 5:1 starts the second genealogical section, that of Adam) which told the people of Israel why *each one of them* did not dwell in great walled cities but spread out over the land of promise in a very different manner than the Gentile civilizations around them. Israel was a partial restoration of God's original creation design, living in a partially restored garden land. God's work of restoring humanity from the fall was not complete, but this is why Israel viewed itself as a 'new humanity' patterned after what Adam and Eve were supposed to have been and done. They were to spread out over their own garden land, maintaining a strong sense that their life was a pilgrimage and a journey of wandering, memorialized in their Feast of Booths (Lev.23:33 – 43) when they lived in tents like their ancestors did in the wilderness, in their confession, 'My father,' that is, Abraham, 'was a wandering Aramean' (Dt.26:5), which reminded them of his archetypal wandering, and in their worship of a peculiar God who wandered about in a tent (the stationary Temple was not God's idea, according to 2 Sam.7) because He once walked about in a garden long ago. I think this was to prepare them for Jesus, who said that he had no place to lay his head and who would send his people throughout the world in Christian mission. The Israelites were not to build a civilization like Cain did in his city, Enoch, or even more problematically, a civilization like all humanity did in Nimrod's city, Babel (Gen.11:1 – 9), which could only be scattered. The fact that Genesis links Cain's descendants with perverting human dignity and bending life around one's self, starting a pattern of retaliatory murder in exchange for verbal insult, starting polygamy, and probably also starting slavery (the word 'livestock' in Gen.4:20 might refer to human slavery), indicates how negatively Genesis viewed this development. Each of those behaviors repudiates both the identity (made in the image of God) and responsibility (commission to multiply and fill the earth) given by God to humanity in creation. Thus, this genealogy of heaven and earth explains why heaven and earth are ruptured in relation to each other, and why God's chosen people Israel live a life on the land whereas those Gentiles who are alienated from God live life in cities. It also helped explain to Israel why marriage in Israel looked the way it did: specifically, that God's ideal for each Israelite was for a monogamous marriage between male and female, with hope for children. Israel's understanding of their own life was rooted in their understanding of God's original purpose in creation.

I have raised questions which I will renew specifically to evaluate whether 'sexual orientation' can serve as a hermeneutical lens that is held prior to reading Scripture. First, there is still the question of gender, of a marriage of 'male and female' identified as being in the image of God, as Genesis 1:27 says that 'in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.' As I have pointed out, in Matthew 19:4 – 5, Jesus links Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 together, thus identifying 'male and female' as the creational ideal for marriage and sexuality. What would ordinarily be read together anyway (Genesis 1 and 2) is thus interpreted by Jesus, who strengthens the bonds between those two passages. Jesus makes clear that those two passages mutually interpret each other. Because we are dealing in the book of Genesis with human origins, gender by itself – including but even apart from reproduction per se, as suggested by Paul's intriguing comments in 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16 about the glory of God in husbands and wives as husbands and wives – is woven into what it means for human beings to bear God's image, making gender inextricable and non-negotiable. This is where the opposite gender dynamics between 'male and female' in marriage from Genesis 1:27 becomes further informed by the sense of 'reunion' and the principle of the 'binding' one flesh nature indicated by Genesis 2. There is something about a marriage of male and female that images God. If Genesis 2 is to be taken in this way, then perhaps the image of God is to be partially seen in a woman's more relational nature expressing itself in a woman who brings forth God's life and beauty to the world simply through her own relationship with God and the giving of herself in relationship with others, who, additionally as a wife, is close to her husband's heart through God's help, helping him and motivating him to articulate his very self to the world around him, which is represented by the strength and masculinity that is visible upon his body needing help and motivation to stir. Perhaps the image of God is to be partially seen in a man's more artistic-functional nature,

expressing itself in a man who was designed to partner with God in a task much greater than himself, who, additionally as a husband, knows his wife to be an inseparable part of himself who guards his vulnerable heart by God's help, who helps him understand more deeply the beauty and life in the world as he shapes it according to God's command and his human creativity, because he has learned that his wife's own most sensitive and fruitful feminine parts lie hidden within her body. Moreover, she helps him pass on the word of God that he has inherited for the sake of those who will come after him, the children that they have partnered together to create. Paralleling male and female in marriage, God's strength and beauty are both plainly evident and yet also needing to be discovered. Our own pleasure in spiritual union with God (and perhaps vice versa) can be both intense every time (the male principle in orgasm) and yet also joyfully intensifying over time with the quality of the relationship and our connection with Him (the female principle in orgasm). Hence, I do think human personhood and gendered human bodies are sacraments – physical signs teaching us something about deeper realities – but this takes place in relation to the other gender in its appropriate context.

Second, this brings us to the question of children again. How could a same-sex marriage have fulfilled the creation responsibility to be fruitful and multiply? It could not. The creation mandate, by its very nature, required marriages of male and female persons *for each and every person*, not just for some persons but not others. I'll come to what the advent of Jesus means for marriage and singleness as I continue to explore Matthew 19:1 – 12. But as far as human marriage and sexuality goes, the ability to bring forth more human life within opposite-sex marriage corresponds to God's original action of bringing forth human life. The responsibility to bear children confirms and reinforces the identity of the male-female marriage being in God's image.

Third, my position is also strengthened by how speech connects God and humanity from creation, as I wrote above when I considered speech, women, and teaching. Human beings were meant to be and do what they verbally passed on to others to be and do. Our words and deeds were meant to be unified in our lives, since that integrity bears the image of the God whose word and deed are always unified in an even more profound way. God's word *is* His deed ('Let there be light'). In fact, God has so much integrity that we can rightly say that God *is* His Word (John 1:1). This means again that the creation responsibility to 'bear fruit and multiply and fill the earth' was intended for everyone, from the beginning. For every single person was meant to be, do, and *speak* this word of God. A same-sex marriage, no matter how loving, would have been an alienation from the created order and the Creator. They would either have to speak about a relation that they were not in, and a task they could not do; or they would have to be silent about the central commission God had given them, which included passing on that word. As related to speech, either option would constitute a departure from the God who speaks life, blessing, and knowledge of Himself. The image of God would have been tarnished by a same-sex marriage in this sense as well.

Had the fall never happened, this creational mode of human life would have repeated itself until God's purpose in creation was fulfilled and a turning point came. That probably would have involved an incarnation of the Son of God into uncorrupted human flesh, the sealing of each person's will into their uncorrupted, God-oriented human nature for all eternity by the Spirit. Human marriage itself would be no more (e.g. Mt.22:30 – 32) because there would be no more childbearing. And upon the earth, a messianic age of glory would have dawned, one more beautiful than the original creation itself.

