

Gender restrictions on sex: a time to keep or a time to throw away?¹

Caleb Anderson

The most polarising ethical, ecclesial and political issue currently facing the global church is homosexuality. By speaking about this topic, I situate myself in a long and dubious line of heterosexuals debating whether other people have specks of dust in their eyes.² I am unavoidably affected by my sociological and ecclesial context (as a Gen-Y New Zealand evangelical Anglican), my relationships with homosexual and other queer friends, my engagement with secular academia, and my privileged position in a hetero-patriarchal status quo (as a cis-gender heterosexual male).³ Nonetheless, I earnestly and hopefully seek God's truth to help illuminate this difficult 'issue.'

Even defining the issue is difficult. It is often framed as evaluating a monolithic concept called 'homosexuality.' This is problematic, even if nuanced to 'practicing homosexuality'⁴ to separate behaviour from involuntary attraction/orientation. We do not attempt to similarly evaluate '(practicing) *heterosexuality*,' given the world of difference between one-night stands, extra-marital affairs, sexual abuse, and sex as part of healthy Christian marriages. Within 'practicing heterosexuality,' we acknowledge the need for standards distinguishing good sex from bad sex.⁵ The present debate hinges on whether the same standards should apply to same-sex relationships,⁶ or whether all sexual relations and relationships lacking the male-female sex-difference are *inherently* immoral.⁷ The question therefore is 'does gender⁸ of partners affect sex's moral status? Is 'male and female' a necessary component of 'good sex'?'

Theological/biblical background

All evangelicals can hopefully agree on some vital background considerations. This is not an abstract exegetical-theological-ethical issue. It is about people and, as sobering suicide statistics⁹ show, a life-and-death matter. We are called to love all people, even enemies and especially the marginalised,¹⁰ following Christ's example. Genesis 1:26-28 establishes humans as embodied, sexed and sexual beings,¹¹ representing God's image in God's good creation. The passage describes people as created "male and female;" whether this entrenches an exclusive gender binary¹² and "compulsory heterosexuality" is highly questionable.¹³

¹ Eccl 3:6. All biblical references, except where noted, are from the New International Version, Anglicised (2011).

² Cf. Matt 7:3-5.

³ Valdes, "Hetero-Patriarchy," passim; Martin, "Heterosexism," passim; Adams, "Foundations."

⁴ Or "homosexual acts" or "homosexual behavior." Jones and Yarhouse, "Science," 73; Zahniser and Cagle, "Homosexuality."

⁵ Different Christians have applied different ethical standards around sex and marriage. Whatever these standards are, here I am only discussing whether they should include a (male-female) gender requirement.

⁶ Lee, "Ask."

⁷ Framing the debate in terms of '(practicing) homosexuality' in fact begs the question, as this is only a morally coherent category if the traditional position is true, and "the sex-difference ... is *morally determinative in and of itself*." Haller, *Reasonable*, 3.

⁸ I use 'gender' and 'sex' interchangeably, as in common English usage; I am skeptical about attempts to bifurcate the social (gender) from the biological (sex). Cf. Coakley, "Gender," 242n.

⁹ Peterson, "Suicide," 5-6.

¹⁰ Bauckham, *Politics*, 143-147.

¹¹ Nordling, "Person," 71-72.

¹² One estimate suggests that 1 in 100 people's "bodies differ from standard male or female;" even looking at purely physical criteria. Intersex Society of North America, "Intersex." Some Christians write this 1% off as "a tiny, tiny, tiny number of newborns" (Reno, "Triumph of Desire"), but we serve a God who leaves the 99 in search of the one (Matt 18:12-14).

¹³ Fabricius, "Propositions." Some traditionalists read the passage this way; equating heterosexual gender binary variously with embodiment, gender, sexuality, and the image of God. Crouch, "Bodies," passim; Nordling, "Embodied"; Jewett and Shuster, *Human*, 136,167. Sarah Coakley suggests that a more biblical/theological conception

Scripture assures us sex is part of God's good creation.¹⁴ However, sex is not central to our identity.¹⁵ We do not have a 'right' to sex; Christian disciples must sacrifice our culture's idolatry of sex and desire to the discipline of chastity, and some must sacrifice sex altogether.¹⁶ As mentioned, not all sex is good sex; most biblical discussions of sex are condemnations of its sinful expressions¹⁷—yet Scripture also condemns hypocrisy.¹⁸ Our sexual desires and cultural attitudes bear the marks of the fall;¹⁹ we await the redemption of our bodies and world, and can enact it, yet only in part.²⁰

Scriptural answers?

To begin asking how Scripture can speak to our question, we can ask whether Scripture ever considers 'bad sex' bad *because* of the partners' common genders, or 'good sex' good *because* of the partners' opposite genders. If such pronouncements do exist, we can explore the "moral logic" underlying them, and examine whether the same moral logic ought to be followed in the same way by Christians in our context.²¹

Bad sex

The scriptural references to same-sex sexuality are entirely negative,²² but it is not clear how gender contributes to these negative assessments, nor how universalisable they are. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is generally acknowledged as "irrelevant to the topic," precisely because Scripture does not highlight the gender aspect.²³ Leviticus' Holiness Code,²⁴ condemning male-male sex alongside living like Egyptians and Canaanites, unfair judgments and beard-shaving, is motivated by patriarchal cultural gender expectations,²⁵ and national purity concerns Christians no longer consider normative.²⁶

Romans 1:24-27, the "most crucial text,"²⁷ may falter on similar counts. The wider passage's masterful "homiletical sting operation" should give us pause; Paul builds up indignation before declaring his readers no better.²⁸ Examining ancient understandings of sexuality indicates nothing in

of gender is "differentiated relationality," which challenges rather than reinforces the "worldly" gender binary. It is also more consistent with contemporary secular thought on sex and gender, and sexual minorities' embodied experiences. Coakley, "Gender," 134–135, 243n., 139–142, 245n., cf. also Williams, "Grace"; Jones, "Sin." See note 40 below on image of God.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Song of Solomon.

