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DISCOVERING BIBLICAL EQUALITY

COMPLEMENTARITY
WITHOUT HIERARCHY



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GENDER EQUALITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

William J. Webb

When Christians discuss the issue of gender equality, often someone will ask, “Doesn’t acceptance of egalitarianism logically lead to acceptance of homosexuality?” Lying behind this question in part is a concern for consistency in how one interprets and applies the Bible. How is it, some argue, that egalitarians do not directly apply some very clear New Testament statements about women’s submission yet still accept the Bible’s prohibitions of same-sex relationships?¹ In response to these questions, this chapter will show that the hermeneutic by which egalitarians reject female subordination to male rule as transculturally normative is the same hermeneutic by which egalitarians affirm the Bible’s prohibition of homosexual behavior as a universal norm.

The concern patriarchalists have about hermeneutical consistency gets voiced

¹Another concern voiced by some patriarchalists is that an egalitarian position might lead to a blurring of gender distinctions altogether and thus lead to acceptance of a homosexual lifestyle. But the egalitarian claim that status differences between men and women are a cultural construct and not inherent in the sexual distinction hardly constitutes a move toward a wholesale rejection of male-female complementarity. Further, this concern seems to lack historical perspective, since several expressions of Christian faith in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fully affirmed women in ministry without that leading to same-sex relationships (Quakers, Salvation Army, early Pentecostals, some early holiness groups). On this see chapter two of this volume. Biblical egalitarians affirm, appreciate and seek to maintain a distinction between the sexes that honors God’s creation design. This includes not only the undisputed differences in sexual and reproductive function (which belie the claim that homosexual relations are somehow “natural”) but also the general psychological differences that can be discerned in studies comparing groups of men and groups of women. One might well argue that the best way to celebrate these general differences is the inclusion of women in leadership, since women can bring a focus that complements that of men. In an integrative sense, egalitarians are stronger advocates of complementarity than are hierarchical complementarians! On gender differences, see chapter twenty-seven of this volume.

several ways. Doesn't departing from the (apparently) plain meaning of the text regarding the role of women in the church and home² open the door to doing something similar regarding homosexual behavior? If one understands gender hierarchy as a culture-bound component of the biblical text, doesn't that encourage one to view the homosexuality prohibitions within a culture-bound framework? If one moves in a less restrictive direction in applying the Bible's women texts, doesn't that naturally lead to becoming less restrictive in applying the Bible's homosexuality texts?

Although these questions are like mixing oranges and bananas,³ they often come to us in the form of hermeneutical entanglements. Indeed, one of my purposes for writing *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* was to unravel the interpretive relationship between these interrelated subjects.⁴ This essay will show that an acceptance of an egalitarian view does not logically move one toward acceptance of a homosexual lifestyle. Six biblical and theological reasons will serve to illustrate the point: the core value of gender boundaries, the direction of redemptive movement, the vice/virtue and penal-code lists, the lack of canonical variance, biblical purpose statements, and pragmatic clues. A seventh, nontheological reason will highlight egalitarians who are producing major scholarly works against accepting homosexuality.

The Core Value of Gender Boundaries

An examination of Scripture reveals that the core value in the commands prohibiting homosexuality is the need to maintain a clear demarcation between men and women. There have been recent attempts to reduce the issue to a lack of lifelong covenant relationships (thus making covenant homosexuality acceptable today), but this is not the fundamental problem with homosexuality for the biblical authors. Rather, the *biblical* concern regarding same-sex sexuality is that Scripture proclaims that in creating humankind in God's own image, God created them "male and female" (Gen 1:27). In Genesis 2 this is reinforced in terms of God's

²I say "apparently plain" because patriarchalists assume that neither the texts themselves nor their own readings of them are culturally conditioned.

³That is, being born a man or a woman is categorically not the same as adopting a homosexual lifestyle. One is a matter of birth pure and simple, while lifestyle issues (not sexual proclivities) are finally the result of moral choices, not accidents of birth.

