

## More than “Mutual Joy”: Lisa Miller of *Newsweek* against Scripture and Jesus

*Religious proponents of gay marriage routinely ignore or twist the major arguments in Scripture and philosophy against homosexual practice. The cover story by Religion Editor Lisa Miller in the Dec. 15, 2008 issue of Newsweek, wholeheartedly endorsed by Managing Editor Jon Meacham, is a perfect case in point.*

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As its cover story for the Dec. 15, 2008 issue, the editors of *Newsweek* offer readers a hopelessly distorted and one-sided propaganda piece on “gay marriage” entitled “[Our Mutual Joy](#).” The 2800-word article is by Lisa Miller, religion editor and author of the “Belief Watch” column for the magazine (her academic credential is a B.A. in English at Oberlin College). She claims that Scripture actually provides strong support for validating homosexual unions and no valid opposition to “committed” homosexual practice. She quotes from scholars such as Neil Elliott and “the great Bible scholar” Walter Brueggemann, who are strongly supportive of “gay marriage.”

There is not the slightest effort on Miller’s part to think critically about her own line or reasoning. The lone voice that she cites against homosexual practice is not from a scholar but from a certain [Rev. Richard Hunter](#), a United Methodist minister who offered a short comment for a “roundtable” discussion sponsored by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. From the thousand pages or so that I have written on the subject over the past decade Miller cites not a word, including [my critique](#) of Elliott’s untenable claim that Paul in Romans 1:24-27 was thinking only of the exploitative homosexual intercourse practiced by depraved emperors like Nero and Caligula; and [my critique](#) (pp. 11-12) of “Brueggemann’s” use of Gal 3:28 (“there is [in Christ] no ‘male and female’”) as support for homosexual unions (my critique is directed at Prof. Stacy Johnson of Princeton Seminary but it applies equally to Brueggemann’s claim).

Miller's article reminds me of the equally distorted (but thankfully much shorter) op-ed article put out in *The New York Times* four years ago by *Times* columnist Nicholas D. Kristof ("[God and Sex](#)," Oct. 23, 2004). My response to Kristof, "['God and Sex' or 'Pants on Fire'?](#)", showed how bad that piece was. My response to Miller will do the same. This essay has three primary components: a discussion of Scripture apart from the witness of Jesus; a discussion of Jesus' witness; and concluding thoughts, which takes in also Meacham's "Editor's Desk" column.

## **The Witness of Scripture apart from Jesus**

Miller's strategy is to argue three things: first, that the image of marriage in Scripture is so alien to anything that would be acceptable to us today that we should run as fast as we can from any appeal to Scripture against "gay marriage"; second, that Scripture has little if anything to say against caring homosexual relationships; and, third, that Scripture contains "universal truths" (concerning "what the Bible teaches about love" and family) that are serviceable for promoting "gay marriage." In a statement that can only be regarded as delusional in the extreme, Miller arrogantly declares as if she were some sort of expert on the subject: "Scripture gives us no good reason why gays and lesbians should not be (civilly and religiously) married—and a number of excellent reasons why they should."

To arrive at her ideological objective Miller makes a number of bad moves. She exaggerates discontinuity and downplays continuity between marriage values in Scripture and our own values (on differences as regards romantic love and egalitarian marriage go [here](#), p. 97). She engages in a distorted form of analogical reasoning that elevates distant analogies like slavery and haircuts over close analogies, with far more points of correspondence, like adult-committed incest. She shows little or no understanding of the historical and literary contexts of the texts that she treats. She ignores just about every major argument against the positions that she espouses. And she extrapolates, from certain "universal truths" in Scripture, illogical conclusions that would have appalled the scriptural authors, like assuming that generic love is a *sufficient* prerequisite for sexual relationships.