But even though the fall did happen, Adam and Eve tried in faith to be the paradigmatic married couple, their genders included, which they had once been before the creation. This is shown in the contrast between two different postures of humanity in Genesis 4. Even after the fall, as indicated by Genesis 4:25 – 26 and its reference to people calling on the name of the Lord, Adam and Eve continued to carry out God's commission by multiplying human life, though it was not as easy and straightforward as before. Then, implicitly, they spoke about and tried to teach each of their descendants about bearing the image of God in a male and female marriage of their own, and bringing forth more human life – children of their own. Now, God's promise of a deliverer who would crush the head of the evil one was identified with the 'seed of the woman' and linked inextricably to childbearing (Gen.3:15), which served to reinforce the desire of God's people to bear children, which in turn reinforced the commitment of God's people to male and female marriages. This explains the overwhelming desire among Old Testament believers for children. One never knew whose child could be the deliverer! We also see this occupation with childbearing in the progression of names chosen by the narrator in Genesis 5. Out of all the generations of people to choose from, over a fairly vast time period, the author of Genesis highlights ten names from Adam to Noah which contain a curious message: 'Man appointed mortal sorrow; the blessed God shall come down, consecrated; [his] death brings despair

and rest.’ The fact that this apparent message spans generations of people affirms the importance of the genealogy, and thus, the importance of childbearing as a sacramental act of hope in God and obedience to him.

| Name | Meaning | Verses |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Adam | Man | 5:1 – 5 |
| Seth | Appointed | 5:4 – 8 |
| Enosh | Mortal | 5:6 – 11 |
| Kenan | Sorrow | 5:8 – 14 |
| Mahalalel | The Blessed God | 5:12 – 17 |
| Jared | Shall Come Down | 5:16 – 20 |
| Enoch | Consecrated | 5:18 – 24 |
| Methuselah | Death Brings | 5:21 - 27 |
| Lamech | Despair | 5:25 – 31 |
| Noah | Rest | 5:28 – 32 |

Also, speech and act were still bound up together, now heavy with words of prophetic future hope. Humanity’s new task after the fall was to pass on a word of hope God had uttered, while living faithfully by that word of hope, i.e. getting married and bearing children, trying as best they can to live the creational commandments under conditions of the fall, because one day ‘a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us’ (Isa.9:6). All this reinforces the picture of humanity as made in the image of the God whose speech and act are one, a God who was also moving towards a resolution of evil through this deliverer. The descendants of Adam and Eve who maintained a hopeful trust in God this way were represented by their son Seth, and also Enosh.

Their disobedient descendants, however, were led and represented by Cain, who rejected the creation mandate in at least three easily recognizable ways: They did not spread out over the earth, they began twisting monogamy into polygamy, and they rejected God altogether as shown by names like Mehujael (‘smitten of God’), Methusael (‘death of God’), and Lamech (‘despair’). Cain began a type of human civilization that, first and foremost, spurned God’s command to spread out. He defied both God’s specific command to him as an individual to ‘wander’ as punishment for his murder, and did not allow others to leave his city as well. His children had to provide him with food, since Cain could not fruitfully work the ground, and security, since Cain was fearful of others and of God. It is no accident that he named his city after his son, Enoch. Whereas God had said that a man will leave his father and mother to cleave to his wife, Enoch could not leave his father Cain. This constitutes a fourth violation of God’s intention by Cain and his line: children were no longer a physical sign of future hope, directing the community to a salvation that was yet future, but made servants and slaves to the past, to older generations who grew more psychologically weighty even as they died. Those are Cain’s fundamental and original ironies.

The point that is germane here is this: Even after the fall, God still intended for *each and every person* to follow the identity and responsibility He gave them to spread out over the earth. That is quite clear from the narrative of Genesis. Even when humanity faced more challenges to do so and lost whatever supernatural power they probably had before the fall to tame the wild creation, because of their previous proximity to God’s presence, God still expected each and every person to continue living out the human identity (as image bearers male and female) He gave them, and the responsibility (as commissioned agents to spread over the creation) that goes along with it. Failure to do so reflected a further alienation from Him. If the line of Cain spurned their creational responsibility to spread out, and the author of Genesis saw this as inherently sinful on their part, confirmed by God’s judgment on Babel (Gen.11:1 – 9), then it is false that God commanded humanity in general but no one in particular. Rather, God commissioned *each and every human being* to participate in their image-of-God identity, as individuals, yes, but eventually in a one-flesh marriage of male and female, so that each person could also do their part in God’s creation commission to bring forth more human life, since the bringing forth of human life is also part of the image of God. The only basis for saying that the line of Cain actively sinned against God, which is rather obvious, is to maintain a position that should be equally clear, that God’s creational mandate was, in fact, given to every single person. God was not interested in making exceptions for some people so long as others walked faithfully with Him. That would defy the integrity of the story and its meaning on several major points. Hence, the hypothetical same-sex marriage resulting from a same-sex sexual orientation would not fit here from creation. To engage in a same-sex marriage would be contrary to God’s creational mandate, which was uttered not generally to humanity writ large, but specifically and personally to *each and every person*. This creational framework undergirds the specific

provisions of the Sinaitic Law about marriage and sexual relations in Leviticus, which I'll revisit below, and then the new creational framework taught by Jesus.

So we start to come back to the question of what happens when the hermeneutical lens itself is actually challenged and overturned by the exegesis. To use a hermeneutical lens is to seek for that idea a privileged position over the biblical story by refusing to be evaluated by it. That is why any hermeneutical lens must be examined so carefully. When the hermeneutical lens cannot be established, and is in fact shown to be contrary to the message of Scripture, then it must be put aside. Exegesis determines the meaning of the biblical text, as we also consider the canonical context and the wider biblical story. The hermeneutical lens does not. In this case, through this treatment of Genesis 1 – 4 with valuable commentary from Jesus in Matthew 19:1 – 12, about which I will say more below, I cannot maintain the idea that sexual orientation is a valid hermeneutical lens by which we are to read Scripture. Already, before I even treat Leviticus or Paul, I have enough reason to conclude that it is not a category that can exist prior to Scripture and alongside it as an equal and valid factual authority. So I cannot accept its use.

I can ask the same question when dealing with Matthew 19:1 – 12 and come to the same conclusion. You say of this passage, 'Even though Jesus himself broadens the framework of the discussion from divorce alone, he doesn't broaden it beyond heterosexual marriage.' You are suggesting here that if Jesus considered sexual orientation as part of the question, or was asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to marry another man?' then he would have explained Genesis 1 – 2 differently. He would say that the 'male and female' portion which he had just quoted was only incidental to the story of Adam and Eve and that gender is a negotiable part of God's vision for marriage. You suggest he would say, 'It really depends on the sexual orientation of the couple'. The conclusion you come to is that Matthew 19:1 – 12 by itself is insufficient to help us answer the question of whether Scripture categorically critiques loving and committed same-sex marriages. Thus, you feel that my treatment of Matthew 19:1 – 12 assumes my position rather than proves it. But once again, is there an indication that the exegesis challenges the hermeneutical lens itself? Is there any reason to think that the passage is more than just indeterminate?

