

One Man and One Woman
Marriage and Same-Sex Relations

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Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley



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Table of Contents

Foreword by Rosaria Butterfield	vii
1. Foundations: Love, Authority, and Sexuality ..	1
2. Directions: God's Word to Ancient Israel about Homosexuality	27
3. Expectations: The Power of Sin and the Power of Christ	47
4. Conclusions: Grace and Truth	67
Bibliography of Works Cited	77

Foreword

We live in a time of radical sea change in sexual ethics. Indeed, even the very language that we use to represent people and relationships has been turned upside down. Words that used to assure stability of meaning—male, female, wife, husband—are routinely redefined by our secular culture so that they no longer mean what they describe. Our culture is more and more bold in its rejection of the Bible, casting it off as irrelevant or even dangerous. It also dismisses the sovereign power of a theistic God, the Creator of the universe and all humanity, who intervenes in the affairs of this world and sustains an intimate personal relationship with His people.

This moral revolt is breaking down our language into alphabet soup. No longer are people understood to be, ontologically, image bearers of a holy God, born male or female by design and purpose. Instead, we are told we are somewhere in the gender and sexuality continuum—LGBTQIAAP—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex,

asexual, pansexual. This arbitrary alphabet is both pervasive and inaccessible; indeed, it is only discernible to a select few. What are Christian parents to do if their covenant child returns from college identifying himself under the umbrella of these letters? How can one respond to a problem that we don't understand? In times like these, the Bible's wisdom seems to operate in a parallel universe to the culture's new rules and norms, and even believers feel unmoored and without hope.

We did not arrive at this problem overnight. The 2015 Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that gave constitutional right to gay marriage escalated a problem that started in the garden of Eden. Because certain categories of reality depend upon exclusivity to exist, gay marriage could not add a new dimension to the integrity of biblical marriage without erupting it. Gay marriage is as much an attack on personhood as it is on marriage. Today, in this era of late modernity, the progressive nature of original sin has degenerated into a world where declaring that there are ethical and moral responsibilities and constraints to being born male and female is considered by the world to be either hate speech or mere stupidity.

We live in a time where good is called evil and evil is called good.

And sadly, shamefully, this is the world that I helped create. I lived as a lesbian and advocated for this moral revolution for ten years of my life. And only when I met the risen Lord did I see how woe-fully and dangerously wrong I had been.

The book you hold in your hand is a pastoral guide through the landscape and land mines of this moral revolution, with the light of the gospel leading the way. Because we are all distorted by original sin, distracted by actual sin, and manipulated by indwelling sin, we are an easily deceived people in great need of pastoral shepherding as we navigate the terms and consequences of this mutiny.

Christians who struggle with unwanted homosexual desires will find in this book loving reminders of what union with Christ promises as we fight against indwelling sin. Parents of adult children who identify as gay or lesbian will better understand how to listen to the discerning words of Scripture as they shake the gates of heaven for their children. And all Christians will be better able to understand and defend why the God who created us has exclusive claims in defining what it means to be male and female and designing biblical marriage as an ordinance of creation and therefore a glorious institution that God made for His glory and our good.

—Rosaria Butterfield

Foundations: Love, Authority, and Sexuality

People are asking questions. “My friend told me she is proud to go to a church where the pastor is a lesbian. What should I say?” “Should I go to the wedding of my cousin, knowing that he is engaged to another man?” “My son feels so confused about who he is, and one of his friends is telling him that there’s nothing wrong with gay relationships if you love each other. How can I give him guidance?” “Why do some churches say that the Bible is not against homosexuality? What does the Bible really say about it?”

