

**Email Exchanges on the Topic of Sexuality**  
**Mako Nagasawa**  
**Letter 5**

Dear \*\*\*\*\*

I hope you are doing well!...

You believe that there is a category of information called 'general revelation' which we can, and even must, use as a hermeneutical lens on Scripture, and that this 'general revelation' exists simultaneously with Scripture, and qualifies it. In cosmology and sexual orientation, you believe the discoveries of the natural sciences supply the content of that category called 'general revelation.' In addition, you ask the very good question of whether the discoveries of the social sciences, when it comes to 'the modern economy' or perhaps 'the nation-state,' also fall into that category of 'general revelation' as well.

I maintain that the question of cosmology is not an appropriate analogy to the question of sexuality because (1) we are dealing with subjects with very different levels of specificity and weight in Scripture itself, and (2) even more importantly, in actuality, in neither case is the matter abruptly altered by applying a hermeneutic of 'general revelation' from 'nature' obtained by science. Regarding cosmology, you seem to suggest that the ancient Hebrews and early Christians saw things in *only* one way, based *only* on the biblical text alone, regarded the Scriptures as the *only* source of information on the subject, and that *only* scientific knowledge eventually overturned that view. I find each part of that statement to be inaccurate.

The Jews of antiquity, the early Christians, and even the medieval Catholic Church do not appear to have been committed to one view. A brief look at the textual data shows why. To other scholars, and to the best that I can tell, the ancient Hebrews seem to be rather agnostic on the precise physical nature of the earth, the solar system, and the universe. They used certain poetic words to describe the *theological* significance of the cosmos. They believed God created it, and that fact certainly affected their theology and their ethics, not least on the topics of marriage and sexuality. But heliocentrism or geocentrism did not affect anything. While they clearly stay away from ideas like the ancient Hindu cosmology of a world resting on an endless column of turtles, they simply borrow poetic expressions without seeing much more significance in the strictly 'scientific' types of questions. For example, how did the ancient Hebrews understand the relation between the earth and the heavens? The biblical text uses multiple sets of images: The earth is said to have 'pillars' (Job 9:6; Ps.18:15) which presumably rest on something, which may recall an image of a flat earth resting on 'pillars.' And as you point out in Psalm 93:1, the earth is said to have been 'established' by God, which might also implicitly refer to this image. Yet, quite surprisingly, God is also said to 'hang the earth on nothing' (Job 26:7), and Job is often held to be one of the earliest books of Scripture, if not the earliest, which is very significant for this issue. So the biblical data does not settle the issue one way or the other. While ultimately the 'pillars' establishing the earth seem to be metaphysical-theological and not physical in nature, thus reconciling these two particular verses, the language itself does not seem very interested in deciding this for us. Likewise, the sun has 'a tent,' a 'chamber,' out of which he runs his course (Ps.19:4 – 5), but what does this indicate when the heavens are poetically referred to as a 'vault/dome' or perhaps a 'sphere' (Isa.40:22; Job 22:14; Pr.8:27) suggesting that the sky is the 'roof' of a vast, palatial, temple-chamber understood from Genesis 1:1 – 2:3; a tent suggesting both a residence but also temporariness (e.g. Isa.40:22; Ps.104:2); a molten metal mirror beautifully reflecting colors from the sun and water (e.g. Job 38:18); a scroll on which knowledge is written (Ps.19:1 – 4) but also suggesting temporariness again (Isa.34:4), etc.; and all these words are used poetically in other traditions as well? Did the ancient Hebrews simply accept the cosmological conception(s) of their neighbors? A good question: Certainly their language shares common poetic images in use at various times, but the answer is indeterminate because their neighbors did not agree on the matter: Homer poetically referred to the earth as a flat circular disk; but the Zoroastrians and Tibetans believed in a spherical earth, so looking to the west and east of the Hebrews doesn't settle the issue. This confirms the clear sense we get in reading the Hebrew Scriptures that the authors of these books did not think the precise relationship between the sun and the earth mattered; what mattered was the relationship between God and the physical universe, and as a major subset of that, God and humanity.

How did the earliest Christians receive the biblical data? The early Christians that I know of – in Augustine's *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Basil of Caesaria's *Hexameron*, Gregory of Nyssa's *The Making of Man*, and John Philoponus' *On the Creation of the World* – were not interested in rooting their cosmological views in Scripture

alone. They took Scripture seriously, of course, but they understood that Scripture, in Genesis 1 and in these poetic references elsewhere to the sun and earth, utilized a poetic genre which admitted different plausible interpretations. So they made some use of the 'science' of their day, not uncritically, but in recognition that this was obviously not a major concern of the Scriptures. The origin of the cosmos was, however, a major concern, and they pushed very hard against the reigning Greek 'science' on that, because of their commitment to Scripture and to Christ.

It is again important to note how exactly 'science' and Christian faith met on the issue of cosmology. There are two main elements. (1) The real clash between Christian and Greek scientific and philosophical thought occurred over whether or not the physical universe and all matter had a beginning. Christians accepted from Scripture God's creation of the universe and of physical matter at a certain point in time. They rejected the reigning Greek view that all matter was co-eternal with the spiritual world, and would always be co-eternal. According to Athanasius, the Epicureans believed all things were self-originated and therefore haphazard, and Plato believed God made the world out of pre-existing and uncreated matter (*On the Incarnation* 1.2). The pagans thus continued to attack Christians for their doctrine of creation. Yet the Christians insisted upon creation *ex nihilo* in the face of the Greek 'scientific consensus' that weighed against them, simply on the bases of Scripture and the Christocentric reality that in and through the resurrection of Jesus, God was bringing about a new type of physical matter, for humanity especially but also for the whole creation. This central and decisive irregularity found in Jesus' bodily resurrection, this 'upgrade' of physical matter, signified that the physical universe is not static and would not remain the same, contrary to the claims of Greek 'science.' Quite significantly for our discussion, they also saw that the biblical story narrated from creation to final redemption gave marriage and sexuality its ethical and theological significance (see Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 1.2 also for his reference to Matthew 19:1 – 12). (2) The Christians also understood quite well what Scripture really insisted upon and allowed the poetic language to simply be poetic, because nothing ethical was affected by whether one believed in a heliocentric or geocentric solar system. Yes, they began by accepting a geocentric view of the solar system with perfectly circular planetary orbits, from Ptolemy and Aristotle. But the Christian philosopher, astronomer, and theologian John Philoponus (490 – 570 AD) rejected much of Aristotle by doing actual empirical research, something the Greek 'scientists' and philosophers refused to do because of their metaphysical presuppositions. Philoponus and others, like Augustine before him, referred to the created universe as a 'book.' It could be read and understood. It could be empirically experimented upon, and the results would be consistent. It operated rationally as opposed to irrationally, because their conception of God was that of a rational creator and law-giver; though to be precise, they knew God to be *more* than a rational law-giver, but not *less*. By contrast, a significant bloc of Muslims believed that God/Allah continued to actively cause all natural phenomena by personal fiat, which *prevented* them from doing many types of scientific research (Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*). Hence, the Christians understood Scripture itself, not as telling them concrete details about the natural world, but as inviting them to empirically study it. While John Philoponus was at the school of Alexandria, he published, starting from 510 AD all the way until his death in 570, at least 40 books on mathematics, physics, chemistry, theology, and philosophy. Although after his death, Philoponus was declared a heretic for his theological adherence to non-Chalcedonian Christology, this does not detract from his efforts as a scientist and philosopher. He was amply quoted by Galileo and other medieval astronomers and physicists on dynamics and his theory of planetary movement. His career and long presence in the academic circles of Alexandria demonstrates that early on, the Christians regarded the poetic aspects of Scripture as scientifically indeterminate but welcoming inquiry, and were okay with questioning Ptolemy and Aristotle. The fact that the Catholic Church financially supported Copernicus, Galileo, and other scientists at medieval research universities, encouraged their research, and welcomed their discoveries, was merely a continuation of this tradition of inquiry. The understanding of a heliocentric solar system changed their understanding of *Ptolemy and Aristotle*, but not their understanding of *Scripture*. I understand that the caricature of Christians and cosmology is different, but I think that is because Enlightenment modernists wanted to (and still want to) paint themselves as the heroes who emerged from the so-called 'dark ages' of medieval Christendom, like the gods beating the titans, not because it was factually true.

Whereas you suggest that the ancient Hebrews and early Christians saw things in *only* one way, based *only* on the biblical text alone, regarded the Scriptures as the *only* source of information on the subject, and that *only* scientific knowledge eventually overturned that view, I find instead that the ancient Hebrews seem to have exercised reserve about different cosmological possibilities, that the early Christians did not base their opinions on the biblical text alone, that Christians did not regard the Scriptures as the only source of information on the subject but rather as a broad introduction to the subject, and that the biblical invitation to study the created world as a stable system overturned a particular cosmology that they inherited from the Greek philosophers. Thus, I would maintain that the question of cosmology is not an appropriate analogy to the question of sexuality. We are dealing here with subjects

that have different literary presentations in Scripture itself, and different levels of weight in Scripture. And in actuality, in neither case is the matter abruptly altered by overlaying onto Scripture a hermeneutic of 'general revelation' from 'nature' and what we 'know' from science. On the question of cosmology, Christians understood Scripture not as a textbook *on* science, but an invitation *to do* scientific research because of the stability of God's creation.

On the question of sexuality, the issues are different. Here we are not even dealing simply with 'nature' in general, but with 'human nature' in particular. Scripture affirms that, after the fall, our genetic inheritance has become corrupted, in each one of us, in various ways. This was believed unanimously by the early church. Thus, human behavior and desire cannot be 'general revelation' to deduce ethical norms. And this is the explanation for how our desires have gone awry, even on a genetic level. You seem to suggest that my position requires me to deny that gay and lesbian people exist, as your associate pastor apparently says. Now, I am aware of some who argue that what really 'exists' is a person with a heterosexual orientation who has somehow become damaged, or fooled themselves, etc. But that is not what I'm saying. To the contrary, I have never been in doubt that gay and lesbian people do, in fact, exist as such, and not simply as misbehaving heterosexuals. What I am denying, however, is the idea that the current state of *human nature*, along with all *human desires* that we observe, and even the *human civilizations* we set up as a result, can serve as a valid hermeneutical lens which can exist simultaneously with Scripture, hover beyond the reach of Scripture's positive vision and negative pronouncements, and claim for itself the power to go behind the text to alter the meaning of Scripture itself.

This is why I keep before you the questions about the committed bisexual and people who want to voluntarily practice open marriages. You did not engage those questions from my last email. For if a bisexual orientation is now to be treated as 'general revelation' that qualifies how we read Scripture, then there is no reason to believe that marriage must be between two people. What is wrong with three? Furthermore, if marital infidelity itself is now judged from 'science' to be endemic to human nature, as some believe it should, then it too should be treated as an item of 'general revelation' that disqualifies Scripture's vision of marriage being a lifetime commitment of absolute fidelity. This is why I do not agree with your hermeneutic. The current state of human nature and the resultant human desires cannot be taken as an independent and normative reference point, because human nature, especially in its fallen state, is dependent on revelation from beyond itself, and cannot be a standard unto itself. In principle, in whatever form this takes, your position takes fallen human condition with all its fallen desires, normalizes some of them, erects no real barrier against the rest, and then makes of these fallen desires the standard which Scripture must meet. I don't think I'm being overly cynical when I suspect there would be no end to the list of what gets attributed to 'human nature' as long as it can be positioned to apparently overthrow Scripture. Rather than Scripture categorically critiquing and refining all human beliefs, behaviors, conditions, and desires, as it bears witness to Jesus' redemption of human nature itself and as it calls for our participation in him, the reverse would happen. Sinful and fallen human nature would categorically critique Scripture, calling Scripture to validate and affirm our very fallenness as an end in itself.

Similarly, you brought up Calvin's take on interest rates, and my critique is the same. Calvin made a mistake. He took the current state of *human civilization* as 'general revelation' (although he would not have called it that) which he then used to override the biblical condemnation of interest rate lending. One caveat on that: this condemnation may not have been absolute, since the Sinaitic Law shows that God allowed Israel to lend at interest to non-Jews (Dt.23:20), though Scripture nevertheless strongly suggests something about God's vision for financial relationships within the covenant community, at the least. But Calvin's motivations were less theological and more strategic: he and the other Reformers needed money with which to fund the printing, travel, and organizational costs of the Reformation. Since the Catholics owned most of the land, the Protestants made a tacit alliance with the merchants and bankers, who during the medieval period had been rather despised, some of which was due to the fact that Gentile churchmen made Jews into the medieval bankers and made their anti-Semitism accompany their anti-usury attitudes. Setting that unpleasant mistake aside, though, for the purpose of understanding the Christian critique of usury, the medieval Catholics were generally correct when they challenged and condemned most forms of interest rate lending. Calvin knowingly ignored that record, and that led to a deep entanglement between Reformed Protestantism and financial capitalism (and the nation-state). So today, we believe that capital has the same moral weight as land and labor in economic production, which means that we believe the capitalist has the right to displace land and labor willy-nilly in his pursuit of the highest return on a capital investment. But this constitutes a major problem not only for Christian ethics but most forms of ethics, because of the ecological and human damage this posture causes. The Social Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church correctly condemns this; see, for example,

Pope John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus* continuing the social teaching that came from a papal encyclical from one hundred years prior, *Rerum Novarum*. I am aware that many people look at cosmology, interest rates, slavery, women, and same-sex orientation as examples of Christians 'loosening up' their opinion. It seems like Christians have just changed their minds on the former four topics, so why not the last? They think these five issues are analogies for each other. But a closer look reveals that none of these topics is an analogy for any of the others. The exegetical and historical questions are very different.

### *Genesis 1 and 2*

You suggest that the image of God can be separated from the conceiving and bearing of human life, and attached to things like rationality. I'm certainly not denying that bearing God's image has other aspects, like having special dignity in creation, ruling in creation, speech, freedom according to one's nature, rationality, relationality, some spirituality proclivity towards God, and spiritual dependence on God. But I must insist that, biblically, the marriage of male and female is an absolutely necessary component of the *imago dei* as well. This is because there was no way for Adam and Eve, or human beings in general, to *create* more human life except through their marriage as male and female. The larger backdrop of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 emphasizes how God made every living thing containing the seeds of life within it. So this point about reproduction is not a minor point. In the case of humanity, it is quite central. There was no way for maleness alone or femaleness alone to create more human life, and thus carry out that part of the *imago dei*. Only male and female, with each other and through each other in a marriage, can do that. Adoption simply does not address this fundamental point about *creating* more human life. While I appreciate the difference that adoptive parents make in raising children nowadays, your suggestion that *adopting and raising* children is a theological equivalent for *conceiving and birthing* them goes a bit wide of the mark. The command to 'bear fruit and multiply' (1:28) is the explicit command which expresses God's desire to image Himself in human beings, to call forth human participation in the life-conceiving and life-creating work He had started in creation. To bear fruit and multiply in loving marriage is to be 'like God,' in this particular way. And God did not simply 'adopt' a pre-existing Adam and Eve; He *created* them.

I believe that when you appeal to 'adoption' as a substitute for gay and lesbian couples in place of child-conceiving and child-birthing, you are making three mistakes. First, you are draining a biblical term of its necessary historical and cultural context. Historical commentaries and studies tell us that adoption in its biblical usage comes from ancient Near Eastern and classical Roman legal practices. It concerned the adoption of an adult man – *not women and not children* – who the adopting father considered worthy, to bestow on that man an inheritance. The outstanding example of Roman adoption in the New Testament world was Claudius' adoption of Nero as an *adult man*, to make Nero heir to the throne. The movie *Ben Hur* also portrays the Roman practice of adoption of Judah Ben-Hur as an *adult man*. It involved ceremonial negotiations with the natural father (called *mancipatio*), a legal case made before the appropriate government authority (called *vindicatio*), and a public celebration in which the heir was presented, and witnesses all throughout. This is very similar to the cultural background of the word 'adoption' when the Old Testament utilizes it to communicate an action on God's part to bestow an inheritance upon His people: (1) God 'adopted' Israel in Egypt to be his first-born 'son' among other nations (Ex.4:22; Rom.9:4), in order to bestow on Israel the inheritance of the promised land; (2) God 'adopted' the Davidic king as a first-born 'son' among other kings (Ps.2:7) in order to bestow on the Davidic king the inheritance of the peoples roundabout, i.e. their fealty. (3) God 'adopted' us into Christ Jesus 'as sons' in order to bestow on us the inheritance of current spiritual blessing and future new creation (Eph.1:3 – 14; Rom.8:12 – 25). In all these cases, we are reading about a very different cultural practice than the one we have today. This is why, for example, we will puzzle over Paul's seemingly gender-insensitive phrase 'adoption as sons,' if we lack an understanding both of his literary-cultural context and his theological discipline of allowing the truth of Christ to qualify metaphorical language. Paul was continuing in this Hebrew literary tradition; he was shedding light on what God was doing to anyone – male or female, adult or child, and each one not worthy but unworthy because of our sin – who believes in Jesus. The parts of that adoption metaphor that did not correspond to the reality of salvation in Christ were addressed, actively excised, and thought away. Only the part of the adoption metaphor that faithfully reflected something true was retained: God in Christ by the Spirit indeed transforms the identities of men, women, and children by joining them to Jesus His Son; He indeed gives them a share in His inheritance, in an even deeper and greater way than a classical Roman or Near Eastern father would have adopted an adult son to make him an heir. So you are misusing the biblical term, retaining the word but dramatically altering its underlying meaning. We cannot do that anymore than

we can take the term 'slave' in Scripture and fill it with whatever content we find at other times and places. I think it is an understandable mistake to make in reading but it leads to very irresponsible conclusions.

Second, you are trying to reason out ethics, not from specific commands pertaining to our relations towards each other, but from a metaphor describing God's activities. That is a category mistake. The limited use of a metaphor for God drawn from the surrounding culture does not, without further explanation and qualification, make it automatically acceptable as an ethical model, especially to override other ethical commands and considerations. For example, even the use of the phrase 'adoption as sons' in the New Testament did not seem to motivate any Christians in the early church to 'adopt sons' in order to put flesh on this metaphor. True, the early Christians did rescue infants left on doorsteps and then raised them, but this was not the same as the culturally and legally defined practice of 'adoption as sons.' The actual practice of bequeathing a large inheritance on an adult male seemed to run aground against Jesus' firm teachings on money, disinheritance, and giving. Thus, we have no record that I know about of Christians continuing the practice of 'adoption as sons,' especially with the explicit intention of enacting the metaphor. Christian faith actually appears to have contributed to the demise of the very cultural practice that it drew upon as an illustration, even when it illustrated God's activity. My point here is that the use of metaphorical language pertaining to God's action does not mean that we can set aside ethical commands pertaining to us. As another example, take Ezekiel's use of the adoption metaphor in Ezekiel 16. In that passage, Ezekiel says that God adopted Jerusalem as a child, and then married her when she grew up. This mixing of adoption and marriage metaphors to describe God's selection of Jerusalem is clearly not meant to be imitated by human beings in our actual relationships. On a human level, even though an adoptive parent and child don't share a blood relation, that would be incest, and God prohibited incest through both Moses and Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor.5). If anyone had approached Moses, Ezekiel, Jesus, Paul, or any other human agent of God's revelation, and argued that he should be permitted to violate clear ethical norms by extrapolating from a metaphor about God's actions, they would have shaken their head, wondered about our sensibilities, and reminded us of the difference between poetic metaphor and clear ethical commands.

Third, you are trying to offer a replacement for a same sex couple's inherent inability to partner with God in creating and giving birth to more human life, and their inability to even represent God's life-giving nature in principle. But, while I think adoption of young children as we practice it today is a courageous thing, it is not to be confused with the term 'adoption as sons' and its function in Scripture. Nor is adoption of young children a substitute for creating and birthing children as part of the *imago dei*. And thus, a same-sex couple does not bear the *imago dei* in their union as a male-female married couple does.

Did the rest of Scripture understand the 'image of God' this way? Demonstrably so, and I'll try to explain why. The words 'likeness' and 'image' occur at the beginning of the genealogy from Genesis 5:1 – 6:8. This is a new literary unit, called 'the book of the generations of Adam.' The genealogy begins with the repeated narration of God's creation of 'man' *in the likeness of God*, and significantly mentions their gendered personhoods: 'He created them male and female' (5:2). The genealogy also says, with heavily weighted words, that Adam 'became the father (ancestor) of a son (descendant) *in his own likeness*, according to *his image*' (5:3). The problem, as we know from Genesis 2:4 – 4:26, is that Adam and Eve had damaged the image of God in themselves, and corrupted their own human nature by internalizing rebellion into their very selves. And thus, each person named in this genealogy, with the husband representing his wife as well, creates new human beings, but in a contradiction of his very being, creates dying human beings. First, he becomes the biological father of children, and a specially named son (or male descendant possibly more than 1 generation removed) is highlighted, presumably because he was faithful to God as well, and this is cause for readers to rejoice; in this sense, each person named lives out and bears witness to the fact that he, with his wife, is made in the likeness of God. Yet, second, each one also dies. The fate of Adam and Eve brought about by their rebellion against God is physically communicated to all human beings, and manifested by humanity's mortality. Implicitly, each person's own personal sin will aggravate their mortality as well, as Paul will point out (Rom.5:12 – 14). So the cadence of this genealogy highlights these two simple things: birth and death. It is hopeful yet bitterly ironic. The capacity for giving birth to life is transmitted from one generation to the next, but also is transmitted is a human nature infected by sin and our captivity to physical death. This is what it means for all human beings to bear the 'his image,' the image of Adam, the contradictory one who both bears and tarnishes the image of God in himself.