### ***A Strong Male-Female Prerequisite throughout Scripture***

A male-female prerequisite is powerfully evident throughout the pages of Scripture. Every biblical narrative, law, proverb, exhortation, metaphor, and poetry that has anything to do with sexual relations presupposes such a prerequisite. Even the male-dominated society of ancient Israel imaged itself as Yahweh's wife so as to avoid any connotation of a marriage between members of the same sex (an image replicated in the New Testament as regards Christ and his bride, the church). There are plenty of laws in the Old Testament delimiting acceptable and unacceptable sexual relationships between a man and a woman.

Never is there any attempt to make such a distinction for same-sex sexual relationships, for the obvious reason that no homosexual relationships are deemed acceptable.

Miller makes much of the fact that the Bible condemns homosexual practice only in “a handful of passages,” while neglecting a number of relevant texts: the narratives of Sodom and of the Levite at Gibeah; the texts from Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History dealing with cultic figures known to play the female role in sex with men (the *qedeshim*); the interpretation of the Sodom story in Ezekiel, Jude, and 2 Peter; Jesus’ discussion of marriage in Mark 10 (parallel in Matthew 19); and Paul’s mention of “men who lie with a male” in 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10 (for a discussion of why these texts indict homosexual practice per se go [here](#), pp. 46-50, 56-57, 72-73).

What of Miller’s argument based on frequency of explicit mention? Bestiality is mentioned even less in the Bible than homosexual practice and incest gets only comparable treatment, yet who would be so foolish as to argue that Jews and Christians in antiquity would have regarded sex with an animal or sex with one’s mother as inconsequential offenses? Infrequency of mention is often an indicator that the matter in question is foundational rather than insignificant. You don’t have to talk a lot about something that most everyone agrees with and that few persons, if any, violate.

Scripture’s male-female prerequisite for marriage and its attendant rejection of homosexual behavior is *pervasive* throughout both Testaments of Scripture (i.e. it is everywhere presumed in sexual discussions even when not explicitly mentioned); it is *absolute* (i.e. no exceptions are ever given, unlike even incest and polyamory); it is *strongly proscribed* (i.e. every mention of it in Scripture indicates that it is regarded as a foundational violation of sexual ethics); and it is *countercultural* (i.e. we know of no other culture in the ancient Near East or Greco-Roman Mediterranean basin more consistently and strongly opposed to homosexual practice). If this doesn’t qualify as a core value in Scripture’s sexual ethics, there is no such thing as a core value in any religious or philosophical tradition.

### ***The Implication of the Creation Texts for a Male-Female Prerequisite***

The creation text in Genesis 2:21-24 pictures woman as coming from the undifferentiated human’s “side” (probably a better translation than “rib”), emphasizing that man and woman may (re)unite as “one flesh” because out of one flesh they emerged. The text states four times that the woman was “taken from” the “human” (*adam*, thereafter referred to as an *ish* or man), underscoring that woman, not another man, is the missing sexual “complement” or “counterpart” to man (so the Hebrew term *negdo*, which stresses both human similarity, “corresponding to him,” and sexual difference, “opposite him”). Within the story line man and woman may (re)unite into “one flesh” precisely because

together they reconstitute the sexual whole. This is a different kind of story from the traditional Mesopotamian story of the creation of woman in *Atra-hasis* where seven human males and seven human females are formed *separately* from a mixture of clay and the flesh and blood of a slaughtered god.

To be sure, the story in Genesis 2:21-24 involves images of transcendent realities that do not have to be taken literally in all details. Nevertheless, the story beautifully conveys the point that man and woman are each other's sexual complement, ordained by God for sexual pairing if sexual relations are to be had (see my discussion [here](#), pp. 8-11). Referring to Alan Segal, professor of early Judaism at Barnard University, Miller claims that Genesis 2:21-24 could not contain any negative implications for polygamy because the text "was written by people for whom polygamy was the way of the world" and is part of a Bible "written by men and not handed down in its leather bindings by God." Most people in the synagogues and churches recognize that the latter description is a false antithesis; that Scripture, while having a human element is not *merely* the compilation of human ideas. Moreover, in writing about an ideal beginning, it would not at all be unusual for an author to reflect on the fact that "the way of the world" is not necessarily God's perfect will.