Few subjects stir up as much controversy today among professing Christians as that of sexual relationships between people of the same gender. For nearly two thousand years, churches uniformly opposed same-sex sexual activity as sinful. That unity has now been shattered. In the last few decades, some denominations have welcomed people practicing same-sex erotic activity into membership and even ordained ministry. Many Reformed and Evangelical

writers still teach that homosexuality is a violation of the laws of God, a sin which Christ must forgive and break its ruling power if we are to count ourselves as Christians.¹ However, an increasing number of people and churches say that one can practice homosexuality and be a Christian.² Both positions claim

1. This is the historic position of the Christian church. Some recent books supporting it include Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction* (Epsom, Surrey, U.K.: The Good Book Company, 2013); Michael L. Brown, *Can You Be Gay and Christian? Responding with Love and Truth to Questions about Homosexuality* (Lake Mary, Fl.: Charisma House, 2014); Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2015); Mark Christopher, *Same-sex Marriage: Is It Really the Same?* (Leominster, U.K.: Day One, 2009); Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2015); Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001); R. Albert Mohler Jr., ed., *God and the Gay Christian? A Response to Matthew Vines* (Louisville, Ky.: SBTS Press, 2014), free ebook accessed August 4, 2015, available from <http://sbts.me/ebook>, henceforth cited as *Response to Matthew Vines*; Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA), *The Gospel and Sexual Orientation*, ed. Michael Lefebvre (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2012); James R. White and Jeffrey D. Niell, *The Same Sex Controversy* (Bloomington, Minn.: Bethany House, 2002); Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

2. Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978); David G.

the moral high ground. No doubt many outsiders find the debate confusing, and ask, “What do Christians believe about homosexuality?”³

Myers and Letha Dawson Scanzoni, *What God Has Joined Together? A Christian Case for Gay Marriage* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005); Pim Pronk, *Against Nature? Types of Moral Argumentation Regarding Homosexuality*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? A Positive Christian Response*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1994); Dan. O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003); Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (Colorado Springs: Convergent Books, 2014).

3. Even the terminology can be confusing. Writers of previous eras spoke of male-to-male sex as *sodomy*, an allusion to the ancient city of Sodom. The word *homosexuality* was not coined until the late nineteenth century. The media currently prefers to use the words *gay* and *lesbian*. See *The Associate Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law, 2013* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 114. Others use the acronym *LGBT* to include bisexual and transgender, the latter referring to persons identifying themselves as a different gender than that of their biological birth. Some find even this terminology an oversimplification of queer sexuality, too confining, or failing to account for fluid and changing desires. The phrase *same-sex attraction* (SSA) is used as well, though this may fail to distinguish between sexual attraction and emotional attraction. In this book, we will generally use the adjective *homosexual* (*homo* being from the Greek word for “same,” not the Latin word for “man”) since it encompasses both male-to-male and female-to-female sexuality, although with the caveat that we do not

In this book, we will set forth the basic teachings of the Holy Scriptures on homosexual desires and acts, and respond to arguments often used by those of differing viewpoints. In a short work such as this, we cannot address all practical questions about how to love and serve people with homosexual inclinations, or how to live as Christians in a cultural and political environment hostile to the Word of God. However, we do intend this short book to be very practical, a tool to equip the people of God to speak the truth in love.

On what basis do we make decisions regarding sex? What gives anyone the right to make moral pronouncements about such a personal matter? How do we know what gender and marriage mean?

The Law of Love and the Teachings of the Bible

The questions raised by homosexuality are deeply personal, for the most important factors in this controversy are not civil laws and policies, but human persons whom God calls into right relationship with Him through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sometimes they are persons whom we know, persons close to us. Always they are persons whom God calls us to

endorse the idea of an immutable sexual orientation sometimes implied in the term.

love: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Lev. 19:18), a command second in importance only to “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart” (Matt. 22:37–39).

Some people would say that the discussion need go no further than, “Love thy neighbor.” There is no absolute law, they say, except the law of love. They dismiss or reinterpret the teachings of the Bible because they claim that the rejection of homosexuality causes great harm to people inclined to it.⁴ If labeling homosexuality as sin produces bad results for people, then the label must be wrong.⁵ One man wrote, “Any interpretation that hurts people, oppresses people, or destroys people cannot be the right interpretation.”⁶ The love of God, we are told, requires the church to accept unconditionally those who practice homosexuality.