We can be sure that this is what the author of Genesis intended since the literary genre of genealogy emphasizes the continuity from one generation to the next. Genesis 5:1 – 6:8 is one of ten such 'books' or 'genealogies' (Hebrew

*toledot*) prior to the Exodus (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2). Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 is an opening, high level introduction with its own literary style and focus. The first genealogy, Genesis 2:4 – 4:26, is about the heavens and the earth (2:4), and it explains why the heavens and the earth are now ruptured apart, why humanity lives outside the garden struggling to bring forth life in all its dimensions, and why human cities filled with injustice dot the landscape. This certainly had implications for everyone downstream in time, especially Israel, who sought to live in a new garden land and avoid life in human cities. All the other genealogies emphasize continuity as well. In each literary unit of genealogy, something happens to the primogenitor that has effects on the rest of his descendants, like God's covenant with Abraham. Or, he does something that has such effects, like Jacob's sin and favoritism damaging the relationships among his twelve sons. Since this is clearly the case in the other genealogies of Genesis, we would expect the same in 'the book of the generations of Adam' in 5:1 – 6:8. The genealogy emphasizes the continuity of this double image bearing: the image of God, expressed in a life-giving marriage of male and female, is contained within the dying image of Adam. Luke, in his genealogy tracing Jesus' humanity all the way back to Adam, is probably emphasizing the same thing; Jesus took the dying image of Adam to himself, to restore the image in human being within himself.

In the context of our discussion, both these aspects of bearing the image of Adam are important. First, the image of God is clearly understood by the biblical narrator as 'male and female' and consisting of conceiving, bringing forth, and passing on life; while bearing the image of God found in a marriage of 'male and female' means more than that, including for instance ruling and rationality, it does not mean less. Second, bearing the image of Adam consists of having a human nature corrupted by sin. In the New Testament, we find Paul's language of all humanity being 'in Adam': 'For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive' (1 Cor.15:21 – 22). And a much longer discussion about Adam occurs in Romans 5:12 – 21, exemplified by the same thought about death coming upon humanity through Adam: 'For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.' This is Paul's shorthand for what he understood from Genesis 5:1 – 6:8. As Paul compares and contrasts Adam and Jesus, his phrase 'in Adam' ('in Adam all die') effectively means 'in the image of Adam,' as it did in Genesis 5:3. And for us to be in Adam's image means that we are a sign of contradiction. As individuals, we both represent God and distort Him. And as married couples, who are male and female, we both give birth to new human beings who are also dying human beings, which both represents God and distorts Him. To be 'in Adam' or 'in the image of Adam' is both an honor and a dysfunction, but for the purpose of our discussion, the logic is simple: In order to physically die, one must be physically born, and in order to be physically born, one must be the product of a union of male and female, which both represents Adam and Eve, and links human beings all the way back to Adam and Eve. Hence the New Testament phrase 'in Adam,' or any comparison between Adam and Christ, affirms the idea that the original *imago dei* for married couples required male and female, as Genesis 1:27 states.

In the New Testament, the biblical writers used the term 'image of God' to refer to Jesus, that is true, but in a way that absolutely affirms human reproduction having been part of the original *imago dei* as far as marriage was concerned. This is because Jesus is the Image of God not merely passively, but actively. This is in fact what the apostles, and later the patristic theologians, realized they were apprehending about Jesus: 'He is the Image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation' (Col.1:15); 'and he is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of his power' (Heb.1:3; cf. Jn.1:1 – 18; 14:8 – 21). They understood that the Word/Son was the person through whom the Father is not only redeeming all things, but originally created all things, and through whom the Father brought forth all created life (Jn.1:3; Col.1:16; Rom.11:36). As in the redemption of life, so in the creation of life: The Son is the Image-bearer of the life-giving Father by the Spirit; he mirrors the Father, not as an independent agent, as it were, but in complete personal union and dependence on the Father by the Spirit. Thus, he is the eternal Image of God within the Trinity. This appears to have dawned quickly on his followers after Jesus' resurrection, if they were not told this by Jesus himself. And this has intimate bearing on what it means for us, knowing this, to read Genesis 1:27. To bear God's image is to be involved in God's creation of more and more life, in all its dimensions. That which the Son is *inside* the Trinity, the male-female marriage is *outside* the Trinity.

You would like to read the first and second portions of that sentence, 'God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him,' as logically prior to, and rather independent of, the third portion, 'male and female He created them.' You ask, 'So why would the union of male and female somehow image the One who is neither male nor female nor a combination of the two?' I suppose because only the union of male and female in oneness

creates more human life. Of course each person bears the image of God in a personal, individual way. But only a married human couple consisting of male and female bears the image of God in a particular way, the way in which their oneness leads to the conceiving and creation of other human beings. You ask the excellent question, 'If Jesus, as an individual, is the exact representation of God, then how can the marriage of male and female be claimed to specially image God when God is fully imaged by a single person?' Through the oneness which male and female is said to be in marriage. The marriage of male and female is treated as a oneness in at least five ways: (1) The poetically structured grammar of Genesis 1:27, as it relates to being fruitful and multiplying human life, parallels 'man' with 'male and female' and 'him' with 'them.' This means that the married male-female couple is seen as 'one' who brings forth new human life. This parallels the use of the plural form 'Elohim' and the singular pronoun 'him' for God Himself. A plurality of persons is still seen as one. (2) The expanded narration of the creation of human beings in Genesis 2 takes Adam as the 'origination point' of Eve, just as the Son of God was the 'origination point' of Adam. Adam contained Eve within himself before she was separated from him, a point to which Paul returns in 1 Cor.11:2 – 16; in that sense, Adam, prior to Eve's emergence, served as a partial reflection or type of the Son of God, because Eve was drawn out of Adam in a similar way to the act by which Adam was drawn out of the eternal Son of God. God's human being known as 'man' is thus both 'male and female' in the special reunion of marriage, and represented by the taking of Eve from Adam's side and their poetic reunion of 'bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh' (Gen.2:20 – 25); (3) Eve's relation to Adam as 'helper' was not simply to assuage his loneliness (since Genesis 1 cannot be separated from Genesis 2 in the way you suggest) but to be his partner in bringing forth life in all ways, including human life in the oneness of their marriage, since that was God's creational command. You ask the good question whether celibacy for the gay person violates God's statement in Genesis 2, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.' No, for 'to be alone' is not the same as 'to feel lonely.' Marriage is not necessarily an answer to the *feeling of loneliness*, as a married person can still feel loneliness in very deep ways, and sometimes more than a single person, for marital difficulties can lead to poignant feelings of loneliness which persist until death, and still the marriage would be binding nevertheless. But marriage *is* the answer to the creational condition of Adam *being alone* while commissioned to bring forth life, and surrounded by animals that bear in their gendered bodies the capacity to bear life. Considering the opposite hypothetical scenario makes this rather clear: If God had created two gay men in Genesis 2 to undo the condition of 'aloneness' as you define it, His plans for humanity and creation would have come to a quick and abrupt end. (4) Moses (in Gen.5) and Paul (in Rom.5 and 1 Cor.15) name 'Adam' when they are obviously referring to both 'Adam and Eve' together; they are referring to the oneness of Adam and Eve and simply calling them both 'Adam.' (5) Jesus (Mt.19:1 – 12) and Paul (1 Cor.6:16; Eph.5:21 – 33) refer to the marriage of male and female as 'one.' Hence, the oneness of male and female human beings in marriage is the special image of God.

The questions I ask in addition to your questions are these: How can one human being, who cannot bring forth human life individually, fully image the eternal Image of God, the Son of God, through whom God brought forth all life? And how can a same-sex couple do so? The answer to both questions is that neither a single human nor a same-sex couple can create more human life, and thus do not represent the *imago dei* in that respect. As far as the creation of more human life is concerned, that which the Son is, in relation to the Father by the Spirit, the oneness of a human marriage of male and female is, in relation to God as a whole by the Spirit. A married couple who are male and female brought together in oneness is the one agent who represents the eternal Image-Son of God in that particular way. You ask why fishes, which procreate by being male and female, do not also bear the image of God in this special way, to which I would respond that, while all forms of life bear a distant resemblance to the God of life in some way, fishes are not capable, among other things, of being human or creating human life in and through themselves. For if the Son is the true and original Image of the Father, through whom the Father, in his joyous oneness with the Son by the Spirit, created all life, then the oneness of a human male-female married couple is in the image of God, and that human couple is intended to live in a symmetrical relation to God by the Spirit, creating more human life, and at least bearing witness to the original design of God in creation through their genders. This means gender is irreducible, and marriage as male and female is not replaceable by a same-sex union.

This has direct bearing on our reading of the early church theologians, including Augustine and Aquinas, whom you mentioned. In the passages you quoted, of course Augustine associates ruling in creation with bearing the image of God, and Aquinas with rationality. But in the same way that ruling and rationality are complementary aspects which do not exclude each other, so life-creating is included in that definition and essential to it. I'll come back to Augustine and Aquinas in particular, but I want to start first with Irenaeus (130 – 200 AD), bishop of Lyon, the earliest writing theologian outside of the New Testament. He says, in his well researched critique of Gnosticism and defense of Christian faith:

‘We also then were made, along with those things which are contained by Him. And this is He of whom the Scripture says, ‘And God formed man, taking clay of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life.’ It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power to make an image of God, nor anyone else, except the Word of the Lord, nor any Power remotely distant from the Father of all things. For God did not stand in need of these [beings], in order to the accomplishing of what He had Himself determined with Himself beforehand should be done, as if He did not possess His own hands. For with Him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things, to whom also He speaks, saying, ‘Let Us make man after Our image and likeness,’ He taking from Himself the substance of the creatures [formed], and the pattern of things made, and the type of all the adornments in the world.’ (*Against Heresies*, Book 4, Chapter 20, paragraph 1)

‘...man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God, the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. For the Uncreated is perfect, that is, God. Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. (*Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 38, paragraph 3)

Irenaeus sees the same functional symmetry I described above. In the first passage, Irenaeus links Genesis 2:7 and Genesis 1:27. He says that there is a ‘pattern of things made’ that is derived from a template within God’s own being. In stamping human beings with His image, God was ‘taking from Himself the substance of the creatures.’ That substance winds up being a particular relation in a particular pattern. In the second passage, Irenaeus is more specific about what pattern that was. All of God was involved in the creation, but the Son of God, as the Image of the Father inside the Trinity because he reflects the Father perfectly, does the ‘work of creating’ at the command of the Father. The Son therefore is the pattern, and ‘man’ is the symmetrical side of that pattern. ‘Man’ is ‘rendered after the image and likeness’ of God, also growing and abounding, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative growth is the reproductive growth that comes through ‘man’ in human marriage as male and female. I mentioned before that the eternal Son of God was the origination point of Adam, just as Adam was the origination point of Eve, who then becomes ‘the mother of all living’ (Gen.3:20), as the marriage of male and female in oneness becomes the origination point for the rest of human life. This pattern of one life becoming a source of life for another is quite germane to our discussion. And since the fall happened, the qualitative growth involves recovery from sin through Jesus. So, here is the earliest writing Christian theologian outside the New Testament affirming that for humans to be in ‘the image of God’ necessarily involves creating more human life. As he says, ‘Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth...and... should abound...’

Thus, Irenaeus is the earliest patristic witness to seeing human procreation as part of the image of God. To speak of humanity represented by Adam or ‘in Adam’ is to assume that human reproduction happened, and that human reproduction was commanded by God within the context of a marriage of male and female. It is to refer to Genesis 1:27 – 28 and 5:1 – 3 and see the creation of more human life as part of bearing the image of God, because the original Image of God is, in expressing the love of the life-giving Father by the Spirit, responsible for the creation of the first human beings.

The way Irenaeus understood Jesus to be a ‘second Adam’ is also significant. Irenaeus sees Jesus retelling Adam’s archetypal story on various occasions:

‘But who else is superior to, and more eminent than, that man who was formed after the likeness of God, except the Son of God, after whose image man was created? And for this reason He did in these last days exhibit the similitude; [for] the Son of God was made man, assuming the *ancient production* [of His hands] into His own nature.’ (*Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 33, paragraph 4)



[The Sinaitic Law] laid, however, a weighty burden upon man, who had sin in himself, showing that he was liable to death. For as the law was spiritual, it merely made sin to stand out in relief, but did not destroy it. For sin had no dominion over the spirit, but over man. For it behooved Him who was to destroy sin, and redeem man under the power of death, that He should Himself be made that very same thing which he was, that is, man; who had been drawn by sin into bondage, but was held by death, so that sin should be destroyed by man, and man should go forth from death... God recapitulated in Himself the *ancient formation of man*, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true. (*Against Heresies*, book 3, chapter 18, paragraph 7, see also 2.12.4, 3.18.1)

It is significant that Irenaeus' line of reasoning about salvation in book 4 includes the 'image of God' language. He proceeds from the idea that the Son of God is more eminent than man, because man was created in the Son's image. This led Karl Barth to say that the Son of God not only became the 'second Adam' in the human man Jesus of Nazareth; he was also the 'first Adam,' the pattern by which God made man, the Image of God behind the image of God. But because we have tarnished the image of God within ourselves, Jesus came to restore it. So he exhibited the 'similitude,' that is, the similarity with us: 'the Son of God was made man, assuming the ancient production [of His hands] into His own nature.' He joined fallen human nature to his divine nature, to reconcile the corrupted human nature to the divine nature by resisting its rebellious desires and cleansing it of its corruption. In the second passage from book 3, Irenaeus repeats the idea of the formation of man being 'ancient' in his famous statement, 'God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that he might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man.' In Irenaeus' view, for Jesus to take human nature to himself and re-stamp it with his image, so to speak, this connects the relation between the new creation and the original creation, the redemption of human nature and its original design by God in creation. For Irenaeus' argument implies that the image of God in human beings, though tarnished by sin, was also preserved *throughout* reproduction and, in fact, *through* reproduction, since reproduction was part of the *imago dei* to begin with, and needed to be recapitulated, or 're-headed up' by Christ, a Pauline phrase (*anakephaloiosis*, Eph.1:10). For the time being, the 'ancient' pattern in which God created human beings is affirmed. That pattern is found in Genesis and deepened by the revelation of the Son of God who served 'behind the scenes of Genesis' as the template or pattern within God for human beings. The new creation may transfigure the original creation in ways that are even more strenuous (economic disinheritance, singleness, etc.), but it does not leave it behind.

Other church fathers also saw the male-female union as reflective of the image of God. Ever the one to see allegories, Origen saw the original creation from Genesis as an anticipation of Christ being male and the church being female, and the union of the former reflecting the union of the latter (*Ancient Christian Commentary*, Matthew 14 – 28, p.89). While defending God's creation ex nihilo, Athanasius quotes from Jesus' words about marriage from the creation order in Matthew 19:1 – 12 in his opening chapter of *On the Incarnation* (1.2). While refuting the Greek pagans, Athanasius says that God left a witness to himself in the creation, not only in the combining of opposites like male and female throughout the animal world, but through their union producing life (*Against the Heathen*, chapters 35 – 37; cf. chapters 38 – 44). Of very practical bent, Jerome and Chrysostom use Genesis 1 – 2 and Matthew 19 to build cases against divorce and polygamy, affirming the male-female union of one husband and one wife (*Ancient Christian Commentary*, Matthew 14 – 28, p.89).

For Augustine and Aquinas, you write, 'Notably, for neither one of them does the phrase "male and female" have anything to do with their understanding of what "the image of God" means in Gen. 1:27.' But you seem to be unaware of what Augustine said in his work *On the Trinity*. There, he did in fact say that 'male and female' is the image of God:

'For he says that human nature itself, which is complete in both sexes, has been made in the image of God, and he does not exclude the woman from being understood as the image of God. For after he had said that God made man in the image of God, he went on to say: 'He made him male and female,' or at any rate (if we punctuate this passage differently) 'male and female he made them.' ...the woman together with her husband is the image of God, so that that whole substance is one image.' (*On the Trinity*, book 12, chapter 7, paragraph 10)

Though I disagree with an aspect of Augustine's interpretation of Genesis and 1 Corinthians 11, since in Augustine's mind, and in Aquinas', the Greek cultural bias elevating 'reason' above all passion or instinct, as if this were the sole distinction between humanity and the animals, is used to also favor the male over the female, this

quote suffices to demonstrate that Augustine recognized that ‘male and female’ in marriage is indeed ‘the image of God.’ In fact, even though Augustine has a reputation for being rather harsh on sex and lust, one of Augustine’s greatest biographers, Peter Brown, notes that it was because we humans live in such a gritty, lustful, fallen world, as compared with the Garden of Eden. Whereas some other theologians, under the influence of Greek dualism stressing reason over passion, soul over body, began to speak only reluctantly about sexual life, Augustine himself, alone among the early theologians, dared to imagine what Adam and Eve’s sex life was like and could have continued to be: ‘Adam and Eve [were] fully sexual beings, capable of intercourse in the Garden of Eden – a glorious intercourse, unriven by conflicting desires, without the shadow of sin upon it.’ (Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p.501) Augustine could imagine the oneness which Adam and Eve enjoyed not merely for procreation’s sake. I am not familiar with enough of Augustine’s writings, and I doubt he put this to paper, but perhaps he would have reflected on how the sexual union of Adam and Eve itself served to reflect the joy of the oneness of being shared by the persons of the Trinity.

But before I leave Augustine, I want to point out that Augustine’s atonement theology is identical with Irenaeus’, because this has implications for Jesus’ affirmation of the original creation order:

Christ is the former and reformer of humans, the creator and recreator, the maker and remaker. (*Tractate on John’s Gospel* 38.8)

Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, had he not taken on himself the likeness of sinful flesh. (Sermon 185)

The Son of God assumed human nature, and in it he endured all that belongs to the human condition. This is a remedy for mankind of a power beyond our imagining. (*De Agone Christiano* 12)

In order to make gods of those who were merely human, one who was God made himself human; without forfeiting what he was, he wished to become, because what he did was add man to God, not lose God in man. (Sermon 192.1.1)

For Augustine, a skilled orator capable of condensing truths into short, pithy statements, to affirm that Jesus is the ‘former and reformer of humans, the creator and recreator,’ is to say the same things Irenaeus said using longer phrases. After all, Augustine had read Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies* and quoted from book 4 in his writing against Pelagius and Julius Eclanum. Thus, Augustine recognized the link between the original creation and the new creation. In fact, at times he moves rather quickly to encourage a married couple, since there will be no marriage in the final resurrection, to live celibately in the present (e.g. *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, on Mt.5:27 – 32). But he did not insist on this because he recognized that there is still the original creation order where male-female marriage is appropriate.

While I think Aquinas elevated ‘reason’ a bit far as well, and as you point out, even to the point of making ‘reason’ the main essence of the ‘image of God,’ he did not discount the union of male and female in marriage. It seems well enough implied in this passage in *Summa Theologica*, especially since he quotes from Augustine:

Q: In the state of innocence, would procreation have taken place through sexual intercourse?

A: God made mankind male and female before sin. For what is natural to man was neither acquired nor forfeited by sin. Now it is clear that generation by sexual intercourse is natural to man by reason of his animal life, which he possessed even before sin, as above explained, just as it is natural to other perfect animals, as the corporeal members make it clear. So we cannot allow that these members would not have had a natural use, as other members had, before sin. Thus, as regards generation by sexual intercourse, there are, in the present state of life, two things to be considered. One, which comes from nature, is the union of man and woman...the order of nature demands that for the purpose of generation there should be concurrence of male and female. The second thing to be observed is a certain deformity of excessive concupiscence [lust], which in the state of innocence would not have existed, when the lower powers were entirely subject to reason. Wherefore Augustine says (*De Civitas Dei* xiv, 26): ‘We must be far from supposing that offspring could not be begotten without concupiscence. All the bodily members would have been equally moved by the will, without ardent or wanton incentive, with calmness of soul and body.’... What Augustine means by the words quoted, [does] not exclude intensity of pleasure from the state of

innocence, but ardor of desire and restlessness of the mind. Therefore continence would not have been praiseworthy in the state of innocence, whereas it is praiseworthy in our present state, not because it removes fecundity, but because it excludes inordinate desire. In that state fecundity would have been without lust.’ (*Summa Theologica*, part 1, question 98)

Thus, I believe the first three literary units of Genesis (1:1 – 2:3, 2:4 – 4:26, 5:1 – 6:8), the New Testament writings, the patristic authors, and the medieval scholastic Thomas Aquinas all affirm the idea that the image of God from Genesis 1 has the element of a marriage of male and female in oneness.

*Leviticus 18 – 20 and the Sinaitic Law*

Here you make the case that the frame for understanding Leviticus 18 and other ethical stipulations is Egypt and Canaan. Seen in this light, the Holiness Code, and perhaps all of the Mosaic ethics, has little to nothing to do with the creation order. Rather, in your view, it has more, if not everything, to do with the necessity for Israel to remain distinct from the Egyptian and Canaanite influences around them. I find it reasonable to compare practices between Israel and their neighbors. But was God interested in Israel being different for difference’s sake? I find that doubtful. While it is clear from the text that, yes, Egypt and Canaan had something to do with the shape of Israel’s laws, we are far from being able to dislodge Mosaic ethics from the overall pattern set by the creation order from Genesis and the meaning of human beings being made in the image of God. This is especially true because Israel saw Egypt and Canaan as transgressing boundaries that were originally set up in the creation order to begin with. There are explicit and implicit literary parallels linking the creation order from Genesis 1 – 2 to the Mosaic ethics as a whole. Hence, I argue that there is an organic, inseparable relationship between rejecting the Egyptian and Canaanite practices and affirming the creation order.