As we shall see, this was certainly Jesus' understanding of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. He understood the deep logic of these texts—the fact that God created two sexes out of one flesh and conceived of them as a sexual pair "male and female"—as indicating the self-contained sexual wholeness of the two-in-one union. He predicated his view of marital twoness, along with its incompatibility with both concurrent and serial polygamy, on the very twoness of the sexes ordained by God at creation. Paul, in his two main indictments of homosexual practice (Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9), clearly echoed the same two creation texts stressed by Jesus as normative for sexual ethics. (For the echo to Gen 1:26-27 in Rom 1:23-27 see below; for the connection to Gen 2:24 in 1 Cor 6:9 note the partial citation of Gen 2:24 in 1 Cor 6:16; compare 1 Cor 11:7-9.)

Miller also dismisses any negative implications for "gay marriage" in Genesis 1:27-28, where "male and female" are spoken of as a sexual pair (compare Genesis 5:2; 6:19; 7:3, 9, 16) and commanded to "be fruitful and multiply." "The Bible authors could never have imagined the brave new world of international adoption and assisted reproductive technology—and besides, heterosexuals who are infertile or past the age of reproducing get married all the time." Her argument misses the point. The author of Genesis 1:27-28 would not have viewed an infertile male-female union with the abhorrence associated in ancient Israel toward a man-male union. Male-female complementarity exists *independently* of whether any procreation actually takes place.

Miller's argument is comparable to reducing the argument against adult-committed incest to the increased likelihood of birth defects. The inherent biological incapacity for two men or two women to reproduce, like the higher

incidence of birth defects in the offspring of an incestuous union, is the *symptom* of a root problem: too much structural sameness or likeness among the participants in the sexual union.

While not reducing “the image of God” to being “male and female,” the author of Genesis 1:27 indicates that God’s image and human sexual differentiation-and-pairing are uniquely integrated: “And God created the human in his image, in the image of God he created it [or: him], male and female he created them.” As Nahum Sarna notes in the Jewish Publication Society commentary on Genesis, “No such sexual differentiation is [explicitly] noted in regard to animals. Human sexuality is of a wholly different order from that of the beast.... Its proper regulation is subsumed under the category of the holy, whereas sexual perversion is viewed with abhorrence as an affront to human dignity and as a desecration of the divine image in man.” An attempt at uniting sexually two males or two females would threaten to desecrate the image of God stamped on humans as complementary sexual beings.

### ***Paul’s indictment of homosexual practice and view of marriage***

In Romans 1:24-27 Paul portrayed homosexual practice as “sexually impure,” “unnatural,” and “indecent” or “shameful” behavior that “dishonors” the participants. How does it dishonor the participants? The logic of a male-female sexual bond is that the two primary sexual halves are united into a single sexual whole. But the logic of homosexual unions is that two half-males or two half-females unite sexually to form a whole person of the same sex, whereas the true missing sexual element of a man is a woman and vice versa. It is, at one and the same time, sexual narcissism and sexual self-deception: a desire for what one already is as a sexual being (male for maleness, female for femaleness), conducted under the false premise that one’s own maleness or femaleness is not fully intact. One may be in need of structural affirmation as a male or female, but not structural supplementation.

#### *1. Was Paul’s indictment of homosexual practice limited to violent forms?*

Miller tries out the argument that Paul’s remarks against homosexual practice in Romans 1:24-27 were directed only at certain exploitative (“violent”) forms of homosexual practice (citing Neil Elliott). This argument won’t work, for many reasons (online readers can see a more extended discussion not only in my critique of Elliott posted several years ago [here](#), but also in my more recent discussions [here](#) [pp. 5-10], [here](#) [pp. 12-18], [here](#) [pp. 3-15], [here](#) [pp. 62-85], and [here](#) [pp. 206-65]).