¹⁵ Benson, "Conversation"; Myers, "Human."

¹⁶ Winner, "Sex"; Nordling, "Embodied"; Adams, "Foundations"; Vines, "Bible."

¹⁷ Vines, "Bible."

¹⁸ See, e.g., Rom 2:1.

¹⁹ Nordling, "Embodied"; Adams, "Foundations."

²⁰ Hays, "Redemption," 10–11; Nordling, "Person," 73; Marshall, "Condemnation," 13.

²¹ Brownson, *Bible*, 5–9, 15.

²² Gen 18:16-19:29; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9 (disputed) and 1 Tim 1:10 (disputed).

²³ Hays, "Redemption," 5. Gen 18-19 seems to focus on the cities' inhospitality in attempting to rape their guests; so too Matt 10:12-15/Luke 10:10-12. The prophets point to various non-sexual sins (Jer 23:14; Ezek 16:48-50). New Testament references highlight sexual sin, but focus on lust (2 Peter 2:6-8) and pursuing flesh that is ἕτερος, different (angelic), not ὁμός, same. Furnish, "Context," 19–20.

²⁴ Leviticus 17-26.

²⁵ Wink, "Homosexuality," 1082–1085; Brownson, *Bible*, 58–59; Zahniser and Cagle, "Homosexuality."

²⁶ Brownson, *Bible*, 269–273; Furnish, "Context," 20.

²⁷ Hays, "Redemption," 7. If ἀρσενοκοίτης and μαλακός in 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10 refer to same-sex eroticism, most of this discussion would also apply there, even if ἀρσενοκοίτης is a rough quotation of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 as Hays suggests. See Valdes, "Hetero-Patriarchy," 95 on μαλακός.

²⁸ Rom 1:18-2:16. Hays, "Redemption," 9; Brighton, "Suggestions," passim.

DRAFT essay by author, a student at Laidlaw College Christchurch. Feedback welcome via TH.

Paul's purview suggested the modern notion of homosexual orientation,²⁹ still less monogamous Christian gay couples. Greeks tolerated men taking male lovers within prescribed limits; anything approaching mutual, monogamous same-sex relationships³⁰ was condemned for threatening rigidly patriarchal sex roles.³¹

Paul describes lustful male-male (and, arguably, female-female)³² sex as shameful (ἀτιμία) and against nature (φύσις, a borrowed Greek concept). Many of Paul's Greco-Roman/Hellenistic Jewish contemporaries deemed same-sex eroticism 'unnatural,' whether for threatening procreation,³³ embodying 'natural' lusts taken to lustful extremes, or contravening 'natural' gender hierarchy.³⁴ Paul seems unconcerned with procreation,³⁵ and his focus on lust may suggest the second meaning.³⁶ However, in 1 Cor 11:14-15 he apparently follows the third logic, declaring long-haired men shameful (ἀτιμία) according to nature (φύσις). If Paul is similarly invoking 'natural' gender roles in Rom 1, he is indeed making a statement about gender, but the similarity to 1 Cor 11 should give us pause for thought about Paul's statements about 'natural' gender roles.³⁷ Whatever logic Paul is following, his argument is evidently conditioned by culturally specific, patriarchal medical/ethical views of 'nature.'³⁸

Good sex/marriage

Biblical explanations of why 'good sex' is good are well-summarised by the Book of Common Prayer's "causes for which Matrimony was ordained."³⁹ Genesis 1 describes God creating humans "male and female" and instructing them to "be fruitful, and multiply."⁴⁰ Gen 2 declares it "not good

²⁹ Some point to Aristophanes' satirical myth in Plato's *Symposium* as an incipient understanding of sexual orientation, but this was an atypical view, not even held by Plato himself, and applied to man-boy sex rather than adult relationships. In any case, it is extremely unlikely Paul was familiar with the myth. Schoedel, "Eros," 46–47; Haller, *Reasonable*, 60–62.

³⁰ Indeed, some suggest *all* attested ancient same-sex eroticism involved some kind of power imbalance in age and/or class. Waetjen, "Antiquity," 111–112; Siker, "Wheat," 140–144; Johnson, "[Review]," 388–390.

³¹ Martin, "Heterosexism," 344–349; Valdes, "Hetero-Patriarchy," 193–195; Schoedel, "Eros," 44–46. Sexuality between women was something of a "taboo subject" in antiquity. In general, women seem to have been restricted to being passive recipients of male sexuality. However, sexual activity that did occur between females was not condemned as harshly in biblical and Greco-Roman sources as illegitimate sex between males; without penile penetration, it was apparently not seen as 'real' sex. Waetjen, "Antiquity," 111; Valdes, "Hetero-Patriarchy," 183, 196; Haller, *Reasonable*, 63–64.