Let me provide more reason for saying that and then circle back to respond to your specific arguments and questions. First, Israel understood itself as a restoration of God’s true humanity, a humanity that began in the creation order but fell from it. This is shown throughout the strategic use of literary markers: God moves by His Spirit to bring His true humanity through water to a garden land; then God blesses them to be fruitful and multiply. God did so with Adam and Eve, placing them in a garden land. Then He repeated this act with Noah and his wife, along with sons Shem, Ham, Japheth, and their wives, bringing them into a new garden land. In the case of Abraham and Sarah, the progenitors of Israel, God first promised to bless them, and then acted in Egypt to deliver them into yet another garden land.

Adam and Eve	Noah & wife, family	Abraham and Sarah, to Israel
<p>Gen.1:2 <b>the Spirit [ruach] of God</b> was moving over the surface of the <b>waters</b>...<sup>27</sup> God created <b>man</b> in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (God then placed <b>humanity</b> in a <b>garden land</b>.)</p>	<p>Gen.7:24 The <b>water</b> prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days.<sup>8:1</sup> But God remembered <b>Noah</b> and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused <b>a wind [ruach]</b> to pass over the earth, and the <b>water</b> subsided. (<b>Noah</b> then planted a <b>garden</b>.)</p>	<p>Ex.14:19 The <b>pillar of cloud</b> moved...<sup>21</sup> and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east <b>wind [ruach]</b>...<sup>29</sup> <b>Israel</b> walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the <b>waters</b> were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.<sup>30</sup> Thus the LORD saved <b>Israel</b> that day from the hand of the Egyptians... (Israel was in the wilderness for 40 years until God placed them in the <b>garden land</b>.)</p>
<p>Gen.1:28 God <b>blessed</b> them; and God said to them, ‘<b>Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth</b>...’</p>	<p>Gen.9:1 And God <b>blessed</b> Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘<b>Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth</b>...’</p>	<p>Gen.12:1 Now the LORD said to Abram...<sup>2</sup> and I will make you a <b>great nation</b>, and I will <b>bless</b> you...so you shall be a <b>blessing</b> ...<sup>3</sup> and in you all the families of the earth will be <b>blessed</b>.’</p> <p>Gen.17:6 <b>I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of</b></p>

		<p><b>you, and kings will come forth from you...</b><sup>8</sup> I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the <b>land</b> of your sojourning...</p>
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Thus, Israel's entire self-understanding was built on this narrative continuity. In fact, the bookends of the Pentateuch also reinforce this identity. As in Genesis 1, in the Song of Creation, as it were, where heaven and earth are the context where God first creates humanity, so in Deuteronomy 32, in the Song of Moses, 'heaven' and 'earth' are called to witness the destiny of Israel and nations (Dt.32:1). Just as God's Spirit hovered over the waters which gave rise to Adam and Eve in the garden land, God said He 'hovered' (Dt.32:11) by His cloud over Israel throughout their wilderness sojourn to lead them into the garden land. Israel understood that God's selection of Abraham was God's way of undoing the fall of Adam. And thus, Israel was God's true humanity, chosen to dwell in a new garden land in the same way Adam once did.

The creational motif of blessing, fruitfulness, and possession of land given to Adam and Eve recurs at very important moments in the lives of the patriarchs: Abraham's call (Gen.12:2), his circumcision (17:2, 6, 8), his offering of Isaac (22:16ff.), God's restating of the promise to Isaac (26:3ff.), God's reassurance of Isaac (26:24), Isaac's blessing of Jacob (28:3), God's promise to Jacob (35:11), the sojourn of the chosen family in Egypt (47:27), and Jacob's narration of the family history to Joseph (48:3ff.). The shift, however, between these events and the original creation account is that God turns the command to be fruitful into a promise, while dominion over nature becomes dominion over Israel's enemies. N.T. Wright suggests that the Genesis Rabbah (14:6), by claiming that Abraham was God's means of undoing the sin of Adam, implies that Israel is or will become God's intended true humanity possessing God's good land (Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*).

Israel's garden land paralleled Adam and Eve's garden land in Eden: God's original home for humanity. The boundaries of the land promised to Abraham (Gen.15:18) have the same boundary markers as the garden given to Adam and Eve (Gen.2:8 – 14). The garden land Israel inherited would flow 'with milk and honey' and 'drink water from the rain of heaven' because the LORD God Himself cared for it (Dt.11:10 – 12). This was similar to God's first arrangement with Adam and Eve. God made a garden for them, filled it with trees laden with fruit; and God Himself watered the garden with a river He caused to flow from Eden (Gen.2:9 – 10). By contrast, however, the land of Egypt, out of which God delivered Israel, required sowing and watering 'like a vegetable garden' (Dt.11:10). This was similar to the 'toil' and 'sweat' required cultivating 'fields' after the fall (Gen.3:17 – 19). Only with Israel did God open a window of insight back into the way things were.

Then, there is Eden, the Tabernacle, and the Temple in Jerusalem: all situations where God's presence was especially manifested. The materials making up the Tabernacle, the dwelling place of God, were the same materials found near the Garden of Eden, the first dwelling place of God (Gen.2:11 – 12). Later we find in the prophets the idea that when Israel's relationship with God is restored, the promised land would become like the garden of Eden (Ezk.36:35, Joel 2:3, Isa.35:1 – 10, 51:3) and the Temple, the greater Tabernacle, will be the new supernatural source of water like the river flowing out of Eden (Ezk.47:1 – 12, Zec.14:8). This is significant in that Israel and Israel alone was the people to whom God was restoring the original primeval blessing. While the rest of humanity would eventually be blessed because of God's promise to Abraham, only to Israel was God directly renewing the blessing and making their life similar to the life experienced by humanity in the garden.

Consideration of the Sabbath expands our understanding and strengthens the ties. The links between the creation narrative and Israel's practices are especially important concerning the recurring theme of sabbath rest. In Leviticus 25, God promised Israel that He would water their land, bring forth produce abundantly, and thereby nourish the people even when they did no work on their sabbath day every seven days, their sabbath year every seven years, and in their Jubilee year after every seventh 'seven' of years, i.e. every fifty years. During these Sabbath times, Israel was to simply go out into their land, pick fruit from their trees, and eat (e.g. Lev.25:6 – 7). This echoes the original conditions humanity was intended to enjoy in the creation, where Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the trees of the garden land freely (Gen.2:16). Israel's multi-layered sabbath ordinance seems to have been an absolute mitigation of work on behalf of Israel during these times for three reasons: to look backward to the rest imposed on creation (Ex.20:8 – 11, 23:12, Deut.5:14) which was the rest that Adam and Eve were originally living within, to foreshadow the rest of being in Christ (Heb.3:12 – 4:13), and to allude to the rest in the future Eternal Kingdom (compare motifs in Rev.21 – 22).

The entire foundation of the Wisdom literature comes from the creation order. 'Wisdom' in Proverbs is portrayed as being present from the beginning of the world, from creation itself (Pr.8:22 – 32) and then entrusted to humanity. Adam was given a word from God, and he was given the task of meditating on it and living it out, in particular with his wife Eve and then, implicitly, with their children. Each successive generation takes the wisdom they have received from their parents and passes it forward. For any Israelite to honor his father and mother was to be faithful to the ordinances that the Israelite understood to come from God Himself. The admonition, 'Hear, my son, your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching' (Pr.1:8) reflects what should have been true from the creation order. The picture of humanity in paradise is to be given a word from God to meditate on, to obey, and to pass on. That word then becomes the starting point of 'wisdom.' God's people need God's wisdom to live in His blessing. This understanding of wisdom corresponds to the creation order, and Israel has now become the heir and beneficiary of God's wisdom.

God was shaping Israel to be (in a sense) a restoration of His true humanity, a restoration of Adam and Eve. He placed them in a garden land because He wanted them to enjoy the fruit of His gardening. The significance of this arrangement was not lost upon Israel. It was part of the wider theme that God's original creation was good, and that God would also restore the original creation order to His people. This means there is an organic, fundamental, and inseparable relation between the creation order and the ethical posture reflected in the Sinaitic Law.

We also see this relationship from the opposite angle. Israel's antagonism with Egypt and Canaan is described as having ancestral origins (Gen.9:22 – 27) as a conflict between at least some Semitic people ('Shem') and Hamitic people ('Ham'). The issue of the dignity of human life, made in the *imago dei*, had been a major issue before the flood, running from Cain's murder of Abel, Lamech's murder of a young man, and humanity's violence which polluted the land with blood that needed to be washed away. The boundary of human life had been crossed, and this was certainly a violation of the creation order, which God affirms when he links human life to the *imago dei* explicitly. From the time of Noah, however, Ham brought into focus other problems running through the human family. If we make a literary association between 'uncovering his father's nakedness' and 'lying with his father's wife' as does the law in Leviticus 20:11, then that gives us a good idea why Noah later 'knew what his son had done to him.' It's because Noah's wife told Noah what had happened. When Ham dishonored Noah, his father, and probably Noah's wife as well, whatever his act was, he appears to have violated a parent-child relation of honor implicit from the creation order. A boundary had been crossed. Noah then foresaw that Ham's son Canaan would cross many more boundaries. Ham's disregard for his parents reflected, at the very least, discontinuity from one generation to the next. Ham was not receiving the knowledge of God which Noah had, involving God's appropriate boundaries. Canaan, being Ham's youngest son, would especially suffer for Ham's rejection of Noah, who is the only human agent who could provide the link back to the creation, and who could authoritatively interpret the post-flood re-creation as well. Thus, behind Noah, Ham was rejecting God Himself. The ancestor of Egypt, Mizraim, was also a son of Ham (Gen.10:6). Thus, from the negative angle describing the concentration of certain sins in different parts of the human family, we see an organic relationship between the sins of Egypt and Canaan and the crossing of boundaries set up by God in creation. Given that Genesis is all about genealogy, this is very important.

We continue to see, therefore, Egypt and Canaan violating God's creation order, which, in effect, is synonymous with violating the *imago dei*. In the case of Egypt, we know less about their specific sins. They worshiped 'gods' in peculiar human-animal forms, which reflects a broken boundary between animals and humanity set up by God. And Pharaoh's 'hardness of heart' towards God, Moses, and Israel is probably a motif that comes from the 'clay' or 'ground' from which Adam was made; for Pharaoh to put God at a further distance from himself meant he was becoming hardened, rigid, inflexible, and brittle. Irenaeus understood it this way as well. Thus, in both cases are these actions by Egyptians violations of God's creation order. Since the Egyptian pantheon relaxed the boundaries of creation, God relaxed those very same creation boundaries to bring about the ten plagues. Water overtook the land, animals ruled over humanity, and so on. The fact that there were ten plagues undoing Egypt mirrors the ten words of God in creation establishing the world; ten times in Genesis 1, God had said, 'Let there be' or 'Let us make'. So the undoing of Egypt to free Israel is itself a revelation – a revelation that Egypt had already broken the boundaries of creation.

In the case of Canaan, we know more about their sins because Abraham was called into closer proximity with them. We read about infighting between Canaanite kings and city-states, and the kidnapping of Lot (Gen.14), before we hear God tell Abraham that the sin of the Amorite was accumulating (Gen.15:16). I take it that sin, in this case, is

both relational (against God) and moral (against the creation order), because there is no other order against which human behavior is being evaluated. Then, we read about the incident of Lot being rescued out of Sodom and Gomorrah, the sin of the Canaanite people of those cities, and the sad and bizarre decision of Lot's daughters (Gen.19). This incident tells us several things. It certainly reflects back upon the Canaanites generally, along with Canaan and his father Ham in particular. This brings us onto sensitive ground. Despite J. Boswell's influential work on this passage arguing that same-sex rape was not part of the sin of the men at Sodom, I join with many others who find his explanation flawed. On the positive side, I think he is right in pointing out that inhospitality is a major part, and perhaps the dominant part, of the problem. Sodom had many sins, according to various passages in Scripture. However, the sexual aspects of their aggression cannot be denied, both in terms of it being rape and being same-sex. The term 'know' is well-established as sexual in the context of Genesis broadly (Adam knew Eve in Gen.4:1) and immediate context (Lot's daughters 'have not known a man' in 19:8). It is also used in the canonical context in Judges 19:22 – 26, where the Benjaminites of Gibeah want to 'know' a Levite guest, and accept as a substitute a concubine who they rape and abuse, a narrative all the more significant because of the many literary parallels between Judges 19 and Genesis 19, as Judges narrates the canaanization of Israel, culturally and religiously. Jude 6 – 7 also refers to angels going after 'strange flesh' in a similar way that Sodom and Gomorrah did, which is a reference to sexual acts. Thus, Boswell wants to remove Genesis 19 from its canonical context, and even its immediate literary context. Furthermore, the decision of Lot's daughters to commit incest with him is probably a reflection of Ham's action in the tent of Noah to 'expose his father's nakedness.' The fact that they give birth to Moab and Ammon, who became people groups opposed to Israel, is itself a mirror of the tension between some Hamitic peoples (from Ham) and some Semitic people (from Shem). The repetition of drunkenness as a problem is also present. All this suggests that Ham did the same to Noah's wife, and thus, Noah himself. It also suggests that Canaan in particular carried on with sexual practices like this in his branch of the human family. Thus, when Lot and his family settled in Sodom, Lot's daughters were influenced by Canaanite culture and reproduced the same behaviors as the Canaanites.

Israel thus understood their laws as occupying the same symmetrical position with the command God gave in the original garden, their human nature as God's image-bearers, and the implicit design of the creation order. They understood that if they sinned, they would go into exile, just as Adam and Eve went into exile. And Israel did wind up in Babylon, just as all humanity wound up in Babel. Thus, from the standpoint of the entire narrative, I cannot agree with your assertion that the frame for the Sinaitic Law was simply Egypt and Canaan. The larger frame is the creation order. Egypt and Canaan served as the negative examples of those who ignored and broke the boundaries of the creation order. Israel was meant to be the positive example of those who kept it.

I'll address your objections to seeing the creation order as the frame for the Sinaitic Law. *I'll start with the link between marriage, family, and land and how that impacted women.* You say that Israel was a patriarchal society, and I differ with you about that. In Israel, as in creation, wealth was God's blessing for all. Land inheritance in Mosaic Israel was tribal, familial and patrilineal. A male Israelite's portion of God's good land came from his father. A female Israelite's portion came through marriage. The exception proves the rule: Numbers 36 describes the special case of Zelophahad where his daughters inherited his land. If an Israelite father had no sons, then his land would pass to his daughters, but those daughters must then marry in such a way that the tribe retained possession of the land and the patrilineal inheritance could resume. The Mosaic land ordinances were thus because they were informed by a creational paradigm. Human origins were tied to the land. The gift of a father to his sons and the blessing a wife received through her husband – the enjoyment of the garden land – were modeled after God's original arrangement with humanity (to marry, be fruitful and multiply). In effect, Israel's land practices portrayed Genesis 2:4 – 26. Adam was given the land from God, and Eve inherited it too, via marriage to Adam. As long as Israel lived as God's true humanity – spiritually, relationally, and ethically – God would provide the garden land to Israel. This was the creational melody that echoed deep within the Mosaic vision of life, and correspondingly, Mosaic justice.

While I would say that Israel's society was 'patrilineal' when it came to land inheritance, I would not say that Israel's society was 'patriarchal.' The reason is because truly patriarchal societies involve the primacy of the family of origin over a newly married couple. Being of Japanese descent, I am very aware that my own culture of origin and many, if not all, traditional cultures that I know of, simply makes a new wife the lowest ranking member of her husband's family. My paternal grandmother made a slave of my mom, while my dad stepped aside, and my mom hated it. While this is/was not universally true in Japanese culture, it is not uncommon either. This is the essence of patriarchy, and it is firmly rejected by the creation order. In Genesis 2, God said that a man would leave his father

and mother and be joined to his wife. That is a radical statement that no traditional culture I know of would have invented or maintained, because it undermines the power of the older generation over the younger. For a man to shift his allegiance from his parents to his wife, under God's overarching authority, of course, meant that marriage takes priority over family of origin. It would have meant, at the least, the privileging of the wife by the husband over all other voices but God's. It made a space for the equality of the husband and wife, if not implying it directly. That is an absolutely radical but simple phenomenon that I have not found any sociologist or anthropologist able to explain. It is one of the many reasons why I think the Scriptures have a superhuman origin. And, coupled with all the observations I've made about men and women before the law, the fact that God truly owned the land and provided for its passage, etc., it is one of the main reasons why I don't think the Old Testament is 'patriarchal' in the senses that we commonly think.

True patriarchy originated in the city of Cain, called Enoch, where Enoch was bound to his father Cain and made to provide food, security, and justification for his father (Gen.4:16 – 25). Not surprisingly, this violation of basic boundaries resulted in much relational damage. Most men who abuse women have been abused earlier by another man, as we see in oppressed peoples today. This is the case of Enoch the man in Enoch the city, the city of Cain. This development is condemned by the biblical narrator, because the city of Cain sits opposite the Garden of Eden. It finds its origin in a murderer running from God, making his son compensate for a curse that was never his son's to bear, and haunted by a vision of a lost garden of innocence, as he sat behind his city walls trying to deface the image of God within his own self. It resulted in men oppressing women, indeed: polygamy in the case of Lamech, who married women named for superficial qualities; Adah means 'ornament' and Zillah means 'shade.' The name Naamah, the sister of Tubal-cain, the only other woman named in this city of male hegemony and violence, means 'beauty.' Here we find a truly patriarchal society which has reduced women to things.

But this means that even an Israelite father was not free to dispose of his land, the basis for all wealth, in any way he chose. It simply passed through him to his sons, for God was the true owner of the garden land. What was clearly expressed in Israel's land practices is the ideal that every Israelite family should have its own land. Even in the case of having children from two marriages in Dt.21:15 – 17, whether it was reluctant polygamy or serial monogamy, whatever was going on in the marriages was not allowed to affect the bestowal of the land inheritances. Leviticus 25 is quite significant because in this section we find the clearest statement about God's desire for Israel's use of the land over time and as it relates to family. Israel was to let the land experience Sabbath rest every seventh year (Lev.25:1 – 8) and every fiftieth year, that is, after seven Sabbath cycles (Lev.25:9 – 12). These Sabbath years for the land were more than simply a year of planned crop rotation to let the soil recover. It was an act of trust in God to provide what they needed, without agricultural planning, irrigation, or cultivation. Every seventh day, seventh year, and fiftieth year, Israel was to experience something of a return to the Garden of Eden, eating freely from the land. The fiftieth year was called a 'jubilee year.' During the jubilee year, people returned to their ancestral lands (Lev.25:13). Land, too, would return to its original tribal and familial boundaries (Lev.25:14 – 28). Land could not be permanently bought or acquired. One tribe or family could not make a vassal of another. If an Israelite fell upon hard times and was forced to sell family property, a kinsman-redeemer was required by Law to intervene (Lev.25:25 – 28). Because land was wealth, there were very strong measures taken to ensure that, over time, no one could accumulate wealth at the expense of someone else. God was weaving a deep principle into Israel's existence: 'The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me' (Lev.25:23). God was reminding Israel of their status as 'aliens and sojourners.' They did not, in fact, own the land. God did. This is fully consonant with the creation order.

Thus, Israel's stay in the garden land existed as a part of right relationships, first with God and also with one another. Wealth was embedded into Mosaic Israel's existence such that they received it from God as part of their relation to Him, and shared it as part of their relation to each other. As part of that commitment, Israelites were to take special care for widows, orphans, and aliens – those who had no connection to land ownership through husband, parents, or lineage in Israel. Repeatedly, God reminded Israel to care for them because they were vulnerable. To not care for them would be to demonstrate the callousness of Cain towards Abel. It would demonstrate that one is not part of God's true humanity.

One might question why the widow, orphan, and alien couldn't own land individually, and that question is very worth noting, but I do not go so far here as to say that an individualistic system would have been inherently better, for at least three reasons. First, the Mosaic land ethics of Israel required relationship, cohesion, and love in family units. In a very real sense, the arrangement of family land suggests that the land was meant *for future generations of*

*the family.* It was meant to be inherited through relationship, and given through relationship. If we today admire the jubilee principle in Leviticus 25, where people and land were restored to one another, where slaves went free, debts were cancelled, and lands returned to their ancestral owners, then we must also acknowledge that that principle could not operate in an individualistic system. Only in a family-based system of land ownership was the jubilee principle operable. Second, the Mosaic land ethics demonstrated an awareness of future generations as much as an awareness of the present generation. It is unclear whether a different arrangement would have achieved more 'justice' over time. It is certainly unclear that Western individualist critics have much of a case to make here anyway, since Western individualistic consumption is creating vast global crises (of environment, energy, food, water, huge government budget deficits, etc.) for which our future children must pay; this constitutes a form of taxation without representation, only across time. Such problems would certainly not have arisen in Mosaic Israel. Third, this arrangement served to remind Israel of God's original creation of humanity. This is how family life in the garden land gave Israel a window of insight into the creation ideal that had been lost long ago. So Israel did not change the basic paradigm for passing down land, which was not treated as an object by itself, but was a gift from God that was stewarded for all people in the community of Mosaic Israel. Human origins were tied to the land. The gift of a father to his sons and the blessing a wife receives through her husband – the enjoyment of an abundant land – were modeled after God's original arrangement with humanity (to marry, be fruitful and multiply). In effect, Israel's land practices portrayed Genesis 2:4 – 26. Adam was given the land from God, and Eve inherited it via marriage to Adam. This was the melody that echoed deep within the Mosaic vision of life, and correspondingly, Mosaic justice. Too, it informed the Christian eschatological metaphor, where Jesus inherits the new creation from his Father, and the church as Christ's bride inherits it through marriage to him. Thus, again, I find that the creation order, if it had been played out without Adam and Eve's fall, exactly underpins the Sinaitic Law on this point.