I would agree with you if Jesus had merely cited some other 'model marriage without divorce or polygamy', for example Boaz and Ruth, or Solomon and the Shulamite in *Song of Songs*, as an *example* of good conduct. If he did not explicitly tie marriage today to marriage at the origin of humanity as male and female, commissioned to reproduce, then I would agree that the text would be indeterminate as an evaluation of the concept of sexual orientation and the possibility of same-sex marriages. Yet the fact that Jesus refers to a marriage in the pre-fall creation order, which involved male and female, does make the critical difference. The creation order is normative, as Matthew 19:1 – 12 rests on Genesis 1 – 4. And I already have sufficient evidence from Genesis 1 – 4 that God applied His image to *each* human being as mediated through their gender, and then called for human participation *from each human being* in the creation mandate to bring forth more human life and spread over the world. Thus, God did not just command humanity generically, as if some parts of God's very first commandments to humanity could simply be set aside on a case by case basis, so long as enough other people did His will. In the creation order, gender mattered, marriage mattered, childbearing mattered, and spreading out mattered, for each person. Jesus is reiterating this by quoting Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 together, 'He who made them male and female...said...', and then applying this to every marriage. This was God's intention and it is Jesus' intention to renew it. Jesus' way of telling the story of creation to new creation here is identical to Paul's way of telling the story from Adam to Christ (Rom.5:12 – 21; 1 Cor.15). The use of 'creation' or 'the beginning' or 'Adam' as the anchor point of one end of the biblical story establishes norms that are reestablished and also surpassed by Jesus. This is what every human marriage was meant to be, from the beginning, in the unspoiled creation before our human nature became corrupted through the fall, resulting in 'hardness of heart'.

The rather abrupt way in which Jesus offers the eunuch option to people lends support to why I don't think he is just talking about 'heterosexual' divorce, but all deviations from God's original creation intent. If, in fact, 'heterosexuality' was just the particular circumstance of the person asking the question, then Jesus probably would have inquired further about what made it so hard for his disciples to accept his definition of marriage when they reacted by saying 'it is better to not get married' (Mt.19:10). After all, it is possible, and probably likely, that some of Jesus' disciples (certainly out of the 120 disciples numbered at Pentecost in Acts 1 – 2) felt some level of same-sex attraction. Moreover, the Pharisees, disciples, or someone in the 'large crowd' (Mt.19:2) could feel challenged by *any* of the three main parts of Jesus' vision of marriage. Perhaps the idea of marrying only one spouse created feelings of stifling claustrophobia (an inclination against monogamy). Perhaps same-sex attraction made opposite-sex marriage unattractive (an inclination against male-female union). Perhaps the duration of marriage seemed

hopelessly long (an inclination against the one flesh life-long bond). Probably any and all of those aspects (and perhaps more) of his definition of marriage challenged people in various ways. I suspect he was perfectly aware of all those feelings. Yet we are not even sure why the disciples complain about how hard Jesus' standard of marriage is (Mt.19:10), for in Matthew 19:11 – 12, Jesus does not ask, 'Why do you say that? What aspect of my definition challenges you? Let me qualify what you might have misunderstood about God's intention from creation.' In this particular passage where the disciples express their reservations about Jesus' high bar, Jesus is not interested in exploring further why they feel this. He is not even encouraging people to get married. He is primarily interested, it seems to me, in protecting God's interest in imaging Himself into the fundamental human relation, so as to bear witness through a human marriage to the creation. And he is unapologetic about it. Heterosexual divorce appears to be only the prompt for Jesus to discuss the larger question of what he calls for in human marriage.

About being a eunuch, you say, and I agree with this portion of your statement, '[Marriage] is normative for most men, but not all.' I would only add that it is not normative *any more* precisely because of Jesus' coming and his bringing God's covenant with Israel to a climax in himself. Jesus' advent and his teaching on being married or being a eunuch brings both a very old and a very new dynamic into human marriage and sexuality. This again shows how Matthew 19:1 – 12 is very important to the understanding of the broader biblical story. So Jesus first heightens the requirements for marriage, returning it to its paradigmatic origin. Second, he also introduces the eunuch category. In the wider theological story being told in Scripture, the emphasis on marriage and childbearing *as a universal duty for all of God's people* comes to an end with Jesus. This is because Jesus himself is the fulfillment of the prophetic hopes for a deliverer, born of human flesh as the 'seed of the woman.' Jesus is the climax of the covenant, a covenant which called for human participation with God throughout, not least through childbearing. However, marriage does not lose its original shape. Jesus retains it as a sacramental witness.

You then suggest, 'Gay men, in a quite fundamental way, are not made for sexual union with women...because they are capable of romantic love and sexual attraction with another gay man. The same holds true for lesbians.' Your argument rests on a definition of how we are 'made', or perhaps, what we 'desire'. That is, of course, where we differ. For Jesus in Matthew 19:1 – 12, there is only one way we were 'made': We were made in the image of God to reflect His nature, partner with Him in all His purposes in creation, and grow in the process, and that is why he references it. If we add Paul's comments from 1 Corinthians 5 – 7, since our bodies are also made to be indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus, and on a deep level to be 'concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord' (1 Cor.7:32), we can also say that the 'eunuch' status can be voluntarily chosen with joy, as Paul commends, for the sake of more ministry. In any case, no one is a eunuch for the kingdom because of how they were 'made'. Quite the opposite. Being a eunuch for the kingdom is the choice Jesus invites us to make when we *cannot* or *do not* live according to how we were 'made'.

So after looking at Genesis 1 – 4 and Matthew 19:1 – 12, can we conclude that these texts merely leave us *uncertain* about loving, committed, same-sex relationships? You are technically correct that this hermeneutical lens of 'sexual orientation' as such is not directly addressed by Scripture itself. If 'sexual orientation' is an upstream source of valid authority, then we can test it exegetically against all the downstream implications it would have. Can this prior commitment, then, to 'sexual orientation' function as a hermeneutical lens, qualify the biblical story, and float above it as an established, factual, independent lens on Scripture, claiming to not be critiqued by it? Within the narrative of creation and what follows, up to the advent of Jesus, these are the questions that we must necessarily ask, to test that question: Can 'sexual orientation' completely qualify and make irrelevant the issue of gender and turn it into a negotiable aspect of God's image and creational vision of marriage? Can it remove the significance of gender, as male and female, from the physical unity of marriage as a sacramental expression of the image of God, despite the grammar of Genesis 1:27? Can it remove the significance of childbirth as God's command to every person, since every person was called to share, to the fullest, in the image of God, this God who brings forth human life with joy? Can it shift the meaning of God's commandment, to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, away from being God's personal invitation *and* command to each and every individual, and turn it into His wish for humanity generically, but a command for no one in particular? Can it remove the unified integrity of speech and act from some of us, which is another key aspect of each of us bearing the image of God, this God for whom unified integrity of speech and act is vital to His very being? Can it break the 'image of God' into parts like this, so that some people retained the whole while others took only parts? Can 'sexual orientation' override the narrative of Genesis when the narrative evaluates characters as if every single person were summoned by God to Himself, certainly before the fall but even afterwards, to both the whole identity and full responsibility He bestowed upon each human being originally? After the fall, was the redemption in Christ which God wove into humanity's ongoing creational