³² Tobias Stanislas Haller presents an impressive argument for the early Christian interpretation of 1:26's 'unnatural' use (ἄφροσύνη) as men's non-vaginal (non-procreative) 'use' of women, in the "same way" as with one another (1:27). Haller, *Reasonable*, 63–64; cf. also Brownson, *Bible*, 206–209.

³³ The science of the day suspected same-sex intercourse would render men permanently sterile, and would thus threaten the survival of the human race if it became too widespread. Furnish, "Context," 27.

³⁴ Martin, "Heterosexism," 341–349; Schoedel, "Eros," passim; Siker, "Wheat," 142–143. A prominent example is Plato, who turned against same-sex eroticism for these three reasons in his final work *Laws*. Schoedel, "Eros," 44–46. Careful observation of ancient writings on sexuality belies William Webb's simplistic declaration that "Homosexuality was widely accepted" in the Greco-Roman world, and Paul's stance represented a stark contrast. Webb, *Slaves*, 39.

³⁵ Schoedel, "Eros," 48–49; Brownson, *Bible*, 117–118.

³⁶ Rom 1:24, 26, 27. Schoedel, "Eros," 68.

³⁷ Vines, "Bible."

³⁸ Schoedel, "Eros," 44–64; Furnish, "Context," 29–30. While Paul clearly uses 'nature' normatively, it is a stretch to suggest, as Hays, "Redemption," 7–10 does (7–10), that he uses the Greek concept of 'nature' to refer to a Jewish understanding of 'creational intent'.

³⁹ Procreation, remedy, union. "Signifying ... the mystical union ... betwixt Christ and his Church" is also mentioned in the introduction. Recent revisions have elevated union, dropped remedy and softened, or made optional, procreation. The Church of England, "Matrimony"; The Church of England, "Marriage"; The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, "Marriage."

⁴⁰ Gen 1:27–28, KJV. Some suggest "male and female he created them" is paralleled synonymously with the previous clause, "in the image of God he created them [lit. 'him.']" – e.g. Patterson, "Creation," drawing on Phyllis Trible and Karl Barth. Barth interprets 'image of God' as human relationality, chiefly displayed in complementary man-woman

for [Adam] to be alone” and creates a “suitable helper” who is “flesh of [his] flesh;” they “leave” and “cleave” into “one flesh”⁴¹ – suggesting an equal, intimate kinship bond.⁴² Jesus, discussing divorce and marriage, cites ‘male and female’ and ‘one flesh’.⁴³ Sex and marriage are used evocatively throughout both Testaments to symbolise the relationship between God and her people.⁴⁴ Paul recommends marriage as a remedy against ‘bad sex’; “better to marry than to burn with passion.”⁴⁵ Only hinted at in the marriage rites is the endorsement of sexual pleasure found especially in Song of Solomon.

As well as being created, biblical sex and marriage are “evolutionary;” adapting dramatically on polygamy, inter-racial marriage, divorce, incest, celibacy and procreation, as contexts and circumstances change.⁴⁶ Within the biblical narrative, this evolution does not extend to condoning any same-sex relationships. Positive endorsements of sex are always between men and women (not always husbands and wives). However, the sex-difference is usually simply assumed; few arguments are presented for why it is necessary or beneficial. Therefore, it remains open for debate whether the sex-difference should continue to be considered *prescriptive*, or downgraded to *descriptive* in light of what has changed since the biblical texts were written.⁴⁷

What has changed?

Sexuality

Sexuality itself, both in theory and in practice, has changed dramatically with the societies in which it is expressed.⁴⁸ Most pertinently, the words ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual,’ and their accompanying conception of in-built, stable ‘sexual orientation,’ were coined by 19th-20th-century psychologists.⁴⁹ Unlike in Moses’ or Paul’s time, and despite lack of institutional support from church and society, we now have homosexual couples inside and outside the church seeking the various goods of marriage.

Science

Wisdom literature endorses gaining knowledge through examining creation, though this cannot be done in a cultural vacuum. Ancient thinking on sexuality, including condemnations of non-procreative sex and non-patriarchal relationships, was unavoidably influenced by ancient medical understandings about sexual attraction, reproduction, and gender.⁵⁰ On many issues, we

unions. This goes against “orthodox teaching ... that each human being bears the image of God *in spite of*, not *because of*” sex differences (Haller, *Reasonable*, 33) and suggests celibates cannot reflect the image of God (cf. Gen 9:6), nor Jesus embody it (cf. 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). Moreover, 20th-21st century Old Testament scholars’ near-consensus reading of the passage suggests ‘male and female’ is better linked with the *following* clause, the fertility blessing common to animals (1:22,28), than with the uniquely human description of being made ‘in the image of God.’ Middleton, *Image*, 22–29,49–50; Brownson, *Bible*, 31–32; Haller, *Reasonable*, 32–35.

⁴¹ Gen 2:18-25; “cleave” from KJV.

⁴² Brownson, *Bible*, 26–37; Haller, *Reasonable*, 31–49. While the English ‘helper’ may imply inferiority, the Hebrew word (עֲזָרָה) does not; indeed it is most often applied to God (e.g. Ps 70:5).

⁴³ Mark 10:1-12; Matt 19:1-11.

⁴⁴ Haller, *Reasonable*, 51–56.

⁴⁵ 1 Cor 7:9. *Ibid.*, 57–62.

⁴⁶ Carrell, “Theologies,” 2–3; Wink, “Homosexuality,” 1083–1085.