First, in Romans 1:23-27 Paul intentionally echoed Genesis 1:26-27, making eight points of correspondence, in the same tripartite structure, between the two sets of texts (humans/image/likeness, birds/cattle/reptiles, male/female). In establishing this link to Genesis 1:26-27, Paul was rejecting homosexual practice

not in the first instance because of how well or badly it was done in the Greco-Roman milieu but rather because it was a violation of the male-female prerequisite for sexual relations ordained by the Creator at creation. Moreover, Paul contended, it was a violation that should be obvious even to Gentiles without the Jewish Scriptures since God had given obvious clues to male-female complementarity in the anatomical, physiological, and psychological makeup of “male and female.”

This brings us to the second point: the kind of nature argument that Paul employs in Romans 1:18-27 isn't conducive to a distinction between exploitative and nonexploitative forms of homosexual practice. According to Paul in Romans 1:19-20, “the knowable aspect of God is visible [or: apparent] to them [i.e. Gentiles] because.... ever since the creation of the world his invisible qualities are clearly seen, being mentally apprehended *by means of the things made*” (1:19-20). Such a nature argument in the first-century milieu is hardly surprising. As Thomas K. Hubbard notes in his magisterial sourcebook of texts pertaining to *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*: “Basic to the heterosexual position [in the first few centuries A.D.] is the characteristic Stoic appeal to the providence of Nature, which has matched and fitted the sexes to each other” (p. 444).

Third, the way Paul words the indictment in Rom 1:27—“males, having left behind the natural use of the female, were inflamed with their yearning *for one another*”—precludes a limitation to coercive relationships.

Fourth, there is plenty of evidence from the Greco-Roman milieu, both for the conception and for the existence, of loving homosexual relationships, including semi-official “marriages” between men and between women. Moreover, we know of some Greco-Roman moralists who acknowledged the existence of loving homosexual relationships while rejecting even these as unnatural (indeed, we can trace this idea back to Plato's *Laws*). And it should go without saying that Jewish writers in Paul's day and beyond rejected all forms of homosexual activity. For example, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus stated the obvious to his Roman readers: “The law [of Moses] recognizes only sexual intercourse that is according to nature, that which is with a woman.... But it abhors the intercourse of males with males” (*Against Apion* 2.199). It is hardly surprising, then, that even Louis Crompton, a homosexual scholar, acknowledges this point in his massive work, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Harvard University Press). “However well-intentioned,” the interpretation that

Paul's words were not directed at “bona fide” homosexuals in committed relationships.... seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstance. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian.

Fifth, Paul's indictment of lesbianism in Romans 1:26 further confirms that his indictment of homosexual practice is absolute, since female homosexuality in antiquity was not primarily known, or criticized, for the exploitative practices of sex with slaves, prostitutes, or children. And there can be little doubt that Paul was indicting female homosexuality, as evidenced by: (1) the parallelism of the language of 1:26 ("females exchanged the natural use") and 1:27 ("*likewise also* the males leaving behind the natural use *of the female*"); (2) the fact that in antiquity lesbian intercourse was the form of female intercourse most commonly labeled "contrary to nature" and paired with male homosexual practice; (3) the fact of nearly universal male opposition to lesbianism in antiquity, even by men engaged in homosexual practice; and (4) the fact that lesbian intercourse was the dominant interpretation of Romans 1:26 in the patristic period.

Miller is full of mistakes on the issue of lesbianism. She claims: "Sex between women has never, even in biblical times, raised as much ire" as male homosexual practice. In the Greco-Roman milieu it generally raised *more* ire; it was thus a less debatable point and could be taken for granted that it was wrong (as lesbian New Testament scholar Bernadette Brooten notes in her book *Love between Women*). Miller adds: "In its entry on 'Homosexual Practices,' the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* [*sic*—*ABD* has no such entry; Miller must be referring to the entry "Sex"] notes that *nowhere in the Bible* do its authors refer to sex between women" (my emphasis). The last time I checked, Romans 1:26 was part of the Bible. The author of the entry, T. Frymer-Kensky, was speaking only about the Old Testament, not about the New Testament, much less about Jews in the Second Temple Period and beyond. Miller cites Frymer-Kensky's reason for the lack of an explicit prohibition of lesbianism in Israelite law: "possibly because it did not result in true physical 'union' (by male entry)." Yet it is just as likely that it went unmentioned simply because in the tightly-controlled, male-dominated societies of the ancient Near East lesbian activity by women was virtually impossible or at least, to judge from the dearth of texts on the subject in the ancient Near East, virtually unknown by males.

