

KEVIN DEYOUNG

What Does the Bible Really Teach about

Homosexuality?



“DeYoung takes on the most pressing issue of our day: whether we will be conformed to the spirit of the age or whether we will follow Christ. Against the sexual revolution and its high priests, DeYoung presents an alternative vision, the ancient wisdom of a Christian sexual ethic. This is the best book on this subject that I have read. Every Christian confronted with these issues, which means every Christian, should read this book. You will finish it better equipped to preach the gospel, to love the lost, to welcome the wounded, and to stand up for Jesus and his Word.”

Russell D. Moore, President, The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission; author, *Tempted and Tried*

“Anyone looking for an accessible, reader-friendly, one-stop treatment of the biblical underpinnings of traditional Christian marriage and sexual ethics would do well to read this book. It is lucid but not simplistic, judicious but not obscure, and convicted but not shrill.”

Wesley Hill, Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Trinity School for Ministry; author, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*

“This book provides a short, accessible, and pastoral toolbox for all Christians to navigate the shifting cultural landscape of sexuality and find confidence and hope in how the Bible directs our steps. DeYoung offers wise and readable apologetics here, providing his readers with both motive and model for how to think and talk about homosexuality and the Christian faith in a way that honors Christ and gives hope to a watching world.”

Rosaria Butterfield, former tenured Professor of English at Syracuse University; author, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*; mother, pastor’s wife, and speaker

“What a gift this book is to the church! Kevin approaches the difficult question of sexuality with compassion and clarity, showing us what God’s Word says about it and why it is important. Well researched, accessibly written, and gospel saturated—this, in my opinion, is now the book on this subject for our generation!”

J. D. Greear, Lead Pastor, The Summit Church, Durham, North Carolina; author, *Jesus, Continued . . . Why the Spirit Inside You Is Better than Jesus Beside You*

“A superb, accessible resource for lay people in every walk of life who need help making sense of one of the most critical, defining issues of our day. Kevin DeYoung approaches this highly controversial topic in a way that is biblically faithful, pastorally sensitive, historically informed, and culturally aware. The stakes are high. We cannot afford not to understand what Kevin has so helpfully laid out for us here.”

Nancy Leigh DeMoss, author; radio host, *Revive Our Hearts*

“Kevin DeYoung has written a good and faithful treatment on the Bible and homosexual practice for the average churchgoer. His work addresses most of the main issues and does so in a succinct and articulate manner. I commend it.”

Robert Gagnon, Associate Professor of New Testament, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary; author, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*

“In the heated atmosphere that currently surrounds discussion of every aspect of homosexuality, the most important domain where we need careful thinking and constrained rhetoric is what the Bible does and does not say on the matter. With his customary directness and clarity, Kevin DeYoung has now met this need. For those interested in careful exegesis of the relevant passages and patient discussion of the issues that arise from it, packaged in brevity and simplicity, it would be difficult to better this book.”

D. A. Carson, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“DeYoung provides a much-needed resource that addresses the important biblical and theological issues related to homosexuality while maintaining accessibility to a broad readership. The Ten Commitments at the end of this book display DeYoung’s pastoral heart and his understanding that regardless of our vices or virtues, we must preach the gospel, together strive for holiness, and exalt Christ above all things.”

Christopher Yuan, Bible Teacher; speaker; author, *Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son’s Journey to God*

“Written with the deftness, clarity, and tender grace we’ve come to expect from DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* answers, point by point, the revisionist theology making inroads in even the most conservative theological circles. It is simply the very best resource any follower of Christ can have to answer the challenge of homosexuality in the church.”

Gregory Koukl, President of Stand to Reason (str.org); author,
Tactics and Relativism

“Solid exegesis and tight writing make this book stand out. Kevin DeYoung concisely explains the key biblical passages and clearly responds to the key objections.”

Marvin Olasky, Editor in Chief, World News Group

What Does the Bible Really Teach about
Homosexuality?

Kevin DeYoung

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Introduction

What Does the Bible Teach about Everything?

The question “What does the Bible really teach about homosexuality?” is about a great many things. It’s about Jesus’s view of marriage, and the point of Romans 1, and the sin of Genesis 19 (whatever it was), and the abiding relevance (or not) of laws found in Leviticus. It’s about the meaning of a few disputed Greek words and the significance of procreation. It’s about the nature of same-sex behavior in the ancient world and whether the nature of personhood and personal fulfillment are defined by sexual expression. It’s about how we change, and what can change and what cannot. It’s about big themes like love and holiness and justice. It’s about personal hurts and hopes and fears and longings and duties and desires. It’s about faith and repentance and heaven and hell and a hundred other things.