⁴⁷ An analogy can perhaps be drawn between Adam and Eve’s genders and their ethnicity. While we may consider their shared ethnicity merely descriptive and of no moral value, common ethnicity and religion (“same-sects marriage”) were considered prescriptive features of marriages throughout the Old Testament, and until quite recently, by many Christians. Haller, “Old.”

⁴⁸ Valdes, “Hetero-Patriarchy,” *passim*.

⁴⁹ Martin, “Heterosexism,” 344n.; Waetjen, “Antiquity,” 113; Furnish, “Context,” 33n.

⁵⁰ Schoedel, “Eros,” 52–59; Haller, *Reasonable*, 16–17.

DRAFT essay by author, a student at Laidlaw College Christchurch. Feedback welcome via TH.

acknowledge the inspired biblical texts' accommodation to ancient scientific understandings (e.g. geocentrism, the value of π and the smallest seed), and attempt to maintain texts' theological/ethical messages while leaving behind their scientific underpinnings.⁵¹

Recent science, while inconclusive, suggests that what we now call sexual orientation is caused by complex and varying mixes of biological, psychological and environmental factors.⁵² Choice is at most a minor factor, and changed orientation is very rare and difficult, though not impossible.⁵³ Gender and sexual minorities often experience negative health outcomes; one study indicates Christchurch LGBT youth are 6.2 times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers.⁵⁴ Research suggests this results more from societal alienation and condemnation than anything inherent in sexual partners' genders.⁵⁵

Contrary to popular notions of being 'born gay,' science suggests sexual orientation is largely socially constructed.⁵⁶ However, the same appears true for sex/gender.⁵⁷ Contemporary science indicates our 'natural' binary, essentialist gender categories are largely produced by contingent, socially unequal historical circumstances. Traditionalists who suggest socially constructed phenomena are irrelevant jeopardise their own justifications for compulsory gender roles in marriage.

If the traditional gender restrictions on sex are dependent on outdated science, the way we express the virtues exhorted in the biblical material may look different today.

New Covenant

In the new covenant, the Jewish Law's purity/impurity distinction moves from external to internal, from separation to confident engagement, and from replicating the old creation to anticipating the new.⁵⁸

Procreation is no longer so important to Jesus or Paul, who do not cite it as a purpose of marriage.⁵⁹ Barrenness is no longer grounds for divorce, and celibacy is now a legitimate – even superior – calling; though only given to some.⁶⁰

Allegiance to Christ relativises the world's oppressive fundamental distinctions (Gal 3:28).⁶¹ Jesus', Paul's and Philip's attitudes towards women and welcoming of eunuchs point towards a weakening of gender roles and restrictions.⁶²

Tradition

⁵¹ Zahniser and Cagle, "Homosexuality." Cf. Josh 10:12-13; 1 Kings 7:23; Mark 4:31.

⁵² Jones and Yarhouse, "Science," 89–106; Zahniser and Cagle, "Homosexuality"; American Psychological Association, "Answers," 2.

⁵³ Jones and Yarhouse, "Science"; Jones, "Help"; Zahniser and Cagle, "Homosexuality"; American Psychological Association, "Answers," 2–3.

⁵⁴ Jones and Yarhouse, "Science," 106–112; Zahniser and Cagle, "Homosexuality"; Peterson, "Suicide."

⁵⁵ American Psychological Association, "Answers," 2–6.

⁵⁶ Benson, "Conversation."

⁵⁷ Jones, "Sin," 145.

⁵⁸ Brownson, *Bible*, 179–203.

⁵⁹ Haller, *Reasonable*, 15–17; Carrell, "Theologies," 3.

⁶⁰ 1 Cor 7:7; Matt 19:11. Haller, *Reasonable*, 16–17; Brownson, *Bible*, 127–146; Williams, "Grace."

⁶¹ Brownson, *Bible*, 65–67; Haller, *Reasonable*, 14; Coakley, "Gender," 140,245n.

⁶² Brownson, *Bible*, 60–64; Haller, "Old," 18–19. Eunuchs, a highly sexualised 'third gender,' were a useful conduit between male and female worlds, and an object of desire for men and women, but despised and distrusted for how they violated 'natural' gender roles (cf. Matt 19:12; Acts 8:26-40). Hester, "Eunuchs," passim.

Christian tradition has almost always opposed all same-sex sexuality, which should not be changed lightly. However, how this has been expressed has changed dramatically.⁶³ Strictly speaking, the tradition on ‘homosexuality’ only began when Christians accepted the concept. Since the 19th century, Christian commentators shifted from reading the Romans 1 condemnation as sex expressing sinful lusts, to sex expressing (sinful) orientations towards the same sex.⁶⁴

Tradition encompasses a rich tradition of changing tradition. Scripture itself reinterprets scripture.⁶⁵ The Jerusalem church, prompted by experiencing the Holy Spirit’s outpouring among the Gentiles, re-examine Scripture and relax laws for Gentile Christians.⁶⁶ Evangelical abolitionists insisted upon following Gal 3:28’s “trajectory” on slavery further than it was enacted – perhaps even anticipated – in New Testament times; despite eminent evangelical opposition.⁶⁷ More recently, Christians have dramatically liberalised our stances on rock ‘n’ roll.⁶⁸ Even marriage has changed; inter-religious marriage is now accepted, though writings on that topic a century ago are “eerily familiar” to the present debate.⁶⁹