⁴William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

having made men and women for *each other*. God did not make men for men, nor did he make women for women.

The biblical prohibitions against homosexuality (and against transvestite dressing, its ritual counterpart) repeatedly emphasize a concern for defining and maintaining male and female relationship boundaries as a way of honoring our Creator. We shall see this underlying concern for male-female boundaries in several key texts: Leviticus 18:22, Deuteronomy 22:5 and Romans 1:18-32.

Leviticus 18:22. The homosexuality prohibition in the holiness code of Leviticus 18 is found within a grouping of laws that relate either directly or indirectly to sexuality:

- incest (Lev 18:6-18)
- menstruation (Lev 18:19)
- adultery (Lev 18:20)
- sacrifice of children to Molech (Lev 18:21)
- ⇒ homosexuality (Lev 18:22) ⇐
- bestiality (Lev 18:23)

Those who argue that the holiness code refers to a specific type of homosexuality often appeal to the presence of the Molech prohibition (Lev 18:21), which immediately precedes the homosexual prohibition of Leviticus 18:22.⁵ They suggest that after mentioning the cult practice of sacrificing children to Molech (Lev 18:21), the author reflects on another practice within pagan cults: homosexual prostitution (Lev 18:22). In this view, then, the prohibition of Leviticus 18:22 might be more narrowly applied today against cult or prostitution-type homosexuality.

While this cult option is tenable,⁶ it is by no means the most probable explanation. Another understanding of the organization of Leviticus 18 is far more likely. The placement of the Molech verse within the sexual-intercourse list is probably related to the nature of the category groupings. Notice that the Molech verse

⁵Some limit the kind of homosexuality addressed in Leviticus 18–20 by suggesting that it is related to pagan cult prostitution and idolatry. For example, see Letha D. Scanzoni and Virginia R. Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), pp. 63-66; S. F. Bigger, "The Family Laws of Leviticus 18 in Their Setting," *JBL* 98 (1979): 202-3; N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers*, Century Bible (London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), p. 126.

⁶For biblical references to male cult prostitutes, see Deuteronomy 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Job 36:14; and possibly Revelation 22:15.

comes immediately after the category of heterosexual intercourse and immediately before nonheterosexual intercourse:

incest (Lev 18:6-18)	<i>heterosexual</i> intercourse
menstruation (Lev 18:19)	<i>heterosexual</i> intercourse
adultery (Lev 18:20)	<i>heterosexual</i> intercourse

sacrifice of children to Molech (Lev 18:21)

homosexuality (Lev 18:22)	<i>nonheterosexual</i> intercourse
bestiality (Lev 18:23)	<i>nonheterosexual</i> intercourse

It would be rather unusual for a list of seventeen sexual intercourse prohibitions to be interrupted by a prohibition that has nothing to do with sexual intercourse. Even so, the placement of the Molech prohibition at this point within the list makes sense once one recognizes its connection to offspring from sexual intercourse. Heterosexual intercourse produces offspring; homosexual intercourse and bestiality do not. Thus the prohibition against sacrificing one's child to Molech is appropriately located after a discussion of heterosexual intercourse—the kind of intercourse that could result in offspring and in the sacrifice of those children to Molech. The author then finishes the list with two remaining intercourse taboos in which offspring are not involved.

This explanation seems much more likely than the foreign cult view. The connection between Molech and the preceding laws that deal with heterosexual relationships is the children that come from those relationships. The Molech text relates to homosexuality and bestiality as a transitional marker that naturally distinguishes between offspring-bearing intercourse and intercourse that produces no offspring. The author may well have cult-prostitution homosexuality in view, but only as one kind of homosexuality among others that fit within this wider sense of the homosexual prohibition. The author's organizational categories relate to offspring and a distinction between heterosexual intercourse and nonheterosexual intercourse.