In short, there is no realistic possibility that Paul's indictment of homosexual practice—or, for that matter, the indictment by any Jew in antiquity of such behavior—was limited to certain exploitative, "violent" homosexual acts.

## *2. Paul on the single life and the purpose of marriage*

Both Jesus and Paul took up the single life "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven," that is, in order to focus on proclaiming the gospel without being constrained by, or putting at risk, one's spouse and children. At the same time they did not view marriage, or the sex that constitutes it, as sinful. Indeed, Paul insisted that married couples maintain a regular sexual relationship (1 Corinthians 7:2-5). It is not true, as Miller claims, that Paul viewed marriage *only* "as an act of last resort for those unable to contain their animal lust" (Miller cites 1 Cor 7:9: "better to marry than to burn [with passion]"). Paul was not an ascetic.

He knew how to live in both abundance and want (Philippians 4:12). His specific remarks about marriage as an outlet for sexual passions do not say everything that Paul believed about the purposes of marriage. They were conditioned first and foremost by the particular circumstances of his audience (the “strong” at Corinth who believed that they were impervious to sexual temptation), as well as by other factors (particularly the routine persecution of Christians in the middle of the first century and the common first-century view of Christians that the return of Christ could well be soon).

It is true that, with Jesus, Paul regarded marriage as a penultimate institution symbolizing at its best the greater, transcendent reality of the marriage of the church to Christ (compare 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-33). However, unlike Miller, this view of marriage did not cause Paul (or Jesus) to view marriage as an institution that could be fundamentally reshaped. His extremely hostile reaction to an adult-consensual sexual relationship between a man and his stepmother is an obvious case in point (1 Corinthians 5). It rather meant for Paul, as for Jesus, that all sexual activity outside of the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman could be denied because it was not a moral imperative that people be in a sexual relationship.

Yes, Paul (with Jesus) believed that the celibate life was a gift. Yet he (with Jesus) also rejected the view that foundational prerequisites to marriage should be reshaped in order to ensure that everyone had a right to sexual relationship of their liking. And, no, it is not true to say, as Miller does, that “Paul argued more strenuously against divorce—and at least half of the Christians in America disregard that teaching.” Paul did not regard remarriage after divorce as *worse* than homosexual practice, any more than he regarded it as worse than adult-consensual incest. Paul presented homosexual practice in Rom 1:24-27 as the supreme example, on the sexual plane, of humans suppressing the truth about their sexual selves self-evident in material creation. It is obviously worse to enter enthusiastically into an inherently unnatural union than to succumb to the dissolution of a union constituted by natural intercourse.

Citing Walter Brueggemann, Miller cites **Galatians 3:28**—“there is [in Christ] no ‘male and female’”—as a text that could be used to justify “gay marriage.” The text does nothing of the sort. Early Christians understood the theology here—note that a similar saying was attributed to Jesus in proto-Gnostic circles—as implying the equality of men and women before God. When applied to sexual relations, however, they understood “no ‘male and female’” as indicating the *end* of all sexual relations. Orthodox Christian circles differed from proto-Gnostic circles not in so interpreting “no ‘male and female’” but rather in making its application to sexual relations optional until the return of Christ. Everyone agreed that the elimination of a male-female prerequisite to sexual relations would, far from leading to homosexual practice, lead to no sex (i.e. to people being like the angels in heaven).



## ***Leviticus and Miller's Bad Analogical Reasoning***

Miller simplistically dismisses the prohibitions of man-male intercourse in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 as “throwaway lines” that belong to a “peculiar” law code containing numerous prescriptions that “our modern understanding of the world has surpassed.” Yet the Holiness Code in Leviticus 17-24 also contains what Jesus called the second greatest commandment: “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18). Should this too be thrown away simply because it belongs to this “peculiar” body of laws? Doubtlessly Miller would say, “No.” What about the prohibitions of incest, adultery, and bestiality, which, along with man-male sex, are located in Leviticus 18 and 20? Should these too be thrown away? Again, she would probably say, “No.”