Cruel words spoken and violent actions done by professing Christians have hurt people deeply. Slander and murder are forbidden by the Bible. We hear

4. Scanzoni and Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor*, 1–3, 6, 28–29, 43, 46, 51–52. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 12, 18–19, 25, 29–30, 50, 95–96, 129, 156–58, 165–67, 169–72.

5. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 14, 129. On Vines’s abuse of Christ’s metaphor of bearing good fruit, see Denny Burk, “Suppressing the Truth in Unrighteousness: Matthew Vines’ Take on the New Testament,” in *Response to Matthew Vines*, 55.

6. Dale Martin, cited in Brown, *Can You Be Gay and Christian?*, 201.

the pain in the words of one secret lesbian, “If the people in my church really believed that gay people could be transformed by Christ, they wouldn’t talk about us or pray about us in the hateful way that they do.”⁷ Christians must repent of their failure to be like Christ in His love for sinners, and of their own failure to walk in humility, knowing that they too are sinners.

However, the Scriptures also teach that unrepentant homosexuality harms people. It degrades them in this present life (Rom. 1:27) and excludes them from the kingdom of God forever (1 Cor. 6:9–10). Love is patient and kind, yet love does not rejoice in sin but rejoices in the truth (1 Cor. 13:4, 6). Therefore, in love we must speak the truth and call people to repent of their sins—even as we repent of ours (Eph. 4:15; Matt. 4:17; 7:5).

To say that the only law is the law of love is not obedience to God’s Word, but situational ethics, a form of moral relativism that rejects the teachings of the Bible in order to follow our feelings. Christ did not say, “Just love one another, and don’t worry about the rest of the Bible,” but gave a host of specific commands and teachings. How can we know what hurts or heals, what oppresses or liberates, and what

7. Anonymous, quoted in Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor’s Journey into Christian Faith*, expanded ed. (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2015), 25.

destroys or saves people, apart from God's Word? Christ did not come to abolish God's laws, but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17). He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). God's laws teach us what love means: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments" (1 John 5:2). Therefore, we must love one another, and learn from the Scriptures what God commands.

Sexual Orientation and the Authority and Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures

When we come to a question like this, we need more than human authority to render a verdict. In this controversy, people often attempt to make a case based on the opinions of experts, whether psychologists, theologians, biologists, sociologists, or lawyers. As informative as such writers may be, they are mere men and women, and often err and contradict each other. Christians have long affirmed that "God alone is Lord of the conscience."⁸ Therefore, only the Word

8. Westminster Confession of Faith (20.2), in *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries in English Translation: Volume 4, 1600–1693*, comp. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 257. The London Baptist Confession of 1677/1689 (21.2) makes the same statement (4:557).

of God can determine our standards and beliefs about what pleases Him.

The Bible of the Old and New Testament is the written word of God. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16–17, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

As we will see in the following pages, the Bible does speak to homosexuality, and it unequivocally and repeatedly condemns it as a sin from which people must be saved by Christ. There is not a single example of a positive commendation of homosexuality in Scripture. This is acknowledged even by many who desire to promote same-sex relationships.⁹

Given the clear statements in the Scriptures against homosexuality, how can a person claim to be a Christian and yet justify homosexuality? The argument often made is that *the Scriptures do not speak*

9. “Wherever homosexual intercourse is mentioned in Scripture, it is condemned.” Pronk, *Against Nature*, 279. Via writes, “The biblical texts that deal specifically with homosexual practice condemn it unconditionally.” Via and Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, 93. See also Luke Timothy Johnson and Diarmaid MacCulloch, cited in DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?*, 132.

