

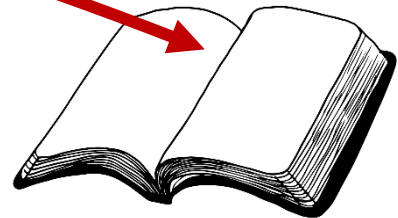
INTRODUCTION AND RECAP

Last week we began to look at the Revisionist argument of James Brownson. We will pick up where we left off examining the argument of equivalence between the egalitarian debates and the current debate over homosexuality. By way of reminder, our goal is to adopt a posture that allows the text to speak for itself rather than one that imposes our assumptions and ideas upon it:

NOT THIS...



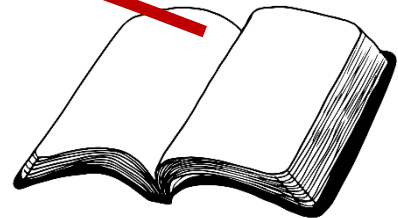
We want to avoid anachronistically imposing ideas and concepts from a later time onto the text and making the text conform to them.



INSTEAD, THIS...



We want to allow the text to speak for itself, on its own terms, and to the best of our ability try to understand it as the author and original hearers would have.



Egalitarianism

It is important to note that the egalitarian debate is a *uniquely Protestant problem* as neither the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox church have ordained women and share the view that there are gender specific roles in marriage and the church. Here, as with other theological matters, the broader *Tradition* of the church is important to consider. Broadly speaking, the egalitarian position is a historical novelty born out of a *flawed* reading of Scripture that initially emerged within the more heterodox or heretically leaning Protestant sects, such as the Quakers.

Nevertheless, since emerging the egalitarian position has taken on varied forms and became more widely accepted in the 1950's and 60's. Broadly speaking, egalitarianism has been afforded the status of being a position that isn't viewed as *definitively sinful or heretical* because there are texts in the Old and New Testament that do evidence an egalitarian understanding of the sexes. But, as we will discuss shortly, the

egalitarian position is based on an *either/or* reading of scripture, which is why we say it is *flawed*. However, as we will see with Brownson, he uses this flawed reading to further obscure the male/female distinction by invoking the specter of patriarchy.

Brownson states there are two contrasting streams within the Biblical canon, one is towards the eradication of patriarchy, while the other seems to instantiate it. What is important to immediately note, is how Brownson frames the view that men and women in marriage have differing roles as being derived from the curse in Genesis 3. He writes:

“The Genesis narrative tells us twice that both male and female are created in the image of God... As I have noted in chapter 2, this portrayal underscores the *equality* of men and women before God and in their relationship to the rest of creation. Moreover, as I also noted above, the account of the creation of woman in Genesis 2 places the emphasis on the similarity of men and women – that is over and against the rest of the animal world. It is not until after the Fall, in Genesis 3:16, that we find explicit discussion about patriarchy...The husband’s ‘rule’ derives not from gracious concern but from greater strength. Therefore, Genesis 3:16 portrays patriarchy not as grounded in *creation*, but in the conflicted relationship between men and women resulting from the *Fall*.”¹

Two Important things to see here:

- First: the complementarian position states the role differences; i.e headship of the husband – are derived from Genesis 2:20-23:
 - Based on the man *being created first*.
 - The woman being made as a *helper suitable for him*.
 - And the man *naming her woman*.
 - He is *misrepresenting the complementarian position* so that he can frame it as an aspect of our *fallen condition* rather than being reflective of the *created order* that has been corrupted by the fall and is redeemed in the gospel.
- Second: Brownson is using the either/or fallacy to obscure the difference as male/female by emphasizing similarity *to the exclusion of that distinction*.

The Scriptures definitely pushed against wider misogynistic cultural norms that *devalued women over and against men*. But the Scriptures also maintain the notion that *men and women are different as male and female, and that these differences do have ongoing implications for the family and church*. Brownson’s way of handling this is to simply emphasize one stream over the other, labeling anything related to gender complementarity *as patriarchal*. For example, he asserts,

“The overall movement of the moral logic of Scripture with respect to patriarchy is thus away from roles defined by household responsibilities in the ancient world including the divisions of honor, status, and worth defined along gender lines and toward a vision of mutuality and equality in which the procreative enterprise of male and female no longer defines human identity at its core. Instead, humans draw their core identity from their union with Christ and their participation in the age to come.”²

¹ James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2013), 58.

² Brownson, 81.

To arrive at this conclusion Brownson essentially deploys an either/or reading of the New Testament texts that address the subject of men and women or husbands and wives. This can be seen in how Brownson reads and interprets Paul. He highlights and emphasizes Paul's statement in Galatians 3:28 that, "...there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus," as foundational while framing other texts that highlight gender specific differences, such as those that speak of wives submitting to their husbands, as *patriarchal hangovers*.