*Did the vision of marriage in the Jewish Law come from the creation order?* You state that Leviticus 18:8 assumes polygamy was acceptable, which contradicts the creation order where monogamy is proscribed for Adam and Eve. You point out that the NIV study notes say that polygamy is the explanation for that verse. But I'm not sure why the NIV study notes suggest that such is the case, and have never seen a note to that effect (I don't use the NIV). Rather, it is much more reasonable to think that the prohibition against having sexual relations with your father's wife in Leviticus 18:8 assumes that one's father might have remarried another woman who is not your biological mother. Given different life expectancies and the greater possibility of a woman dying in childbirth, this happened more frequently, and it's the very situation Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 5. Furthermore, cases of surrogate motherhood or concubinage (Hagar with Abraham, Bilhah and Zilpah with Jacob), levirate marriage or insemination (Tamar with Judah) and so on do not constitute polygamy as such, but rather reflect the overwhelming importance placed on having children, for both practical and theological reasons, which I explained in my last email. Curiously, they reflect a certain *aversion* to adoption, which has some bearing on your earlier suggestion as far as interpreting Scripture goes. The case of Laban's treachery, tricking Jacob into marrying Leah in addition to Rachel, cannot be read as a pure endorsement of polygamy, but a case where Jacob tried to maintain, in face of Laban's trickery, the sacredness of his sexual union with Leah and an existing vow with Rachel. Deuteronomy 21:15 – 17 treats the situation where a man had (or 'has had' because of some issues of translation of the Hebrew verb tense) two wives and favored one, but if this is current polygamy rather than serial monogamy (because of death or divorce), I suspect this was to handle cases that were current in Israel and among the 'mixed multitude' not descended from Abraham that had come out with them from Egypt (Ex.12:38) and ostensibly become part of Israel through circumcision (Ex.12:43 – 49), and perhaps it was even a retroactive judgment on Jacob's favoritism of Rachel; it served to regulate a bad situation, much like our current tax code taxes citizens on stolen items, but it did not encourage the behavior that got people there to begin with. The only two examples after Genesis 4 of real polygamy that I can recognize are (1) Elkanah, a man portrayed as an insensitive fool who cared nothing for Hannah's future, who seems to have married Peninah after Hannah was childless (1 Sam.1); this was not approved as a normative example, takes place at a very low point in Israel's spiritual life as a community, and may have even been the reason for God showing particular favor, among all other Israelite women, to Hannah, through the birth of her son Samuel; and (2) King David and his heirs who broke God's command against multiplying wives (Dt.17:17) by using marriage for political or selfish ends. These examples of polygamy are condemned by the text in a narrative fashion.

*Were men and women equal before the law?* You also raise questions about the value of women in the Mosaic legal system and whether it corresponds to the creation order, or what we can legitimately infer from it. You seem to be under the impression that women were considered property, for example, under the tenth commandment. But women are clearly not property. Just because the sin of coveting includes in one list objects, people, and implicitly, favor from God, favor among other people, and personality traits internal to a person (clearly factors for Cain in



Genesis 4, Saul in 1 Samuel 10ff., and the apostle Paul in Romans 7:14 – 25), does not mean that the objects of covetous desire are all morally equivalent.

One of the most noteworthy patterns is how the Law of Moses demonstrated the equal value of human beings. This came from Israel's understanding of humanity being originally created in the image of God, and that Israel was to reflect the ethics involved in that calling. In the Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian law code that was contemporary with the Law of Moses, the punishment for a crime depended on whether the victim was rich or poor, which of course disadvantaged women. By contrast, the Law of Moses specified equal punishments for crimes regardless of whether the victim was male or female, rich or poor, an Israelite or a Gentile. Look at this comparison:

<p>Code of Hammurabi: <sup>197</sup> If a man has broken another man's limb, his own shall be broken. <sup>198</sup> If a man has destroyed an eye or a limb of a <i>poor man</i>, he shall pay one maneh of silver. <sup>199</sup> If a man has destroyed an eye or a limb of <i>the servant</i> of another man, he shall pay one-half of a mina. <sup>200</sup> If a man has made the tooth of another to fall out, one of his own teeth shall be knocked out. <sup>201</sup> If the tooth be that of a <i>poor man</i>, he shall pay one-third of a maneh of silver.</p>	<p>Leviticus 24 <sup>17</sup> If a man takes the life of <i>any human being</i>, he shall surely be put to death. <sup>18</sup> The one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life. <sup>19</sup> If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: <sup>20</sup> fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him. <sup>21</sup> Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. <sup>22</sup> There shall be <i>one standard</i> for you; it shall be <i>for the stranger as well as the native</i>, for I am the LORD your God.</p>
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This 'one standard...for the stranger as well as the native,' regardless of whether the victim was poor or rich, male or female, Israelite or foreigner, was a startling practice given Israel's historical context. Property also did not give a person leverage in an Israelite court of law, which can be seen as Israel's protection for the person who owned less land from others who owned more, but simultaneously it also provided no incentive for any one Israelite to acquire more wealth than another, and did not advantage men at the expense of women. In the Code of Hammurabi and in many other social codes up to today, a person's wealth determined their worth. But in the Law of Moses, it was the reverse; a person's worth determined their relatedness to others first, treatment under the law, and their minimum level of wealth. While the death penalty and other penalties would not have been necessary prior to the fall, I think it's plain to see that the value of human life in the Sinaitic Law is underpinned by the creation order.

*Did wives and husbands have equal rights and penalties under the Jewish Law?* You ask whether the Sinaitic Law penalizes men equally as women for sexual infidelity. You bring up Dt.22:13 – 21 as an example of a law that metes out the death penalty for a woman who had not been virginal at the point of marriage. Is there an equivalent for a man? If not, then it seems unfair. Since a man cannot be physically tested for virginity at the point of marriage, I happily grant you that particular point. However, it is fairly clear that men who were caught having sex before marriage were also subject to the death penalty (Dt.22:22 – 24). In fact, if no one was around to help the woman, or to determine if the woman cried out, indicating her unwillingness, then the benefit of the doubt was extended to the woman and only the man was put to death (Dt.22:25 – 27). That basically means that any woman stood in the more powerful legal position of being able to accuse any man of rape and non-consensual sex, and the principle of needing two to three witnesses seems suspended in this case. All in all, the Sinaitic Law is equally strict towards men and women with all sexual relations. While sin, rape, and adultery are fundamental discontinuities with the creation order, the basic moral vision of the sacredness of marriage from God's creation order remains expressed in the Sinaitic Law.

The situation described in Numbers 5:11 – 31, the test of marital fidelity, probably did apply to a wife who suspected her husband of cheating on her. We know this to be true of the certificate of divorce in Deuteronomy 24 because Jesus himself was of the opinion that the woman could initiate divorce according to the older interpretation of the Sinaitic Law (Mk.10:11 – 12). This is because the Jewish rabbis recognized that the Hebrew language involved gendered nouns and pronouns, and also used economy of speech. So, even when Dt.24 describes a husband initiating a divorce, the Jews understood this to mean that a wife could initiate divorce as well. Linguistically, they regarded the language as being the 'inclusive male' tense, that is, the example of the male which included the female. They recognized this until the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. The material Elephantini, from Egypt in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, shows wives divorcing their husbands, and this suggests that the practice was even more widespread in the Ancient Near East. Unless there was something specifically said to pertain to a husband and not to a wife, they viewed the law as actually applying to both. The incursion of Greek culture, and its strong anti-female bias, started

to affect rabbinical interpretation. But the Sinaitic Law itself extended to wives the same protections and rights as husbands. On the question of marriage, fidelity, and divorce, again, I don't see any real discontinuity between the creation order and the Sinaitic Law, except to acknowledge what Jesus acknowledged: divorce would not have been necessary or practiced before the fall.

There is one possible exception of the husband being able to cancel his wife's vow of consecration to a special religious task or vocation, if made without his permission (Num.30), which, if this is to be interpreted unidirectionally, might be a concern that comes out of the imagery of the fall. It might, however, be interpreted bidirectionally, so a wife could cancel her husband's vow if made without her permission. That, too, bears some relation to the creation. I can see this issue going both ways. But in all the other ways that I can recognize, a wife and husband had the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities.

*Were wives and girls considered property in the Jewish Law? Did that come from the creation order?* I have already pointed out how wives could initiate divorce from their husbands, and presumably call for a test of their husband's fidelity, because the Hebrew gendered language made use of the 'inclusive male' tense or example; mere 'property' would not have been able to do this. If a woman were mere property, would the Sinaitic Law exempt new husbands from any public service for a full year 'to give happiness to *his wife*' (Dt.24:5)? For what is the happiness of mere property worth? Would neglecting a widow be a criminal act if she were property? Would a widow of a priest have legal right to return to her father's household if she were widowed (Lev.22:13) if she were mere property? If women were property, and if a woman happened to be indentured as 'slaves' and injured, then she would not be given release for any bodily injury done to her as compensation (Ex.21:26 – 27), or avenged life for life if she were killed while a 'slave' (Ex.21:20).

Before I examine Exodus 21, and the examples of Hebrew 'slavery' so-called, a linguistic and grammatical point might also help: In Hebrew, the word 'buy' takes its meaning from the nature of the subject to which it is applied. Hence, Eve bought (begot) a man from the Lord (Gen.4:1), God bought (gained, wrestled free) Israel (Ps.78:54), a person who hears reproof buys (gets, develops) wisdom (Pr.15:32; 16:16), a relative can buy (redeem) a kinsman from slavery into freedom (Neh.5:8). Even in English, we speak of 'buying' politicians, a person's loyalty, a person's labor, etc. without referring to chattel slavery per se. Furthermore, the phrase 'I have today bought you and your land' with money appears in Genesis 47:23, but Joseph was not enslaving people but only instituting a 20% tax on crops in return for present assistance (Gen.47:24 – 26). Just because the words 'buy' or 'possess' or 'slave' or 'his property' are used with reference to a person does not mean that the *person* is regarded as inanimate property without personhood before God, but rather their *labor* is being contracted and owed for a specific amount. Theodore Dwight Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery*, 1837, p.15 – 21 does excellent work interpreting the word 'buy' where Israel was instructed to buy their servants, and the phrase 'bought with money' when it occurred.

In the legislation of Ex.21:4, the issue is that an indentured man and an indentured woman have different terms of service to a household, and thus different schedules for release, not that a female indentured servant remained the property of the master forever, and not that 'slavery' or indentured service took precedence over marriage in a fundamental way. Each indentured servant – man or woman – would be released either at the jubilee year every fifty years (Lev.25:39 – 42) on Israel's common calendar, or seven years after their term began (Dt.15:12), whichever happened first. You say, 'Female slaves are never to be freed.' But you are neglecting the schedules for release, which applied equally to women as to men. In addition, the 'bondservant' option of Ex.21:5 – 6 was designed for *the benefit of a slave* who was about to go free; he could *force* his master to retain him as a permanent part of his household so he would not have to hit a pause button on his marriage and wait for his wife's term of indenture to expire, too. If a man became a 'bondservant' to a master with the ear-piercing ceremony, only then does the text say that he is bound 'permanently' (Ex.21:5 – 6). Even in that case, rabbinical opinion in the Jewish Encyclopedia online says that the voluntary bondslave went free in the jubilee year or upon the death of the master. A Hebrew man in indentured service still retained parental rights over his children and marital rights to his wife, so that when he went free in the jubilee year, he would take his family (Lev.25:39 – 42). Since Hebrew 'slavery' was really 'indentured servitude,' as a contract of labor, not a ceding of personhood, 'ownership' of an indentured servant did not cascade into ownership over all the servant's human relations and material possessions.

The legislation in Exodus 21:7 – 11 refers to a preliminary form of wedding betrothal for young girls, not a sale by parents of the girl into slavery. The daughter being 'sold' into betrothal became a free woman within the new family, a daughter, not a servant with servant duties, and not a chattel slave that could be resold (Ex.21:8). Any

breach of marriage contract by the betrothed man/family earns the girl her freedom and the man receives no compensation (Ex.21:10 – 11). Jewish rabbis view it as pertaining to poor families who could not afford a dowry for their daughter: 'In the ancient world, a father, driven by poverty, might sell his daughter into a well-to-do family in order to ensure her future security. The sale presupposes marriage to the master or his son. Documents recording legal arrangements of this kind have survived from Nuzi. The Torah stipulates that the girl must be treated as a free woman; should the designated husband take an additional wife, he is still obligated to support her. A breach of faith gains her her freedom, and the master receives no compensation for the purchase price.' (Nahum M. Sarna, *Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary Series: Exodus*, 1991, note on Exodus 21; see also Ken Campbell (editor), *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, 2003, p.55 – 57).

There were several aspects of the Sinaitic Law that seem to me indirectly related to the creation order and to a woman's place in it. That is, there are situations of sin, divorce, exile, punishment, work, disease, death, priesthood, Tabernacle, etc. that are foreign to the original creation order, but must still be incorporated into Israel's collective life, and brought into some kind of more distant relationship with the creation order which still illustrates it through the acknowledgement of human sin. For example, the Tabernacle sanctuary is seen as a new but greatly diminished Eden, and Israel's priesthood is cast as a greatly diminished Adam guarding and keeping it. The valuation of vows in Leviticus 27 derives from this situation. The valuation of 'difficult vows' paid to the priesthood in Leviticus 27 is based on the gender and age of the person because the vow is connected to the person's ability to do farm work. Vows of consecration for special assignments or periods of prayer were made to the priests at the sanctuary. The priests would normally collect tithes and offerings from the rest of the Israelites, which supplied their need. But if a man in his prime working age (20 – 60 years, Lev.27:3) takes a vow of consecration and does not farm, the priests would also be affected by the loss of agricultural output. To compensate for that, the Sinaitic Law instituted the valuation of these vows. Thus, in Leviticus 27, his valuation is higher than that of a woman, for reasons of work productivity, as it would be for a man younger than 20 or a man older than 60. I can't find a real reason to disagree with this difference in valuation of exempted labor. And I certainly do not think that women are being cast as property; property would not be able to make vows of consecration to God.

In this context, it's also worth mentioning Exodus 22:16 – 17, the so-called 'bride-price' because of the misunderstandings that occur about this passage and the Sinaitic Law's view of women. If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married (which means she is young), and has sexual relations with her, he must pay her father the 'bride-price,' and she shall be his wife. If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the bride-price for virgins to her father. The following comes from Dr. Gordon Hugenberger, who is a scholar of Ancient Near Eastern literature and languages, pastor of Park Street Church, in his class *The Theology of the Pentateuch*. In this case, seduction may be the man's initiative but it is not coerced sex. And if she changed her view on her own consent, we must recall the powerful position a woman had in claiming that she was coerced and raped. This is a young woman who is not betrothed, who probably nevertheless sees potential in this relationship, who does not want to accuse the man of rape, yet made a hasty and sinful judgment to have sex with him. For this, the man is not paying the father for her, or paying the father for damaging his 'property.' Rather, the bride-price is, and should be translated, 'marriage present.' It's an amount of money that the man gives to the father of the bride in order to (1) express the seriousness of his intentions and (2) for the father and the boyfriend to constitute a public declaration that this money will be going with the bride; the father will give a dowry which includes the marriage present. So she's not being 'bought' in any way. It's like a premarital agreement with the father involved. Because the money passed through the father's hands, the money is on record as belonging to the young woman, no matter what. It's the only way the wife could be guaranteed what the father had passed on, including the husband's 'marriage-present.' If the husband dies, or if the husband is unfaithful, she will still have her marriage-present. However, the father does have a right of refusal. This is not because the father regards his daughter as 'damaged property' but because she is a minor, and he can be assumed to be acting in her best interest, for example if she had diminished capacity, or if the father suspects the man is a deceiver. In various other Ancient Near East documents, a daughter's wishes would be considered. This is similar to a daughter taking a vow of consecration to God with her father's permission in Num.30:3 – 5. And notice that neither the young woman nor her would-be male suitor would be stoned for this, because a lawful procedure was followed; marriage was attempted in good faith but declined. This way of the Law's handling a very non-ideal situation gives us yet another insight into the intentions involved in God's creation order, and it does not actually diminish the young woman.

If women were property, would wives be able to retain their own property separately from her husband? No. But Jesus told a parable of the woman who searches for one of her ten coins (Lk.15:8 – 10), which was part of a set,

given by her husband to the woman's father and then to the woman, so that the gift was not conditioned on her marriage. So was the so-called 'bride-price' of Exodus 22:16 – 17. Would property be deserving of honor as mothers, called into worship, lead all Israel in worship and rise to high levels of national leadership as Miriam did, be able to make vows of consecration, or commanded to observe the Sabbath, for God causes even the inanimate land to keep working to produce food while men rest, so why not have the women work, too? Would Joel say that women as property would receive the Holy Spirit along with men, and speak prophetically along with men (Joel 2)? And so on. In the tenth commandment, 'slaves' are also in that list and are not considered anywhere near property; you can see from the proviso to help a runaway slave settle down and not return him to his master (Dt.23:15 – 16) that 'slavery' in Israel was really 'indentured servitude,' and these servants' humanity was protected under law; given that running away was relatively easy in Israel (with no standing police force, etc.), this made Hebrew 'slavery' a voluntary institution; you can read my study of slavery for more details about this. In any case, if a wife or child were simply 'property' then a Hebrew husband or father should be able to sell them for financial purposes, or compel them to work with him as indentured servants; but he absolutely could not. Unlike the other Ancient Near Eastern societies, the Law of Moses did not permit family members to sell each other into indentured service to recover family debts. The head of the household sold *himself* into indentured service, and while his family certainly joined him as members of the master's household, since everyone lived and worked on household farms and there was no 'commuting to work' back then, they did not become the property of the master, nor were they contracted to serve. In the Sinaitic Law, a man could retain and accumulate actual property even while indentured; neither his possessions nor his human relations became the property of another man under Hebrew 'slavery.'

*Were women more unclean than men? Did that relate to the creation order?* One whole category of Israel's laws dealing with humanity's fallen state maintains boundaries and differences, and it is worth talking about how these treat and affect women. You raise the question of menstruation in Leviticus 18:19. You ask whether this has anything to do with the creation order, making the case that the Egyptians and the Canaanites practiced sex during a woman's menstruation, and that this accounts for the command to Israel to not do so. In theory, I suppose that could be the case, but I think that this law about menstruation fits into the pedagogical purpose of teaching Israel about life and death and the boundary between them; and the two purposes would not be mutually exclusive. A woman's menstruation represents death; it is the womb emptying itself of life-giving potential, especially because blood contained life that, in menstruation, was passing into death. A man's sperm represents life, and a 'nocturnal emission' represented life passing into death. Thus, the Sinaitic Law instructs Israel not to mix living sperm with a woman's menstruation. This aligns with distinctions between living people touching the dead or their tombs; with the command to avoid touching lepers, whose skin conditions often resemble a corpse; with not eating pigs and lobsters, which feed on dead or decaying material; with not cooking a kid in its mother's milk, since that combines life and death. This was part of Israel's ongoing lesson in distinguishing between life and death. Connected to this is the simultaneous cleanness and uncleanness of human nature and human birth. Due to the corruption of human nature, human birth is both a cause for rejoicing yet also a source of pollution. The practices surrounding circumcision in Leviticus 12 illustrate that. A woman giving birth to a girl would be considered unclean for sixty-six days; but a woman giving birth to a boy would be considered unclean for thirty-three days after her son was circumcised. The lesson pertains not to some inherent difference between girls and boys but the symbolic nature of circumcision. Circumcision symbolically communicated the cutting away of a part of human nature that was polluted and corrupted. It was used as a physical metaphor of a deeper spiritual reality pertaining to the heart, by Moses (Dt.30:6) and Jeremiah (4:4; 31:31 – 34). God would circumcise the human heart; and he did so first in the human nature of Jesus, which is why Paul says that there was a circumcision of Christ (Col.2:11), when Christ cut away the sin from within himself by putting it to death through his own personal death (Rom.6:6; 8:3); thus anyone – male or female – who participates in Christ now experiences 'circumcision of the heart' by the Spirit of Christ (Rom.2:28 – 29). I thought it worth commenting on because that practice is often cited as an example of the Sinaitic Law's supposed belief that men are superior to women, from birth. Far from it; rather, it is trying to communicate the significance of circumcision. Another category of laws maintains boundaries and differences among living things, like mixing different materials, various animals, etc. This seems to reinforce the point to Israel about boundaries in creation among the animals. In any case, I think there is a clear relation between these types of situations, less desirable as they were in the post-fall world, and the creation order to which it pointed. The relation is more distant, but nevertheless apparent. The creation order was still being used as the overarching framework.

In essence, even before I approach Leviticus 18 – 20, I don't find myself taking some New Testament principle about being 'more positive' or 'more liberal' about women than the Sinaitic Law, which supposedly views women as property, and then 'overriding' the Sinaitic Law. Trying to make that case as an inter-testamental foundation for

being ‘more positive’ or ‘more liberal’ about sexual ethics is not exegetically accurate. The Sinaitic Law does not view women as property, any more than it views ‘slaves’ as property. Now there are institutional differences: the Temple building versus the Temple people, which affects ceremonial issues; Mosaic land inheritance versus Jesus’ call towards disinheritance from all land, which naturally affects both men, women, and family; or the fact that Mosaic Israel was a civic society with capability to carry out civic punishments, whereas Jesus’ church is not and we must think carefully about its role in any given political situation. But those are not the same issues, and it is not about Jesus being ‘more liberal’ than Moses on matters of gender or sexual ethics. Rather, the creation order is expressed and maintained in different ways that match the different missions of Mosaic Israel and the Messianic new Israel. If anything, what we consistently find is that it is Greek culture and thought about gender and sexual ethics that caused a shift from truly Hebraic, biblical thought. The ancient Hebrews were clearly informed by the concept of the *imago dei*. However, the incursion of Greek culture to the Ancient Near East in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, and eventually Alexander the Great, brought about a deterioration in the station of women as many Jews (and other ANE peoples) absorbed the Greek anti-woman prejudice. Then, although Jesus and the New Testament authors vigorously returned to the Hebraic concept of both men and women individually being made in the image of God, and together in marriage as a special form of God’s image, Greek influences crept in again. So, to be accurate to history, texts, and cultures, a different story line is in order. But that is a larger point for another time.