to the modern understanding of a person's sexual orientation.¹⁰

In response, we must first ask what they mean by "sexual orientation." According to the American Psychological Association, "Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes."¹¹ Thus orientation is a remarkably broad and indefinite concept based upon a person's experience of social and sexual desires.¹² The Scriptures speak very positively of emotional connections and friendships between people of the same sex. However, with regard to sexual desires, though the Bible does not use the term *orientation*, it speaks of male sexual desire toward males and female sexual desire for females, and condemns such desires (Rom. 1:26–27). Thus Scripture does address the orientation of a per-

10. Hendrik Hart, foreword to Pronk, *Against Nature*, xi; Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 21–41, 129. Mohler says of Vines, "His main argument is that the Bible simply has no category of sexual orientation." Mohler, "God, the Gospel and the Gay Challenge: A Response to Matthew Vines," in *Response to Matthew Vines*, 14.

11. American Psychological Association, *Answers to Your Questions: For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008), 1, accessed August 4, 2015, <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.pdf>.

12. Mohler, "God, the Gospel and the Gay Challenge," in *Response to Matthew Vines*, 18.

son's sexual attractions. It is not true to say that the Bible has a hole in it, and we must fill the hole with man's wisdom about sexual orientation.

The modern concept of sexual orientation, however, goes beyond a description of our desires; it seeks to set a new definition of identity and personhood. The Word of God teaches that our identity is found in being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). Therefore, our lives are defined by how we relate to God and His will. In the modern, secular perspective, our identity as human persons is found in our feelings and emotional experiences.¹³ This perspective grows out of the philosophical movement known as Romanticism. Secular psychologists from Freud onward have especially focused our identity on our *sexual* feelings.¹⁴ This fundamental shift in how we define our identity sets the stage for people to claim a “homosexual sexual orientation” as their basic identity. Thus any attack on the goodness of homosexuality is an

13. This expresses one side of our modern dualism in the secular hybrid of the philosophies of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The modern perspective divides truth into two separate categories: that which is scientific, empirical, physical, and deterministic; versus that which is personal, emotional, spiritual, and free. Nancy R. Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2004), 101–109. Thus personal matters are held to be entirely subjective, which is a rejection of the authority of God.

14. Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 94–95.

attack on their persons. We must reject this distorted sense of identity. Our changing emotions and experiences cannot define us. God is the Creator and Lord of all. He made us by His word, and He continues to define us by His word. The most basic question about our identity is not, “How do I feel?” but “How am I representing God as His living image?”

This objection also misunderstands the Bible’s teaching on sin. Not all sin is a direct act of the will or conscious choice. As the last of the Ten Commandments shows, sin also includes evil desires (Ex. 20:17). Since the fall of mankind from our original state of righteousness, the very mindset of the human race is fundamentally hostile to God, our desires have become corrupt lusts, and our hearts evil (Gen. 3:6; 6:5; 8:17; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10–12; 8:7–8; Eph. 2:3). Though believers in Christ are so changed by God’s Spirit as to “delight in the law of God after the inward man,” they still find “evil is present” in themselves when they choose to do good (Rom. 7:21–22). The Bible calls this indwelling evil “sin” (Rom. 7:20). Therefore, part of our sinfulness is our corrupt desires that lead to sinful choices and actions.¹⁵ To say that

15. This view of sin is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Reformation faith (following Augustine) as distinct from Roman Catholicism, which sees corrupt desires as disordered but not sinful. Denny Burk, “Is Homosexual Orientation Sin?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 1 (2015): 97–99.

homosexuality is deeply rooted in a person through tenacious desires does not prove it to be right; many of our desires are stubbornly corrupted by sin. If a person's desires are oriented toward something forbidden by God's Word, then that orientation is sinful. Therefore, while there is nothing wrong with emotional attachments and social desires toward people of the same gender, a *sexual* attraction towards a person of the same sex is sinful.