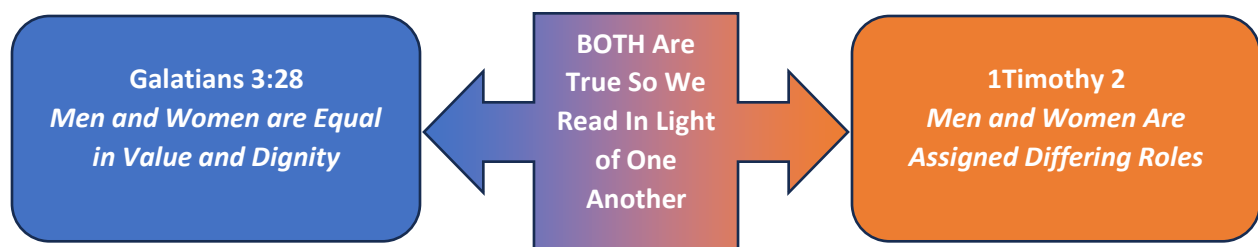
By ignoring the *male/female distinction in the creation account as having any significance whatsoever*, Brownson is able to relativize Paul's instructions to husbands and wives as being merely a 'pragmatic' concern that isn't really constitutive of any enduring sexual ethic. He writes,

"One gets the distinction that the gender distinctions Paul is speaking of here have a pragmatic basis, not a deep ontological basis... In other words, for Paul, the family structures that are part of this world are indeed patriarchal; other forms of social organization within families were inconceivable in his day. To the extent that people participated in these structures, they needed to recognize the limits and roles that were required of them, particularly when failure to do so would disrupt communities and shame individuals."³

But this utterly fails to allow the internal logic of *Paul's reasoning to play any role in reading Paul*. Paul refers to the *creation account* as the basis for these distinctions. They were made man and woman and Paul is arguing that *these created differences AS male and female have ongoing implications*. This can be seen most clearly in the way Paul argues in 1Timothy, where grounds the distinction in the creation account:

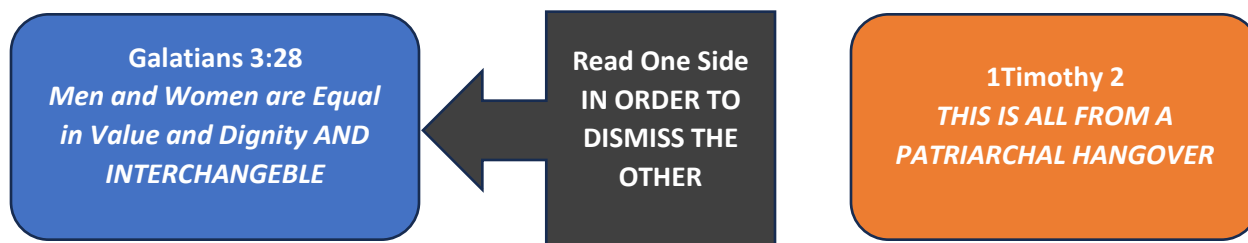
"I do not permit a woman (wife) to teach or to exercise authority over a man (her husband); rather, she is to remain quiet. **For Adam was formed first, then Eve**; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control." - 1 Timothy 2:12–15

Resolving any supposed tensions between statements of equality and texts like the one above would be to ask how the texts can be understood *in light of one another*. Truth is *in the tension*.



Brownson is not resolving any tensions. He is constructing a way to discard Paul's commands to husbands and wives as a patriarchal hangover because they weaken and undermine his assertion that the male/female distinction in Genesis is meaningless.

³ Brownson, 72–73.



Brownson can be seen to be doing this in his statement that,

“...hierarchy or patriarchy cannot be construed to be the essence of a normative ‘gender complementarity’ that is allegedly violated by same-sex unions. We might understand gender complementarity in other terms, of course.... However, if we are to say that same-sex unions are wrong, we cannot say that they are wrong because they violate a hierarchical understanding of gender complementarity. The Bible, taken as a whole, does not support such a hierarchical vision of gender complementarity as expressive of core Christian identity. Moreover, Paul's insistence in 1 Corinthians 7:3-4 that husbands and wives exercise mutual authority over each other's bodies explicitly removes hierarchical relationships from the sex act itself, where, *in Paul's vision, a purely egalitarian structure exists.*”⁴

By labeling all the husband-and-wife commands as a patriarchal hangover and dismissing them as merely pragmatic concerns, Brownson is again obscuring the underlying logic in Paul's own argument, *the male female distinction at creation*. Why? So he can argue for a purely egalitarian structure that allows for the *sameness* of homosexual unions to be accepted. Men and women are *essentially the same* and therefore *interchangeable*.

Thus, while we would say the egalitarian position is in error because it is based on a flawed way of reading the scripture, Brownson is taking that way of reading these groupings of texts in order to make conclusions that are *definitively sinful*. This is where the false equivalence between the egalitarian debates and the current one over homosexuality lies. However, it is worth noting that the egalitarian argument and the arguments for homosexual inclusion share the same hermeneutical approach.