responsibilities (childbearing, spreading out, speaking the word of God in hope and witnessing to it in an embodied integrity) entrusted to only those with a 'heterosexual orientation'? Can we make our own biochemistry, or our own desires, the reference point for human sexual relationships, even though Jesus himself, along with Paul later (Rom.8:18 – 25), acknowledged that the physical world has gone awry, and that things can happen in our mother's womb that are the result of humanity's fall?

If some (or all) of the downstream implications of a hermeneutical theory are rejected by exegesis of the biblical text, then the assertion that lies upstream must be false. Because exegesis answers 'no' to all of those questions above, I must conclude that the overarching source from which these questions flow and are triggered – the idea that 'sexual orientation' should qualify everything else we read in Scripture about sexual behavior – is invalid. The claims of 'sexual orientation' to be a hermeneutical lens based on established, indisputable fact, and to introduce a new variable into biblical interpretation, are simply not true. The idea that we are to follow our 'sexual orientation' to live out God's vision for healthy relationships cannot occupy a privileged place above the biblical text. Instead, it must be re-examined, scrutinized carefully, and deconstructed, for it is a claim to truth which does not conform to the truth claim of the biblical witnesses. Hence, I cannot agree with you that Scripture is simply indeterminate and silent about the subject of loving, committed same-sex marriages. Even before I turn to examine Leviticus or Paul, Genesis and Jesus indicate that even the most loving and committed same-sex marriage that I have seen or could imagine is not what God intended from creation. If Scripture is held to be truth at all, the exegetical conclusions are to be brought forward and upheld as truth over this prior commitment.

The underlying inconsistency of your approach is shown when you try to answer the question of marriage for a person who is more committed to bisexuality in principle. You believe the bisexual person simply has a wider pool of people to choose from for marriage. Your explanation for this appears to be a pragmatic one: it allows everyone to experience sexual expression and enjoyment with one other person while upholding some commitment to biblical authority. And again, there are surely people for whom this would suffice. But the actively and simultaneously bisexual person would surely pick up on the inconsistency (and already has). On the one hand, you believe a person's 'sexual orientation' is a creation category and therefore any person should be able to follow their 'sexual orientation', despite what Scripture says about 'male and female' and all those other considerations. On the other hand, you believe that God's design for marriage is an exclusive relationship between two, and only two, people. You think the biblical text is not negotiable on this point. Yet is 'marriage' subordinate to 'sexual orientation'? Or is 'sexual orientation' subordinate to 'marriage'? Said another way, why can't we apply an even wider hermeneutical lens with its own claim to truth? The biblical writers did not speak about, or seem to even know about, the possibility of three or more people in a mutually consensual relationship. Maybe this was the result of their limited cultural experience: They never saw such a relationship in a healthy form. But we in the modern age have experienced it positively, and monogamy is so obviously and sadly restricting because so many people are unable to actually do it. Bisexuality is more fulfilling for the bisexual, and consensual adultery can actually preserve a 'marriage'. So why can't we use that wider hermeneutical lens as an established, unquestioned fact while we read Scripture? What makes your hermeneutical lens so unquestionably right when it feels so narrow? You have not offered a solid theological or biblical explanation for why the exegetical and the hermeneutical principles intersect in only that particular way, because you don't really have a way of evaluating your own hermeneutical lens. It is simply asserted as such. This highlights the problem of carrying in a prior commitment that claims to be invulnerable to evaluation by exegesis. In part, this is why I maintain the position I do.

You object to the fact that I am, in effect, lumping support for same-sex marriage in with 'tolerance of unmarried cohabitation, infidelity, and non-monogamy'. It seems appropriate to directly answer certain questions you asked me of that sort. You ask if I differentiate voluntary, committed same-sex unions of equals from adultery and rape. I certainly do in the sense that adultery involves unfaithfulness to a vow (presuming there was a vow of faithfulness of the 'traditional' sort), and rape involves coercion and violence. But if you are asking the question from the opposite direction, that is, whether I can put same-sex marriages on the same theological footing as opposite-sex marriages, then the answer is no, I cannot do that. In that sense, and, I might add, only in that sense, do same-sex unions fall into a category with adultery and rape, because same-sex unions do not correspond with God's original creational design of marriage as male and female. So I understand the import of your question and how my response might be heard. I would maintain, however, that while the colors red and yellow are very different from each other in many ways, compared with blue, red and yellow do share at least one characteristic: They are both not blue.

You find it very meaningful that people are able to express the fruit of the Spirit in committed and loving unions. You ask me if I think the fruit of the Spirit can be demonstrated in such relationships. Generally, yes, but I would say three things about that. First, the very language you're using presumes the male-female marriage and childbearing backdrop of Genesis 1 – 2. That is, when the language of 'bearing fruit' is applied to our relationship with Jesus by the Spirit, it is drawn from the concrete reference point of male-female marriage and childbearing from Genesis 1:27 – 28. It also comes from the 'vineyard' analogy, as Jesus speaks of being the vine and us as branches bearing fruit (Jn.15:1 – 17). But the human childbearing analogy is also always present because 'fruit' for both plants and humans is a reference to reproduction. For example, Paul makes human marriage a metaphor for our union with Christ in Romans 7:1 – 6. Paul says that we are 'married' to Christ in his death, and also 'married' to him in his resurrection; we are drawn into oneness with him as we share in his new humanity by his Spirit. Then, perhaps playfully extending this sexual pun, Paul calls us to 'bear fruit for God' (Rom.7:4). This innuendo about childbearing draws from the sexual relationship of male and female in marriage. The physical representation is a sacramental window into the spiritual designed to help our understanding. Alternatively, if we look the other way round, one can see that the deeper spiritual reality of union with God through the Son's union with our humanity was always anticipated by God; He designed our physicality and male-female marriage as a way to help us understand what He wanted to do in personal union with us. This is perhaps one additional reason why Jesus called his people back into the original creation paradigm. Even though singleness is to be very much respected and supported in the kingdom of God, marriage as monogamous, male and female, and binding continues to be the normative definition of marriage and the normative reference point for understanding this language of 'bearing fruit' because of the symbolic potential if not the actuality of bearing children. Second, if people in a same-sex union have a greater level of mental and emotional well-being because of the companionship and the felt relief of sexual expression, I can respect that, but I'm not sure we can equate all of that with the fruit of the Spirit. Third, the Spirit always condescends to us, humbly taking whatever opening we give him to work, even if we are living other aspects of our lives in alienation from God. So I am happy to grant the presence of some of the fruit of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, mental or emotional well-being, or any other positive indication that we would commend and feel grateful for, but that does not prove that same-sex marriage is theologically good. It only proves that the Holy Spirit is, in fact, good. And if the Spirit is distinct from any human relationship we have, which he is, and if the Spirit can be trusted to bring us into more and more of the good that God has for us, which he can, then I think we must appreciate his invitation to us to bear even more fruit in our lives.