Someone might object, however, that the biblical writers were ignorant of what modern science has shown, namely, that biology determines sexual orientation through brain structure, hormones, and/or genetics. This objection misrepresents the findings of science.¹⁶ Both professional psychologists and psychiatrists acknowledge that, while people often do not consciously choose their desires, the cause of such desires cannot be simplistically attributed to biology. They acknowledge that we do not understand how biology and personal experiences shape sexual desire.¹⁷ If sexuality were determined simply

16. Christopher, *Same-sex Marriage*, 29–32.

17. "There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation.... Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation." American Psychological Association, *Answers to Your Questions: For a*

by genetics, then in a pair of identical twins, both twins would have the same sexual inclinations—but this is often not the case.¹⁸

Even if certain biological factors do tend to lead to homosexual inclinations, this does not prove such inclinations to be innocent. The Bible teaches that original sin has brought disorder to man's body and soul so that even our bodies must be brought into submission and cleansed from defilement.¹⁹ If it could be proven that some people have a genetic tendency towards becoming rapists, we would certainly not justify sexual violence on that basis.

Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality, 2. "The American Psychiatric Association believes that the causes of sexual orientation (whether homosexual or heterosexual) are not known at this time and likely are multifactorial including biological and behavioral roots which may vary between different individuals and may even vary over time." American Psychiatric Association, "Position Statement on Issues Related to Homosexuality" (2013), accessed August 5, 2015, <http://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Learn/Archives/Position-2013-Homosexuality.pdf>.

18. "Sexual orientation is not an immutable part of our biology.... If it were, the concordance rate would not be so low between identical twins (i.e., both twins would always have the same sexual orientation, which is not the case)." DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*, 112. See Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 403–406.

19. Rom. 6:19; 7:24; 8:10, 13; 1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Cor. 7:1. See RPCNA, *Gospel and Sexual Orientation*, 14.

The objector might reply that, whatever the cause, many people have an inherent homosexual orientation which does not and cannot change. This is a popular claim, but it too is dubious. There are psychologists calling for a recognition of “sexual fluidity” in both men and women, that is, that desires are not immutable, but change with time and relationships.²⁰ A significant number of those who self-identify as “homosexuals” experience some sexual desires towards people of the opposite gender.²¹ Some people inclined towards homosexuality report success after seeking to reduce same-sex desires and increase

20. Lisa M. Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire* (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); “Just How Different are Female and Male Sexual Orientation?” video lecture, October 17, 2013, *Cornell University*, accessed August 7, 2015, <http://www.cornell.edu/video/lisa-diamond-on-sexual-fluidity-of-men-and-women>. She argues for “fluidity as a general feature of sexuality” for males and females of all sexual inclinations (37:38 in video). Diamond is a feminist and lesbian psychology professor at the University of Utah. See also Joe Kort, “Going with the Flow: Male and Female Sexual Fluidity,” *Huffington Post: Gay Voices*, updated 4/10/2015, accessed August 7, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joe-kort-phd/going-with-the-flow-male-_b_6642504.html. Note that Kort’s blog post contains some offensive language. Butterfield writes, “No one in the LGBT community from which I emerged would have ever claimed to have been ‘born this way.’ We believed that sexuality was fluid.” Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 108.

21. Diamond, “Just How Different are Female and Male Sexual Orientation?” video lecture.

opposite-sex desires.²² Most significantly, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit does change people who formerly delighted and engaged in same-sex erotic activity and gives them a new identity and a new way of life in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:9–11). Again, God has spoken on this issue, and people once given over to homosexual activity can repent of this sin and be delivered from it.

This objection is also falsified by history. Rather than driving a wedge between the Bible and the modern world, we should recognize that we live in a situation well understood in the ancient world. Greco-Roman culture considered it acceptable for a man to engage in sexual activity in many different directions over the same time period or variously at different times. Thus one man might have sex with his wife, make use of female prostitutes, have a sexual relationship with another man, engage in pederasty or a socially approved sexual relationship with a teenaged boy, and commit adultery with non-prostitute women other than his wife. Though different men may have had different inclinations at various times, the culture did not have a binary concept of

22. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 418–29; Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2007), 325.

definitive homosexual versus heterosexual orientations.²³ Nor is such the concept taught in the Holy Scriptures.