Furthermore, the composer of the holiness code appears to have a broader understanding of homosexuality, given the comparative terms used in the prohibition. The prohibition compares homosexual intercourse with heterosexual intercourse: "You shall not lie with a male *as [a man lies] with a woman*; it is an abomination" (Lev

18:22; see also 20:13). The author's concern in this verse reflects the point of the organizational structure for the entire passage: homosexuality, like bestiality, breaks with heterosexual patterns. The list as a whole thus reinforces the comparative point within the verse.⁷

In sum, the Leviticus 18 list is most likely organized around heterosexual versus nonheterosexual intercourse. If this structural analysis reveals the author's intent, then covenant homosexuality fits within the prohibition. The core issue is appropriate sexual boundaries. The incest laws, for example, focus primarily on a man's crossing the boundary with a woman who is a close relative, including a granddaughter (Lev 18:10).⁸ The severity of punishment in the incest cases⁹ relates to the degree to which one violates a "family member and close relative" boundary. After the incest laws in the list of Leviticus 18, one encounters two further areas for setting sexual boundaries—homosexuality and bestiality—similarly defined by nature-and-society structural issues. In other words, the author's concern in Leviticus 18 is rooted in *maintaining sexual boundaries* between humans and animals, between men and close female relatives, and between people of the same gender.

Deuteronomy 22:5. Deuteronomy 22:5 similarly focuses on the issue of sexual boundaries in its prohibition of cross-dressing: "A woman shall not wear a man's apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the LORD your God." The verse appears to be a symbolic or external-ritual prohibition that correlates with the homosexuality prohibitions. Obviously the specific substance of gender distinctions expressed through clothing is cultural and subject to change. Yet most societies retain some kind of dress distinction between men and women. Many Old Testament scholars regard this text as a prohibition against not only transvestite activity (dressing and acting like the opposite sex) but

⁷One might also examine the parallel passage of Leviticus 20, which is organized in part around descending levels of punishment. Even though the sacrificing of children to Molech receives the same level of penalty as homosexuality (death), it is split off from homosexuality and placed ahead of the sexual taboo list in a separate discussion (Lev 20:1-5).

⁸This is as close as Leviticus 18:6-18 and 20:11-12, 17 get to an actual father-daughter relationship, but such an act is surely presupposed by the very nature of the laws as they are set out in chapter 18.

⁹Leviticus 20:11-12, 14, 17, 19-21. The incest prohibitions within Scripture establish sexual boundaries with several very positive purposes: (1) preserving lines of family honor and structure, (2) protecting against sexual exploitation of those with less power within the family and (3) protecting against sibling rivalry and broader family rivalry. We might add an additional purpose today: the genetic benefits of restricting sexual intercourse with (and potential offspring from) close relatives.

also the primary forum in which it would be expressed, homosexuality.¹⁰

This Deuteronomy text indicates, along with the holiness code material (Lev 18 and 20), that it makes little difference to the biblical prohibition whether or not homosexuality is expressed in a covenant/equal-status relationship. Just as incest laws are designed out of a concern not to cross close family relationship lines, so also the homosexual codes appear to be given in order to retain appropriate sexual boundaries.

Romans 1:18-32. This text voices similar concerns about celebrating creation-based differences between male and female within a Christian heterosexual ethic. Paul speaks against women who “exchanged natural sexual relations [heterosexuality] for unnatural ones [lesbian relations]” and against men who “also abandoned natural relations with women [heterosexuality] and were inflamed with lust for one another [gay relations].”

Some homosexuality advocates attempt to define *unnatural* as something against one’s sexual orientation and to reduce Paul’s concerns about homosexuality to strictly idolatry-related or lust-related problems. These attempts, however, have not been convincing¹¹ and seem to reflect a radical misunderstanding of the discourse of Romans 1:18-32. Paul is setting out to show how the Gentile (pagan) world, by rejecting what could have been known about God *from* creation (Rom 1:18-20), has chosen idolatry—the worship of creation itself (in the form of the creature) rather than the Creator (Rom 1:21-23). The ultimate expression of this rejection of the Creator is to be found in Gentiles’ “believing a lie” about God and about themselves, and this has resulted in homosexual activity (Rom 1:24-27). Only after this scathing rebuke does Paul add a list of all kinds of other sins that come from the same rejection of God (Rom 1:28-32).