(2) I will begin to address your questions to me about Leviticus, but not without leaving Matthew 19:1 – 12 behind, because it has a bearing on some of the questions you ask. You ask if Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 might permit oral sex or mutual masturbation for a same-sex couple. I'm familiar with the argument from the pen of Daniel Boyarin, though not Saul Olyan. Boyarin understands some Jewish rabbis as prohibiting anal sex, while seeing other sexual activity as forms of masturbation, which is also frowned upon but sanctioned against with less force.

I think Jesus in Matthew 19:1 – 12 basically answers some larger questions surrounding that. We are probably all a bit unnerved by the serious tone that Jesus maintains by using the dreaded word 'eunuch', and not just the word 'single' or the word for 'unmarried'. For the word 'eunuch' means that there is no sexual activity happening for that person. Whereas the word 'single' or 'unmarried' would only *imply*, in the Jewish-Christian context in which Matthew writes, that there is no sexual activity happening, the word 'eunuch' means *explicitly and of necessity* that there is no sexual activity or stimulation happening while the person is not married. As well, Jesus' first two categories of actual eunuchs refer to men who cannot physically engage in sexual activity, whether by birth or castration. First, 'there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb,' by which I take Jesus as acknowledging that some damaging things happen in the physical world, and even to us in the womb, that reflects the creation being in a state of decay, groaning, and alienation from its Creator, because human beings aborted the creational mission and fell into sin instead. That is a point that has relevance here in its own right. Second, 'there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men' by castration, unpleasant as that is to think about. Third, 'there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'.

I have had a thought about why Jesus uses such a strong concept: it is actually easier to be sexually chaste if one tries to avoid being sexually stimulated altogether. So, while I acknowledge the personal difficulty of what you are saying about avoiding kissing and certain other forms of physical affection, I would like to share that my advice to myself while I was dating, and others about dating, is 'affection, not arousal'. This understanding is also based on the Song of Songs in its repeated refrain, 'Do not arouse or awaken love until it pleases'. But it also comes out of personal experience and conviction. Letting yourself be sexually stimulated and then forcing yourself to cool off is

actually the more difficult path; it leads to a greater sense of frustration; why would you want to keep doing that to yourself? It clouds our judgment and hinders the cultivation of other abilities and sensitivities. As challenging as the idea of being a 'eunuch for the kingdom' is, it has also been a helpful word, too. Now we can have a sense of humor about arousal when it happens, but we are to entrust our thoughts and our bodies to Jesus and let him steer us away from it, that is, if we are standing outside of marriage as Jesus defines it. This is a hard inward choice. The only place for sexual *arousal*, not just consummation, according to Jesus here, is his super-strengthened definition of marriage. That is often surprising for people. In Christian thought, sexual consummation is obviously for marriage, but sexual arousal is on a continuum that also belongs to marriage. That being said, I think there are many non-arousing forms of physical affection, and it does depend on each person and when they cross that line for themselves.

Given that Genesis 1 – 4 and Matthew 19:1 – 12 already critique same-sex unions of all sorts, without exception, the prohibitions in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are most naturally understood to be not simply prohibitions on pederasty or cult-prostitution of the same-sex variety, but same-sex intercourse categorically. When the Sinaitic Law wants to make a specific injunction against cultic prostitution, it does so (Dt.23:17 – 18). The other two Leviticus passages are without qualifiers. This agrees with the historical-cultural data on the Canaanites. Greg Bahnsen writes, 'The historical fact is that in Canaanite culture homosexuality was practiced as both a religious rite and a personal sexual perversion in general; it was popular in the temple and the town, performed both religiously and hedonistically. Israel's pagan neighbors knew both secular and sacred homosexuality... The Bible condemns the sex life of the heathen town as well as the sexual idolatry of the heathen temple.' (Greg Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), p.45)

All the references in the Sinaitic Law to marriage and sexuality, not simply the ones referring to same-sex intercourse in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, are best understood as part of the larger story spanning creation to new creation. God was simply giving to Israel the principal implications of His commandment to humanity from creation. The relationship between what is prohibited negatively and what is commanded positively hangs together on the vision from creation of monogamous, male-female, one-flesh binding marriage.

So does Leviticus speak to anal sex in particular and not gay relationships in general? Is it relevant that some Jewish rabbis thought Leviticus 18 and 20 permitted oral sex or mutual masturbation? As a question mark hovering over the historical judgment of Robin Scroggs, since he limits them to pederasty, yes (see below), but for the purpose of determining Christian practice, no. Do I think Leviticus 18 and 20 actually permitted those forms of sexual expression? Probably not, but I think it's an irrelevant question. Jesus' use of the term 'eunuch' in Matthew 19:12 answers that question, as does Song of Songs in its own creative way, and it's supported in my experience and others' experience, that it is quite a bit easier to stop sexual stimulation at its source rather than at some later point.

(3) When translating *arsenokoitai*, you ask that we give Robin Scroggs due consideration in his shift of the Leviticus ban from same-sex sexual activity in general to pederasty in particular. Of course, but I think we can both agree that being early to state a position doesn't make one's entire argument sound.

First, if Boyarin and Olyan take Jewish commentators on Leviticus 18:33 and 20:13 as speaking against anal sex by all male couples without respect to age, what permits Scroggs to take Philo as an authority when limiting those verses to pederasts? I am not sure how Scroggs can know Philo's full intent or why he privileges Philo's literary output above all other Jewish commentators on this point. Boyarin's and Olyan's data show that Scroggs is arbitrary when he simply enlists Philo as the authoritative Jewish commentator on the subject. Scroggs wants to apply the phrase *meta arsenos koiten gynaikos* against pederasts, while other Jewish commentators apply the phrase against anal sex by all same-sex male couples, even, tellingly, adult couples.

Second, Scroggs also does not adequately explain why Paul condemns lesbian coupling in the same language with which he presumably condemns male pederasty in Romans 1. Sappho and the other examples of Greco-Roman lesbianism that we know of were not pederastic. If, in Romans 1, Paul was really writing against male pederasty in particular but lesbian coupling en toto, that would be remarkably uneven.