Another, similar objection is that the apostle Paul did not understand the possibility of a positive, affectionate sexual relationship between men, and therefore wrote only against abusive or promiscuous relationships.²⁴ However, it is not true to say that people in Greco-Roman culture were ignorant of the full range of sexual relationships that we know of today.²⁵ Vines errs when he writes that “same-sex relations... were approved only when a man dominated someone of a lower social status.”²⁶ Though there certainly were such oppressive relationships, especially with

23. William L. Petersen, “Can ΑΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ Be Translated by ‘Homosexuals?’” *Vigiliae Christianae* 40, no. 2 (June 1986): 188; Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 31–36.

24. “In the few places where same-sex sexual acts are mentioned in Scripture, the context suggests idolatry, violent rape, lust, exploitation, or promiscuity. Nothing is said about homosexual orientation as understood through modern science, nor is anything said about the loving relationship of two same-sex persons who have covenanted to be life partners.” Myers and Scanzoni, *What God Has Joined Together*, 84–85.

25. DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Say about Homosexuality?*, 83–86. He cites the findings of scholars such as Thomas Hubbard (non-Christian), William Loader (proponent of same-sex marriage), Bernadette Brooten (lesbian), N. T. Wright (Anglican bishop), and Louis Crompton (gay).

26. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 37.

slaves, there were also examples of male lovers both of whom were regarded as noble, such as the Greek heroes Harmodius and Aristogeiton, and according to some ancient interpretations, Achilles and Patroclus. In Plato's *Symposium*, Pausanias and Agathon shared a sexual relationship as adults, and Pausanias speaks of men entering into sexual relationships with youths that would extend into a lifetime of love.²⁷ The ancient world did have a concept of two men in a so-called "positive, committed relationship."

Therefore, the attempt to sideline biblical teaching as irrelevant to same-sex orientation fails. Biblical writers knew of such relationships, and included them when they wrote against homosexuality.

Christians must not embrace a view of the Bible as insufficient to guide our faith and obedience. As we saw, in 2 Timothy 3:16–17, Paul wrote that God gave us the Bible to make His servants "perfect, thoroughly furnished," that is, "completely equipped" for every good work, including the works of moral reproof and direction. Therefore, the Bible is sufficient for our moral instruction, and to say that it does not give us competent instruction on homosexuality is to deny the wisdom of the God who inspired it. This is not a new issue. Shall we believe that a loving God left

27. Plato, *Symposium*, 181d. See Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 351–52.

his people for thousands of years with an incomplete view of their sexuality?

If the biblical writers were silent on such an important matter concerning our sexuality, then we would have to ask, “What else does the Bible not know about what it means to be human?” In other words, as Al Mohler writes, it would imply that “the Bible simply cannot be trusted to understand what it means to be human, to reveal what God intends for us sexually, or to define sin in any coherent manner.”²⁸ This amounts to allowing our feelings and experience to dictate our beliefs and interpretation of the Bible, instead of submitting to God to direct our beliefs and interpret our experiences through His Word.²⁹

The Bible does give holistic instruction on sexuality, including homosexuality, and we must hear what it says. Furthermore, the conclusions of the social sciences are not neutral, objective facts, but

28. R. Albert Mohler Jr., “God, the Gospel and the Gay Challenge,” in *Response to Matthew Vines*, 19.

29. “When he begins his book, Vines argues that experience should not drive our interpretation of the Bible. But it is his experience of what he calls a gay sexual orientation that drives every word of this book. It is this experiential issue that drives him to relativize text after text and to argue that the Bible doesn’t speak directly to his sexual identity at all, since the inspired human authors of Scripture were ignorant of the modern gay experience.” Mohler, “God, the Gospel and the Gay Challenge,” in *Response to Matthew Vines*, 18.

the writings of people profoundly influenced by the spirit of the age. Whenever the word of man contradicts the Word of God, we must obey God.