The reason we spent so much time on this is because this framing of the biblical commands and statements that point to male/female role differences *as patriarchal hangover* plays a substantial role in how the revisionist argument treats certain key texts.

OTHER ELEMENTS TO REVISIONIST ARGUMENTS

The Bible Does Not Address Modern Understandings of Same-Sex Relationships

This argument has two main parts to it. The first has to do with orientation, the second the notion that modern day same-sex relationships are categorically different than those known to the biblical writers. We'll look first at the notion of orientation before asking whether or not a monogamy in the context of a same-sex relationship is enough to warrant affirming same sex relationships as good and blessed by God.

⁴ Brownson, 81.

Orientation

Vines raises the question of orientation in chapter 2 of his book. He frames the discussion as Brownson does by pointing to past debates like Galileo and how new information led to revised ways of understanding the biblical text. He contends that in the time of the biblical writers that same-sex sex was understood to be an expression of unbridled and excess lust and not connected to one's internal sexual orientation. Thus, our current understanding of orientation should cause us to rethink our position on same-sex unions.⁵

First, it should be stated that the mere presence of a desire does not justify it. If we take seriously the notion of sin and its ongoing impact on humanity, we should not be surprised if we find persistent wants and desires that run contrary to what God declares right and good.

Second, a major issue in our contemporary context is how we have conflated our sexual appetites with our sense of self. This is a development that Carl Trueman explores in his book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. He notes how this understanding of our sexuality,

“...means that debates about the limits of acceptable sexual expression become almost pointless because any attempt to corral sexual behavior is then rendered an oppressive move designed to make the individual inauthentic.”⁶

This way of thinking about ourselves is not only new, but wholly alien to the biblical conception of what it means to be a human being. It is a reductionist anthropology that enshrines our sexual urges as the most essential thing about what it means to be a human being. One could argue this is even expressed in the phrasing *Gay Christian*. This reductionist framing seems to be at play in Vines thinking. For example, he argues the requirement of celibacy for a gay Christian is an unthinkable and perhaps an even *inhuman* sort of thing to require. He writes,

“It sends a message to gay Christians that their sexual selves are inherently shameful. It's not a fulfillment of sexuality for gay Christians, but a rejection of it.”⁷

But if it is sinful, then the *only* appropriate response is to repent, resist, and rest in the justifying and shame-lifting assurance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We *are not* our sexual desires, and thinking so leads to all manner of erroneous modern ideas about what it means to be and live a full human life.

Third, whether orientation is a framework of the biblical writers is *irrelevant*. If the act is described as sinful that is all that matters, *regardless of the underlying structure of the desire because the desire and act itself are sinful*. This is true whether the desire in question is *fleeting or persistent*.

Furthermore, the notion that orientation was wholly unknown to the ancient world is a significant overstatement. Critiquing Brownson's assertions regarding this, Preston Sprinkle notes,

⁵ Matthew Vines, *God And the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case In Support Of Same-Sex Relationships*, First trade paperback edition (New York: Convergent Books, 2015), 41.

⁶ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of The Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020), 264.

⁷ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 57.

“...[The] claim that ‘writers in the first century, including Paul, did not look at same-sex eroticism with the understanding of sexual orientation that is commonplace today’ ignores a wealth of historical evidence to the contrary.”⁸

Because of Orientation Same Sex Unions Fit the Criteria for Being One-Flesh Unions

An additional part of the argument regarding orientation rests atop an argument that Brownson formulates in his book redefining the understanding of ‘one-flesh’ unions. In fact, Vines relies heavily on Brownson’s work in this and other sections of his book. In critiquing the traditional view, Vines writes,

“Because same-sex couples share the same anatomy, [the traditional] argument continues, they cannot become ‘one flesh’ in the biblical sense. But as New Testament Scholar James Brownson explained..., this interpretation oversexualizes the phrase ‘one flesh.’ In the Bible, the term ‘flesh’ is used metaphorically to describe ties of kinship.”⁹

The ‘broader ties of kinship’ argument Brownson attempts to make only holds *if the distinction of male and female in Genesis 1:27 and the designation that a man and woman are being joined as ‘one-flesh’ in Genesis 2:23-24 means nothing*. But as we saw, one only arrives at that conclusion by first assuming modern gender and queer theory as true and imposing that on the biblical text.

As Brownson himself acknowledges, the Genesis account “...assumes that marriage is constituted by a husband and wife.”¹⁰ As we discussed before, what a text assumes reveals the internal logic or moral framework of the text. One doesn’t defend what one assumes *as a given*. And the text assumes, as a given, that the one-flesh union is between *a man and a woman who are husband and wife*.

Additionally, the wider kinship bonds Brownson points to in support of his argument are individuals who are *genetically related to one another*. Which is to say, they have a *common ancestry*. The wider ‘kinship bonds’ *presuppose* the marital bond of ‘one-flesh’ unions, so the whole notion is rather contradictory.