Third, when I examine what Scroggs said about limiting the *arsenokoites* to being the active adult partner, and the *malakos* as the younger boy probably held against his better judgment, surely against his will at the outset, and sometimes against his will in an ongoing way, I'm left with more questions. Is this a good explanation for why Paul

lists *malakos* in a vice-list of this sort? Is Paul really holding these young boys responsible for something they were probably not morally responsible for? That interpretation poses its own, rather significant, difficulties.

The reason why Richard B. Hays and others reject Scroggs' limitation of Leviticus 18 and 20 to pederasty is because the historical-cultural context of Leviticus does not support limiting *meta arsenos koiten gynaikos* that way (since Canaanites practiced same-sex intercourse both at home and in their temples), nor does the theological context of Leviticus support it (since it takes the Genesis creation order as its frame), nor does the historical-cultural context of Paul's ministry support limiting *arsenokoitai* that way (since, as I mentioned, gay sex was not only pederastic), nor does the theological context of Paul's ministry support that (since he too took the Genesis creation order as normative, following Jesus).

Incidentally, I'm not suggesting that Paul's only exposure to same-sex coupling was through literature, although we can be quite certain that he had been exposed to the Greek literature since he quoted from Aratus, Cleanthus, and Plautus in Acts 17:28, and since the works of Plato, Dio Chrysostom, Plutarch, and Diodorus Siculus were probably even more widely known than that. I suspect, rather, that he was exposed to it through personal contact with same-sex couples. The historical-cultural data that I have seen strongly suggests it. More on this below.

(4) You bring up good questions about 1 Corinthians 6 – 7. I have argued on the basis of Genesis 1 – 4 and Matthew 19:1 – 12 that the Genesis creation order of marriage as male and female undergirds Paul's thought. And in that framework, gender is not just incidental, but purposeful and non-negotiable. So I am not making a hermeneutical assumption that is unverifiable. I am working from a foundation that is provable exegetically. So I do think the reason for why Paul takes for granted that Christian marriage is opposite-gendered is because male and female marriage is normative from the Genesis creation and reaffirmed by Jesus. And, by extension, the reason for why Paul omits consideration of same-sex marriage is because he considered it to be unacceptable.

You ask whether the issue of women in leadership parallels the issue of sexuality. I do not think it does, because, as I mentioned earlier, the Greek words for 'male' (*arsesin*) and 'female' (*theleiai*) are specific and leave no ambiguity about what the writer is stressing and intends to say. When *arsesin* and *theleiai* are used, as they are in Romans 1, male and female in their gender are being stressed. This is not like the use of gendered pronouns or the use of the man (*anthropos*) as the example that includes women (*gynaikos*). This is shown supremely in the fact that Jesus became man (*anthropos*) in a way that undeniably includes women. The stress there falls on Jesus as the divine-human being who redeems human nature in himself and offers a cleansed human nature back to men and women. Significantly, Jesus is never spoken of, and must never be spoken of, as the divine-male being who redeems male nature.

(5) Your interpretation of Romans 1:26 – 27 hangs on the idea that Paul had no idea what a 'sexual orientation' was. You raise a good point, asking how are we to regard 'sexual orientation' if it did not exist as a phrase back then. Can we safely assume that people had no idea that same-sex attraction could start from birth? Let's first make sure we understand the historical sources in the same way. Greek culture had a great deal of sexual diversity. The fact that some Greek moral philosophers called same-sex intercourse *para physin*, against nature, does not take away from the wider observation that significant portions of Greek life and culture simply accepted it, and that some of those very philosophers actually still endorsed it. According to same-sex-marriage proponent John Boswell, 'Many Greeks thought gay people were inherently better than straight people' (*The Church and the Homosexual: An Historical Perspective*, 1979). Classical Roman culture was the same. Boswell notes that 'gay marriages were also legal and frequent in Rome for males and females. Even emperors often married other males. There was total acceptance on the part of the populace, as far as it can be determined, of this sort of homosexual attitude and behavior. This total acceptance was not limited to the ruling elite; there is also much popular Roman literature containing gay love stories.' And even the Jewish community shows some indication that they observed enduring same-sex attraction in their midst, and struggled to make sense of it. Why else would some Jewish rabbis even think of interpreting Leviticus 18:33 and 20:13 as giving a strange, shadowy permission to oral sex or mutual masturbation?

With a great deal of confidence, we can safely put to rest the notion that the biblical writers had no observations of people with same-sex attraction that lasted a long, long time, probably even throughout their lifetimes. We can put to rest the notion that they had never seen gay married couples. The desire for and attraction to another person of the same sex is something they understood quite well. Given all this data, why must we assume that the early

Christians, including Jesus and the apostles, simply had no concept of what we would call 'sexual orientation' today? Some people seem to be of the mind that just because the terms 'heterosexuality', 'homosexuality', or 'sexual orientation' did not exist before the early 1900's, that people had no idea what the underlying content of those words meant. To me, that seems to be a kind of nominalism which suggests that words so totally bring into reality the things they signify that the things signified did not exist at all in people's minds before the words did.

You want to qualify Paul's argument in Romans 1:26 – 27 on the assumption that he had never considered that sexual orientation was a product of one's birth. Yet is this the appropriate assumption to make given the Greco-Roman world and the Jewish rabbinical world with which Paul was intimately familiar?

You grant that Paul's original meaning when he used these terms is fairly well determined by the common and consistent use of them by the Greek moral philosophers who noted same-sex unions, and also by the Jewish contemporaries of the time, but now you object to the Greek sources themselves, saying that they, too, fail to question their own presuppositions. You write, 'In general, writers who maligned same-sex unions as "unnatural" did not attempt to reconcile this with the naturalness of same-sex orientation, and by and large, they did not acknowledge the orientation to begin with.' I want to clarify what I wrote last time, as my brevity apparently gave you the wrong impression. Most Greek writers were not maligning same-sex unions, but were using the words *para physin* and *kata physin* to describe it. The Stoic-Cynic philosopher Dio Chrysostom seems to be the only writer who clearly maligns it. Plato and Plutarch are approving and encouraging it. They recognize that it goes against the biological order, but they are not attaching a moral judgment to it. Far from it. Many Greek men thought lower of women, many idealized male friendship including male-male erotica, the Stoics even despised the biological order and sex altogether. So why would they feel the need to 'reconcile' their same-sex orientation with the biological order? To the average Greek, the biological order ranged from neutral to despicable. This would make the question of the origins of sexual orientation completely irrelevant to them. If a person wanted to attribute it to nature, nurture, or choice, what difference would it have made to them? Gay relationships and gay sex were virtues in themselves. If you first felt same-sex attraction at age 22, age 13, or from as far back as you can remember, it was all good to them. So when you expect ancient Greek literature to wrestle with whether same-sex attraction was endemic to the person or whether it started from birth, you are expecting something incongruous. You fault the Greek authors for not writing a diagnosis of a problem which they didn't perceive as a problem in the first place.