But before we get up close to the trees, we should step back and make sure we are gazing upon the same forest. As is so often the case with controversial matters, we will never agree on the smaller subplots if it turns out we aren’t even telling the

same story. The Bible says *something* about homosexuality. I hope everyone can agree on at least that much. And I hope everyone can agree that the Bible is manifestly not a book *about* homosexuality. That is to say, if we think the big takeaway from this Big Book is the rightness or wrongness of homosexual activity, then we've managed to take a sublime narrative and pound it into a single talking point.

As important as the question is—"What does the Bible really teach about homosexuality?"—the first and more significant question is "What does the Bible teach about everything?" Which means we can't start this book with Leviticus 18 or Romans 1. We have to start where the Bible starts: in the beginning.

Tale as Old as Time (and Older Still)

The first person we meet in the Bible is God (Gen. 1:1). And the first thing we see about this God is that he is before all things (cf. Ps. 90:1–2). God is self-existent, independent, without beginning or end, without equal, the Creator God distinct from his creation, a holy and unrivaled God—eternal, infinite, and, in his essence, unlike anything or anyone that ever was, is, or will be. This is the God we first meet in the first verse of the first book of the Bible.

And this is the God who created all things (Neh. 9:6; Acts 14:15; 17:24). He created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it (Rev. 10:6). What's more, he made men and women as the crown of his creation, making them in his image and after his likeness (Gen. 1:26). He created them to rule and to reproduce and to have a relationship with him (Gen. 1:26–28; cf. 3:8).

But the first man and the first woman disobeyed God's command. They listened to the Slithering One as he tempted them

to doubt the clarity and goodness of God's word (Gen. 3:1–5). They took a bite from the forbidden fruit, and the fruit bit back. When sin entered the world, it was not just a fall; it was a curse. The man, the woman, the Serpent, the ground—all felt the sting of the curse so that “not the ways things are supposed to be” became “the ways things are.” In just retribution for sin, God drove the man and the woman from the garden and placed an angel to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). Their heaven on earth was no more, at least not until God would bring heaven back to earth (Gen. 3:15). The central plotline of the story of Scripture was set in motion: a holy God making a way to dwell in the midst of an unholy people.

Space does not permit a full retelling of this story, but one only has to look at the Promised Land or the temple to see the same narrative carrying forward. The Promised Land was a type of Eden, and Eden was a foreshadowing of the Promised Land. God describes the creation of Israel in the same way he describes the creation of the heavens and the earth (Jer. 4:23–26; 27:5). The boundaries of Eden and the boundaries of Canaan are similar (Gen. 2:10–14; 15:18). When Jacob comes back from the east to enter Canaan, he is met by an angel (Gen. 32:22–32)—an allusion to the angel placed at the entrance to Eden. Joshua likewise encounters a heavenly guardian when approaching the Promised Land by way of Jericho (Josh. 5:13–15).

God was giving his people a new kind of paradise, a reconstituted heaven on earth, a promised land in which God would be their God and they would be his people. But once again, they proved to be covenant breakers. Generations later, after being expelled from the garden, God plucked Abraham out of Babylon to go to the land of Canaan (Gen. 11:31–12:7). And generations later, after being expelled from the Promised Land, God plucked his people out of Babylon and sent the exiles back to their homes (Ezra 1:1). Adam had the garden and failed to

obey. Israel got the garden back, and they failed to obey. Both were expelled east of Eden. In both cases, it took the sovereign hand of God to bring his people back from Babylon to where they belonged. The Promised Land was a lens through which God's people were supposed to look back to the Eden that was and look forward to the Eden that was to come again (Heb. 11:8–10, 13–16).

In the same way, the tabernacle and the temple were meant to reflect the garden of Eden and symbolize a kind of heaven and earth. The tabernacle was a copy and shadow of what can be found in heaven (Heb. 8:5). Once inside the tent, God's people were transported into a symbolic heaven, staring at deep blue curtains with images of cherubim seeming to fly in midair (Ex. 26:1–37). The Spirit filled Bezalel and Oholiab in the fashioning of the tabernacle just as the Spirit hovered over the chaos in the formation of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:2; Ex. 31:2–11). The entrance to both the tabernacle and the temple was on the east, reminiscent of Eden. Angels were carved on the mercy seat on the lid of the ark of the covenant, which was placed inside the Holy of Holies—another reminder that, like Eden, angels were guarding the presence of God. Even the menorah, with its branches, buds, and blossoms, was meant to look like a tree, likely a reminder of the tree of life found in the garden (Ex. 25:31–36). The Lord God put his tabernacle in the middle of the camp (and later, his temple in the midst of the city) to visually represent his dwelling place among the people. Just as God had walked with Adam in the cool of the day, so he made a way to dwell in the midst of his chosen people.