Modern Day, Consensual, Same-Sex Relationships were Unknown to the Biblical Writers

This assertion is based on the argument that all the same-sex relationships of the ancient world were exploitive forms of sex, such as pederasty. We’ll examine this in more detail shortly as we look over the specific biblical texts that address same sex sexual relations. But this assertion is based on selective reading of the ancient sources available to us.

Preston Sprinkle points to examples of relationships that do seem much closer to monogamous same-sex arrangements than either Brownson or Vines would have us believe.¹¹ Robert Gagnon, as well, shows this by walking through the distinctions Plato makes in the *Symposium* between what we would label exploitive versus consensual forms of same-sex relationships.¹²

⁸ Preston M. Sprinkle, “Romans 1 and Homosexuality: A Critical Review of James Brownson’s ‘Bible, Gender, Sexuality,’” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 24, no. 4 (2014): 525. *I highly recommend reading this article for the specific historical citations the author references.*

⁹ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 144.

¹⁰ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 31.

¹¹ Sprinkle, “Romans 1 and Homosexuality: A Critical Review of James Brownson’s ‘Bible, Gender, Sexuality.’”

¹² Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, 8th ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 350-354.

In the end, this assertion consensual relationship were unknown is demonstrably false. As Gagnon notes,

“There were certainly instances of exploitative homosexual relationships in antiquity and pederasty was the most common form of homoerotic expression. Yet that is a far cry from making the case that homosexuality in Greco-Roman society was inherently exploitative or that it was so prone to exploitation that Jews and Christians could not make the distinction between exploitative and non-exploitative forms. Victimization simply did not factor significantly in the arguments that Jews and Christians made in the ancient world. All forms of homosexual and lesbian conduct were wrong simply because of what it was not: natural sexual intercourse with the opposite sex.”¹³

The Bible Never Had a Sexual Norm

This argument is predicated on trying to undermine the notion we can rely on the biblical text, usually pointing to the practice of polygamy in the Old Testament or misrepresenting a text. We’ll see this in Vine’s work when we examine the prohibitions of same-sex unions in Leviticus 18. However, here we will simply take up the issue of polygamy as it is the issue most referenced.

First, the bible describes polygamy taking place in the Old Testament. But there is not a single instance where this practice is described *favorably*. In each instance, the practice leads to complications, conflict, and sinful situations. We need to understand that stories can teach us things by *showing us that doing something is not good*. In fact, the bible *frames polygamy as originating in sin by highlighting the first polygamist was Lamech, a descendent of Cain who boasted about being more violent and vengeful than Cain*:

“And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. ...Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech’s is seventy-sevenfold.”” - Genesis 4:19–24

Second, there is a command in Leviticus 18 that does seem to forbid polygamy and the translation of this verse has historical precedent and evidence among the Essene community, a separatist religious community that were contemporaries of Jesus. The verse in view is Leviticus 18:18. We are using the NASB as this English rendering best shows the interpretive aspects to this text:

“You shall not marry a woman in addition to her sister as a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness.” - Leviticus 18:18

However, the section rendered ‘to her sister’ could also be understood as an idiomatic expression in Hebrew. The same exact phrase is used elsewhere and is rendered generically as ‘to another.’

“...in Hebrew, “a woman in addition to her sister,” is *ishah el-achotah*, which literally means “a woman to her sister.” This is an idiomatic expression, which, as scholars like Richard Davidson and Gordon Hugenberger have argued, is always used in the distributive sense of “one in addition to another.” Consider the following verses in which this exact phrase is used idiomatically:

¹³ Gagnon, 360.

Five curtains shall be coupled to one another [ishah el-achotah], and the other five curtains shall be coupled to one another [ishah el-achotah]. (Exodus 26:3)

And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains one to the other [ishah el-achotah] with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be a single whole. (Exodus 26:6)

Their wings touched one another [ishah el-achotah]. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. (Ezekiel 1:9).”¹⁴

Below are images of the English translation next to the Hebrew from Leviticus 18 and Exodus 26 so you can see the underlying Hebrew is the same:

<p>blood relatives. It is ^alewdness.</p> <p>18 'You shall not ¹marry a woman in addition to ²her sister ³as a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness.</p> <p>19 ^aAlso you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her ^bmenstrual impurity.</p> <p>20 ^aYou shall not have intercourse with your neighbor's wife, to be defiled with her.</p> <p>21 'You shall not give any of your offerings ^ato ¹offer them to</p>	<p>אֶת־בִּתְּבִנָּהּ וְאֶת־בִּתְּבִתָּהּ לֹא תִקַּח לְגִלוֹת עֲרוֹתָהּ שְׂאֵרָה הִנָּה זִמָּה הוּא:</p> <p>וְאִשָּׁה אֶל־אֲחֹתָהּ לֹא תִקַּח לְצִדָּר לְגִלוֹת עֲרוֹתָהּ עָלֶיהָ בְּחַיֶּיהָ:</p>
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<p>shall have ^athe same measurements.</p> <p>3 "Five curtains shall be ¹joined to one another, and the other five curtains shall be ¹joined to one another.</p> <p>4 "You shall make loops of ¹blue on the edge of the ²outermost curtain in the first set, and likewise you shall make them on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the second ³set.</p> <p>5 "You shall make fifty loops in the one curtain, and you shall make fifty loops on the ¹edge of the curtain that is in the</p>	<p>וְעֲשִׂיתֶם בְּאַמָּה וּרְחֹב אַרְבַּע בְּאַמָּה הַיְרִיעָה הָאֶחָת מִדָּה אֶחָת לְכָל־הַיְרִיעוֹת:</p> <p>חֲמִשָּׁן הַיְרִיעוֹת תַּדְוִינָן וְקִבַּרְתְּ אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֲחֹתָהּ וְחֲמֵשׁ יְרִיעוֹת חִבְרֹת אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֲחֹתָהּ:</p>
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Thus, Leviticus 18:18 rather than being a specific prohibition against marrying *sisters*, is a general prohibition against marrying more than one wife at any time if rendered as:

“You shall not marry a woman in addition to another as a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness.”

In fact, this appears to be how the Essenes or Qumran community interpreted this verse, pointing to it in support of their accusations that the Pharisees were guilty of committing fornication because of their practice of polygamy.¹⁵ This reality points to an interpretive tradition that existed *prior to and contemporary with* Jesus and the first Apostles *making much better sense of what seems like a sudden shift to the exclusive monogamy we see Jesus and Apostles teaching*. This is a conceivable possibility as Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for neglecting the commands of God for the traditions of men (see Mark 7:8).

¹⁴ David Wilber, *Is God a Misogynist?: Understanding the Bible's Difficult Passages Concerning Women*, Kindle Edition, 2020, 42.

¹⁵ Wilber, 40–41.

Thus, while this interpretation of Leviticus 18:18 is can be disputed, it does have linguistic and historical credibility. Also, it is worth asking which makes more sense: that Jesus and the Apostles would *invent an emphasis on monogamy* as being in accord with God's laws and the creation account, *or that they were drawing upon an existing interpretation* that, while being the minority take, was the correct one?

In this light, OT laws that regulate polygamous marriages like Deuteronomy 21:15-17, may be taken in the same way Jesus said the laws on divorce were to be understood. They were concessions by God to mitigate against additional harm or hurt, but not expressive of God's ideal arrangements. It's the ideal then, drawn from Genesis, that Jesus and the Apostles were pointing back to and subsequently calling Christians to embody as the church.

THE TEXTUAL DISPUTES

Having looked at the varied elements that often are present in the revisionist arguments, we will now look at the key texts on homosexual practice that form the basis of the disputes. Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, 1 Timothy 1:8-11, and Romans 1:26–27.

Leviticus 18:22, 20:13

The text simply reads:

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” - Leviticus 18:22

“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.” - Leviticus 20:13

There is no dispute over what these texts say. However, the revisionist side argues that this text doesn't have any relevance for the church today for varying reasons. The two we will look at are that:

1. The command was against idolatrous worship practices not a general prohibition.
2. These commands are due to patriarchal understandings of gender and have no relevance in our contemporary understanding.

Only a Prohibition of Idolatrous Worship

This argument is also used against Romans 1, so we won't revisit it there as the same principles apply.

1. Yes, the command is given within the context of larger admonitions to avoid participating in idolatrous worship.
2. But to say the warnings against idolatry limit the commands to just that context is absurd for two reasons:
 - a. Do the other commands against incest, adultery, or bestiality (Lev. 18:6; 20, 23) only apply to the context of idolatry as well? If not, why then is this specific command limited while the others are not?
 - b. The opposite trajectory is just as reasonable and, in fact, a better way of understanding the command. The commands are not limited to a specific idolatrous practice but are to be understood as being the sorts of practices that those who ARE idolaters engage in.
3. Thus, the commands are binding because they are the practices of those who ARE GIVEN OVER TO IDOLATRY and to know and walk with God means NOT doing these sorts of things for He detests them.

Based on Patriarchal Understandings of the Genders so Doesn't Apply Today

This is the core of Vine's revisionist argument regarding Leviticus in chapter 5 of his book, *God and the Gay Christian*. His main argument is that the patriarchal social framework is what sits behind the prohibitions in Leviticus regarding same sex sexual relations, *not* gender differences. To make this case he argues that in the ancient world women had a subordinate status and that the offence wasn't that it was two men, but that one of the men was being treated *like a woman which denigrated his status*.