Like slavery, churches have taken the biblical movement on procreation further than the New Testament church, by accepting non-procreative sex and contraception.⁷⁰ The church has always blessed couples who cannot have children for age or medical reasons.⁷¹ Recent marriage liturgies have amended procreation to “stability necessary for family life.”⁷² Non-procreative couples can have families through adoption (arguably a more Christian way);⁷³ medical technology offers new, if ambiguous, possibilities.⁷⁴

On gender, too, churches have moved further than New Testament implementation. Paul seems to take contradictory stances towards the oppressive gender expectations of surrounding cultures: assuming, enforcing, humanising, relativising and liberating. The best way to make sense of this seems to be that the New Testament’s “trajectory” points away from strong gender roles and restrictions.⁷⁵ This trajectory may correlate with secular science: highlighting the contingency and injustice of ‘natural’ human gender roles and restrictions may challenge 1 Cor 11 and Rom 1, but seems to point in the same direction as Gal 3:28.

Experience

Another ever-changing and ambiguous feature is the church’s experience; most pertinently, the outpouring of the Spirit on homosexual Christians, and the “fruit” of the traditional stance versus monogamous homosexual relationships.⁷⁶

⁶³ Toulouse, “Muddling Through: The Church and Sexuality/Homosexuality,” *passim* notes we are all ‘liberals’ compared to evangelical and mainline Americans 50 years ago.

⁶⁴ Martin, “Heterosexism,” 344n.

⁶⁵ E.g. Isa 56:3-8 cf. Deut 23; Mark 2:27. Zahniser and Cagle, “Homosexuality.”

⁶⁶ Acts 15:1-35

⁶⁷ Webb, *Slaves*, 30–66; Bauckham, *Politics*, vii–xi, 10, 18.

⁶⁸ Toulouse, “Muddling Through: The Church and Sexuality/Homosexuality,” 7–8.

⁶⁹ Haller, “Old.”

⁷⁰ Brownson, *Bible*, 109–112, 118–121.

⁷¹ Haller, *Reasonable*, 17–18; Brownson, *Bible*, 119. Even couples who intend never to have children have problem finding clergy willing to marry them.

⁷² The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, “Marriage.”

⁷³ Cf. James 1:27. Haller, “Old,” 19.

⁷⁴ Smietana, “Personhood.”

⁷⁵ Webb, *Slaves*, 30–66; Jewett and Shuster, *Human*, 155–171; Bauckham, *Politics*, vii–xi.

⁷⁶ Zahniser and Cagle, “Homosexuality”; Vines, “Bible.”

Should the gender restrictions remain in force?

Evangelicals applying Scripture in 21st-century New Zealand are left with two main options: *traditionalist*: the traditional gender requirements on ‘good sex’ must remain, or *revisionist*: one or more of the above changes necessitates removing the gender requirements.

It is worth examining the strongest arguments put forward for the traditionalist stance: procreation and gender complementarity. Procreation seems to be the only good feature of sex that unequivocally cannot be experienced by non-heterosexual couples.⁷⁷ As we have discussed, however, the church sanctions non-procreative sex and relationships. Some traditionalists attempt to assert that heterosexual unions are “intrinsically” procreative in some way, but the logic is unconvincing.⁷⁸ In practice, this ultimately collapses into a form of the next argument; biologically-based gender complementarity.⁷⁹

James Brownson observes that underlying most traditionalist cases, explicitly or otherwise, is a “moral logic” of “gender complementarity.”⁸⁰ This logic posits prescribed, essentialist, binary ‘male’ and ‘female’ gender roles, which ‘complement’ one another in sex and marriage.⁸¹ In order to argue against same-sex relationships, this is taken further: gender complementarity is advanced as a necessary feature of ‘good sex,’ able to trump all the other goods of sex and marriage. Any sex or relationship not exhibiting heterosexual complementarity is thus necessarily ‘bad sex;’ worse, indeed, than something Scripture clearly does oppose; people without the gift of celibacy remaining alone (cf. Gen 2:18), burning in lust (cf. 1 Cor 7:9).⁸²

When traditionalists attempt to explain *why* the Bible might assert a universally applicable restriction of sex/marriage to male-female couplings, complementarity is the primary argument advanced.⁸³ For example, Robert Gagnon reads ‘nature’ in Rom 1 as God’s created order of gender complementarity.⁸⁴ Gagnon also interprets Gen 1-2’s ‘image of God,’ creation of Eve, and first ‘one-flesh’ union explicitly in terms of compulsory heterosexual complementarity. Gagnon relies upon highly problematic readings of Genesis, particularly as Genesis 2 focuses not on Adam and Eve’s complementary differences, but on their similarity; unlike the animals, Eve is “flesh of [Adam’s] flesh.”⁸⁵

While it is questionable whether the Bible teaches any kind of complementarity, it is found in various pagan and secular philosophies, from the Taoist yin and yang to Jung’s anima and animus.⁸⁶

⁷⁷ Some suggest that the husband-wife relationship as symbol of Christ and church depends on the gender roles inherent in the metaphor, but others point out biblical metaphors defy literal gender ascriptions (the church is both Christ’s bride and his body), and suggest same-sex relationships can symbolise God’s love for the church too. Haller, *Reasonable*, 25–28, 51–56; Rogers, “Complementarity”; Coakley, “Gender,” 140–141. In any case, biblical symbols are drawn from the world of the original authors and readers, and if we tried to preserve all these features in our world, we would have to maintain the master-slave relationship, which is also symbolic of Christ and his people. Haller, *Reasonable*, 28.