But the temple was destroyed—divine retribution for the sins of the people. As often as God had made a way to dwell in the midst of his unholy people, just as often had they squandered their God-wrought restoration. So God sent his Son as a son of Abraham and a son of David (Matt. 1:1–17). His

coming would mark a new genesis, a new beginning (Matt. 1:1). God took on flesh and tabernacled among us (John 1:14). Jesus Christ would rebuild a new temple and reform a new Israel. Jesus would be a better Moses and a second Adam (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:20–28). He would die when we deserved to die (Mark 10:45). He would drink the cup of God’s wrath we deserved to drink (Mark 14:36). At the same time, in death he would succeed where all others had failed, so that instead of an angel guarding the entrance to God’s presence so we cannot enter in, we find an angel at the empty tomb telling us that Christ has gotten out. All the promises of God are Yes and Amen in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). And if we repent of our sins and believe in Christ, all the promised blessings—forgiveness, cleansing, redemption, eternal life—become our promises, too (Acts 2:37–40; 16:30–31; Eph. 1:3–10; 2:1–10).

The garden, the land, and the temple did not prefigure a day when holiness no longer mattered. They pointed to the heavenly reality that has been our hope since Adam and Eve were barred from Paradise. That’s why the picture of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22 is a portrait of Eden restored. The tree of life is the long-awaited reward for those who believe and persevere. The reward is for those who know the grace of Christ (Eph. 2:1–9), are joined to Christ (Rom. 6:1–10), and have credited to their account the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:7–11). The right to eat from the tree of life is not the right of those who profess one thing and do another (Rev. 3:1). It will not be enjoyed by those who forget their first love (2:4), those who deny the faith (2:10), or those who give themselves over to sexual immorality (2:14). Only those who overcome, only those who conquer, will be granted the right to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God (2:7). The heavenly vision of Revelation is the consummation of everything the garden, the land, and the temple pictured and

predicted. No chaos, no conflict, no tears, no death, no mourning, no crying, no pain, no night, and no detestable thing. Nothing to interfere with a holy God and his holy people. The way things were—the way things should be—will finally become the way things are forever and ever.

Smaller and Bigger Than You Think

That's the story. That's what the Bible is all about. In one sense, there's not a whole lot about homosexuality. The story of the Bible is not the story of God giving a lecture on same-sex marriage or trying a case before the Supreme Court. Although homosexuality is one of the most pressing and painful controversies of our day, it's not what the church has been singing and praying and preaching about for two thousand years.

And yet, in some ways it is.

For two millennia the church has focused on worshipping a Christ who saves, a Christ who forgives, a Christ who cleanses, a Christ who challenges us and changes us, a Christ who convicts us and converts us, and a Christ who is coming again. If, as the Apostles' Creed tells us, Jesus Christ is coming again to judge the living and the dead (Acts 17:31; Rev. 19:11–21); and if those who repent of their sins and believe in Christ will live forever with God in his new creation (Mark 1:15; Acts 17:30; Rev. 21:7; 21:1–27) through the atoning work of Christ on the cross (Isa. 53:1–12; Rom. 5:1–21); and if those who are not born again (John 3:5) and do not believe in Christ (John 3:18) and do not turn from their sinful practices (1 John 3:4–10) will face eternal punishment and the just wrath of God in hell (John 3:36; 5:29); and if among those in the lake of fire excluded from the heavenly garden are the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars (Rev. 21:8, 27)—then determining what constitutes

sexual immorality in God's mind has everything to do with the storyline of Scripture.

Is homosexual activity a sin that must be repented of, forsaken, and forgiven, or, given the right context and commitment, can we consider same-sex sexual intimacy a blessing worth celebrating and solemnizing?

That is the question this book seeks to answer. It's not a question that dominates the pages of the Bible. But it is a question that touches many of the important and most precious truths the Bible upholds.

What Kind of Book?

Given the highly charged nature of this topic, and considering the different sets of eyes that may be reading these words, perhaps it would be helpful to explain at the outset what kind of book this is: *this is a Christian book, with a narrow focus, defending a traditional view of marriage*. Let me develop each of those phrases.

This is a Christian book. That doesn't mean there is nothing here for non-Christians to consider. I hope that anyone interested in what the Bible says about homosexuality will be able to benefit from this book. But as a Christian writing a Christian book I am going to assume a fair amount of common ground. I'm going to treat the Bible as God's Word, as an inspired, authoritative, unbreakable, fully trustworthy account of divine revelation.¹ So whether you are a Christian leader trying to instruct others, a religious skeptic wanting to see what Scripture says, or a searching teenager trying to decide for yourself what to believe, I pray there is something in this book to help you understand the Bible a bit better.

¹For more on these themes see my book *Taking God At His Word: Why the Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

With a narrow focus. This second point follows from the first. While there is much to be gained by exploring homosexuality through the lenses of sociology, biology, history, politics, and philosophy, my aim is much simpler: to examine what the Bible teaches about same-sex behavior. Is it a sin—something always outside of God’s will—when persons of the same gender experience sexual intimacy together, or can homosexual practice be holy and pleasing to God in the right circumstances?