In support of this assertion, he references Philo and Clement of Alexandria. I don't have access to Philo, but I do with Clement so I will focus on Vines treatment of him. We will spend a good bit of time on this matter as there are some important things that emerged as I looked into how Vines frames and utilizes Clement in his argument. He writes,

"Clement of Alexandria, a second-century Christian writer, said passive men 'suffer the things of women.' He warned men against removing body hair, writing that man's willingness to engage in a feminine activity meant he would take the woman's role in sex. 'He who in the light of day denies his manhood,' Clement wrote, 'will prove himself manifestly a woman by night.'

Yes, the clear denigration of women in these texts is offensive. But notice what the writers don't say. They don't talk about the design of male and female bodies – there is no mention of anatomical complementarity. Instead, they base their rejection of same-sex relations on a different belief: because women are inferior to men, it is degrading for a man to be treated like a woman."¹⁶

The work being cited is *The Instructor*. And to provide context, in the chapters leading up to the quotes from Vines, Clement is lamenting and criticizing the carnal and sexualized practices of the larger culture. He is extolling both women and men to adopt a posture of chastity and modesty. In fact, note how in the following quote Clement seems to *value* women and views their actions aimed at sexualizing themselves as failing to recognize their true value and beauty:

"Unawares the poor wretches *destroy their own beauty*, by the introduction of what is spurious. At the dawn of day, mangling, racking, and plastering themselves over with certain compositions, they chill the skin, furrow the flesh with poisons, and with curiously prepared washes, thus *blighting their own beauty*. Wherefore they are seen to be yellow from the use of cosmetics, and susceptible to disease, their flesh, which has been shaded with poisons, being now in a melting state. So they dishonour the Creator of men, *as if the beauty given by Him were nothing worth*."¹⁷

In our modern context, this would be like a Pastor telling women who post nude and sexually explicit videos on *Only Fans* that they are dishonoring themselves and the God who made them with an inherent beauty and worth which they fail to understand. This isn't to say Clement is perfect – but does it sound like Vines is representing him fairly?

What of Clement's statements about men plucking out their hair? The broader context here has to do with actions the men were taking to make themselves attractive to other men *by feminizing themselves*.

¹⁶ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 88.

¹⁷ Philip Schaff, ed., *ANF02. Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)* - *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, 581, accessed October 17, 2022, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.html> Clement, *The Instructor*, Ch. 2.

We may find Clement's arguments *odd*, but his references to hair and beards and the admonition to stop removing them is because they are men, and it is in their nature *as men* to have hair on their face and bodies. Clement is taking issue with the fact they are intentionally trying to look more *like women as an act of sexualizing their appearances to attract other men*. Clement writes,

"It is therefore impious to desecrate the symbol of manhood, hairiness. But the embellishment of smoothing (for I am warned by the Word), if it is to attract men, is the act of an effeminate person,—if to attract women, is the act of an adulterer; and both must be driven as far as possible from our society."¹⁸

Thus, if we are being fair to Clement his concern is the connection the activity of men removing body hair had to do with the perverse purposes for the removal of hair. We might think it silly today, but we mustn't assume that Clement did not know his own culture and time better than we do.

Additionally, Vines asserted there is no reference to the design of male or female bodies and anatomical complementarity in Clement's arguments. While Clement doesn't talk *directly* about genitalia, the references he is making to hair on men and their efforts to feminize themselves only makes sense if Clement views men and women *as physically different*. In fact, he asserts the efforts at feminization of some men is so bad that one would have to *see them naked to know they are a man* – which only makes sense if Clement also assumed *genital differences* were part of what distinguished men and women,

"But for one who is a man to comb himself and shave himself with a razor, for the sake of fine effect, to arrange his hair at the looking-glass, to shave his cheeks, pluck hairs out of them, and smooth them, how womanly! *And, in truth, unless you saw them naked, you would suppose them to be women.* ...For God wished women to be smooth, and rejoice in their locks alone growing spontaneously, as a horse in his mane; but has adorned man, like the lions, with a beard, and endowed him, as an attribute of manhood, with shaggy breasts,—a sign this of strength and rule."¹⁹

Lastly, what of the one quote about being a woman at night? The context is the men who are engaged in all sorts of activities to show themselves in this effeminate and sexualized way *in public*. To which he says,

"Their want of shame in public attests their unbridled licentiousness in private. For he who in the light of day denies his manhood, will prove himself manifestly a woman by night...

The man, who would be beautiful, must adorn that which is the most beautiful thing in man, his mind, which every day he ought to exhibit in greater comeliness; and should pluck out not hairs, but lusts. I pity the boys possessed by the slave-dealers, that are decked for dishonour. But they are not treated with ignominy by themselves, but by command the wretches are adorned for base gain. But how disgusting are those who willingly practice the things to which, if compelled, they would, if they were men, die rather than do?

But life has reached this pitch of licentiousness through the wantonness of wickedness, and lasciviousness is diffused over the cities, having become law. Beside them women stand in the

¹⁸ Schaff, 588 Clement, The Instructor, Ch. 3.