Additionally, the Greeks were fond of differentiating people from birth on many counts. They thought they were descended from a different human ancestor than everyone else; to them, this made them superior and everyone else slave potential. Plato thought that people were born into three types: philosophers, warriors, and everyone else. Under the impress of Greek cultural thought about good souls, bad bodies, male superiority, and birth, the Gnostics held that women were born as deformed or corrupted men. The Greeks were perfectly comfortable creating theories about birth. Thus, I find it extraordinarily difficult to believe that the Greeks never entertained the idea that a person could be born with a same-sex attraction.

I also find it perfectly reasonable and imaginable that pious Jews of the time would have looked at gay people and asked the same question the disciples asked Jesus concerning the blind man in John 9:1 – 2, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born gay?' Jesus had to repeatedly extricate God's activity from these kinds of circumstances and clarify that neither God nor personal or parental sin was the cause of such things (cf. Lk.13:1 – 5). People were constantly making guesses about these kinds of things. The Jewish people had seen birth defects and other congenital issues and commonly chalked them up to either God's judgment or the fallen world generally. Yet you believe it is more historically likely that Paul never considered this idea? Likewise, you seem to assume, against historical and cultural assessment, that the Greek and Jewish authors who serve as a linguistic comparison group to Paul also never considered that a person might be born with a same-sex orientation. Although I don't know of any ancient document that explicitly says so, there is ample data from the picture we get from all the historical sources to suggest that many people were more than willing to grant that sexual orientation was the product of one's birth.

All this makes Paul in Romans 1:26 – 27 the more clear in scope and foundation. Yes, Paul employed the same semantic words – *para physin* and *kata physin* – as those Greek moral philosophers who identified same-sex coupling as against the biological order, whatever they thought of that. But fundamentally, Paul goes a step further by saying that the biological order is derived from the theological order of creation. Paul follows Jesus as a Jewish creational theologian who saw marriage as originally designed for male and female, and restored to be such for those

who undertake marriage. Genesis 1 – 4 and Matthew 19:1 – 12 demonstrate that God’s creational identity, which He invested into humanity by virtue of making us in His image, and God’s creational commission, which involved childbearing and spreading out over the earth, were the responsibility of each and every human being to be, to do, and to speak about. Paul’s thought fits in seamlessly with this line of thought. And I have shown in the last email that Genesis 1 – 4 and Jesus, not least in Matthew 19:1 – 12, are really the true sources of Paul’s thought, since Paul gives indications that Genesis 1 – 4 were uppermost in his mind when he dictated Romans 1:21 – 32. Paul’s use of *para physin* and *kata physin* indicates that he is thinking as an orthodox Jew who sees Israel’s destiny and ethics as being fulfilled in Jesus. He agrees with Plato and Plutarch that same-sex activity of all sorts, categorically, without qualification, and regardless of when the person starts feeling the desires, sidesteps the biological order. But he clearly does not agree with them about the moral and spiritual weight that carries. For Paul, same-sex behavior of all sorts violates the theological order of creation and redemption.

You would prefer to define the words ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ as measuring a person’s behavior merely against the sexual orientation of the person, not against the theological order. You write, ‘But fundamentally, I just cannot get my head around how homosexuality can be unnatural when it is natural.’ You believe we can call same-sex marriages ‘natural’ as long as the two partners feel that it is.

I think you are taking the words ‘nature’, ‘natural’, ‘marriage’, and sometimes even ‘love’ and modifying the underlying biblical content which are meant to fill those terms. To make a parallel to a more distant issue: A similar dynamic occurred during the fourth century when Arius defined the Fatherhood of God according to his own experience as an earthly father. His experience was that he was a man, and that there was a time when he was not a father; but when he had a son, he became a father. He therefore applied that reasoning to the Triune God, saying, ‘There was a time when the Son was not.’ In effect, he reasoned that the use of human language to point to a deeper reality about God justified fully importing all human experience and connotations behind that word into it. In essence, he drained the word ‘Father’ of its normative biblical content with which Jesus had filled it in Scripture, and filled it with new content, his own content. In the thought of Arius, though he didn’t want to admit it, the word ‘Father’, in principle, then, became an empty cipher to be filled by whoever wanted to adjust its meaning.

In my observation, this is what you are doing with these words. You clearly do care about Scripture, and I am impressed by your efforts at every turn, but at the same time, you effectively drain the word ‘nature’ and other important words of their biblical content, and in place of that content, you supply your own definition. So you remain committed to the *words* of Scripture, but not the underlying *substance* behind those words and the context which gives those words *meaning*. Unlike theological mistakes surrounding the word ‘father’, which has a much narrower range of humanly possible meanings, since a man can only become a father through the birth of his own child or by an adoption, the words ‘nature’ or ‘natural’ or ‘marriage’ have a wider range of potential meanings, and ‘sexual orientation’ is hard to distinguish from ‘desire’ in general. That is why you are actually quite vulnerable to those who sit further along the spectrum from you and me, like people committed to active bisexuality who define the words ‘nature’, ‘natural’, ‘marriage’, and ‘love’ from *their* own perspective and experience.

This is only part of a wider problem, which we can back up slightly to see from a wider perspective. The wider problem is that your experience, even your experience of sexual orientation, is not everyone’s experience. Sexuality can be fluid over the course of a person’s life, as the American Psychological Association notes. In a few cases, sexual orientation does respond to choices we make. In quite difficult cases, a person’s sexual orientation and/or sexual preference changes in the middle of a marriage, leading to painful choices either way. Moreover, I suspect that we will soon know how to manage serotonin, testosterone, estrogen, and other hormones in our bodies to impact our sexual preferences and sexual orientations, and that will introduce new questions. My assessment of this is that ‘sexual orientation’ cannot serve as a firm basis for a person’s identity, and especially not as a hermeneutical lens or qualifier on Scripture.

The deeper problem is that our experience cannot be held as an equal authority with Scripture or a commitment prior to it. So the critique by Athanasius, the defender of the divinity of Christ, was not simply that Arius was wrong, heretical, or what have you. He did say those things, of course, but he went much deeper than that. Athanasius carefully examined Arius’ method and said that Arius was being ‘unscientific’. That is, Athanasius said that Arius’ method did not properly correspond to the object being studied, which was in that case God Himself. Rather, Arius was ‘reasoning out of a center in himself.’ I think you doing something similar. You are taking, not just the substance of our creaturely experience in this case, but some of our *fallen* creaturely experience, and trying to

normalize it and read it back into the creation. By saying that, I am agreeing that sexual desire, at least for some, is influenced by genetic factors that might start for us even in the womb. Jesus acknowledged that we can be damaged physically in our mothers' wombs (Mt.19:12), and Paul said that the physical world is groaning and longing for renewal (Rom.8:18 – 25). There are all kinds of ways in which our genetic inheritance has been corrupted and can go awry. Our interaction with the natural world has also deteriorated, which surely impacts us even at the genetic level. None of which is comforting for you to read, I expect.