Romans 1 adds two significant contributions to a biblical discussion of homosexuality. First, the implied creation and procreation theology underlying Leviticus 18 is now made explicit in Romans 1. Paul appeals to God’s intention for male-with-female sexuality as something that is clearly revealed in nature and thus, by

¹⁰Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 287-88; Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1990), p. 162; P. J. Harland, “Menswear and Womenswear: A Study of Deuteronomy 22:5,” *Expository Times* 110, no. 3 (1998): 73-76.

¹¹See R. T. France, “From Romans to the Real World: Biblical Principles and Cultural Change in Relation to Homosexuality and the Ministry of Women,” in *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee*, ed. S. K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 234-53. Cf. Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), pp. 229-303.

specific inference, within the complementary gender design of men and women. This observation about God's purposes being visible in creation around us again reflects the core biblical concern with gender boundaries, yet with greater clarity.

As a second contribution, Romans I provides the only explicit prohibition of lesbian sexuality within a biblical discussion of homosexuality. An inclusion of lesbian acts within the homosexuality prohibitions is extremely important for understanding biblical concerns; it shows that the range of the biblical prohibitions of homosexual activity is broader than what some would suggest. This text argues against a narrowing of biblical concerns to certain limited forms of homosexuality (such as pederasty—men with young boys). In the ancient setting Paul's comments about lesbian sexuality would certainly include homosexual acts among equal-status female participants. By inference, therefore, Paul's parallel comments about gay sexuality most likely includes, but is not limited to, equal-status participants in the case of two males. Thus the lesbian prohibition of Romans I further confirms the broad range of homosexual activity that falls within the biblical concerns.

The Romans I idea that God's revelation is clear in the created world around us verifies that the core biblical issue is sexuality that accords with God's creation of male and female. All three texts show that the biblical problem with homosexuality is not really about covenant or a lack of it; it is not really about equality or a lack of equality of sexual partners. The deepest issue for the biblical authors is a breaking of sexual boundaries that violates obvious components of male-and-female creation design.

The Direction of Redemptive Movement

Besides the transcultural core value of gender boundaries, there are a number of other reasons that acceptance of egalitarianism does not logically lead to accepting homosexuality. One of the clearest hermeneutical reasons for rejecting this logical-acceptance thesis is the dramatic difference in "movement" within biblical homosexuality texts compared to women texts. At this point we need to return to the idea that "movement provides meaning," developed in chapter twenty-two as part of an egalitarian hermeneutic. Some familiarity with this concept will assist in the discussion here.

The meaning of a biblical text should be understood not just through the isolated words on the page but also in light of the text's underlying spirit or movement. For instance, biblical texts placing limits on women and slaves within the broader social context of the ancient world generally show redemptive movement in a *less*

restrictive direction, granting higher status to and improved treatment of women and slaves (and a corresponding reduction of patriarchal and slave-owner power). In many texts having to do with women's relationships to men (usually husbands), and in many slavery texts, the isolated words on the page do not reflect an ultimate social ethic; yet the redemptive movement within the text is certainly headed in a liberating direction.

On the other hand, when the texts prohibiting homosexual behavior are read against the backdrop of the ancient world, we discover a biblical spirit that creates movement in a *more restrictive* direction. The biblical text moves restrictively compared to the openness toward and acceptance of homosexuality in the social realm and in pagan worship of the day.¹² In other words, we encounter a freeing or less restrictive movement with respect to slavery and patriarchy but a more restrictive movement with respect to homosexuality.

A commitment to biblical authority means that our modern application honors the direction and meaning of the redemptive spirit within the Bible. Although this is not a popular answer to the homosexuality question in our society, only a sexual ethic that excludes homosexual behavior retains the spirit and redemptive movement found in Scripture, as its words are understood in light of the ancient world context.