¹⁹ Schaff, 587 Clement, The Instructor, Ch. 3.

stews, offering their own flesh for hire for lewd pleasure, and boys, taught to deny their sex, act the part of women.”²⁰

There may be some sexism contained in Clement’s words, but to assert a hierarchical and patriarchal view of men and women is the *only, main, or primary and driving force* of his objections to same-sex unions is to misrepresent him. His argument is that men and women are different and that men, given over to their lusts and vanity, are trying to look more like women to sexually attract other men. This is why he distinguishes between the poor slave boys forced into this and those ‘...disgusting [ones] who willingly practice’ this.

Vines may have done this unintentionally by relying on the writing or opinions of someone else who quoted Clement and framed his thinking in this way. Nevertheless, finding this sort of shoddy scholarship being used as foundational support for the argument that misogyny and patriarchy are the dominant reasons those in antiquity reject same-sex relationships causes me to view *the rest of Vine’s work with greater suspicion*. It highlights the importance of, whenever possible, tracing down and fact-checking sources to verify the veracity of the arguments people are putting forth.

The Key Problem with the Patriarchy Framing

It is one thing to state someone like Clement was influenced and shaped by misogynistic views of his day. This is most assuredly true! But as we saw, that isn’t the whole of what is influencing and shaping his thinking for he did *have the Scriptures that also played a significant role*.

However, it is an *entirely different thing to assert that the biblical writers were motivated only by misogynistic views of women when speaking against same-sex erotic relationships*. To say this is to effectively malign the Spirit by insinuating there are base motives that lay beneath the commands and instructions we have in the Scriptures. It ignores the most basic understanding, the internal logic of the biblical text itself, that the male/female distinction at creation is important and constitutive.

Here, Vine’s is following in Brownson’s failed efforts to obscure the male/female distinction by invoking the specter of patriarchy. But in doing this, they are both undermining the authority of Scripture for the sake of advancing an argument that requires contorting the Scriptures to fit into our modern framing of sexuality and gender.

1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and 1 Timothy 1:8–11

We are looking at these two texts together for the revisionist objections to each one, which is tied to the meaning of the underlying Greek, are the same. Thus, for the sake of time we will only look at 1 Corinthians, since the key word in question is found in both texts.

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” - 1 Corinthians 6:9–11

²⁰ Schaff, 588–89 Clement, The Instructor, Ch. 3.

The revisionist argument hinges upon the interpretation of the word, ἀρσενοκοῖται (arsenokoitai) used in both texts and μαλακοί (malakoi) used in 1Corinthians and whether or not this word is addressing homosexual sex in general or just exploitive forms of sex such as pederasty and prostitution.

Historically the words have been understood to mean:

Arsenokoitai: men who lay with men. | Malakoi: effeminate or soft men.

First, we'll look at the word arsenokoitai as understanding this word sheds light on the use of malakoi in 1Corinthians and either opens or closes the door regarding the NT teaching on homosexuality.

Arsenokoitai

Arsenokoitai is a word that was likely coined by the Apostle Paul as no examples of arsenokoitai exist prior to Paul's use of the term in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. The question is why then the apostle Paul would seemingly create a word and, if he did, what does it mean?

The answer is actually found in the OT prohibitions regarding homosexuality in Leviticus 20:13. As Greek became a more common language among the Jews, they created a Greek translation of the Hebrew OT scriptures known as the Septuagint (LXX). Below is Leviticus 20:13 from the LXX:

“καὶ ὃς ἂν κοιμηθῆ μετὰ **ἄρσενος κοίτην** γυναικός”

The two words in bold are “arsenos koiten.” It doesn't take someone being an expert in the Greek language to see the obvious connection between this and Paul's term, ἀρσενοκοῖται (arsenokoitai). Looking at them on top of one another the connection is made plain:

Leviticus 20:13:	ἄρσενος κοίτην
1Corinthians:	ἄρσενοκοῖται
1Timothy:	ἄρσενοκοῖταις

Paul, a former Pharisee, being exceptionally versed in the OT in both the Hebrew and the Greek used the Greek translation (LXX) to coin a term for his Greek speaking/reading congregations when speaking about sexual ethics for the church. In doing so he is affirming the OT teaching that homosexual sex in total is a sin. The argument often made that this term is about exploitive forms of same-sex sex like pederasty make no sense because he could have easily used the actual word παιδεραστής (*paiderastes* (adult males who have sex with boys) if that was what he really had in mind.

This leads to us being better able to understand the use of malakoi, which meant soft or effeminate men. In 1Corinthians it is usually translated together with arsenokoitai as “men who practice homosexuality.”

Malakoi

In Roman/Greek culture sex was viewed through the lens of dominant/submissive or active/passive and not male/female. This is not to say that Paul and the biblical worldview didn't see sex through the lens of male/female, for it does as we have seen over and over. The reason we today, or until recently, have understood sexuality through the lens of male and female is due to how successful Christianity has been at shaping the West's understanding of human sexuality *by overturning the Greco/Roman view*.