Gender, Sexuality, and Marriage in God's Created Order

In order to understand the Bible's teaching on homosexuality, we must step back and consider what the Scriptures say about mankind and sexual relationships. God laid the foundations of these truths in the book of Genesis, which contains an historical account of mankind's origin. The first chapters of the book of Genesis teach us several key facts about the human race.

1. God created man *in the image of God* (Gen 1:27). People are not animals (Gen. 1:24–25), but God's special creations designed to reflect His character as they rule over the world (Gen. 1:26, 28). This teaches us that though mankind has fallen into misery by our sin (Genesis 3), every human life is precious (Gen. 9:6), and every human being should be treated with basic respect (James 3:9). God created the human race for His glory, and we have a high and noble calling (Isa. 43:7).

Therefore, we should not act like animals (though our bodies share similarities with some animals),

or try to justify our behavior by comparing it to the behavior of animals. Our lives have a deeper meaning than our physical desires. We are spiritual beings who exist for God. We have souls. We are responsible persons made for His glory, and are accountable to our Creator. This also implies that we must treat all people with honor and dignity (1 Peter 2:17).

2. God created man *in two distinct genders*: “male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27). God created the man first out of the earth and gave him God’s law to be the leader that she needs (Gen. 2:9, 15–17; Eph. 5:23; 2 Tim. 2:13–14), and then created the woman out of the man as a “help meet for him,” the helper that he needs who shares the same human nature (Gen. 2:18, 21–23). Both had the dignity and authority to rule over God’s world, but were distinct from each other as male and female (Gen. 1:27–28).

This teaches us that gender is not merely a personal mindset or a social construct, but an aspect of God’s fixed order in creation. The genders of the first man and woman were set when God first created them on the sixth day, and the gender of each of their offspring is set at conception.³⁰ The words translated

30. We recognize that some people are born with a mixture of male and female genitalia (*intersex* persons). However this is a rare biological abnormality resulting from the fall, and most

“male” and “female” reflect categories applicable to animals as well as humans,³¹ implying that the gender of each person corresponds to his or her physical sex.³² Both men and women share the image of God, but God designed them to function in different ways for His glory. It is very good for a man to be a man, and very good for a woman to be a woman (Gen. 1:31). They should not try to erase their differences or construct a genderless society, but to live as equal but different persons, a difference visible even in their clothing and hairstyles (Deut. 22:5; 1 Cor. 11:14–16).³³

intersex individuals identify as a man or woman. This condition is distinct from homosexuality and transgenderism.

31. Gen. 6:19; 7:3, 9, 16.

32. It is not helpful to assign a person a gender identity distinct from genitalia and based upon brain biology or some personality tendencies more commonly found in the opposite sex. Jacob and Esau were quite different, but both equally male. RPCNA, *Gospel and Sexual Orientation*, 23–28.

33. Vines writes, “Adam and Eve were right for each other, not because they were different, but because they were alike.” Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 46. On the contrary, Gen. 1–2 teaches the complementarity of the two genders both because they are alike (man created in God’s image) *and different* (male and female). See Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991), 95–112. Vines refuses to recognize that both the sameness and differentiation of Adam and Eve made their union

At this point the Scriptures confront *transgenderism*, the personal assumption of a different gender identity than one's biological sex at birth. Transgenderism is not identical to homosexuality, and is commonly treated as a distinct matter. Katy Steinmetz writes, "There is no concrete correlation between a person's gender identity and sexual interests; a heterosexual woman, for instance, might start living as a man and still be attracted to men."³⁴ Some would go so far as to remove any fixed sense of gender in our culture and replace it with an infinite variety of identities or an "omnigender."³⁵ This is rebellion against the order established by the good Creator of all things.