⁷⁸ Haller, *Reasonable*, 20–21.

⁷⁹ See, for example, the discussion here: Radner, “Wronger”; Carrell et al., “Undone?”; Haller, “Discussions.”

⁸⁰ Brownson, *Bible*, 17–18.

⁸¹ Coakley, “Gender,” 138. The logic relies upon a strict binary conception of gender (see note 13 above). Accordingly, complementarity is seen as exclusive to heterosexual couples; same-sex couples are thought to lack the necessary difference to complement (or “supplement,” Haller’s preferred term) one another. Cf. Rogers, “Complementarity,” passim; Haller, *Reasonable*, 37, 47–48.

⁸² Vines, “Bible.”

⁸³ Brownson, *Bible*, 16–38.

⁸⁴ Gagnon, “Review,” passim. Cf. also Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 114–115.

⁸⁵ Gen 2:23. Moreover, the language of “one flesh” denotes a newly forged kinship bond involving sexual intimacy, rather than a single body comprised of ‘reunited’ halves. Brownson, *Bible*, 26–34. See note 40 above on image of God.

⁸⁶ Haller, *Reasonable*, 33–34; Coakley, “Gender,” 138–139; Williams, “Grace.”

DRAFT essay by author, a student at Laidlaw College Christchurch. Feedback welcome via TH.

Troublingly, it tends to imply people are somehow incomplete without an opposite-sex partner; Barth bizarrely opposed celibacy on the basis of gender complementarity.⁸⁷ This also contravenes orthodox Christian teaching that the celibate Jesus is fully human, and the full image of God.⁸⁸

Heterosexual complementarity is also based on essentialist binary gender roles, and can be used to justify male dominance.⁸⁹ Some traditionalists use ‘complementarity’ as a euphemism for gender hierarchy, asserting essential male ‘headship’ and female ‘helper’ roles.⁹⁰ This perhaps comes close to the patriarchal assumptions of much of the biblical material. However, it is not favoured as a current Christian stance by those who hope to support women’s leadership and equality in heterosexual marriages. Thus, other thinkers attempt to salvage complementarity from hierarchy, suggesting a complementarity based in biology⁹¹ not hierarchy, able to incorporate equality in difference.⁹² However, the logic seems to fall down here. If essentialist gender roles and gender restrictions are rejected as scientifically, ethically and exegetically flawed, it appears no clear basis remains for retaining the gender restriction on sex/marriage. This leads to an unusual stance of ‘girls can do anything – except have sex with other girls.’

How can a divided church love LGBT people?

This is a difficult issue to take sides on, largely because it has been made to represent much more than the question of gender restrictions on sex/marriage. For many, it is a line in the sand about whether a church prioritises Scripture; for others it is a litmus test about whether a church is truly welcoming and loving. Any genuine evangelical response must seek to honour both Scriptural truth and Kingdom love and justice.

Whatever stance(s) the church takes, this is an extremely difficult issue pastorally. If we decide sex and marriage require the male-female sex difference, we must ask how we can welcome and honour people who experience homosexual orientation. We must challenge ourselves to make LGBT people welcome in our churches, and assist queer Christians who cannot enter heterosexual marriages to order their sexuality in lifestyles of celibacy. We must ask ourselves hard questions about whether it is fair to enforce celibacy upon people who do not feel that they have been given this gift.

Ministry to LGBT persons may be easier if we decide the sex-difference can be dropped from sex and marriage, and thus extend Christian marriage to homosexual (and other queer) couples. However, promoting and maintaining chastity through celibacy, abstinence or marriage is by no means easy, even for heterosexuals.

All sides must ask how we can co-exist peacefully with people in our own churches, and other Christian denominations, who disagree with us. With the global church unlikely to reach consensus any time soon, perhaps the only way churches can avoid denominational ruptures is to allow difference on regional, congregational or individual levels.⁹³ Some revisionists and traditionalists may be willing to compromise by blessing monogamous same-sex unions; this could be kept

⁸⁷ Haller, *Reasonable*, 32–38.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 35–38.

⁸⁹ Coakley, “Gender,” 139.

⁹⁰ Brownson, *Bible*, 18–22.

⁹¹ This would be, however, a simplistic biology of “tab and slot” not borne out by contemporary biological understandings of sex or gender. Haller, *Reasonable*, 42.

⁹² Brownson, *Bible*, 22–26. Select examples include Gagnon, N.T. Wright and Paul Jewett. Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 20–24; Jewett and Shuster, *Human*, 164. Note also the subtitle to Pierce, Groothuis and Fee’s edited volume: *Complementarity without hierarchy*. Pierce, Groothuis, and Fee, *Equality*.

⁹³ Carrell, “Theologies,” 4–7.

DRAFT essay by author, a student at Laidlaw College Christchurch. Feedback welcome via TH.

separate from marriage, yet acknowledged as at least a better alternative to promiscuity (cf. 1 Cor 7:9).⁹⁴ But revisionists may not be happy with this ambiguous blessing, and traditionalists would need to ask whether it is consistent to maintain that sexuality directed towards the same sex is fundamentally disordered, yet bless some expressions of it. We would also need to decide whether such people can be church leaders, and how to deal with people on both sides who are not happy with such a compromise.