When I look at Leviticus 18 – 20, I think there are a few preliminary points to make. There is a relationship between the Babel account and the Holiness Laws of Leviticus 18 – 20. The laws in Lev.18 – 20 were intended to insure that there would be no ‘wickedness’ (noun root of verb ‘to plan/purpose’ found in Gen.11:6) or ‘confusion’ (noun root similar to ‘Babel’ in Gen.11:7 and 9) in the land. In the Pentateuch, these nouns are used only here. The spread of human sin after the fall resulted in all humanity holed up at Babel. The spread of human sin in the land of Canaan resulted in the same wickedness and confusion as at Babel. God was resetting that particular land, scattering the Canaanites through war and displacement, and reclaiming it as His own, to plant there the Israelites, who were commissioned to restore it to some modicum of creational fruitfulness. Naturally, in Leviticus 18 – 20, Israel’s relationship with the land was bound up, both positively and negatively, with their commitment to observe the creational boundaries. In fact, these Levitical laws seem to account for a period of time in which God protected human beings from the consequences of marrying someone too close to them genetically. Although Adam and Eve’s children logically must have intermarried, Leviticus 18:1 – 18 now prohibits sexual contact between close relations, whether blood related or positionally through someone else’s marriage. Although Abraham married his half-sister Sarah, Leviticus 18:11 and 20:17 now forbid it. Although Jacob married two sisters, Leviticus 18:18 now forbids it. So in some sense, the Sinaitic Law is retroactively correcting the patriarchs, making sure that Israel does not repeat their mistakes, and represents the creation order in its expression by a large human community. Negatively, the special land of promise was ‘defiled’ and ‘spewed out’ the Canaanites because of sexual misconduct, bodily mutilation, idolatry, unfairness and lying, oppressing the foreigner, and child sacrifice (Lev.18:24 – 30; 20:22). God told Israel that it would do so again for Israel if they repeated those behaviors. The relation between God, people, and land was ontological, as it was in the Genesis creation. The sometimes disorganized way in which these laws are ordered together suggests that to break any of those relationships (God and people, people and people, people and land) was to break the others. Hence, the various punishments for these violations involve being ‘cut off’ (i.e. excommunicated) from Israel, or the death penalty, lest Israel itself be exiled from the garden land, ‘spewn out’ or ‘vomited’ by the land itself. It was obedience to God, not economic development or industrialization, that would bring forth God’s blessing upon Israel from the land, just as it would have in the pre-fall world.

In fact, a larger literary connection between Genesis 1 – 11 and Leviticus 11 – 17 can be made, which has bearing on the connection between Genesis 12 – 50 and Leviticus 18 – 20.

Distinctions in the created world and animal life in Gen.1 and between good and evil in Gen.2	Distinctions between clean and unclean animals in Lev.11
Pains in childbirth in Gen.3	Impurity at childbirth in Lev.12
Nakedness, attention drawn to skin in Gen.3	Graphic horror of skin diseases to depict humanity’s state of uncleanness before a holy God in Lev.13
Adam and Eve banished from the garden	Unclean person must live outside the camp in Lev.13:46
Waters of the flood used in cleansing the land of ‘all flesh’ that had ‘corrupted His way.’ (Gen.6:12)	Water is the primary means of cleansing diseased flesh. Water appears 7 times in Lev.14 (v.5, 6, 8, 9, 50, 51, 52)
The ark was plastered with pitch, inside and out in (Gen.6:14)	The house was plastered with clay after the soiled material was removed inside and taken out of the city

	(Lev.14:41-42). The house was atoned for (Lev.14:53b).
Noah waited at the door of the ark for seven days (Gen.7:4, 10)	The priest was to wait at the door of the house for seven days (Lev.14:38)
Noah waited for the bird in the ark for two series of sevens (Gen.8:10, 12)	The one to be cleansed waited for two series of sevens (Lev.14:7, 8)
Two birds were sent out of the ark. One, the raven, flew out over the water and the other, a dove, flew over the dry land (Gen.8:7 – 12). The raven was unclean and the dove was clean.	Two ‘clean birds’ were taken: one was slain ‘over water’ and the other was released over the face of the field. The slain bird was a sin offering (Lev.14:52), took away the uncleanness; the other bird went free.
A sacrifice was offered at the conclusion (Gen.8:20)	A sacrifice was offered at the conclusion (Lev.14:10, 21)
Noah offered a ‘clean animal’ and a ‘clean bird’ on the altar. (Gen.8:20)	The one to be cleansed offered a male lamb and two doves on the altar (Lev.14:21 – 22)
Noah was given dietary regulations (Gen.9:3) and warned about consuming the blood (Gen.9:4)	Dietary regulations have been given (Lev.11), along with a strict warning about consuming the blood (Lev.17, cf.7:26).
God established a covenant with Noah (Gen.9:9)	God established a covenant with Israel (Lev.26:44)
The sign of the covenant was the rainbow in the clouds (Gen.9:14-15)	The sign of God’s presence in the covenant was the cloud over the atonement cover (Lev.16:2)
Noah drank wine and became drunk and lay in his tent (Gen.9:21)	Aaron and his sons were warned not to drink wine or fermented drink when they went into the Tent of Meeting (Lev.10:9)
Noah’s two sons/descendants, Ham and Canaan, were cursed (Gen.9:24-27)	Aaron’s two sons, Nadab and Abihu, were cursed (Lev.10:1)
Noah’s son Ham saw his father’s nakedness (Gen.9:22)	‘Do not uncover the nakedness of your father.’ (Lev.18:7) Uncovering nakedness is called the defilement of the Canaanites (Lev.18:24 – 30)
Humanity plans and brings confusion at Babel (Gen.11:1 – 9). At Babel, God’s concern was that nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them’	The holiness laws in Lev.18 – 20 were intended to insure that there would be no wickedness (noun root of verb ‘to plan’) or confusion (noun root similar to ‘Babel’) in the land. The nouns are used only here in the Pentateuch
Abram married Sarai, his half-sister (Gen.11:29, 20:12)	The holiness laws prohibited marriage to one’s half sister (Lev.18:11, 20:17)
Jacob married two sisters (Gen.25 – 35)	The holiness laws prohibit marrying two sisters (Lev.18:18).

The purpose of the narrative’s structure is to portray the spread of ritual defilement in Israel’s camp as a reversal of God’s plan of blessing. And, to view the story retrospectively, the early narratives of Genesis, by paralleling the later rituals dealing with contamination, shows that the first sin in the garden was a form of contamination in God’s good creation. This illustrates the spread of sin in both the created world and in the covenant community. This reinforces the sense that the Holiness Laws of Leviticus 18 – 20, when we come to them, are, among the purposes this section serves, retroactively critiquing even the patriarchs of Genesis 12 – 50. Even some of their decisions were influenced by the ‘wickedness’ and ‘confusion’ of human culture at Babel. But if Genesis 1 – 11 is to be taken as one literary unit in this sense, which it clearly is, and is literarily describing the spread of sin as it moves humanity away from God’s original creation order, and if Genesis 12 – 50 is its literary complement, describing God’s efforts to move the chosen family back towards his original creational idea, then this has bearing on Leviticus 11 – 17 and 18 – 20. Leviticus 11 – 17 and 18 – 20, then, are also calling attention to the original creation order. Leviticus 18 – 20 is most naturally understood as explicitly recalling Israel away from Babel and back to God’s creation design, even farther than God was able to bring the patriarchs.

So in my mind, God’s creation order, with its explicit and implicit ethics from Genesis 1 – 4, is firmly ensconced as the original framework of the Sinaitic Law, including those ethics dealing with same-sex sexuality. What is at stake in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is not the reduction of the passive male partner to the status of a woman. On a social level and a sexual level, the status of a woman was nothing to be despised, in and of itself. To the contrary, women were appreciated and celebrated. When God’s creation reaches its crowning crescendo in the Hebrew Scriptures, it does so not in the creation of the man, but of the woman! A woman’s sexuality was poetically seen as a deep well

whose waters would quench her husband's thirst. This is why the 'woman at the well' is a consistent biblical literary motif stretching back through the Old Testament to the creation itself: Eve was presented to Adam by the river flowing out of Eden; Eleazar met Rebekah by a well and brought her back to Isaac at another well; Jacob met Rachel by a well; Moses met Zipporah by a well; the Proverbs describe a wife as a well of fresh water (Pr.5:15 – 19); the Song of Songs as a garden and a well of fresh water (Song 4:15), a reminder of Eden itself. In the Song of Songs, the sexual union of husband and wife is celebrated for its own sake, without any reference to childbearing. And the Song of Songs is a play with a strong woman character who speaks easily over half the lines. What anti-woman worldview produces such literature? Boyarin, Nissinen, Brooten, et.al, are importing the deeply Greek anti-woman prejudice into their reading of the Old Testament. But it doesn't originate there, doesn't belong there, and fails to explain the biblical data. What was at stake in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 was the image of God, expressed fully in the human marriage of a male and a female. Besides the union of opposite genders and whatever else gender signifies (though I suspect gender cannot ultimately be reduced to something else), the overwhelming, unbroken assumption behind the Sinaitic Law and Israel's existence as a whole was the carrying on of the creational blessing: to be fruitful and multiply. Israel's land arrangements absolutely assumed everyone would get married. Their stance against polygamy made room for it, since there was a woman available for every man, and vice versa, at least in principle. Their focus on childbearing presupposed it, and even required it. Their messianic hope was absolutely tied to it. Thus, to engage in a same-sex sexual relationship was to cut oneself off from the people who were meant to express God's good creation order, an order that Israel saw that Egypt, Canaan, and the rest of the Gentile nations around them had forgotten, to various degrees. Perhaps it was a repetition, on some level, of the sin of Ham in dishonoring his parents and cutting himself off from knowledge of the creation order. In Mosaic Israel, a same-sex relationship was to be drawn into one's self in a sexual way, to not opening one's self up to the future God had in mind, rooted in the original archetype, but embodied in children, and literally nurturing Israel's messianic hope for being God's human partner in undoing Adam and Eve's sin, for it was ultimately as a human child that the Messiah would come.

The probable reason behind the lack of explicit prohibition on lesbian relationships is not theological but social-situational and linguistic. Women in most ancient cultures stayed closer to home before they were married, under the watchful eye of their parents, and they were married at younger ages. So I can easily imagine that female-female sexual relations were simply not observed, or as relevant to comment on directly, whereas male-male sexual relations were. Given Israel's understanding of itself in relation to the creation order, they would have understood that this implicitly covered female-female sexual relations as well.

But might same-sex relationships fall under 'ritual' issues which were temporarily given to Israel, and not the category of moral issues that are more serious? You cite Boswell calling Lev.18:22 a 'ritual' issue and not a 'moral' one. The distinction first concerns how to interpret the Hebrew word *toevah*, translated 'abomination,' and then how to render it into Greek. Boswell offers that *toevah* does not 'usually' signify something intrinsically evil, like rape or theft, but something that is ritually unclean for Jews, like eating pork or having sex during a woman's menstruation. The word 'usually' is not a strong foundation on which to build this case. But even as I try to look at his argument sympathetically, in Leviticus 18, *toevah* is used to condemn child sacrifice, incest, adultery, and bestiality, all of which are unquestionably moral issues. In addition, the word *toevah* was used to *summarize* all the practices of the Canaanite nations, in Leviticus 18:24 – 30, Deuteronomy 18:9 and 20:18, and 2 Kings 16:3 and 21:2. It is significant that the Canaanite nations did not even have the capacity to group their laws into the category 'ritual' or 'ceremonial' because they did not have the Tabernacle sanctuary that Israel had. It was not a relevant distinction to them or for them. That God held the Canaanites accountable for upholding these laws seems to indicate that they came as a package, and/or that they were actually given to humanity in some form long before Moses, as Noah distinguished between clean and unclean animals long before God established any sanctuary, or before Israel itself. Based on the narrative sequence of the Pentateuch, I believe both. Jeremiah also used the word *toevah* for stealing, murder, adultery, swearing falsely, idolatry and hypocrisy (Jer.7:9 – 10). Thus, on the literary level alone, Boswell's judgment that *toevah* 'usually' relates to ritual issues and not moral ones, and that therefore we can consider Leviticus 18:22 as 'ritual,' is incorrect.

Moreover, gay male sex brought about the death penalty in Leviticus 20:13, and it is hard to dismiss that. In addition to all the sexual sins listed in Leviticus 20 that brought on the death penalty, the death penalty was used for the false prophet (Dt.13:5), the idol worshiper (Dt.17:7), the person disobedient to the priest or the judge (Dt.17:12), the stubborn and rebellious son (Dt.21:21), and kidnapping (Dt.24:7). There is an abbreviated list of sexual sins

bringing on the death penalty in Dt.22:22 – 24 which is probably a brief restatement of the full list of sexual sins in Leviticus 20. These are unquestionably moral, not ritual, acts.

Daniel Helminiak makes a further argument, that the Septuagint translates the Hebrew word *toevah* into two different Greek terms: *bdelygma*, for ritual purity issues pertaining only to Israel's sanctuary, and *anomia*, for moral issues that are inherently wrong. He also ignores the moral weighting to all sexual sin given by the death penalty in the Sinaitic Law, which is quite an oversight, but he finds it notable that the LXX translates *toevah* in Leviticus 18:22 *bdelygma*. Helminiak writes, 'In the Septuagint, the Hebrew word *toevah* in Leviticus 18:22 is translated with the Greek word *bdelygma*. Fully consistent with the Hebrew, the Greek *bdelygma* means a ritual impurity, an uncleanness. Once again, there were other Greek words available, like *anomia*, meaning a violation of law or a wrong or a sin' (*What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*, 2000, p.52). Helminiak's argument depends on the assumption that the LXX translators can be regarded as authoritative in translation as the original Hebrew authors were in composition, and the assumption that indeed these words were used in clearly different ways. So those two questions must be examined. First, it is unclear to me what weight to give the LXX translation on this issue. Of course the LXX is quoted by the New Testament, but so is the older Hebrew version of the Old Testament. I have often wondered why and would like more time to study that larger question from all angles. One reason is that at certain points, the LXX is a bit more assertive at building messianic expectation around certain Davidic passages, for example when it renders God's speech to King David in 2 Samuel 7:14, 'He will *resurrect* your seed.' One might think that the New Testament authors would quote that immediately, but it is notable that they actually avoid that passage and others like it. Perhaps this was partly because the rest of the 2 Samuel 7 passage refers to God disciplining the heirs of David for their sins, which was not true of Jesus, and partly because it would have been considered a relatively 'cheap shot' as far as textual citations go. The New Testament authors were more respectful of the original Hebrew Scriptures than that. The LXX seems to represent a variant of the Hebrew original that largely remained faithful to the sense and quality of the Old Testament, but not in all ways. To my knowledge, it seems to be slightly midrashic in the messianic direction. Hence, when the New Testament quotes from both the LXX and Hebrew variants, it seems to not necessarily endorse the LXX text categorically, but rather engages with it as a textual and rhetorical tradition familiar to many Jews. All that to say: If a case is made about *anything* on the basis of the LXX alone, I remain unsure of what weight to give that argument. I don't think we can take the LXX as 'the' authoritative translation of the Hebrew Scriptures when the New Testament does not take it that way.

Second, and more significantly, the Greek word *bdelygma* is used in the New Testament about unquestionably moral and not just ceremonial matters. The love of money is 'detestable' (*bdelygma*) in the sight of God' (Lk.16:15). Common Cretan practices of lying, gluttony, and laziness (Ti.1:12), and other sins which contradict standards of Christian leadership (Ti.1:6 – 8) show up in some contradictory men who are actually unbelievers: 'by their deeds they deny him, being detestable (*bdelygma*) and disobedient and worthless for any good deed' (Ti.1:16). The harlot of Babylon, with all her moral sins, primarily immorality, greed, slavery, is an 'abomination' (*bdelygma*) (Rev.17:4 – 5). The spiritual and relational sins characterizing those thrown into the lake of fire are all moral: 'the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable (root *bdelygma*) and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars' (Rev.21:8). People will not enter the New Jerusalem because they are 'unclean', not in a ceremonial sense, but in a moral sense: they practice 'abomination (*bdelygma*) and lying' (Rev.21:8). In addition, the word is found in Jesus' phrase 'the abomination (*bdelygma*) of desolation' (Mt.24:15; Mk.13:14) referring to the complete desecration of the Temple. While this would indeed be a ritual issue since it concerns the sanctuary, it is so monumental a violation of the first commandment that I doubt Jesus meant it would be a *merely* ritual issue. So the argument that the Hebrew *toevah* is subdivided into two separate and strict categories of ritual (*bdelygma*) and moral (*anomia*) cannot be maintained in the face of the textual data. The words elide into one another and are, perhaps, more like rough synonyms. Indeed, in English we can use words like evil, sinful, wrong, immoral, unlawful, bad, horrific, abominable, etc. to refer to the same thing. That seems to be the case here.

Thus, Leviticus 18 – 20 is not simply rooted in a reactionary stance against Egyptian and Canaanite practices, without going any further. God was not telling Israel to be different simply for the sake of being different. Instead, Egyptian and Canaanite cultures were understood as bearing an ancestral hostility to Israel and to God's creation order. And while the condition of human fallenness brought about a host of attendant issues not originally present in the pre-fall creation order (e.g. the possibility of divorce, the necessity for Israel to carry out punishment, etc.), the laws for handling those incidents are shaped by, and made to illustrate, the creation order in various new ways. So the vision of sexuality in Leviticus 18 – 20 is not rooted merely in a cultural reaction to their contemporaries, or in a



view of women's sexuality as ontologically inferior to men's, but in the deeper implications of bearing the image of God as male and female. The narrative, the literary structures, and the grammar all confirm that same-sex sexual relationships were violations of God's creation order and the role of Israel's men and women, with women affirmed as fully human and not sub-human, to bear the image of God together.

### *Matthew 19:1 – 12*

You believe Matthew 19:1 – 12 gives us no indication about what to think about same-sex unions but only heterosexual divorce, whereas I believe that the basis for Jesus' condemnation of divorce is his interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 on the subject of marriage, which he defines as male and female. It seems that your treatment of Matthew 19:1 – 12 depends on the validity of your previous treatment of Genesis 1 – 2 and Leviticus 18 – 20. Since I do not concur with your treatment of that Old Testament material, for all the reasons listed above, I maintain that Jesus is affirming God's original and exclusive intent for marriage as a male-female oneness. I find this to be consistent with the nature of the New Testament discussion about the restoration of God's image in human beings in and through Christ, which I elaborated on above as well. There is a relationship between what is prohibited negatively (e.g. heterosexual divorce and same-sex unions alike) and what is envisioned positively, since the former is derived from the latter. I will elaborate on Matthew's Gospel as a whole to demonstrate that.

You raise a number of good questions which I think are appropriate to answer here, as we look at Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. You write, 'Given that the necessary consequence of the traditional position is permanent celibacy for gay people, if we want to continue to uphold that position, we need to be able to affirm the following: Not only should all gay people be alone for their whole lives, but we can confidently pronounce that it is God's will that all gay people be alone for their whole lives. Thus, God believes that it is good for the man to be alone—if the man (or woman) is gay. Can we really, authoritatively qualify the very first thing in Scripture that God declares to be not good by saying that, for some people, it is?' Yes, since the problem of *being alone* is linked inseparably to the creation mandate involving our gendered beings and procreation, in which Adam needed 'a helper.' Marriage is not necessarily a 'cure' for the *feeling of loneliness*, which a person might have for any number of reasons. You are trying to sever the relation between Genesis 2 and Genesis 1, as I pointed out above, though Jesus unites those two passages here quite inextricably in Matthew 19:1 – 12. To be celibate is not necessarily to be truly and entirely alone in a larger relational sense.

Of course there are sexual urges. And you raise the good question of whether anyone in Scripture 'consign[s] a whole group of people to lifelong singleness when that does not appear to have been the author's intent.' The problem is that you are looking for that intent in Paul, where it is not stated explicitly, though I would argue that it is implicit. Regardless, it is found here in Matthew 19:1 – 12, on the lips of Jesus. When his disciples say how hard his definition of marriage is, Jesus does not miss a beat. He consigns to lifelong singleness anyone who does not agree with his definition, which he says comes from God's original creation order in Genesis 1 and 2. Jesus gives his followers the option to be single if we find that his definition of marriage is not possible for us to live out, but he does not give us the option of changing his definition. Indeed, as challenging as it is for us, Jesus shows no interest in defining marriage as a fundamental right to which every human being is entitled. In Jesus' view, we are not entitled to marriage on our own terms any more than we are entitled to sex on our own terms.