You might have other questions you’d like this book to address: How do I tell my parents what I’m struggling with? How do I help my children with their struggles? What if I’ve been abused? How can I trust the church when my experience with the church has been so negative? How can I minister to my friend now that he’s told me he’s attracted to men? Should I attend a same-sex wedding? Should I let my lesbian daughter and her partner spend the night at my house? How can I fight against the temptation to lust? What does the Bible say about sexuality in general? How can my church minister more effectively to those with same-sex attraction? How should I speak about these issues in the public sphere? How should I handle this issue in my church and denomination? What should our policy be on hiring and ministry cooperation? How will the church help me find relational fulfillment and gospel purpose as a celibate man or woman with same-sex attraction?

These are all good questions, and there are books and blogs and new resources coming out all the time in an effort to tackle these issues. For the most part, this book is not about these questions. At least not directly. Before any of these questions can be answered, we must first figure out whether homosexual practice is a sin or a blessing or something else. Once we answer that question, we can move on to a thousand points of application and search for the most courageous and winsome ways to address the sin and suffering we all experience. Of

course, at times our words will be few as we simply listen to, weep with, or put an arm around a friend. Human beings are complex creatures. There is no easy formula for shepherding a wayward soul or caring for a broken heart. But on the level of pastoral strategy and institutional discernment, our deliberations and conversations are bound to be ineffective, or even counterproductive, until we determine what the Bible teaches about the rightness or wrongness of homosexual activity. And for an increasing number of Christians, answering the question “What does the Bible really teach about homosexuality?” doesn’t appear as straightforward as it once did.

Defending a traditional view of marriage. In case you didn’t know already, I should make my position plain. I believe same-sex sexual intimacy is a sin. Along with most Christians around the globe and virtually every Christian in the first nineteen-and-a-half centuries of church history, I believe the Bible places homosexual behavior—no matter the level of commitment or mutual affection—in the category of sexual immorality. Why I believe this is the subject of the rest of this book.

Preaching to the Choir, but Different Choirs

At this point, candor is probably the best course of action. The elephant in the room is that there are different elephants in this room. We all come to this subject from different places with different perspectives. Let me address three types of people who may be reading this book.

First, there are the convinced. By convinced, I mean people who have opened this book certain (or at least fairly certain) that homosexual behavior is wrong. I’m going to argue for that same conclusion, but the right conclusion can be handled in the wrong way. Focusing on other people’s sins, while ignoring our own, would be the wrong way. Being haughty about biblical

correctness, instead of humbled by our own fallenness, would be the wrong way. Turning every conversation into a theological throwdown would be the wrong way. Treating people like projects to fix or problems to solve or points to be scored, instead of people to love, would be the wrong way. But “blessed are the pure in heart,” you say. Yes, and blessed are the merciful and the mournful too. If you walk away from this book angry and arrogant, disrespectful and devoid of all empathy, someone or something has failed. I pray the failure is not mine.

Second, there are the contentious. Here I’m thinking of those whose reaction is already somewhere between simmering frustration and absolute disdain. Maybe you picked up the book wanting to get a feel for the “other” side. Maybe your friends or parents told you to read the book because they thought it might change your mind. Maybe you were hoping I’d point us in the direction of a mythical third way. I admit I may not be able to convince you to change your mind in one hundred and fifty pages. But I hope your mind will at least be open. If you are not convinced by the lexical, logical, and exegetical arguments, I only ask that you make doubly sure it is the actual arguments that are unconvincing. Our feelings matter. Our stories matter. Our friends matter. But ultimately we must search the Scriptures to see what matters most. Don’t discount the messenger as a bigot if your real problem is with the Bible. I don’t think I’ve resorted to *ad hominem* attacks, and with God as my witness, and as far as I can discern my own heart, I’ve not written anything in this book out of personal animus for those in the gay community. You may think I’m wrong about everything. But if affirming homosexual behavior is the more enlightened conclusion, it seems only fair that this conclusion would be reached not based on gut reactions and growing peer pressure, but by bringing the best arguments to light and weighing them out through a reasoned use of Scripture (Acts 19:9–10; 24:25).