The question of homosexuality is the primary question our context is asking, so it is vital that we address it. Nonetheless, we must not let our exclusive focus on this question get in the way of much “weightier”⁹⁵ Kingdom/biblical themes such as oppression, greed, hypocrisy, embracing outsiders and reconciliation. Regardless of what specks of dust queer people do or do not have in their eyes, heterosexuals must focus first on the planks in our own. We must also ask how we can put loving people ahead of debating issues. Following Christ’s example, we must challenge ourselves to embrace and love the marginalised in society, both those we consider sinners and those we do not. This involves taking responsibility for the harm we have done, and making restitution.

Though some suggest the strongest ‘position’ is a stance of humble uncertainty,⁹⁶ I lean towards a revisionist position. The biblical texts may assume the male-female gender restriction on sex/marriage to be universally binding, but this seems more assumption than assertion. Moreover, these assumptions appear to be derived more from the texts’ human contexts, and cultural moral logics of procreation and patriarchy, than from the promptings of the texts’ divine author. Much has changed in human contexts since the biblical texts were written. In light of this, the church has already moved significantly on these moral logics; downgrading procreation from a compulsory facet of sex/marriage, and challenging the oppressiveness and restrictiveness of patriarchal gender roles. The church has also begun to ask what it means to genuinely love God’s LGBT children. I cannot help but suspect the Spirit is calling the church to more further, and remove all gender restrictions on sex and marriage, as part of the on-going redemption and liberation of our bodies and our world.

- *Caleb Anderson*
All Souls’ Day 2013, Christchurch

⁹⁴ Ibid., 7; Marshall, “Condemnation,” 13; Anderson, “Marriage.”

⁹⁵ Cf. Matt 23:23, KJV.

⁹⁶ Zahniser and Cagle, “Homosexuality.”

Bibliography

- Adams, Marilyn McCord. "Shaking the Foundations: LGBT Bishops and Blessings in the Fullness of Time." *Anglican Theological Review* 90, no. 4 (September 1, 2008): 713–732.
- American Psychological Association. "Answers to Your Questions: For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality." American Psychological Association, 2008. <http://www.apa.org/topics/sexuality/orientation.pdf>.
- Anderson, Caleb. "Theology and Marriage." *Anglican Life*, September 30, 2013. <http://www.anglicanlife.org.nz/Magazine/Theology-and-Marriage>.
- Bauckham, Richard. *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*. 2nd ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.
- Benson, Christopher. "A Better Conversation About Homosexuality." *Christianity Today*, July 30, 2012. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/julyweb-only/better-conversation-about-homosexuality.html>.
- Brighton, Les. "Some Suggestions About the Proper and Improper Use of the Material on Homosexuality in Romans 1." *Stimulus* 11, no. 4 (November 2003): 18–19.
- Brownson, James V. *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-sex Relationships*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013.
- Carrell, Peter. "Two Theologies of Marriage: Working from Creation and Companionship." In *Tough Questions Today: Exploring Theology of Marriage*. St Christopher's Avonhead, Christchurch: Theology House, 2013. <http://www.theologyhouse.ac.nz/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Two-theologies-of-marriage-Peter-R-Carrell.pdf>.
- Carrell, Peter, Ephraim Radner, Tobias Stanislas Haller, Bryden Black, and Caleb Anderson. "Radner Undone? [and Comments]." *Anglican Down Under*, 2013. <http://anglicandownunder.blogspot.co.nz/2013/08/radner-undone.html>.
- Coakley, Sarah. "The Trinity and Gender Reconsidered." In *God's Life in Trinity*, edited by Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker, 133–142. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Crouch, Andy. "Sex Without Bodies." *Christianity Today*, June 26, 2013. <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2013/july-august/sex-without-bodies.html>.
- Fabricius, Kim. "Twelve Propositions on Same-sex Relationships and the Church." *Faith and Theology*, January 17, 2007. <http://www.faith-theology.com/2007/01/twelve-propositions-on-same-sex.html>.
- Furnish, Victor Paul. "The Bible and Homosexuality: Reading the Texts in Context." In *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, edited by Jeffrey S. Siker, 18–35. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.
- Gagnon, Robert. "A Comprehensive and Critical Review Essay of Homosexuality, Science, and the 'Plain Sense' of Scripture, Part 2." *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 25 (December 2003): 179–275.
- Haller, Tobias Stanislas. "Continuing Discussions Down Under." *In a Godward Direction*, August 29, 2013. <http://jintoku.blogspot.co.nz/2013/08/continuing-discussions-down-under.html>.
- . "Old Is New." *In a Godward Direction*, August 30, 2013. <http://jintoku.blogspot.co.nz/2013/08/old-is-new.html>.
- . *Reasonable and Holy: Engaging Same-sexuality*. New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2009.
- Hays, Richard B. "Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: The Witness of Scripture Concerning Homosexuality." In *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, edited by Jeffrey S. Siker, 3–17. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.
- Hester, J. David. "Eunuchs and the Postgender Jesus: Matthew 19.12 and Transgressive Sexualities." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28, no. 1 (September 2005): 13–40.
- Intersex Society of North America. "How Common Is Intersex?" *Intersex Society of North America*. Accessed October 29, 2013. <http://www.isna.org/faq/frequency>.

DRAFT essay by author, a student at Laidlaw College Christchurch. Feedback welcome via TH.