In fact, we are not entitled to thoughts on our own terms. Jesus' teaching on lust (Mt.5:27 – 32), and his teaching throughout the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:29), demonstrate that, as well as the answer to your question about the distinction between love and lust. You ask, 'Equally, if not more, significant, can we qualify the consistent teaching of Scripture that there is a major moral difference between love and lust when it comes to sexuality, and say that, for an entire class of people, there is effectively no difference? Can we amend the Bible's teaching that sexuality—for all its dangers—is a fundamentally good thing, and now teach that, for some people, it is fundamentally bad?' I think on this point you are again trying to retain the biblical words while changing their underlying definition. I wrote of this in an earlier email when I referred to the four different Greek words (*storge*, *phileo*, *eros*, *agape*) which are often translated into our English word 'love.' Love for God and appropriate love for neighbor, by contrast, stays within God's design and bounds. As C.S. Lewis' points out in *The Four Loves*, *agape*, love for God and charity towards others, must balance out *storge*, *phileo*, and *eros*. *Agape* prevents them from running over their appropriate boundaries. Love for God sets the parameters for all the other loves and their

downstream expressions. This seems to be why Jesus gives the great commandment in the form that he does: love for God is first, love for neighbor second (Mt.22:36 – 39).

In the West, we tend to shift the word ‘lust’ into the realm of psychology as if it only referred to ‘selfish motivation’ or ‘an attitude of take, take, take.’ We define ‘lust’ as if its opposite were simply ‘self-giving.’ That has some truth, but is an anachronistic rendering. The word ‘lust’ was used by the biblical writers to describe any desire that carried a person beyond the ordinances of God (e.g. Rom.1:24; 6:12; 7:14 – 25; Jas.1:14 – 15, 4:1 – 3), which in the case of our discussion here, comes from the creation order. Thus, the difference between love and lust also involves *the object* of one’s desire, and not just one’s *motivation*. According to Matthew 19:1 – 12, a man whose first marriage fell apart because he cheated might, years later and with more maturity, have the proper motivation to have a godly marriage. But that does not mean he can. He has sabotaged himself because of his past actions, and now the *object* of his desire – a second wife – is not appropriate. According to Matthew 5:27 – 32, a married man who lusts after a woman who is not his own wife may have all the good intentions in the world to accompany that lust with every other acceptable motivation of self-giving. But still the *object* of his desire is inappropriate. This is why the early Christian theologians simply used the word ‘lust’ to refer to all desires that carried their host towards objects that lay beyond what God ordained was appropriate.

You ask, ‘Is the biblical teaching that all human beings have equal dignity and worth by virtue of being made in God’s image ultimately compatible with the belief that gay people are inherently inferior to straight people at the core level of their capacity for romantic love and self-giving, especially given that gay people themselves reject this view?’ One need not deny the equal dignity and worth of all people made in God’s image, in an individual sense, due to the state of their desires. The question involves whether a given sexual union is in God’s image or not.

For Jesus is not only restoring marriage to God’s original creation ideal, he is inviting Israel and all humanity to God’s original creation ideal, through his own person and work. We see this in the larger context of Matthew’s literary structure. Matthew divides his Gospel up into five main blocks of Jesus’ teaching, with narrative material that fills it out.

- When Jesus had finished these words... (Mt.7:28)
- When Jesus had finished giving instructions... (Mt.11:1)
- When Jesus had finished these parables... (Mt.13:53)
- When Jesus had finished these words... (Mt.19:1)
- When Jesus had finished all these words... (Mt.26:1)

The structural allusion to the Pentateuch is reasonably strong. Furthermore, there are other narrative similarities between Matthew’s Gospel and the Pentateuch surrounding the story of Israel. Like Israel in the Pentateuch, Jesus is the true descendant of Abraham, Jesus is hunted as a baby boy by a foreign ruler, Jesus goes to Egypt with his family, Jesus emerges out of Egypt, Jesus later gets baptized in the Jordan River and goes through the wilderness for forty days (echoing Israel’s forty years), Jesus then gathers a new people, pronounces blessings and curses, is blessed and takes on the curse, and finally, in his resurrection, goes with his people into a new inheritance from a mountaintop. All this reminds any reader of Israel’s story in the Pentateuch. Jesus is being portrayed as the new Israel, the Messiah who sums up Israel in himself and carries Israel’s story to a new and fresh conclusion, the conclusion Israel could not reach by itself. He becomes the new humanity that God was trying to make of Israel, who failed because of the internal corruption of sin. Israel had been trying to be and become God’s new humanity to undo the sin of Adam and Eve, to remain in the garden land and obey God’s command, and to worship God at His sanctuary at a new Eden. But they had failed, and gone into exile in Babylon, which is highlighted so prominently and poignantly in Mt.1:1 – 17. Jesus, then, has become the new Israel, the true Israel, who also represents all humanity because he is the true Adam. He is the one who is restoring humanity to the plan God intended from the beginning.

One more literary point of significance, then back to ethics. Matthew brings his Gospel to a close with a scene very much like the ending of the Pentateuch. Jesus is on a high mountaintop in Mt.28:18 – 20, like Moses was on a high mountaintop in Dt.34. Jesus is overlooking a vast inheritance, just like Moses was overlooking the inheritance back then. But this time, Jesus is not dying alone on the mountain; his death and resurrection had already occurred; and now Jesus is going out to conquer, not land but people’s hearts, as his inheritance. So he says to his disciples, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.’ A fitting

conclusion for a well designed teaching manual: a commission to use it and reproduce it. Jesus' mission thematically builds upon Israel's spreading throughout the garden land, which itself builds upon Adam and Eve's spreading the garden throughout the land. No surprise: He is God's new humanity, or rather renewed humanity, bringing human beings back into the original creation order.

The question follows from the relationship between creation and resurrection (or new creation). Jesus claims to be reversing 'hardness of heart,' which had set into humanity after the fall, including Israel, in order to reissue the creation order norms. Jesus speaks of the need for heart level transformation not only in Mt.19:1 – 12 but also 15:19 – 20: 'Out of the heart come evil thoughts, adulteries...' The motif of heart level transformation occurs in the first major teaching section of Matthew, called the Sermon on the Mount (5:1 – 7:29). The theme of Jesus transforming the human heart is the main focus of this section.

- Blessed are the pure **in heart**... (Mt.5:8)
- But I say to you that everyone who is angry [in his **heart**] with his brother... (Mt.5:21 – 26)
- He who looks on a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her **in his heart**. (Mt.5:28)
- But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you [**heart** attitude of self-defense vs. self-giving]. (Mt.5:38 – 48)
- Your Father who is in heaven sees your **secret** motives. (Mt.6:4, 6, 18)
- Where your treasure is, there will your **heart** be also. (Mt.6:21)
- Beware of the false prophets, who...**inwardly** are ravenous wolves. (Mt.7:15)

This means the Sermon on the Mount can only be the 'new covenant' prophesied by Jeremiah, written on the human heart (Jer.31:31 – 34). Jesus seems to have intentionally given it on a mountain, as God gave the Ten Commandments before on Mount Sinai. In fact, in the very next section, Matthew 8 – 9, Jesus does ten miracles by his word: a new ten commandments, reflecting back on the new 'law of the heart' that this is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, and the deepening of the Sinaitic Law.

This is another data point that says Jesus sees the creation order being restored through his teaching and person. This would have been clear to a Jewish audience because Jesus says about false prophets that their 'fruit' is, ironically, only thorns and thistles (7:16), which are not really fruit at all in the literal sense, but are 'fruit' in the sense that they are the 'results' of still being 'inwardly ravenous wolves' who have not yielded to Jesus' heart-transforming word. Thorns and thistles were emblematic of the fall into sin in Genesis 3. Jesus' use of those terms signifies that those who do not wrestle on the level of the heart to receive Jesus' word are still in the realm of sin and resisting Jesus' work of renewing the creation order. By contrast, a true follower of Jesus bears fruit that is nourishing (7:17ff.), emblematic of the life-bearing life forms God created in Genesis 1 and 2. Moreover, Jesus echoes the creation order by his dense usage of the terms 'good' and 'evil' in 7:11 and 7:17 – 19. Everything about how Jesus envisions the human heart being responsive and obedient to God is how the human heart was supposed to be in the creation. Jesus' vision of human life lived in trust of the Father was informed by the creation order: relationally (5:21 – 48), spiritually (6:1 – 18), and materially (6:25 – 34). Jesus is helping us understand what he means by 'pure in heart' (5:8) and how he will be restoring our hearts to that state. By delivering this 'new law for the heart,' Jesus is renewing the creation order in the heart of his followers. Marriage according to Mt.5:27 – 32 is a return to the creation order, as he expands on in Mt.19:1 – 12. This is what it means to overcome 'hardness of heart.'

You have raised the question of knowing believers by their fruits. The phrase appears in this very context, Matthew 7:16 – 20, and also Luke 6:43 – 44 in a very similar context. You take the phrase 'know them by their fruits' in a way that assumes that same-sex unions should be included in those 'fruits.' But here, Jesus speaks of 'fruit,' in contrast with 'thorns and thistles,' as referring to the originally good creation order in contrast to the products of human sin. As I maintain above, God's original creation order involved male and female made in His image to bear the 'fruit' of more human life. The play on words here between Genesis and Jesus is intentional. 'Fruit' is about the reproduction of life. In particular, throughout the narrative of Scripture, 'fruit' refers to a physical object which has life in itself physically to bring forth more life, whether the fruit is an apple which has seeds in itself for more apple trees, the union of male and female in a marriage which has a seed in itself of more human life in male and female genders, or the union of the believer with Christ by the Spirit which issues forth in the seeds of new life meant to be planted in another person. In my last email, I said that to speak of reproduction of plants and humans is to speak of

God's original design from Genesis 1 and 2, founded in the physical world. The same-sex couple does not physically have life in their union; nor do they, at the very least, represent the original design of the male-female union; and thus, a same-sex couple as a couple does not bear fruit either physically or spiritually. To now speak in the context of Matthew 7 of the 'fruit' of a transformed life is to speak of the union of the Spirit of Christ with the believer, reproducing the spiritual life that human beings were originally intended to bear from the creation, and restoring men and women to the original design of the physical union of marriage from the creation order. So when you say, 'Ultimately, the traditional interpretation simply does not bear good fruit,' I cannot agree with you. You are making your assumption your conclusion. While the way in which Christians treat their gay neighbors can certainly always improve, the traditional interpretation about marriage and sexuality is the only one that bears good fruit, by definition.

Thus, Jesus' teaching on marriage and sexual ethics in Mt.5:27 – 32 and 19:1 – 12 take their natural place in this larger framework demonstrated by the entire literary structure of the Gospel of Matthew itself. What is stated in these smaller passages is also stated by the entirety of the larger context in which we find them. While making room for the single eunuch who does not get married, Jesus removes 'hardness of heart' and restores the creation order as far as marriage and sexuality are concerned. 'He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'' (Mt.19:5 – 6).

#### *Romans 1:21 – 32*

I want to point out before delving into Paul that my case does not actually rest on Paul's writings. It is interesting to see how much energy is spent on Paul, since to me, the case can rest entirely on Genesis and Jesus without even considering Paul. But, since the discussion must at least include Paul, and raises the very good question of whether Paul agrees with Genesis and Jesus, I'll comment further on him.

As we return to Paul, I want to acknowledge your assertion that my 'argument rests in part on the historical assumption that there is no fundamental difference between LGBT identities, people, and couples today compared with the first-century world.' Actually, I don't think it does, but I'm glad to pursue the discussion in this area as we talk about Paul.

You quote Boswell in his observation that words corresponding to the terms 'gay' and 'straight' did not exist in Greek or Latin. Of course, I concur with him on that particular point. What I don't agree with are the conclusions he draws from it. Is it true that concepts don't exist in people's consciousness until a singular word exists to define it? Sometimes, but not always. Many Asian cultures have special words for 'older brother' or 'younger sister' or various family members, or people who are of Asian descent but have been raised elsewhere, or foreigners at various degrees of remove. But this does not mean that people lacking singular words for those categories in their languages are unaware of them. It's just that in other cultures, those categories do not *determine* how relationships unfold. Similarly, the word 'Trinity' did not exist before the Nicene Creed, yet the concept of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was firmly imprinted upon the mind of the early church, as witnessed by the spontaneous, decentralized development of the so-called 'Apostles' Creed' throughout the church in the Mediterranean, Africa, and Asia. When various heresies crept up that threatened the integrity of that concept of God, though it did not have a name, the church responded vigorously. Centuries later, they named the concept which they had been defending all that time. So it is quite plain that the concept existed before the singular word. As another example, the word 'wrist' did not exist at the time of Jesus; so the apostolic writers say that the nails were driven through his 'hands,' because the word 'hand' back then was thought to encompass what we now call 'the wrist.' And yet would they not be able to identify where on his body they meant, knowing that only a stake driven between the radius and ulna would be able to partially support the weight of a human body, whereas the fleshy part of the 'hand' (the 'hand' as we now call it) would simply tear?

Perhaps the question Boswell is overlooking is this: What if Paul and others use different words and phrases than the ones we are looking for, especially if they categorized it under a larger label? After all, why do we assume Paul was heterosexual? How do we know Paul himself wasn't gay? He spoke of 'coveting of all kinds' (Rom.7:7 – 13) and the 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor.12:7). And if that were the case, how would he describe it? He would describe it using Jewish theological terms. Whether Paul was or not, I don't know, of course. But I maintain that Paul does

show an awareness that people's sexual and other desires may be oriented towards the wrong objects in a way that is connected to a corrupted genetic inheritance. This is precisely the meaning of Romans 1:21 – 32 and Ephesians 4:17 – 19. To describe those desires, he used phrases that referred back to the fall from God's creation order. The very passage we have been examining, Romans 1:21 – 32, is a treatise on fallen human desires. Much of Paul's description of fallen humanity is emotional, registering on the level of desire: They did not 'give thanks' (1:21); 'God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity' (1:24); 'they worshiped' other created things (1:25); they 'burned in their desire toward one another' (1:27); they were 'filled with... greed... envy... strife... malice' (1:29); emotionally they became 'haters of God' (1:30) and gave 'heartily approval' (1:32) to others who did the same things. Paul is not describing an individual's experience, as if there were a strict sequence of actions by which someone goes from rejecting God, to self-deception, to idolatry, to sexual impurity, to same-sex activity, to disobedience to parents, and only then to unkindness and unforgiveness. Paul is describing humanity's fall in general. Hence, Romans 1:21 – 32 is never read by anyone, to my knowledge, to be the strict roadmap of an individual's progression into sin. He is describing broad categories of ways human beings express their alienation from God. Ephesians 4:17 – 19 is a similar passage. Boswell appears to have been looking for Paul to demonstrate an individual, psychological, and physiological understanding of sexual orientation in isolation from all other issues because that is how we look for it today. But Paul's language is categorical, physical, and theological. His word for all wrongly oriented desires is simply 'lust.' His understanding of the physical source of those desires in us is 'the body of sin' (6:6), or 'the flesh' (7:14 – 25; 8:3), the corruption that has set into human nature from the fall, which affects us all in different ways. Thus, Boswell's observation that Greek and Latin did not have terms for 'gay' and 'straight' is mildly interesting but it lacks the ability to say anything more than that.

So the terms 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' have to do with people (1) verbally identifying themselves by their sexual orientation and (2) expecting that designation to matter in relationship with others, whether in a positive or negative way. So Boswell makes unwarranted presumptions when he suggests that people before the 1848 Central European coinage of those words had no real way of signaling their sexual preferences, for example non-verbally; or that people had no way of observing that their own orientation, or that of others, seemed permanent; or that ancient literature gives us exhaustive knowledge about those people's conceptual and linguistic range of awareness. He jumps to conclusions and demonstrates a lack of basic anthropological and sociological understanding about how communication works.

Moving on then: You consider four possibilities for understanding Paul in Romans 1:26 – 27:

1. Paul is referring to violations of the creation order. All acts listed in Romans 1:21 – 32 are against that creation order. This view sees same-sex erotic acts as being categorically against God's creation design.
2. Paul should be understood, or re-understood, as referring to individual sexual natures, at least when the topic of sexual activity comes up.
3. Paul is referring to violations of the cultural, customary order. This is based on his use of *physin* in 1 Corinthians 11. In this view, same-sex relations in Rome were not accepted because of the stigma against an adult Roman man playing the 'passive' and 'womanly' role to another man, and Paul was making a rhetorical point within his 1<sup>st</sup> century context, drawing upon his audience's agreement with him on this point.
4. Paul is referring to acts 'beyond nature' or 'in excess of nature' but not 'against nature.' In this view, same-sex erotic acts are done out of an excess of lust, after one has exhausted opposite-sex relations. Paul would be condemning experimental pan-sexuality done by people who are heterosexual in orientation but carried in excess by lust past the appropriate boundaries for that heterosexual person.

First, as you point out, the big question is how we understand the word *physin*. I appreciate your desire to be thorough about the word and its uses in Romans 1:26 – 27, Romans 11:17 – 24, and 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16. As you've seen among the sources you've consulted, there seems to be uncertainty, if not outright discontinuity, between each of the three uses listed there. But the solution is found by comparing the thought categories of Hebrew and Greek. To begin with, the Hebrew language had no single word equivalent to the Greek term 'physin.' In the Hebrew worldview, reality was fundamentally relational, constantly referencing God as Creator and extending into relationships. So the Hebrew language spoke of 'the creation' regularly but not of 'nature' per se, or of the 'nature' of something as an independent thing. Greek philosophical thought, however, moved in the opposite direction. And thus in Greek, to speak of 'nature,' or the 'nature' of something, immediately abstracted it from the Creator-creature relationship that the Hebrew worldview held so tightly. Aristotle, for instance, believed that to understand the essence of an object, you had to isolate it from all other relationships, and only once you had done

this were you able to comprehend an object truly. But this foundational maxim in Greek thought had to be explicitly rejected in the Trinitarian debates because the Christian Nicene theologians came to understand that God was fundamentally and indivisibly relational, and that the Hebrew mind was correct in perceiving ontological matters in a relational way. Relationships, they concluded, were fundamental to reality, and not incidental. Hence, theologian Thomas F. Torrance, after carefully studying the patristic sources, and following the great theologian Karl Barth in his own return to those sources, developed the phrase 'onto-relational' to say that ontological reality itself, as designed by God, is a relational reality. Thus, when we are dealing with the term *physin* in the Greek New Testament, we must attend to the immediate context in which it is being used. For the translation of a fundamentally Hebrew thought about 'nature', or the 'nature' of a particular object, into the Greek language involves relational categories by necessity. The questions we must attend to whenever a Hebrew writer uses the Greek word *physin* are: The nature of something with respect to what other being, thing, or question? What relationships are being discussed here? This immediately renders the mere 'word study' method of approaching *physin* in these three New Testament locations, or in other locations, to be inappropriate. Failure to do this lands everyone in vague puzzlement about all three passages here (Romans 1:26 – 27, Romans 11:17 – 24, and 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16) and the seven other passages found in the New Testament (Romans 2:27; Galatians 2:15 and 4:8; Ephesians 2:3; James 1:23 and 5:17; 2 Peter 1:4)

Recognizing Hebrew onto-relational categories clears the air of at least one rather weak argument. When some people cite Romans 11:17 – 24, that God changes the 'nature' of the wild olive branch, or acts against its nature, as evidence that Paul in Romans 1:26 – 27 was merely speaking of heterosexuals acting 'against their own personal nature' by acting homosexually, I'm surprised at why they perceive this to be an argument ultimately in favor of the pro-gay position. For anyone who says this is claiming as a matter of settled conviction that God can and does act against a person's own 'nature', according to Romans 11:17 – 24. So if the argument can proceed as sloppily as that, then, on the one hand, Romans 1:26 – 27 becomes technically indeterminate for the purpose of establishing any sexual norms other than anti-pederasty, which might be considered a victory for defanging that passage. However, on the other hand, Romans 11:17 – 24 can now serve as an argument that God can act against the 'nature' of a person, in the case of a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person, the 'nature' of their sexual orientation. God simply acts and commands things against a person's 'nature,' even individually defined. Since the overall argument does not actually rest on Paul but on Genesis and Jesus, anyone in the pro-gay position handling *physin* in this way is trying to barricade the front door while losing the entire house through the back. In any case, rather than go down that path, we must attend to the relational context of the things discussed in each passage in order to understand how Paul, or any other Hebrew writer, is using the word *physin*. To neglect it is not only inappropriate with respect to the thought patterns actually present, but also lacking in seriousness with respect to how real arguments might actually be sustained.

You are absolutely right in pointing out that the word *physin* by itself does not simply mean 'the order of creation' in every single context it is used. After all, a wild olive tree does not differ from a cultivated olive tree in a biological sense, in the 'order of creation.' An olive tree is still an olive tree in that biological sense. Notice that other attempts at translating *physin* like 'cultural custom' or 'descent' wouldn't even be apt translations here either, for the wild and cultivated olive trees cannot be said to differ by those categories. But if Paul is using *physin* to describe, not some sort of 'absolute intrinsic difference' but the particular relationship between the two olive trees with respect to one's wildness and the other's cultivatedness, then there is no confusion or awkward translation at all.

Similarly, when Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:14 uses *physin* with respect to how men and women culturally present themselves in hairstyle and dress, he is not making an awkward appeal *in that regard* to an 'order of creation.' Paul read as well as we do that Adam and Eve were initially naked, and certainly without hats and scissors. Nor is he making an appeal to some absolute 'custom' or 'descent' of dress and hairstyles, since fashion has never been a particularly stable facet of human life, with clear lineage and such. Paul is simply saying that when men and women pray and prophesy, they should look like men and women, respectively, with respect to each other in their cultural context. There were those who believed women needed to appear as men in hairstyle and dress, on the Greek conviction that women were defectively made men, a thought which shows up in the Gospel of Thomas verse 114 where that document says that women will become men in the soulful realm after death. But Paul was firmly against that Greek gnostic view because he was a Jewish creational theologian who believed that male and female represented God in some particular way. So women should not appear as if they were men because God's eschatological affirmation of women as women was clear in the Old Testament; Simon Peter in Acts 2 quoted Joel 2 about the Spirit speaking through both men and women, without collapsing women into men, or vice versa.