Third, there are the confused. I will be pleased if this book can be useful for all three groups. I especially hope that something in these pages will be helpful for brothers and sisters in this last category. I'm a pastor first and foremost, and while I have tried to make an intelligent case for the historic position on marriage and sexuality, I don't pretend to have plowed new scholarly ground or overturned every stone. That's because as much as we need dense, comprehensively footnoted, five-hundred-page tomes on this subject (and we do need them), we also need resources for moms and dads and lay elders and college students and grandparents and high school administrators and small group leaders and dozens of other "ordinary" people who aren't sure how to make sense of this issue. More than anything, I want to open the Scriptures and make things a little clearer for those who may be thinking, "Something seems wrong with these new arguments, but I can't put my finger on it," or "Maybe the Bible doesn't say what I thought," or "Maybe I need to give the Bible another chance," or "All my friends are saying one thing, and I'm not sure what to believe anymore." Keep digging. Keep praying. Keep trusting that God's Word is clear, true, and good.

Odds and Ends

My outline is simple and straightforward. Part 1 consists of five chapters which examine the five most relevant and most debated biblical texts related to homosexuality. In these chapters I hope to defend biblical sexual morality, namely, that God created sex as a good gift reserved for the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman. In part 2, I focus on seven of the most common objections to this traditional view of sexual morality. These seven chapters seek to demonstrate that there are no persuasive historical, cultural, pastoral, or

hermeneutical reasons for setting aside the plain meaning of the Bible as it has been understood for nearly two millennia. A concluding chapter tries to explain what is at stake in this debate.

Before we dive into the biblical texts, let me make two final preliminary comments. The first is about terms. There is no perfect way to describe the two sides in this debate, so rather than using just one set of terms I'll employ a variety of labels interchangeably. I may call the position that says homosexual behavior is sinful the *conservative* position, or the *historic* view, or the *nonaffirming* stance. Most often I'll use the term *traditional*. For the opposite view, I use words like *progressive*, *liberal*, or *affirming*. Most often I'll use the term *revisionist*. I understand these words can be misconstrued and that people on both sides won't like them for one reason or another, but I think they are all common enough to be understood.

It's also important to note that I'll be using a number of interchangeable phrases in reference to *homosexual activity*, including: *homosexual behavior*, *homosexual practice*, *same-sex sexual intimacy*, *same-sex sexual practice*, and *same-sex sexual activity*. Quite deliberately, these terms suggest a freely chosen activity or behavior. In using these terms I am not speaking in a blanket way about those who find themselves attracted to persons of the same sex, nor am I commenting on whether these desires were consciously chosen (almost certainly not) or whether and when the desires themselves are sinful. This is an important and complicated issue—exegetically, theologically, and pastorally—but it is not the focus of this book (for a brief discussion see “Appendix 2: Same-Sex Attraction: Three Building Blocks”). Unless specifically stated otherwise, it should be assumed that in speaking of homosexuality I am talking about the self-determined activity of those who are engaged in sexual behavior with persons of the same sex. If my writing sounds

more attuned to men who practice homosexuality, that's because the Bible is calibrated in the same way. The experience of women who practice homosexuality can be quite different from that of men, but the same determination about the activity itself applies equally to both sexes, even if the Bible leans more heavily in helping us understand men-with-men sexual behavior.

Along those lines, I've tried to avoid the labels *gay* and *lesbian* because I think they add confusion rather than clarity to the question at hand. In a few instances where the terms are employed, I've added a description like "those who self-identify as gay or lesbian." Similarly, although I do not believe two persons of the same sex actually can be married (according to the biblical and traditional understanding of the word *marriage*), I do refer to *same-sex marriage*. I chose to clearly state my objection up front rather than put "same-sex marriage" in quotation marks throughout the book or refer to it as *so-called* same-sex marriage.

My final introductory comment concerns the authority of Scripture. It's become cliché to hold up the Bereans as an example of biblical studiousness, but in this case it's a cliché worth perpetuating. When Paul preached the Word in Thessalonica, people were so angry they formed a mob, beat up his friends, and drove Paul and his companions out of the city (Acts 17:5–9). Paul's experience in Berea, however, was much different: "Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). I want to be like the Bereans, and I hope you do, too. Let's be eager and careful and persistent in studying the Word. On any subject, in any direction, we must be careful not to twist the Word to suit our own whims and wishes. As painful as it can be, we must reinterpret our experiences through the Word of

God, rather than let our experiences dictate what the Bible can and cannot mean.

If Jesus thought the Scriptures were spoken by God himself (Matt. 19:4–5) and utterly unbreakable (John 10:35), it’s certainly appropriate in any confusing, complicated, or controversial matter to ask at the very outset, “What does the Bible really teach?” Whether you are prepared to agree or disagree with this book, I encourage you to keep three things open: your head, your heart, and your Bible. Don’t settle for slogans and put-downs. Don’t assume the worst about those who disagree with you. And don’t think that God won’t speak to you through the Scriptures if you stay humble, honest, and hungry for the truth. After all, man does not live by bread alone (or sex alone), but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4).

Part 1

*UNDERSTANDING
GOD'S WORD*

One Man, One Woman, One Flesh

GENESIS 1-2

Suppose God wanted to create a world in which marriage required a man and a woman. How would he arrange this world? What sort of story would be told?