The Vice/Virtue Lists and the Penal Codes

Brief, undeveloped references to homosexuality are found within the "vice lists" of I Corinthians 6:9-10 and I Timothy 1:9-10. While the cryptic nature of these lists makes it difficult to specify the kind of homosexuality in view (whether broad or specific), one term used in the lists, *arsenokoitēs*, is of particular importance. The word literally means "a male who goes to bed [has sexual intercourse] with males" and in all likelihood was derived intentionally by the apostle from the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. If so, then these vice lists may well reflect broad concerns about gender boundaries like those noted in my discussion of Leviticus 18.

¹²While in broad socioreligious terms the ancient Near East and Greco-Roman historical data might be described as mixed (some for and some against homosexuality), the biblical texts move clearly in one direction. The biblical authors move to a prohibition of any homosexual activity, and they likewise restrict their sexual metaphor depictions of Yahweh to the heterosexual realm (unlike ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman portraits, in which certain pagan gods are depicted in acts of bestiality and homosexuality).

Along with its occurrence within the vice lists, homosexuality makes the death-penalty list in Leviticus 20:13. As noted earlier, the author's concern in the companion text of Leviticus 18 is maintaining sexual boundaries between humans and animals (bestiality), between men and close female family members/relatives (incest) and between people of the same sex (homosexuality). Now in Leviticus 20 each of these actions—bestiality, homosexuality and (the worst cases of) incest—receives the death penalty. Due to the contextual connection between Leviticus 18 and 20, likely the same broad scope of homosexuality argued for in Leviticus 18 (above) is in view in the penalty text of Leviticus 20.

What is especially important for hermeneutics about the vice/virtue lists and the death-penalty lists is their contribution to cultural/transcultural discussions. Both the vice/virtue lists and the penal codes of Scripture reveal what might be called “near to the heart” or “to die for” values within the covenant community. For the most part the issues within these lists are highly transcultural in nature.

A major difference between the egalitarian issue and the homosexuality issue should now become apparent. Women serving in leadership roles is simply narrated (Judg 4–5; 2 Kings 22:11–20), and in one case it is forbidden (1 Tim 2:12), but it certainly never receives this sort of death-penalty or vice-list censure. In fact, there is considerable variance within the many texts dealing with women's roles. When compared to the biblical texts on women's submission, the homosexuality prohibitions are clearly in an entirely different category—a category of extreme weightiness. Biblical injunctions with light or no censure are far more apt to involve significant cultural components; texts with heavy censure (death-penalty and vice lists) are more likely to convey transcultural matters.¹³

The Lack of Canonical Variance

Within the biblical canon as a whole there is considerable variance among the texts that address women's roles in a patriarchal setting, while canonical variance is entirely lacking in the homosexuality texts.

Consider first the women texts. Sometimes the husband has the prerogative of making unilateral decisions that overturn his wife's decisions (patriarchy; Num 30:1–16), yet sometimes the husband is instructed to make decisions in the context of mutual deference and mutual consent (egalitarianism; 1 Cor 7:3–5). Sometimes

¹³See Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, pp. 172–79, 192–206. On the exceptions of menstrual and sabbath laws, which evidence a mixture of cultural and transcultural components, see pp. 168–70, 178 in that book.

women are not permitted to inherit property (patriarchy),¹⁴ yet sometimes they are given property rights along with men (egalitarianism; Num 27:1-11; 36:1-13; Job 42:15). Sometimes women are not permitted leadership roles (patriarchy; I Tim 2:11-12), yet sometimes they have significant leadership opportunities within the covenant community (egalitarianism; Judg 4:4-5:31; 2 Kings 22:14-20; Acts 18:1-4, 18-19, 24-26; Rom 16:7). For egalitarians, this canonical variance conveys a sense of God's latitude in blessing women with various leadership gifts and opportunities.

While patriarchalists may not find this evidence as compelling as egalitarians do, one thing should be reasonably clear: there is a major difference in this regard between the women texts and the homosexuality texts of Scripture. Unlike the women texts, a canonical survey of the homosexuality texts fails to reveal one shred of variance.