Nevertheless, when the Apostle Paul was addressing homosexual sin to the Romans and Greeks who made up the church, he did so in a way that prevented them from assuming, as was their custom, it was only

wrong to be the submissive partner. He did this by using *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* together in order to address both the active (*arsenokoitai*) and passive (*malakoi*) participants as being in sin.

Thus, the contemporary translation of ‘men who practice homosexuality’ is an accurate *translation*. While not literal, it conveys the intended meaning that Paul had in view given the assumptions about sex that Greeks and Romans had at that time.

Additionally, the combination of the words from Leviticus 20:13 into *arsenokoitai* and its use in 1Corinthians 6 points to a thematic connection between the two sections of Scripture. For both texts warn of death and/or judgment. Leviticus warns that to do such things merits being put to death. 1Corinthians 6 warns against being deceived, for those who practice homosexuality (among the other vices listed) will not inherit the kingdom of God. These warnings of judgment are why we cannot simply choose to ignore the debates taking place today.

Romans 1:26–27

This text is probably the most obvious of the ones in the New Testament as there is no dispute over the meaning of any of the words or the translation. It reads,

“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.” - Romans 1:26–27

The revisionist objections to this text take on a few different forms. The first, is nearly identical to the objection of Leviticus by trying to limit the prohibition strictly to the context of idolatrous worship. But for the same reasons that objection fails with Leviticus, it fails here as well. The activities being described by Paul are not only bad *in the context of idol worship*. Rather, these are the sorts of things one who *is an idolator does*.

The second objection has to do with the *reason* Paul is objecting. The problem is not that people of the same sex are having sex, it’s that what is occurring here is an expression of unrestrained lust, leading to shameful and dishonoring actions and that is the main focus Paul has in view. This is this the take that both Brownson and Vines adopt.

In both cases, the *specter of patriarchy shows up again in order to reframe the issue*. Thus, it is not that the actions are contrary to nature for they involve same-sex sex. No, they are against nature for the woman is acting as a man and the man as a woman and the patriarchal hierarchy is being upended to the shame and dishonoring of those participating in such acts.

The problem here is the idiomatic usage of the term ‘nature’ involved the notion of *telos*, end, or purpose. It was a way of saying something was occurring that was out of step with the obvious intent, design, or purpose for which it was made. Again, one can only adopt the revisionist angle by first proving the *male/female distinction is a meaningless distinction in the biblical framework*. But, having failed to do this, Brownson and Vines have nothing to stand on in making these assertions.

And, as we have already seen with Clement, who lived from 150-215AD, patriarchal and misogynistic thinking was not the only or main thing that shaped his views on homosexuality. Clearly, Clement had an understanding that men and women were different, and that difference *meant something*.

As Gagnon notes rather bluntly, the ‘natural’ suitability of the male and female biology was as apparent to the ancients as it is to us today:

“A male who allowed himself to be penetrated was acting like a female quite apart from issues of dominance and submission: the appropriate receptacle was absent from the male sex. The receptive male was trying to receive something that only females were made to receive. A female who attempted to have sex with another female could not penetrate a woman’s vagina without a prosthesis substituting for the male organ. This is simply a basic biological difference that was as obvious in antiquity as it is today. Males have a sex organ suited for penetration and no orifice appropriate for sexual receptivity. Females have genital organs suited for receiving male penetration and no penetrating organ of their own. Sexual intercourse is complimentary for males and females, not males with males or females with females.”²¹

CONCLUSION

We’ve covered a ton of ground in the last few weeks, but hopefully we have touched on enough things to either give you confidence in the traditional position or at least give you pause if you think the revisionist arguments are built atop unassailable scholarship. They are not.

The matter of homosexuality and, with it, transgender ideological notions that our biology is a meaningless ‘thing’ we can trade off and on like an article of clothing are significant and deeply theological issues. In discussing these matters we are talking about what it means to be made in the image of God and how our sexuality ties into these matters. For as Paul said,

““Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” - Ephesians 5:31–32

Thus, matters of sexuality are not incidental but do tie directly into the gospel. And the analogy Paul makes here is significant. As the church we are said to be united to and made one with Christ. We are like Christ in that we share his image. But we are also different from Christ in that we are creatures, He is creator.

The union of man and woman as one in marriage is meant to reflect this deeply profound truth. We are like one another as we both share in the Image of God, but we are different than one another as male and female. The joining of male and female as one points to and reflects the glorious mystery of our union with Christ. The creature being made one with his or her creator. Homosexuality, with its ‘union’ of ‘sameness’ obscures this deep truth. We are meddling with things we should not. As Lewis warned,

“...we are dealing with male and female not merely as facts of nature but as the live and awful shadows of realities utterly beyond our control and largely beyond our direct knowledge. Or rather, we are not dealing with them but (as we shall soon learn if we meddle) they are dealing with us.”²²

²¹ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 365.

²² C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock; Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 239.

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