Incidentally, I think this is why women's appearance as women represented the 'authority' (not subjection) given to them (1 Cor.11:10): God gave them as women authority, like a crown, which was typically denied them in their cultures, to deliver His word in prayer and prophetic utterance. Notice that women's hair coverings did not connote 'authority' in pagan Greek culture, whereas taken up into the Christian argument for the equality of the sexes, it does in a general sense. That is, the particular form that women's dress or hairstyle took was not the precise issue, but rather its difference from men's dress and hairstyle. Men and women are to appear with respect to their genders as men and women – and that general difference is quite understandable across all cultures – for it plays a theological role in presenting God's redemption for both men and women equally, His missional-prophetic use of men and women as such in their gendered beings, especially God's granting women authority as women.

For the sake of thoroughness, I'll comment briefly on the New Testament's uses of *physin* in other places (four more in Paul, two in James, and one in 2 Peter) to show that the relational or conceptual context matters in determining what *physin* is referring to. Paul in Galatians 2:15 refers to those who are Jews 'by nature': that is, nature with respect to the covenantal difference between Jews and Gentiles because of circumcision and upbringing in the Sinaitic Law, not with respect to there being some genetic difference between Jewish humanity and Gentile humanity. And so in Ephesians 2:3, Paul refers to all human beings – both Jew and Gentile – being 'by nature children of wrath': nature with respect to being now corrupted by sin internally, despite the difference between Jews and Gentiles. This shows that Paul uses *physin* in ways that highlight the relational issue or context that he is talking about at the time. Similarly, in Galatians 4:8, Paul refers to 'beings that are by nature no gods at all': nature with respect to the intrinsic difference between the angelic, elemental powers and the one true God known in and through Jesus Christ, a discussion which seems to encompass origin, essence, status, etc. This usage is present in James, who speaks of our 'natural face' (Jas.1:23), and of Elijah being a man with a 'nature like ours' (Jas.5:17), which speaks of our humanity as both a relational reflection of God, dependent on Him, and yet sinful. So, the New Testament writers use *physin* as meaning *nature with respect to* a larger relation. It does not always mean 'essence' nor 'cultural custom' but must always reference a larger question or framework. This makes the biblical usage of the term different from the Hellenistic philosophers' usage of the word, which proceeded along the Aristotelian premise of compartmentalization, atomization, and intrinsic separation from all other things. With the exception of Peter's reference to 'the divine nature' (2 Pet.1:4), *physin* does not refer to a stand-alone essence. (And even in the case of the divine nature, God's nature is still intrinsically relational, which is discussed even in 2 Peter by God the Father sharing his glory in the transfigured Jesus (2 Pet.1:17 – 18) and then with us (2 Pet.1:2 – 9), promises that were made and fulfilled by the Holy Spirit operating in human beings (2 Pet.1:21). Thus, the Nicene theologians realized that they had to use the Greek word *ousia* to refer to 'a relational essence,' not simply 'an undifferentiated essence' when used in reference to God. See T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*.)

How, then, do we treat Romans 1:26 – 27? When we come to the term *physin* with respect to sexuality and gender in Romans 1:21 – 32, and especially the term *para physin*, we find that Paul was indeed referring to 'the creation order' and God's design of male and female for the purpose of sexuality. I will repeat some observations from a previous email. Paul begins, 'For since the creation of the world,' God's power has been evident in 'what was made' (Rom.1:20). Humanity's fall involved a temptation towards knowledge of a sort, which was in fact detrimental, so Paul describes the fall of the human mind in those terms: 'They became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools' (Rom.1:21 – 22). Rather than live as the 'image of God' which we were created to be, we worshiped 'an image in the form of corruptible man' and creatures and debased ourselves (Rom.1:23ff.). Hence, the word 'image,' which occurred first in Genesis 1:27, appears, but in an ironic form describing sin as an irony. Very significantly, Paul calls God 'the Creator' (Rom.1:25). And most interestingly, he does not use the standard Greek terms for 'women and men' (Rom.1:26 – 27) but instead uses the terms 'female' and 'male,' probably referring to Genesis 1:27, 'male and female He created them.' Sexual relations between same-sex partners are *para physin*, against their nature with respect to how male and female was created by God.

Notably, when referring to sexual acts, other Hellenistic Jewish writers used the phrase *para physin* in the same way Paul did. Philo, speaking of the Judaic understanding of marriage, says, 'What are our marriage laws? The law recognizes only sexual intercourse (or mixing, union) that is in accordance with nature (*kata physin*), the [intercourse a man has] with a woman, and that only for the procreation of children.' (Philo, *Abraham* 26.135; *Special Laws* 2:14.50; 3:36; cf. Robert A.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, 2001, p.166 – 167; Romero Penna, *Christian Anthropology and Homosexuality – 4. Homosexuality and the New Testament*, 2005) Philo, being enamored with Greek philosophy, seems to fall into the tradition of Plato, who, in his

creation story the *Timaeus*, called same sex acts *para physin* because they could not produce children. Philo also said, commenting on Genesis 19, 'But God, moved by pity for mankind whose Saviour and Lover He was, gave increase in the greatest possible degree to the unions which men and women naturally [*kata physin*] make for begetting children, but abominated and extinguished this unnatural [*para physin*] and forbidden intercourse, and those who lusted for such He cast forth and chastised with punishments...' (*Abraham* 133 – 141). Josephus, as I mentioned before, refers to the same-sex relations of the people of Elis and Thebes as *para physin*, including it with incest as some of the 'monstrous and unnatural [*para physin*] pleasures' of the Gentiles (*Against Apion* 2.273 – 275). Pseudo-Phocylides (dated between 100 BC – 100 AD) urges that 'the limits of sexual intercourse set by nature not be transgressed by intercourse between males' (lines 190 – 192). The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (ca. 150 BC – 200 AD) speaks disparagingly of corrupters of boys and Sodom, 'which exchanged the order of its nature.' Second Enoch 10:4 reads, 'This place [of torment], Enoch has been prepared for those who do not glorify God, who practice on earth the sin which is against nature, which is child corruption in the anus in the manner of Sodom....' Moreover, Paul's argument about Gentile sin and idolatry in Romans 1:21 – 32 is very similar to the one found in the *Wisdom of Solomon* (dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC). Hence, even when Jewish writers other than Paul are speaking about sexual acts, they reference God's creation order using the term *para physin*. They speak about what is 'natural' (*kata physin*) or 'unnatural' (*para physin*) not as measured against individualistic desires, but against biological and/or theological realities larger than us.

You note in support of option 4 that Boswell parses out *para physin* into two separate terms – *para* and *physin*. He claims, on that basis, that *para* sometimes means 'in excess of' or 'more than' or 'beyond.' His observation about the word *para* is true enough by itself, but unfortunately, the terms cannot be parsed that way in this context. When discussing sexual behavior, the terms conjoined make a stock phrase that always means the same thing. Boswell's methodological approach falters here, and the literature overwhelmingly shows it. Greeks referenced the biological order and saw it as not conforming to the natural world on the basis of reproduction, or, in some cases, to the physical fit of the penis in the vagina. And while it is true that they had different evaluations of same-sex erotic acts, their usage of the phrase *para physin* conforms without exception to these meanings. Jews, however, referenced the creation order, a theological framework, and saw it as a sin against God; this is surely more important to any study of Paul and his audience because it means we are not simply going around in circles interpreting Paul's use of *para physin* in isolation; there is, in fact, an outside measurement. In fact, not only in every instance of Hellenistic Jewish literature, but in every instance of Hellenistic philosophy and literature *en toto*, the phrase *para physin* means 'contrary to nature,' or 'against nature.' The fact that Jewish writers referred to Israel's God and His creation when speaking of sexual acts makes this clear. And the Stoic usage is a secondary point of corroboration. With reference to sexual acts, *para physin* is a stock phrase with consistent meaning.

Option 4 also tries to read into Paul more than he actually says. The explanations offered by Dio Chrysostom and some others for the same-sex erotica they observed, namely that it was the result of those people's insatiable bisexuality, is certainly interesting, but it is uncertain what role that plays in understanding the thought of Paul. Paul roots his understanding of same-sex acts in a theological, God-centered framework. For him, it is not simply the result of individuals exceeding the limits of passion, but an aspect of corporate humanity's historic fall and ontological corruption. As I said before, Romans 1:21 – 32 is never read by anyone, to my knowledge, to be the strict roadmap of an individual's progression from rejecting God to self-deception to idolatry to sexual impurity to same-sex activity to parent-child disobedience to unkindness and so on. Things do not happen in that particular order in a lock-step way for every person. What Paul is doing is describing humanity's fall in general. So when I cited Dio Chrysostom, it was to highlight his usage of the phrase *para physin* as part of a linguistic comparison group to Paul, but not because I think Paul and the Stoic philosopher shared a common understanding of the development of human sexuality. In fact, they do not share a common understanding about such matters. So citing Dio's explanation as a condition for understanding Paul is out of place.

Likewise, John Chrysostom's homily and the comments of other Christians are irrelevant for our particular discussion. That is because John Chrysostom and others simply attribute any desire to go beyond God's proper bounds as 'lust' or 'greed.' They follow the apostolic understanding that when the *object* of one's desire is inappropriate, that desire is considered a 'lust.' Hence, Martin's distinction between disoriented desire and inordinate desire is a projection of his own mind. I have studied John Chrysostom fairly deeply on the issue of greed, wealth, and giving, and my impression is that he does not make that distinction. For him, disoriented desire and inordinate desire are equivalently and equally the result of 'lust' and/or 'greed.' The biblical writer James speaks of lust that way with respect to material things (Jas.1:14 – 15; 4:1 – 3), in which the orientation/object of



one's desire and the inordinateness of one's desire are one in the same, because the object of desire is the same. I suspect that John Chrysostom would not make that distinction when it comes to sexuality either. But in any case, John Chrysostom's suggestion about how *an individual person* develops a same-sex attraction is an addition to what Paul is relating in Romans 1:21 – 32, and an attempt to explain Paul further. Paul himself does not get quite so specific. Paul linked same-sex attraction and activity generally to the fall, but not to any particular theory of individual psychology or biology.

So, since I do not think *para physin* in relation to sexual acts can be parsed as Boswell does, and since I do not find that reading pagan or later Christian attempts at explaining same-sex attraction and activity is the same thing as reading Paul himself, I don't think option 4 can stand.

On option 3, and on making a direct parallel between 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16 and Romans 1:21 – 32, I have noted that the word *physin* must be understood as 'nature in relation to' and not simply 'absolute nature' or 'cultural custom' or some such thing. 'Nature,' as in the natural world, is related to God by virtue of God's creation and sustaining of it. That is the reality. And, with the exception of God Himself who independently anchors all being, the 'nature' of a person or thing is 'to be in relation' to another being or thing, especially God but including others. The Hebrew (and early Christian) onto-relational worldview must correct the Greek atomistic worldview at this very point. Thus, Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16 can use *physin* to speak about the nature of men and women in relation to each other concerning appearance and speech utterances. Then, in Romans 1:21 – 32, he can use *physin* to speak about the nature of male and female in relation to God, to the creation order, and to each other in sexual expression.

Moreover, the presumption that option 3 must make about the 'customs' of sexual practices is not supported by the historical evidence. If Paul was relying on a cultural consensus among his audience that Roman gay sex was against the current custom, it is not clear that he had it. Mark D. Smith says, 'Canterella demonstrates that in the Roman Republic, pederasty was considered the 'Greek vice,' which true Romans reviled, but that did not prevent them from engaging in other forms of homosexual activity. By the early second century BCE Rome had passed the *Lex Sca[n]tina* and the edict *De adtemptata pudicitia* which made pederastic behavior, and even the attempt to seduce a freeborn boy, liable to criminal prosecution. By the time of the Principate, pederasty becomes extremely rare in the sources, while at the same time there appears to be a significant increase in homosexual activity between consenting adults.' ('Ancient Bisexuality and the Interpretation of Romans 1:26 – 27', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. 64 Sum, 1996, p.223) Yet evaluations of this period don't seem to agree on how public versus private this behavior was. One historian claims that in the first century, the cultural and political Roman climate elevated the ideal of the Roman man who was able to dominate others – militarily, sexually and otherwise – and was never dominated by another, and that this had a corresponding effect on sexual attitudes. Same sex acts were conducted privately; between men it was socially and legally rejected. A Roman master practiced it with his slave girls and slave boys (Angelo di Berardino, *Christian Anthropology and Homosexuality*, 1997, p.3 – 4). Perhaps gay sex was driven into the closet for men for a time. But then again, perhaps not. The recently discovered wall paintings at the Suburban Baths at Pompeii (preserved from 79 AD by volcanic ash) show men and women being equally depicted as 'active' and 'passive,' and often at the same time in group sex. This evidence from Roman culture of the same time period is significant. And still other sources show that lesbian sex in Rome enjoyed a personal, social, and economic liberation unparalleled until the present day (Roy Bowen Ward, 'Why Unnatural? The Tradition Behind Rom.1:26 – 27', *Harvard Theological Review*. Vol. 90:1997, p.279; Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, 2003). Option 3 supposes that Paul was trying to find common ideological ground with his audience about the nature of sin, based on 'custom.' But are we to read Paul as simply taking one position in a Roman culture war? Did Paul apparently want to win a cheap rhetorical victory, without making a point of larger substance? And if he thought he had the grounding from his culture to critique gay male sex, what did he think grounded his critique of lesbian sex? Thus, I do not find that option 3 makes sense of history or of Paul. Paul does not appear to be appealing to unified cultural opinion or tradition.

Furthermore, options 2, 3, and 4 all ignore Paul's many references to the entire creation and discount his background as a Jewish creational theologian now impacted by Jesus. This is especially true of 1:21 – 32 but it extends beyond that passage to Romans as a whole. In Romans, Paul situates his entire argument from within 'the holy Scriptures' (1:2), which is emphatically a story that begins with God's creation and His creation order, and demonstrates God's commitment to restoring His fallen creation. Significantly, in the midst of his argument about Abraham, Paul refers to God as He 'who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist' (4:17), which is a reference to Abraham, but behind Abraham, to creation, and then he proceeds to make the case that although Adam damaged

creation and humanity, God is bringing forth a new creation and new humanity in Jesus by the Spirit (6:1ff.). He makes a very important remark about the created world as groaning under the weight of corruption and subjected to futility because of him (i.e. Adam) who subjected it thus; but God will renew the created world along with humanity as well (8:18 – 25). And all the way at the end of the letter, Paul says, ‘The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet’ (16:20), which refers to God’s promise at the fall to be victorious over the serpent through a messianic seed. Thus, Paul’s mind throughout Romans is reaching from the original creation to the consummation of the new creation, the full scope of the Scriptures – its history as well as its prophetic hope.

Paul’s purpose in writing the letter, in fact, is to defend the ‘righteousness of God’ (1:16 – 17), which means Paul is explaining that God has not abandoned His promises to Abraham and Israel to undo the sin of Adam. This link between Israel and Adam undergirds Paul’s thought, not least on marriage and sexuality. The covenant between God and Israel is the central dramatic plot sequence in the narrative from creation to new creation. Far from abandoning His covenant with Abraham and the Sinaitic covenant with Israel, God has inaugurated their fulfillment in Christ, the one in whom Israel is truly represented. Thus, in Romans, Paul is aware that he must explain or corroborate the narrative of Israel’s Scripture and point to the need for both Gentiles and Jews to come to Jesus, and then to explain on what terms they are to live together and turn outward in mission to the world. Paul is condensing the vast narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures into concrete examples of the corruption of all human nature, demonstrated in particular actions that violate God’s creation order (1:18 – 3:20). He then explains Abraham’s role as God’s human partner (4:21 – 25) in undoing the sin of Adam which resulted in death for humanity (5:12 – 21) until Jesus Christ brought made resurrection life available on the other side of death (6:1ff.) therefore undoing the fall. Paul therefore sees Israel as an ironic hero (2:17 – 3:8), and the Sinaitic covenant established between God and Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex.19ff.) as an honored but transfigured covenant fulfilled and surpassed by Jesus (7:1 – 8:4; 9:1 – 11:36). How would Paul have read and understood the very Scriptures he celebrated and on which he anchored his message? Options 2, 3, and 4 do not make much attempt to engage Paul’s stature as a Jewish creational theologian who has completely centered his understanding of God’s work on Jesus. It certainly does not explain Paul’s firmly Jewish view of marriage as taught by the Pentateuch in Romans 7:1 – 4.

After considering your four options, I conclude that option 1 is the only way to understand Paul in Romans 1:26 – 27. He was, through and through, a Jewish creational theologian. He described same-sex unions as violations of the creation order, like all Hellenistic Jews before him and contemporary with him. All acts listed in Romans 1:21 – 32 are against that creation order, which is the only plausible explanation I can think of for Paul’s usage of the phrase, the ‘ordinance of God’ (1:32), which he says all have violated in some way, shape, or form. Do you think there is another explanation for the phrase ‘ordinance of God’ which fits all the data I have considered so far?

### *1 Corinthians 5 – 7*

To substantiate that further, and also address the questions you raised about 1 Corinthians 7, I will look at that letter as well. Paul sees a connection between Jesus’ resurrection and the creation. Paul demonstrates that connection throughout the letter through his Jewish rabbinical training which is now centered in Jesus. Notably, in chapter 15:1 – 58, which is all about resurrection, Paul makes numerous links between creation and resurrection, categorically. (1) He makes his familiar comparison between Adam and Jesus, speaking of the original humanity and Jesus’ new humanity (15:21 – 22). (2) He refers to Jesus’ reign over all other rule and authority, including death itself, which is a creational motif of Adam ruling in creation (15:23 – 26), meaning that Jesus as God’s true humanity has brought about the restoration and expansion of God’s creation order while also undoing the fall within and through his very own humanity. (3) He quotes Psalm 8, ‘He has put all things in subjection under his feet’ (15:27), which is Israel’s reflection on the dignity God has given humanity in the creation order, and finds fresh significance in it because he knows Jesus has been elevated to be God’s truly human being. (4) He speaks of the relationship between our current physical bodies and our future resurrection (i.e. even more physical) bodies as like the relationship between a seed and a fully grown plant (15:35 – 44). The dynamic of reproduction established in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 thus becomes an illustration of human destiny, for it is perhaps the only physical illustration available to us if we want to speak of going from one order of life to another; and hence reproduction, as I have argued above, is *necessarily* connected to fully bearing the image of God. The one is definitely connected to the other, but in a relation like what we would call ‘an order of magnitude’ of change. When he speaks of the *soma pneumatikon*, Paul is not speaking of an ethereal body, but a body which is even more invested with the Spirit (*pneuma*) of God. It is more physical, not less; imperishable, not perishable; immortal, not mortal. (5) He speaks again of Adam and Jesus, quoting Genesis

2:7, and contrasting them (15:45 – 50) as the sources of two different types of life: Adam’s *psychikos* and Christ’s *pneumatikos*. (6) Paul thus exclaims that Jesus’ resurrection is the defeat of death, into which humanity fell at the fall (15:51 – 58). Paul is unmistakably a Jewish creational theologian who has now centered the whole story of God around Jesus, Israel’s Messiah who represents *Adam*, thus simultaneously representing Israel and every other human being. And from what we find in 1 Corinthians 15, resurrection is not just tied to the creation order, but is simultaneously grounded upon it and fulfills it.

Before I explore 1 Corinthians 5 – 7 again, I want to consider the whole of 1 Corinthians as Paul’s treatment of the topic of ‘the body.’ If 1 Corinthians were a tapestry, it would look like a sequence of five rectangles: a blue rectangle at the top, underneath it a green rectangle second, then a purple rectangle third, a red rectangle fourth, and at the bottom, a rectangle that has all four colors – blue, green, purple, and red – brilliantly interwoven. The letter is composed of five major sections that are connected to each other in the fifth section. Each section has to do with our bodies and Jesus’ body. In the first section, chapters 1 – 4, the issue is the unity of the corporate body, the community. That is tied to the last section, chapter 15, which is about Jesus’ resurrection body and our future resurrection body. Because Jesus has one body, those who are ‘the body of Christ’ must also relate in a oneness – not in terms of worshipping in one place but in terms of good relationships. In the second section, chapters 5 – 7, the issue is sexuality and our individual bodies. That is tied to the last section, chapter 15, about Jesus’ resurrection body and our future resurrection body. Because Jesus has a purified body, we are to have purified bodies. In the third section, chapters 8 – 10, the issue is about differences in food, cultures, and disciplining our bodies for Christian mission. That is tied to the last section, chapter 15, Jesus’ resurrection body and our future resurrection body. Because Jesus offers his body to all humanity, so our mission is to offer our bodies to his mission. In the fourth section, chapters 11 – 14, the issue is worship as one body. That is also tied to the last section, chapter 15, Jesus’ resurrection body and our future resurrection body. Because Jesus’ body is physically filled with the love of God, so the Christian body – corporately – must be physically filled with the love of God.