Given the historical context of the first century Mediterranean world, I also think that Jesus and the apostolic writers would have appreciated the struggles a person with same-sex attraction had. It is true that the few incidences in the New Testament on same-sex behavior are about behavior and are unremittingly negative. But to look only at that data as if that was their only pastoral approach to people and their desires is to truncate off those verses from the rest of the Scriptures. They spoke repeatedly about the process of spiritual growth as the reshaping of human *desire*. They did not simply care about behavior, although behavior was obviously important to them also. Human desire was a strong focus. They studied the human heart and mind because the Old Testament writers before them did. In the Psalms and Proverbs, we are invited by the Scriptures to reflect on our own *desires* (Ps.37:4; Pr.10:24; 11:23; 13:1 – 2; etc.) Jesus diagnosed the human heart and all its desires. In his view, each person's heart was the source of that person's evil and a portion of humanity's collective evil (Mt.15:18 – 20) and each heart needed healing and transformation to reorient those desires towards God and others appropriately. In this, Jesus followed a long line of Old Testament prophets who diagnosed the human heart or human nature in exactly the same way: Moses (Gen.6:5 – 6; Dt.30:6), David (Ps.51:10); Isaiah (Isa.32:6); Jeremiah (Jer.31:31 – 34), and Ezekiel (Ezk.36:26 – 27). Paul viewed covetousness as a fatal spiritual desire (Rom.7:14 – 25) remedied only by Jesus. And especially in Romans 1:21 – 32 and also Ephesians 4:17 – 24, Paul offers insights into the corruption of human *desire*, and by the same token, possibilities for its renewal and restoration in Christ. Jesus and the apostolic writers all viewed human desire as something that was responsive to Jesus' Spirit and they took pains to shepherd our desires. This is why Jesus appealed to a 'how much more than' argument: If you as an earthly father, despite being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give you the Holy Spirit (Lk.11:13); if an unjust judge eventually listens to a powerless widow because she bothers him so much, how much more will God the just and compassionate one listen to his children because he cares about them (Lk.18:1 – 8); if God sent Jesus to die for us while we were His enemies, how much more will He pour out His Spirit into our hearts now that we are His children (Rom.5:1 – 11); and so on. Paul spoke of longing for the Philippians with 'the affection of Christ Jesus' (Phil.1:8), indicating that Jesus had strong emotions and kindly affect, and demonstrated that affection to others. They used human desire as a gauge of the heart's approximation to God's heart. This concern for reshaping our negative desires and cultivating positive desires explains the constant explanations they give of Jesus' love for us and our new identity in him. They understood how to take heart-level choices with Jesus' Spirit that yielded a new set of godly desires, and sometimes even mitigated old ones. The patristic evidence shows that the early Christians took care to allow the Spirit to reshape their desires and awaken new, more godly, ones, which is exactly what they would have had to do if they had been engaged in same-sex behavior and attraction. To me, it helps explain why the early Christians had so much enthusiasm – even excessive enthusiasm – for the chaste life of the unmarried 'eunuch'.

Perhaps this is an appropriate time to offer a comment on something you said. I want to sit with your question about whether there is purpose in the suffering of a gay person who struggles to be celibate. I certainly do not think that there is a justification of the *suffering* of a gay person socially on account of being gay, or a gay person who struggles for Christian integrity while retaining same-sex attraction. The suffering of this sort that we endure is not the result of God causing it from behind us, as if the world were a chain of falling dominoes pushed by a divine finger. Nor do I think there is a justification for *suffering* in general. I'm certain that God does not use an 'end justifies the means' approach. The good that God brings about in the midst of suffering and struggle is not offered as a justification for the hardship. He justifies *us*, but not that mess.

But I do think there is a purpose for us to *struggle* to align our sexual lives with Jesus' word. That purpose is to have a deeper experience of Jesus and deeper identification with him. I think that somewhere near the center of your formidable labors to understand Scripture is the question of whose human experience determines reality, and what meaning does our human experience, especially our suffering and struggle, have in relation to that reality. Whose human experience can be taken as normative? And do our lives and struggles have any meaning? My response is that Jesus of Nazareth is the only human being whose experience of God, experience of human life, and interpretation of that experience are normative for all human beings; his sufferings and struggles can give meaning

to ours, even to people struggling to give their sexuality to him. Jesus did not hold up every particularity of his life for imitation, such as his carpentry, geographic location, 'eunuch' status, or the languages he spoke. But as Jesus saw his life and teaching relate to the character of God, he did put himself forward as God's normative humanity around which our lives are called to revolve for meaning and light. Jesus started this experience at his conception, when he took to his divine nature an alienated human nature, what John calls 'the flesh' (Jn.1:14), the most negative way of speaking about us. Did Jesus take on a human nature that also included internal genetic damage? If his incarnation means that he entered into as much of the human experience that he could, then I suspect that he did. And what this meant for him we can barely apprehend, but I think we can glimpse it. He fought, every moment of his life, to realign his own flesh with the love of the Father. Never in thought, emotion, word, or deed did he sin, because he struggled against sin at its source: in his very own heart and mind as he gave his life to the Father at every moment. This is why Jesus struggled through the wilderness and Gethsemane, the examples of intense temptation that bracketed his public ministry and characterized his earthly life throughout. This is also why Paul says, 'God condemned sin in the flesh' of Jesus (Rom.8:3). God's wrath did not fall *upon* Jesus at the cross alone, but *within* Jesus and *upon* the corruption in his flesh, throughout his whole life as he chose to love the Father. He is the only human being who totally welcomed God's perfect love for himself as a person, and embraced all of God's resistance to, and judgment upon, the corruption of human nature in his physical body. So it is necessary to also say this from another angle, a deeper angle that opens up to us God's purpose in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus did for each of us what we could not do for ourselves. He alone cleansed, elevated, beautified, and glorified human nature, transforming it in his own body into a God-soaked, resurrected, new humanity, which he shares with us by his Spirit to begin a lifelong process of transformation in us, a process fraught with struggle and joy. In our uniqueness, limitations, and frailty in cultivating our love for Jesus and fidelity to him, we bear witness to him, to the struggle between his two natures in his own body, and there is purpose in that, perhaps the highest of purposes. In our struggling, we bear witness to the person and work of this Jesus, and the sacred road he walked on each person's behalf. And in fanning the flame of our love for him, we cast a small light, but a light nevertheless, towards the hope for which all creation yearns: the return of Jesus, the redemption of our bodies, and the renewal of all things in the love of God.

As before, I look forward to your reply and further discussion.

Warmly,
Mako