Perhaps he would first make the man, and then—seeing the man was all alone—make a suitable partner for him. Maybe, in an expression of their equality and complementarity, God would fashion the second human being out of the first. Maybe the name of the one (*woman*, *ishah* in Hebrew) would be derived from her natural complement (*man*, *ish* in Hebrew). And in order to show the unique fittedness of the man for the woman, perhaps God would give them a command (to be fruitful and multiply) that could only be fulfilled by the coming together of the two sexes. Maybe the story would end with the two—one man and one woman—starting a new family together

and entering into a new covenant relationship, solemnized by an oath and sealed by the sort of physical union capable of perpetuating this family and reflecting their status as image bearers of a divine Creator.

If God wanted to establish a world in which the normative marital and sexual relationship is that between persons of the opposite sex, Genesis 1–2 fits perfectly. The narrative strongly suggests what the church has almost uniformly taught: “Marriage is to be between one man and one woman.”¹ A different marital arrangement requires an entirely different creation account, one with two men or two women, or at least the absence of any hints of gender complementarity and procreation. It’s hard not to conclude from a straightforward reading of Genesis 1–2 that the divine design for sexual intimacy is not any combination of persons, or even any type of two persons coming together, but one man becoming one flesh with one woman.

In recent years, however, some have questioned whether this straightforward reading of the text is really all that straightforward. Eve, some argue, was not a complement to Adam as much as a basic companion. The problem she remedied was aloneness, not incompleteness. And doesn’t the text indicate that the woman, as opposed to the animals, was suitable for the man because she was *like* the man, not because she was different? Perhaps the language of “one flesh” does not depend on any particular sex act (or any sex act at all). After all, Laban told Jacob “you are my bone and my flesh!” (Gen. 29:14), and the tribes of Israel told David “we are your bone and flesh” (2 Sam. 5:1; cf. Judg. 9:2; 2 Sam. 19:12–13; 1 Chron. 11:1). Why make so much of some supposed sexual “fittedness” when Genesis 2 nowhere mentions procreation? To be sure, the argument goes,

¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) 24.1. This confession (1646) has been used by Reformed and Presbyterian churches for centuries and serves as a doctrinal standard for millions of Christians around the world.

Genesis uses the example of a man and a woman forming the covenant bond of marriage, but why can't this illustrate what is normal rather than prescribe what is normative? The union of two men or two women can demonstrate the same leaving and cleaving and the same intimate sharing of all things that we see from Adam and Eve in Genesis 2.

As plausible as this revisionist reading might look at first glance, it does not do justice to the specific contours of the creation account. There are at least five reasons we are right to think that Genesis 1–2 establishes God's design for marriage and that this design requires one man and one woman.

First, the way in which the woman was created indicates that she is the man's divinely designed complement. In Genesis 2:21, we see the Lord God taking something from the man (one of his ribs) in order to make a helper suitable for him (v. 18). Then verse 22 emphasizes that the woman was not fashioned out of thin air or out of the dust of the ground, but from "the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man." What makes the woman unique is both that she is like the man (expressed in the covenantal commitment statement "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh") *and* that she is differentiated from the man. The text has sameness and difference in view. Adam delights that the woman is not another animal *and* not another man. She is exactly what the man needs: a suitable helper, equal to the man but also his opposite. She is an *ishah* taken out of *ish*, a new creation fashioned from the side of man to be something other than a man (2:23).

Second, the nature of the one-flesh union presupposes two persons of the opposite sex. The phrase "one flesh" points to sexual intimacy, as suggested by the reference to nakedness in verse 25. That's why Paul uses the language of "one flesh" when warning the Corinthians against being "joined" to a prostitute (1 Cor. 6:15–16). The act of sexual intercourse brings a man

and a woman together as one relationally *and* organically. The sameness of the parts in same-sex activity does not allow for the two to become one in the same way. Mere physical contact—like holding hands or sticking your finger in someone's ear—does not unite two people in an organic union, nor does it bring them together as a single subject to fulfill a biological function.² When Genesis 2:24 begins with “Therefore” (or, “For this reason”), it connects the intimacy of becoming one flesh (v. 24) with the complementarity of Woman being taken out of Man (v. 23). The *ish* and the *ishah* can become one flesh because theirs is not just a sexual union but a *reunion*, the bringing together of two differentiated beings, with one made *from* and both made *for* the other.³

Third, only two persons of the opposite sex can fulfill the procreative purposes of marriage. One of the reasons it was not good for the man to be alone is because by himself he could not reflect the Creator's creative designs for the world. God created vegetation, trees, fish, birds, and every living creature “according to their kind” (Gen. 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25). The multiplication of the plant and animal world was to take place each according to its own type. Likewise, God created the man and the woman deliberately so that they could be fruitful and multiply (1:28). If the man was to fulfill this command, God would have to make “a helper fit for him” (2:18). While it's true that procreation is not explicitly mentioned in Genesis 2, it is directly commanded in Genesis 1 and specifically mentioned as affected by the fall in Genesis 3. Clearly, we are meant to

²Patrick Lee and Robert P. George, *Conjugal Union: What Marriage Is and Why It Matters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 50.