Here are some of the explicit semantic and conceptual links between various sections in 1 Corinthians 1 – 14 and the resounding finale in chapter 15:

<b>Main topic</b>	<b>Problem addressed in main body of 1 Corinthians</b>	<b>Tied up in the conclusion (the resurrection chapter, ch.15)</b>
Intro	The Corinthians need strengthening and wisdom: “So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as <i>you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ</i> . He will also strengthen you <i>to the end</i> , so that you may be blameless <i>on the Day</i> of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1:7 – 8)	<i>Focus on the Future hope of Christ’s return and renewal of the world. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins... Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (15:1 – 19, 58)</i>
Part 1: Unity in the Body, Spiritual Leadership	The church is being torn apart by factions; people have their favorite leaders: “Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of <i>the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish</i> . But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.” (2:6 – 7)	Jesus will destroy the ‘rulers of this age,’ who divide humanity: “Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” (15:20 – 34)
Part 1: Unity in the Body, Spiritual Leadership	Church leaders do not honor one another: “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw the work of each builder will become visible, <i>for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done</i> . If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.” (3:10 – 17)	In the Future, God will test the work of every minister, i.e. the quality, and whether it is built on the one foundation, Christ: “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (15:58)
Part 1: Unity in the Body,	What are Christian leaders? How should we regard them?: ‘Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. But	In the Future, Jesus will judge us accurately: ‘For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is

Spiritual Leadership	with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. <i>Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God.</i> I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, ‘Nothing beyond what is written,’ so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another. (4:1 – 6)	worthless; you are still in your sins...[But Christ has been raised from the dead] Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (15:16 – 17, 58)
Part 2: Sexuality and the Body / Believers Wronging Each Other	One man having sexual relations with his stepmother; he needs to be put outside the corporate body of Christ, so that he would repent and be saved from his own sin in the near or distant future: “When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in <i>the Day of the Lord.</i> ” (5:1 – 13)	Paul says that our attachment to sin will cultivate in us a desire to reject our true human inheritance from God: “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’ Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’ Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame... Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” (15:32 – 34, 50)
Part 2: Sexuality and the Body / Believers Wronging Each Other	Believers are suing each other in secular courts. But ironically, believers will judge the world and angels in the future; we are competent to advise each other: “When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? Do you not know that <i>the saints will judge the world?</i> And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters?...But you yourselves wrong and defraud—and believers at that. Do you not know that <i>wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?</i> ” (6:1 – 9)	Believers will share the position of Christ: “The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.” (15:47 – 49)
Part 2: Sexuality and the Body / Believers Wronging Each Other	The Corinthian Christians think they can do anything with their bodies, even sin: “Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, malakoi, arsenokoitai, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything. ‘Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,’ and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and <i>will also raise us by his power.</i> ” (6:9 – 20)	What we do in the body (e.g. sex, greed, etc.) matters eternally because our bodies will be raised and might somehow be affected: “So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable...For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.” (15:35 – 57)
Part 2: Sexuality and the Body / Believers Wronging Each Other	The Corinthian Christians are too tied to this present world, and all of its concerns: “I mean, brothers and sisters, <i>the appointed time has grown short</i> ; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For <i>the present form of this world is passing away.</i> I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord.” (7:17 – 35)	They need to consider the Future and how near it is. That will help put things like marriage & singleness, etc. in perspective. It will help them be less ambitious and concerned about financial security: “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (15:58)
Part 3: Mission and Our Bodies	The Corinthians are being influenced and divided by spiritual powers: “Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for	Jesus will destroy the ‘rulers of this age,’ who divide humanity: “Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” (15:20 – 34)

	Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.' (8:5 – 6)	
Part 3: Mission and Our Bodies	Paul preaches because Christ has been raised to the heavenly throne: 'For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me...' (9:16 – 17)	Paul reiterates his authority for preaching the gospel of Jesus: 'Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...[then] to more than five hundred brethren at one time...then...James, then to all the apostles; and last of all... to me also. For I am the least of the apostles...' (15:1 – 7)
Part 3: Mission and Our Bodies	Paul pushes his body out of love for others in Christian mission: 'Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.' (9:25 – 27)	Paul refers to his bodily hardships as 'worth it' only in light of his future bodily resurrection with Jesus: 'If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied...Why are we also in danger every hour? I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" (15:19, 31 – 32)
Part 3: Mission and Our Bodies	Paul speaks of the time of the church as 'the ends of the ages': Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (10:11)	Paul gives the larger framework for why the 'ends of the ages' is now, and it relates to Jesus' resurrection: 'But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.' (15:20 – 24)
Part 4: Unity in the Body / Spiritual Gifts	Paul refers to the creation order to support women/wives speaking in prayer and prophecy, bearing the word of God equally with men: 'But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ... For a man is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man...and all things originate from God.' (11:2 – 12)	Paul refers to the creation order by naming Adam in contrast with Jesus (15:21 – 22), quoting explicitly from Genesis 2:17 (15:45) regarding the creation of Adam, and quoting from Psalm 8, which is Israel's reflection on the dignity God gave human beings from creation, and applying it to Jesus' rule over all (15:27). He then commissions all in Christ, men and women alike, to the 'work of the Lord' (15:58).
Part 4: Unity in the Body / Spiritual Gifts	They are excessive in certain gifts, mainly tongues. They need to love each other, because love is not just our duty, it is our destiny. It is the one characteristic that will last into eternity: "Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." (13:1 – 13)	They must keep the Future in mind, and the fact that they are participating in a new resurrection order, rooted in Christ's love, that will last into eternity: "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain...you are still in your sins...Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (15:13 – 14, 17, 58)

Paul teaches us here how to think in a Christian way about our bodies. *Everything* about our bodies and how we use our bodies is connected to the resurrection body of Jesus. If Jesus never rose from the dead, and if his body decomposed in the grave, then our bodies really don't matter to God. And if that is the case, as virtually all Greeks believed in some form, then we can do whatever we want with your bodies; the Epicureans especially embodied that ethic; though some Greeks went the opposite route and completely deny their bodies, like the Stoics tended to. Jesus' resurrection body answers all the questions about the future of our bodies and all the questions related to how we use our bodies in the present. This is what it means to think, speak, and live consistently if we say that Jesus rose from the dead.

Hence, 1 Corinthians challenges our culture like no other biblical document. For here, Paul says that we are not actually the primary owner of our bodies. God is the primary owner of my body, of your body, of all our bodies. You are the secondary owner of your body. You have been entrusted with your body to share it with God. God has a vision for how we all use our bodies. That vision is for our bodies to house Him. This is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19: ‘Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?’ Even though it ‘feels’ to us that we, from the day we are born, are the only ones totally invested in our bodies and entitled to our bodies because we are the only ones who ‘live’ in our bodies – who else is there? – the radical Christian idea is that the Spirit of God was meant to live in our bodies. We make a personal choice to open ourselves up to him, and he becomes the leading partner in an adventure in our bodies to redeem his physical and spiritual world.

I’ll briefly restate the ethical considerations for sexuality and marriage, and then move onto the epistemological considerations of what constitutes true knowledge of the physical world and human beings.

Ethically, this creation-to-resurrection framework is explicitly present in 1 Corinthians 5 – 7, as sexual relationships relate doubly to our individual bodies and to the corporate body of Christ. Paul is certainly thinking about the creation order because he quotes from Genesis 2:24 in 1 Corinthians 6:16: ‘For He says ‘The two shall become one flesh.’ I’ve noted previously that, like Jesus before him, Paul ascribes authorship of that statement to God Himself, not simply to Moses. Throughout this section, he corrects the places where the Corinthians had gone wrong against the creation order and God’s original vision for marriage from Genesis 1 and 2. First, he condemns the sexual relationship between a man and his stepmother (5:1 – 13); this violates the creation order of marriage even though the man and his stepmother did not share a blood relationship. Next, he uses the problem of believers suing each other in court as an example of how sin, illustrating at a distance the issue of sexual sin, disrupts the life of the corporate body and its mission to the world (6:1 – 8). Then, Paul presents a vice-list which focuses on sins of the body or sins against someone else’s body (6:9 – 10), saying that ‘neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor *malakoi*, nor *arsenokoitai*, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.’ The one who worships idols bows his body inappropriately before an idol and performs a denigrating service to it; the one who commits sexual sin uses his own body and another’s inappropriately; drunkards inappropriately take substances into their bodies; the greedy and the swindlers violate the realms of other people’s bodies; etc. Then, as he dismantles the popular Greek wisdom of how to handle the body, since the Greeks said ‘food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food’ ergo our sexual organs are similarly and simply ‘meant to be used’ (6:12 – 14), Paul brings to bear the fact of Jesus’ bodily resurrection and, through him, God is revealing a new order of physical bodies which will be different from our current physical bodies, but somehow but still historically connected to them like a full grown oak tree is connected to its previous acorn form. He brings this up to urge the Christians not to unite themselves with prostitutes because that produces a one-flesh union that seems to have future ramifications as well as present ones (6:15 – 18). This one-flesh union is rooted in the creation order, but it has hidden implications for us in the resurrection order. In that sense, sexual sin is a sin against one’s own body, in addition to being a sin against someone else’s body as well. Then Paul states the guiding conviction of his theology of the body: our bodies were meant to house the Spirit of God (6:19 – 20).

From this central conviction, Paul works out the ramifications of marriage, singleness, and a smattering of other very practical questions in 1 Corinthians 7. In connection with this passage, you ask whether ‘the gift of celibacy’ can be imposed on a whole group of people, namely those who have same-sex attraction if they are committed to upholding the historic, orthodox position. Is that Paul’s intention? You are right to ask whether any such thing can be found in Paul, especially in the very chapter where he speaks of celibacy as a ‘gift’ (7:7). Paul is not answering that particular question in this passage. Although, I will say again, it is important to note that Jesus himself articulated that position in Matthew 19:1 – 12. Nevertheless, what Paul says here has bearing on your question, albeit one step removed. In this context, Paul is confronting a cultural attitude that threatened God’s creation order: the Greek denigration of the body, and of women and marriage in particular as one of the downstream implications of that earlier view. The Greek language does not have quotation marks to tell us when Paul is quoting a view that he rebukes. Suffice to say, I read the opening lines of chapter 7 as follows: ‘Now concerning the things about which you wrote, ‘It is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.’ The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband...’ (7:1 – 3). Paul stresses that ‘immorality’ is not the reason for marriage as an institution, as if God made marriage merely as a concession to human sexual urges, which some (though not all)

Greeks, like the Stoics, took to be negative and 'dirty.' Rather, Paul sees marriage as entailing responsibilities in love between husband and wife, and that's why he uses the language of 'duty' in 7:3. 'Duty' in Paul's mind is a positive responsibility to fulfill an honorable role, and a husband and wife have duties one to another to respect each other's sexual desires, not to denigrate them or see them, within their marriage, as dirty and tainted. This again points back to Paul's very different understanding of our bodies as originally good from God's creation order, and marital sexual expression as good from that same order. The difference between Paul as a Jewish creational theologian and the Greek denigration of the body, with its chaotic variety of outcomes, could not be more different here.

But at the same time, while honoring the body and the creation order, Paul wants 'to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord' (7:35) in terms of discretionary time and energy to pursue the mission given by Jesus to his church; this is the subject to which he turns in 1 Corinthians 8 – 10 when he talks about challenging his own body and his own bodily desires for the sake of Christ's mission and Christ's love for others. His central conviction that the Spirit indwells each Christian's body means that commitments that Christians make, even to other Christians, and even in marriage, are not ultimate. We must think carefully and, at times, sit loose to any relationship that involves us ceding the use of our bodies to any other authority than Jesus himself. For the Spirit of God has primary ownership of our bodies, as stated in 6:19 – 20, and Paul is demonstrating how a Christian works out that core conviction while we live in the midst of other human relationships and commitments. These commitments need to be refined, and in some cases renegotiated, limited, and avoided. Even the marriage of male and female must not become all-consuming, and Paul says, 'But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none...' (7:29), not in the sense that the spouses can cheat on each other as if their marriage did not exist, but as a limit to the narcissism that can develop within a married couple. Now that Christ's love and mission towards the world is a factor, Christian marriage itself must be qualified and limited. Our desires – sexual and otherwise – must be qualified and limited in light of the dawning of Jesus' resurrection and all its implications: 'and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away' (7:30 – 31). Also, Paul discouraged upward mobility through self-enslavement, since some forms of self-enslavement had that potential and appeal: 'do not become slaves of men' (7:23). He asked Christians to weigh other priorities besides the desire to be married, asking people to consider singleness. And in this context, he called celibacy a 'gift' (7:7), not in the same sense as the supernatural charisms we call 'spiritual gifts,' but the situational 'gift' of life station.

You ask, 'Can we alter the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 that Christians who lack the gift of celibacy should be able to enter into a committed relationship by saying that this only applies to straight people? Can we override the traditional Christian understanding of celibacy as a vocation and simply start issuing blanket mandates of celibacy on whole groups of people?' The relevance of this whole discussion about singleness is that Paul does not regard marriage and sexual expression as a 'right' in the sense we feel about it today. He sees them, within the creation order in which God holds it and extends it to us in trust, as good. Paul is no Greek Gnostic. On that basis, it seems that Jesus and Paul would have refused other people the 'right' to marriage as well: those who committed adultery in a previous marriage, for example. But he also sees the resurrection of Jesus, and our future resurrection, and the mission to the world that exists in between these two points in time, as the higher good to which we are also called. That calling has implications for our use of our bodies. What is very challenging to us today is how willing Paul is to challenge his own body for the sake of God's larger call. What he eats or not (8:1 – 13), whether he marries a believing wife or not (9:5), whether he receives financial support for his bodily needs or not (9:6 – 15) are all questions he submits to Christ. Even the things of which he is able to avail himself based on his vocation as an apostle, by the ordinance of Jesus, he does not claim, for there is a larger claim upon him, and upon his body. His summary statement is: 'Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave...' (9:25 – 27). If Paul thought that way about desires that operated properly within God's creation order, he was all the more challenging about desires that went outside it. Hence when he gives his vice-list in 6:9 – 10, he is naming behaviors that Christians must renounce and desires that they must resist in favor of cultivating our desire for Jesus and his healing of us.

Such a strong conviction needs further explanation, I think. Why did Paul think this way? This leads me to Paul's Christ-centered epistemology, not just ethics, regarding human nature and the human body, which he had based on his personal access to the resurrected Jesus; that encounter constituted him to be an apostle (9:1). In light of

Jesus' resurrected body, Paul understands that our own human bodies have not fully matured, in a sense. Not only is the human body infected with the disease of sin, thus corrupting our original genetic inheritance in various ways, it has not undergone the same profound transformation that Jesus' own body went through in his resurrection, which was intended for all of us from the creation. Paul sees that there is a connection between deeds done in the body now and the quality of our body in the eschatological future. This might be illustrated by the fact that Jesus' hands and feet and side had holes in them. Somehow, there is a line of continuity between what we do in our bodies now, in this life which has been given to us by God in trust and partnership, and the bodies which He will give to us when He renews all things. Acts of love, faith, and self-sacrifice, it seems, however large or small, will somehow be physically reflected upon and within our bodies. When we appear in glory, and when Jesus transfigures the accidents of our genetics, the varied external circumstances of our lives, and the devastation of sin within us and around us, then what he will reveal in our bodies will be our desire for him which we have cultivated, our trust of him, and our acts of love and self-sacrifice done in partnership with him, whatever that meant for each of us, in our own particular ways. The way we lived our lives apart from Jesus will also be somehow manifested, perhaps by the absence of the marks of love for Jesus. This is probably why he warns the Corinthians that sexual sins in defiance of the creation order are sins committed against one's own body (6:15 – 18): not just my body today and in this lifetime, but my body as it will exist in its resurrected state. There is some kind of relationship between the two. Something about our inward choices for or against Jesus will be manifested by our physical, resurrected body. The name of Jesus written on our hearts will be manifested by the name of Jesus written on our foreheads. What is hidden will be revealed. What was done privately within will be made public without.

This is another reason why I cannot agree with you about what you call 'general revelation.' Whatever knowledge we gain about the human body and human nature using whatever science we have at our disposal today cannot serve as norm and a standard. Even the things that we think of as permanent and unchanging about ourselves, like one's sexual orientation for those who experience it that way, will be shown to be only the temporary context for showing forth what is deeper, more true, and more real about us. All the scientific knowledge that we can accumulate in the present is not determinative for Christian ethics, or for a Christian understanding of ourselves. We simply cannot conclude, using scientific methods, that our bodies have a destiny far beyond what we experience in the here and now. That deduction lies beyond the reach of the physical sciences. However, for Paul, and for all the apostolic writers, real knowledge about human nature and human desire comes from the eschatological *future*, not merely the present, and certainly not without regard for the creation order. That future is exemplified and embodied in the person of Jesus, whose body has already undergone that transformation because of his faithfulness on our behalf, and now is a concrete historical data point suitable for public examination based on historical and theological grounds. 'Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is' (1 Jn.3:2). 'For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory' (Col.3:3 – 4). 'The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly' (1 Cor.15:47 – 49).

You also raise the question of the distortion of social, political, and religious structures: 'Even though Christ tells us that current social, political, and even ecclesiastical structures of power are distorted from God's ideal (Jn.2:13 – 22; Mt. 23; Lk.13:49 – 53), and that, in the kingdom of God, the last will be first and the first will be last (Mt. 20:16), can we unreservedly maintain as Christianly acceptable a societal status quo that treats straight people and their marriages as superior to gay people and theirs?' Let me first make clear that I think the church is not the same as society, and I think that the state should therefore perform civil unions for everyone, leaving the word 'marriage' open as a First Amendment issue for various groups to debate amongst themselves. Second, Jesus does indeed tell us that there are distortions from God's ideal. Human nature itself has become distorted by the fall. But Jesus' response to this is not to dilute the creation order. He maintains it, because that order, which is present in his own teaching, serves as the only reference point by which any normative ethical expressions can be articulated. If we are concerned that structures of power are distorted from God's ideal, it helps to know what that ideal is, and originally was. By contrast, your proposal that we count 'general revelation' as valid knowledge can only serve to normalize human sinfulness. So I don't think your approach answers the question it purports to. You charge that Christians have used 'the natural order' to defend slavery, racism, misogyny, and oppression of all kinds, but you must also know that they merely used the *language* of the natural order while redefining the underlying *content*. They were doing precisely what I find so inaccurate: taking the *current, fallen* state of human society or human nature and saying that that state was normative. In truth, it is precisely the creation order that weighs against those arguments.



In light of these assertions, I think it is worth acknowledging the parallel between the early Christians confronting the Greek scientific view of the 'eternal universe' and today's Christians confronting today's scientific views of human nature. The basis for Christians qualifying and carefully sifting through modern scientific views of human nature is the same as the basis that Christians had for rejecting the prevailing Greek view of the universe's eternity. Modern science trying to ascertain 'human nature' has a marked tendency to normalize and eternalize whatever behaviors we demonstrate in the present, just as Greek 'science' and philosophy normalized and eternalized all observations about the physical cosmos back then. And just as Christian faith in the early patristic period confronted Greek culture and thought with a creation and a resurrection, so Christian faith today confronts the secular world with the conviction that the creation order from which we come, and the resurrection hope to which we are called and drawn, exerts a greater influence on our understanding of ourselves than any scientific observations of our current state. For only when we look outside ourselves, namely in the creation order prior to the fall, and in the resurrection which will transfigure that creation order with fresh glory, will we be at all able to hold fast to 'what should be' and not relapse into simply 'what is.' And finally, this knowledge about ourselves and our humanity continues to come from the irruption of God's saving activity in history in the person of Jesus and culminating in his bodily resurrection, just as it did in the early Christian confrontation with Greek 'science' and philosophy. Christian knowledge is real, and really knowable, because the resurrected Jesus is attested by both history and Scripture, and knowable in personal encounter through the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence, this knowledge about our humanity is historical, literary, metaphysical, physical, personal, and objective. So the Christian stands by conviction upon a platform of legitimate knowledge: Our bodies are neither what they should have been, nor what they will be, for they will come to us in the future from God through Christ by the Spirit. And the ramifications of our choices are not fully understood in the present either, because that, too, will be revealed in the future.

You say that it is unkind and a disservice to people who are gay to ask them to conform, by whatever combination of personal and spiritual strength they find, to a creation order and resurrection hope that denies them the expression of their desired sexuality. I can affirm that it is indeed a tall order, especially for late teens and young adults. But I have two objections to the accusation of unkindness. (1) First, your statement also tends to assume that the intensity of our sexual desires stay the same and that other desires cannot become more weighty and significant to us than our sexual ones. In Japan, for example, a growing proportion of the population said that they had 'no interest' in or even 'despised' sex (interestingly, 36% of male respondents and 59% of female respondents aged 16 to 19, reports the Japan Family Planning Association). Whatever the underlying reasons are for that, and while I suspect it's going to be far more difficult in the U.S., since our culture is hyper-sexualized (although some aspects of Japanese culture are, too, so that remains a mystery to me), still I wonder if something remains to be learned. (2) My second objection to your assertion is that you also assume that the relationship between the creation order and the resurrection order, and above all Jesus who mediates both to us, is not the way that the biblical writers understood it. Part of the pastoral response, therefore, must include the fact that we are all still in the process of becoming. There are choices that we make regarding our bodies and desires in the present that will somehow have an impact on our bodies and desires in the future. We have a hard time understanding human experiences that we have not yet gone through, yet we are invited to imagine it nevertheless as we reflect on Jesus' own resurrection. What will our bodies be like on that day Jesus returns? They will be like Jesus' body, but what will that be like? My small children have no idea what it will feel like to inhabit bodies that will one day be bigger and stronger than the ones they inhabit now. But we know that there are things they can do now that will prepare their bodies and minds to be healthy and ready for that day. That is an analogue to our own situation, spiritually, as we peer into the resurrection future which Jesus' people will share with him. And just as my children experience flashes of strength and beauty in the process of maturing from childhood to adulthood, we can experience in our own selves, by the presence of Jesus' Spirit, glimpses of that hope and strength, and yes, even purity, which will one day be fully ours. I am not saying that a person's struggle with same-sex attraction will necessarily go away because of Jesus, if indeed he or she chooses to struggle with it. But I am saying that Jesus will make that struggle worth it.

Best,  
Mako