Different Purpose Statements

The biblical texts affirming the subordination of slaves and the subordination of women—the “obey” and “submit to” texts—frequently include an explicit purpose statement about behaving thus in order to win a non-Christian husband or slave owner.¹⁵ These subordination texts are purpose-driven by a passion *to make one's behavior attractive to society*. On the other hand, the purpose statements related to the homosexuality prohibitions reveal a concern *to make one's behavior distinct from the broader social setting* (Lev 18:3; I Cor 6:9-10; see also Lev 18:24-30; 20:22-24).

With the texts pertaining to slaves and women, one may retain the purpose meaning by rethinking the actual behavior in the modern context; with the homosexuality texts, one may retain the purpose meaning only by staying with the same behavior. The difference is significant—the two types of purpose statements in Scripture head in diametrically opposite directions. The countercultural component within the homosexuality prohibitions raises the likelihood that they express transcultural concerns.

Different Pragmatic Clues

Interpreters must often move up the ladder of abstraction, away from the particulars of a text, in order to cross the application bridge between the biblical world

¹⁴This is the standard pattern in Deuteronomy and elsewhere in the Old Testament.

¹⁵Slaves: I Timothy 6:1; Titus 2:9-10. Women: Titus 2:4-5; I Peter 3:1 (cf. I Pet 2:12).

and ours (see chapter twenty-two for a visual diagram). One of the reasons for moving to an abstracted principle is that at times the pragmatic rationale underlying a biblical text disappears within the modern setting. For instance, the biblical command “When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet [barrier/railing] for your roof” (Deut 22:8) makes little sense in much of the modern world, since the reason for the rule generally does not exist in our setting.¹⁶ Most of our houses have peaked rather than flat roofs, and we generally do not entertain guests on these peaked roofs. It would be somewhat absurd for a Christian to look up and down their street for railings on rooftops in order to identify biblically based homes on the block. So one has to move up the ladder of abstraction and say that what is transcultural and binding from this text is the principle of constructing homes to ensure the safety of guests.

In the ancient world the New Testament commands for women to “submit to” their husbands (Eph 2:22; Col 3:18; I Pet 3:1; see also Tit 2:5) are built on a set of underlying cultural assumptions. The ancient world would have had a hierarchy between men and women whether the Bible said anything about it or not. Patriarchy was automatically established in the ancient world since women, compared to men, received far less formal education, had no access to the kinds of information sources now available in our homes,¹⁷ had less economic independence, had less social exposure,¹⁸ had less available time outside the home,¹⁹ had less physical strength (significant in an agrarian setting), and wives had less maturity than their husbands (males were often ten to fifteen years older than their twelve-to-fourteen-year-old brides).

Since these circumstances generally no longer exist in our Western world, any application of the “submit to” commands must push up the ladder of abstraction, beyond patriarchal social customs and toward a mutual-deference relationship between women and men. Modern Christians should move away from the heavy

¹⁶The ultimate theological basis for the command—the character of God and the value of people—provides the basis for the more abstract transcultural principle underlying or embedded within the command.

¹⁷Information is now readily accessible in homes through electronic media (TV, radio, telephone, Internet, DVDs, CDs, etc.) and literature (books, newspapers, magazines).

¹⁸Their outside-the-home activities were often of practical necessity restricted to the well (for water) and the market (for food).

¹⁹The lack of available/discretionary time outside the home was due to a number of factors: economic poverty, large families, lack of modern technology within the home and shorter life spans (often one-third to one-half the lifespan of women today).

“submit to” instructions of these biblical texts. Changes in the pragmatic support for a biblical command must affect our applications today.