³See Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 60–63. Along the same lines, John Calvin observes, “Something was taken from Adam, in order that he might embrace, with greater benevolence, a part of himself. He lost, therefore, one of his ribs; but, instead of it, a far richer reward was granted him, since he obtained a faithful associate of life; for he now saw himself, who had before been imperfect, rendered complete in his wife” (*Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. John King [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989], 133).

see offspring issuing from the union of the uniquely fitted *ish* and *ishah*. That sometimes married men and women are unable to have children by reason of biological infirmity or old age does not change the procreative purpose of marriage found in Genesis. Marriage is, by definition, that sort of union from which—if all the plumbing is working properly—children can be conceived. Homosexual unions by their very nature do not meet this definition, nor can they fulfill this procreative purpose. The issue is not, as one revisionist author argues, whether procreation is required for a marriage to be valid.⁴ The issue is whether marriage—by nature, by design, and by aim—is a covenant between two persons whose one-flesh commitment is the sort of union which produces offspring.

The importance of procreation as the natural outworking of the marriage covenant is also seen in the Old Testament levirate laws. These laws, like the one in Deuteronomy 25:5–6 (cf. Mark 12:19), are so named because they obligate a deceased’s man’s brother to marry his widowed sister-in-law (if she is childless) and produce offspring for his brother. Reproduction was so plainly the normal expectation (and blessing) of marriage that even death could not be allowed to thwart marriage’s procreative purposes under the Mosaic law-covenant.

We see this principle even more clearly in Malachi 2:15:

Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.

The Hebrew in this verse is among the most difficult in the entire Old Testament, so we cannot be overly dogmatic about any interpretation, but the English Standard Version reflects the consensus

⁴James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 115.

of most translations (including the Holman Christian Standard Bible, King James Version, New International Version, New Living Translation, and New Revised Standard Version). Malachi, in rebuking the men of Judah for treating their wives faithlessly, deliberately harkens back to the creation account. He says in effect, “God made the man and the woman to become one flesh so they might produce godly offspring. Be on guard, therefore, that you not profane such a holy union by divorcing your wives.” Not only does Malachi recognize the procreative purpose in marriage; he finds this principle in the Genesis creation account. This is why the *Westminster Confession* (Presbyterian/Reformed) says marriage was given, in part, for the “increase” of “holy seed,” and the *Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican) says holy matrimony was “ordained for the procreation of children,” and *Humanae Vitae* (Catholic) says “the unitive significance and the procreative significance” are “both inherent to the marriage act.”⁵ While it would be wrong to say procreation is the *sole* purpose in marriage or that sexual intimacy is given *only* as a means to some reproductive end, it would also be wrong to think marriage can be properly defined without any reference to the offspring that should (and normally does) result from the one-flesh union of a husband and wife.

Fourth, Jesus himself reinforces the normativity of the Genesis account. When asked to weigh in on the Jewish divorce debate—whether divorce was permissible for any cause or whether only sexual sin could tear asunder the marriage covenant—Jesus sides with the more conservative Shammai school and disallows divorce for any cause except sexual immorality. To make his point, Jesus first reminds his audience that God “from the beginning made them male and female” and then quotes directly from Genesis 2:24 (Matt. 19:4–6; Mark 10:6–9). There is no

⁵ WCF 24.2; *Book of Common Prayer*, “The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony”; *Humanae Vitae* 2.12.

indication that Jesus references Genesis for mere illustrative purposes. In Jesus's mind, to answer the divorce question necessitates a right understanding of marriage, and to get at the nature of marriage one must go back to the beginning, where we see God instituting marriage as the lifelong union of a man and a woman.

Moreover, monogamy makes sense only within this Genesis understanding of marriage. Apart from the complementarity of the two sexes there is no moral logic which demands that marriage should be restricted to a twosome.⁶ I'm not arguing that the acceptance of same-sex marriage will lead inexorably to the acceptance of polygamy. But once you've accepted the former, you no longer have a consistent intellectual case to reject the latter. It is mere sentiment and lingering tradition which leads many progressives to insist that same-sex unions ought to involve the commitment of two persons and only two persons. If marriage is simply the formation of a kinship bond between those who are committed wholly to one another, there is no reason why multiple persons or groups of people cannot commit themselves wholly to one another. There is no internal coherence to the notions of monogamy and exclusivity if marriage is something other than the reunion of two complementary and differentiated sexes. It's because God made the woman *from* the man that she is also *for* the man (1 Cor. 11:8–9, 11–12). And it's because the two—male and female—are divinely designed complements each for the other that monogamy makes sense and same-sex marriage does not.