- Jewett, Paul King, and Marguerite Shuster. *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human : a Neo-evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996.
- Johnson, William Stacy. "Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church/The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics [Review]." *Theology Today* 63, no. 3 (October 2006): 386–394.
- Jones, Serene. "What's Wrong with Us? Human Nature and Human Sin." In *Essentials of Christian Theology*, edited by William C. Placher, 141–158. 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.
- Jones, Stanton L. "'Help, I'm Gay': A Pastoral Conversation About Same-sex Attraction." *Leadership Journal* 34, no. 4 (October 14, 2013).
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2013/fall/help-im-gay.html>.
- Jones, Stanton L., and Mark A. Yarhouse. "The Use, Misuse, and Abuse of Science." In *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, edited by David L. Balch, 73–120. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.
- Lee, Justin. "Ask a Gay Christian...(Response)." *Rachel Held Evans*, September 19, 2011.
<http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/ask-a-gay-christian-response>.
- Marshall, Chris. "Paul's Condemnation of Homosexual Conduct: Romans 1 in Recent Exegesis." *Stimulus* 11, no. 4 (November 2003): 7–16.
- Martin, Dale B. "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32." *Biblical Interpretation* 3, no. 3 (1995): 332–355.
- Middleton, J. Richard. *The Liberating Image : the Imago Dei in Genesis 1*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1996.
- Myers, Ben. "Why Sex Tells You Nothing About What It Means to Be Human." *Faith and Theology*, June 13, 2009. <http://www.faith-theology.com/2009/06/why-sex-tells-you-nothing-about-what-it.html>.
- Nordling, Cherith Fee. "Embodied, Human, Sexual." *Perspectives Journal* no. November 2007 (November 2007). <http://www.rca.org/page.aspx?pid=3596>.
- . "The Human Person in the Christian Story." In *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, edited by Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier, 65–78. Cambridge Companions to Religion. Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Patterson, Sue. "Creation and the Theology of Sexuality." In *Tough Questions Today: Exploring Theology of Marriage*. St Christopher's Avonhead, Christchurch: Theology House, 2013.
<http://www.theologyhouse.ac.nz/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Creation-and-the-Theology-of-Sexuality-final-Sue-Patterson.pdf>.
- Peterson, Dana Rachele. "Youth Suicide: Executive Summary." Briefing. *Parliamentary Library*, October 31, 2000. <http://www.parliament.nz/resource/0000000313>.
- Pierce, Ronald W., Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon D. Fee, eds. *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Radner, Ephraim. "Same-Sex Marriage Is Still Wrong; And It's Getting Wronger Every Day." *The Anglican Communion Institute, Inc.*, July 17, 2013.
<http://www.anglicancommunioninstitute.com/2013/07/same-sex-marriage-is-still-wrong-and-its-getting-wronger-every-day/>.
- Reno, R. R. "Triumph of Desire." *First Thoughts*, August 19, 2013.
<http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2013/08/19/triumph-of-desire/>.
- Rogers, Eugene F. "Same-sex Complementarity." *The Christian Century*, May 17, 2011.
- Schoedel, William R. "Same-Sex Eros: Paul and the Greco-Roman Tradition." In *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, edited by David L. Balch, 43–72. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.

DRAFT essay by author, a student at Laidlaw College Christchurch. Feedback welcome via TH.

- Siker, Jeffrey S. "Gentile Wheat and Homosexual Christians: New Testament Directions for the Heterosexual Church." In *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, edited by Robert L. Brawley, 137–151. 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- Smietana, Bob. "When Does Personhood Begin? : And What Difference Does It Make?" *Christianity Today*, July 1, 2004. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/july/7.24.html>.
- The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. "NZPB Marriage Liturgies." A *New Zealand Prayer Book He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*. Accessed October 17, 2013. <http://anglicanprayerbook.org.nz/777.htm>.
- The Church of England. "The Book of Common Prayer: The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony." *The Church of England*, 1662. <http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/book-of-common-prayer/the-form-of-solemnization-of-matrimony.aspx>.
- . "The Marriage Service." *The Church of England*. Accessed October 17, 2013. <http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/pastoral/marriage/marriage.aspx>.
- Toulouse, Mark G. "Muddling Through: The Church and Sexuality/Homosexuality." In *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, edited by David L. Balch, 6–42. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.
- Valdes, Francisco. "Unpacking Hetero-Patriarchy: Tracing the Conflation of Sex, Gender & Sexual Orientation to Its Origins." *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities* 8, no. 1 (1996): 161–211.
- Vines, Matthew. "The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality." Speech presented at the College Hill United Methodist Church, Wichita, Kansas, March 2012. <http://www.matthewvines.com/transcript>.
- Waetjen, Herman C. "Same-Sex Sexual Relations in Antiquity." In *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, edited by Robert L. Brawley, 103–116. 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- Webb, William J. *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Williams, Rowan. "The Body's Grace." Michael Harding Memorial Address presented at the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, 1989. <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/08/24/3301238.htm>.
- Wink, Walter. "Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality." *Christian Century* 96, no. 36 (November 7, 1979): 1082–1086.
- Winner, Lauren F. "Sex in the Body of Christ." *Christianity Today*, May 2005. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/may/34.28.html?paging=off>.
- Wright, N. T. *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part One (Chapters 1-8)*. For Everyone. London: Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
- Zahniser, James H., and Lisa Cagle. "Homosexuality: Toward an Informed, Compassionate Response." *Christian Scholar's Review* 36, no. 3 (March 1, 2007): 323–348.