In today's popular rhetoric, gender is a social construct, whereas sexual orientation is an unchangeable identity. The Bible takes the exact opposite approach. The idea of sexual orientation, so often implied in the nouns homosexual and heterosexual,

good. This is part of his overall strategy to appeal to evangelical egalitarians to take the next logical step: if the two genders are not distinct and complementary, then they can be interchanged in sexual relations. See Mohler, "God, the Gospel and the Gay Challenge," in *Response to Matthew Vines*, 19–21.

34. Cited in R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 68.

35. Virginia R. Mollenkott, *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001). See the discussion in Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent*, 72.

is “nothing more than a fragile social construct, and one constructed terribly recently,” as Michael Hannon writes.³⁶ Our identity was set by our Creator when He made us in His image in two distinct genders. Mohler says, “The binary system of gender is grounded in a biological reality and is not socially constructed.... We affirm that biological sex is a gift from God to every individual and to the human community to which that individual belongs.”³⁷

3. God united one man and one woman *in marriage to produce children*. God said to them, “Be fruitful, and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). He oriented their sexuality towards each other in a lasting sexual bond. Through the creation of the first man and woman, God revealed His purpose for marriage: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). The Lord Jesus Christ quoted this statement as the word of the Creator, and taught us to build our view of marriage upon it (Matt. 19:4–6).

Since God provided an authoritative pattern for the marital, sexual relation, we are not free to create our own forms of sexuality according to our desires

36. Michael W. Hannon, “Against Heterosexuality: The Idea of Sexual Orientation Is Artificial and Inhibits Christian Witness,” *First Things*, no. 241 (March 2014): 28.

37. Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent*, 80.

or imagination. God's answer for mankind's sexual needs is: "let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (1 Cor. 7:2). Marriage was not invented by man, and man has no right to define marriage as he pleases. Marriage is God's gift for the mutual help and companionship of one man and one woman. Its link to bearing children shows that one purpose of marriage is the bringing of children into the world, a purpose that requires the participation of a man and a woman (Gen. 1:27–28; 4:1, 25).

4. Although God created human gender, sexuality, and marriage in perfect goodness (Gen. 1:31), mankind quickly *fell from this happy state into sin and misery* by disobeying God's command. Sin entered the world, not just bad decisions but a distortion of human thinking and desires (Gen. 3:6). The verdict of God over the whole human race, apart from those under God's saving grace, is that every purpose of the thoughts of our hearts is "only evil continually," even from our childhood (Gen. 6:5; 8:21).

Therefore, we cannot build our sense of right and wrong about sexuality (or anything else) upon our own thoughts and feelings. Mankind is corrupted and darkened by sin, with the result that people may commit sexual sin with little or no remorse (Eph. 4:17–19). We turn things upside-down, provoking

God to exclaim, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20). Our only hope to know the truth is the Word and Spirit of God.

The very words homosexual and heterosexual arose from an attempt to define people according to their sexual desires. This distorts our identity. While our sexual desires are an important aspect of who we are, they are far from the core of our identity. Rosaria Butterfield writes, “If I self-define as heterosexual or homosexual...everything, including nonsexual affection, is subsumed by this new humanity of sexuality.”³⁸ We must resist the attempt to make our feelings into our identity, and instead learn our identity from our Creator. Rather than saying, “I am a homosexual,” or “I am a heterosexual,” we should say, “I am a man or woman created in the image of God for His glory, but fallen into sin.” The Bible’s call to repentance is not a call to change from one sexual orientation to another. Butterfield says, “You cannot repent of sexual orientation, since sexual orientation is an artificial category built on a faulty premise.”³⁹ The call to repentance is a call to reject the lie that our sexual desires define us, and to submit to the

38. Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 98.

39. Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 107.

authority of God's Word in order to learn who we are and what we must become.

Therefore, the Bible offers us foundations on which to build a true and realistic view of human sexuality. Rather than simplistically say, "All we need is love," we have recourse to God's detailed instructions throughout Scripture. The Bible does address homosexuality, and it does so in the context of a view of marriage as the union of two divinely created genders, man and woman.