⁶ True, polygamy existed in the Old Testament, but it does not enter the picture as a divine blessing (Gen. 4:23–24) and never receives divine approval (see Denny Burk, *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013], 98–100). Polygamy is often the source of pain and heartache in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is ruled out by both Jesus (Matt. 19:3–9; Mark 10:1–12; cf. Matt. 5:31–32) and Paul (1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6). But even where polygamy was practiced, the two-ness of the marital bond still found expression. Solomon's wives were not married to each other. The nature of marriage was still a man and a woman in one-flesh union, even if the man joined with many women separately in multiple marriages. It is important to emphasize Jesus's assumption and methodology, to the effect that polygamy should be prohibited precisely because it fails to line up with God's design in the garden.

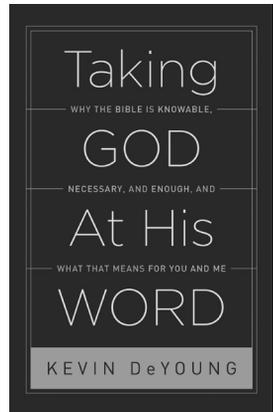
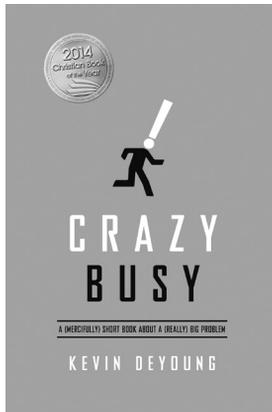
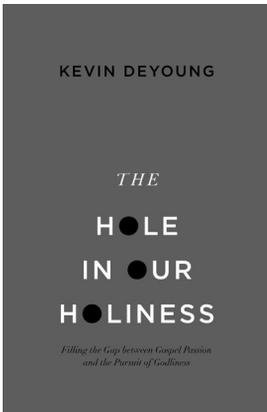
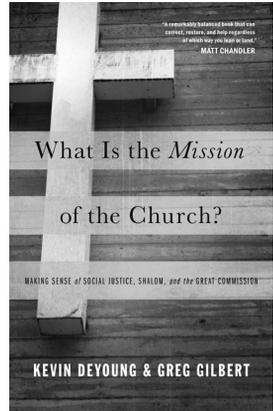
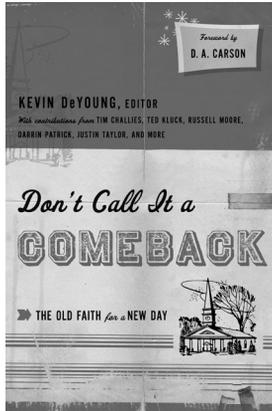
Fifth, the redemptive-historical significance of marriage as a divine symbol in the Bible only works if the marital couple is a complementary pair. Think about the complementary nature of creation itself. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). And not only that, but within this cosmic pairing, we find other “couples”: the sun and the moon, morning and evening, day and night, the sea and the dry land, plants and animals, and finally, at the apex of the creation, the man and his wife. In every pairing, each part belongs with the other but neither is interchangeable. Just as heaven and earth were created to be together—and, indeed, that’s how the whole story of the Bible ends—so marriage is to be a symbol of this divine design: two differentiated entities uniquely fitted for one another.⁷

It makes perfect sense, then, that the coming together of heaven and earth in Revelation 21–22 is preceded by the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19. Marriage was created as a picture of the fittedness of heaven and earth, or as Ephesians 5 puts it, of Christ and the church (vv. 31–32). The meaning of marriage is more than mutual sacrifice and covenantal commitment. Marriage, by its very nature, requires complementarity. The mystical union of Christ and the church—each “part” belonging to the other but neither interchangeable—cannot be pictured in marital union without the differentiation of male and female. If God wanted us to conclude that men and woman were interchangeable in the marriage relationship, he not only gave us the wrong creation narrative; he gave us the wrong *metanarrative*. Homosexuality simply does not fit with the created order in Genesis 1 and 2. And with these two chapters as the foundation upon which the rest of the redemptive-historical story is built, we’ll see that homosexual behavior does not fit in with the rest of the Bible either.

⁷See N. T. Wright’s Humanum 2014 lecture for more on this theme (available on YouTube, accessed December 4, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsB-JDsOTwE>).

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KEVIN DEYOUNG is senior pastor at University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan. He blogs regularly at the Gospel Coalition and has authored or coauthored numerous well-known books, including *Just Do Something*, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, *The Hole in Our Holiness*, *Crazy Busy*, and *Taking God At His Word*.

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