Now we come to the question of pragmatics and the biblical commands that prohibit homosexuality. Should we or should we not move up the ladder of abstraction to reconfigure our modern application of these commands? As we examine the homosexuality prohibition, we discover underlying reasons such as sexual-intercourse design, reproductive design and nurturing design.²⁰ These three patterns of human design have as much relevance in our setting as they did in the ancient setting.²¹

A fourth reason underlying the homosexual prohibitions is the benefit of raising children by a father and a mother, who can provide different yet complementary role models for their sons and daughters. Children raised by two parents of the same sex can certainly experience parental love; however, they lack a natural kinship setting in which each can derive modeling from and relationship with a parent of their own gender.²² To this consideration one might add the benefits of having a relationship with an opposite-sex parent, as well as the benefits that different-gender spouses bring to a home through their providing gender-complementary (not monolithic) perspectives and ways of doing things. This latter benefit would extend also to a home consisting of a heterosexual couple without children.

These four pragmatic components underlying the Bible’s homosexual prohibitions still apply as one moves from the ancient world to our modern world. An understanding of pragmatics between the two worlds pushes our contemporary application of women texts up the ladder, while the pragmatics of the homosexuality

²⁰These underlying reasons may require explanation. (1) *Sexual-intercourse design*: the creative architecture of male and female sexuality with its part-and-counterpart configuration argues against same-sex relationships. Two males or two females can function sexually; they can produce sexual arousal and climax, but not in a way that utilizes the natural, complementary design of body parts. (2) *Reproductive design*: the mutually completing contribution of male-and-female chromosomes, the egg and sperm, and so on argues against gay and lesbian relationships. (3) *Nurturing design*: the physical design of female breasts, their function of nurturing and comforting infants, and the benefits of breast milk for a strengthened immune system argue for heterosexual relationships (and against homosexual relationships) in which the mother can breastfeed her children.

²¹One could well add the factor of the survival of the human race—which is dependent on heterosexuality—as an ongoing, transcultural pragmatic. However, this discussion is a complex one and requires extensive development if a persuasive case is to be built. See Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, pp. 216-20.

²²At the very least one might consider all of the distinctly male and distinctly female changes across the life span of either gender. For example, see B. R. Wainrib, ed., *Gender Issues Across the Life Cycle* (New York: Springer, 1992). These life-span gender differences suggest a significant natural benefit of boys’ being able to relate to a male father and girls’ being able to relate to a female mother.

texts argues that the interpreter stay down the ladder with the concrete-specific commands prohibiting homosexuality. There are good reasons not to move up the ladder of abstraction here.

Scholarship Arguing a Heterosexuality-Only Thesis

Finally, the idea that egalitarianism logically leads to accepting homosexuality ought to be viewed as fallacious in light of major publications in recent decades. The best research and strongest argumentation for a heterosexuality-only position within a Christian sexual ethic are found in books written by egalitarians.²³ After reading these major egalitarian-authored works on homosexuality, one should be convinced that an egalitarian position truly does not lead to accepting homosexuality.

Conclusion

I conclude by coming back to the opening question: *Doesn't acceptance of egalitarianism logically lead to acceptance of homosexuality?* This essay has argued that the answer is “No, not at all.” When the hermeneutics that lead to egalitarian conclusions are consistently applied to the homosexuality texts, the result is a strong argument *against* accepting homosexuality within a Christian sexual ethic.

Scripture's sexual-intercourse prohibitions are primarily concerned with maintaining sexual boundaries—boundaries between humans and animals (bestiality), between men and close female family members/relatives (incest), and between people of the same gender (homosexuality). Whether we speak of the ancient world or of our contemporary world, the concerns remain the same. Only in embracing and celebrating these sexual boundaries does the covenant community pay homage to God's design within creation. These creative-design considerations truly transcend time and culture.

²³The most comprehensive and scholarly work to date in defense of an exclusively heterosexual Christian ethic has been written by an egalitarian: Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. A number of other noteworthy books against accepting homosexuality have also been written by egalitarians: Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995); Marion L. Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1995); Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1998); Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998); Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*. One should add to this noteworthy grouping the hierarchicalist James B. DeYoung, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in the Light of the Bible and Classical Jewish, Greek and Roman Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 2000).