But then her argument as to why we should ignore the prohibition of male homosexual practice falls flat: She asks: “Why would we regard its condemnation of homosexuality with more seriousness than we regard its advice, which is far lengthier, on the best price to pay for a slave?” Here the only litmus that she develops for determining importance is length of discussion. Well, the “love your neighbor as yourself” text and the prohibitions of adultery and bestiality in the Levitical Holiness Code are also, like the prohibition of homosexual practice, only one verse each. So that can't be a good test of what is still relevant.

Here is my explanation as to why we should regard the prohibition of homosexual practice in Leviticus with great seriousness (notice that I use a combination of criteria). First, the Levitical Holiness Code treats it as a matter of great seriousness. It is the only offense in the sex laws in Leviticus 18 specifically tagged with the word *to'evah*, meaning “abomination, something abhorrent (to God).” A concordance search shows that when this expression is used in the Old Testament it almost always applies to offenses that we still regard as offensive today (idolatry, child sacrifice, cheating the poor, etc.). The prohibition of man-male sex is also put in the first-tier of sexual offenses (i.e. a capital offense) in Leviticus 20:10-16, along with adultery, man-(step)mother and man-(step)daughter incest, and bestiality, all of which we still regard as heinous today.

This leads to the second point: Leviticus groups the prohibition of homosexual practice with other proscriptions that remain valid. In general the sexual offenses proscribed in Leviticus 18 and 20 don't classify well as acts of merely ritual impurity. Unlike ritual impurity offenses, they aren't contagious by touch, aren't rectified merely by ritual bathing, and involve only intentional acts. These are *moral* impurity offenses, as Jewish scholar Jonathan Klawans of Boston University has noted in his book *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford University Press).

Third, these prohibitions are clearly appropriated in the New Testament. The term *arsenokoitai* (“men lying with a male”) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 was formulated from the Greek version (Septuagint) of Leviticus 18:22 (“with a male [*arsen*] you

shall not lie as though lying [*koite*] with a woman”) and 20:13. In Romans 1.24-27 Paul uses two terms, “uncleanness” (*akatharsia*) and “indecent” (*aschomosune*), that appear frequently in the discussion of sex laws in Leviticus 18 and 20. As already noted, the notion of a male-female prerequisite to sexual relations is not isolated to Leviticus but is weaved into the fabric of every discussion of sexual relations in Scripture.

Fourth, the reason for the proscription is implied in the proscription itself, underscores the absolute character of the prohibition, and, like the creation texts, makes sense: *another male shall not be made into a man’s sexual counterpart, a woman* (“you shall not lie with a male as though lying with a woman”).

The only sexual offense in the lists in Leviticus 18 and 20 that would seem odd to us is **sex with a menstruating woman**—and Miller latches on to it as a good analogy to the prohibition of homosexual relations. But there is good reason for bracketing this particular sex law off from others in chs.18 and 20. (a) It is not listed as a first-tier sexual offense in Lev 20:10-16. (b) It is the only sexual offense among the laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 that elsewhere overlaps with *permitted* ritual impurities in Leviticus (Lev 15:24). (c) It is the only sexual offense in Leviticus 18 and 20 where the main issue is the interaction of fluids (blood and semen) rather than the legitimacy of the sexual union per se and (d) the only one that could occur inadvertently in the course of acceptable sexual activity. Moreover, (e) it is the sexual offense in Leviticus 18 and 20 with the least support in the rest of the canon (i.e. constricted Old Testament support and no clear New Testament support).

Miller repeatedly refers in her article to the Bible’s laws regulating **slavery** as an appropriate analogue to its consistent prohibition of homosexual practice. The analogy is terrible. Scripture does not show the kind of vested interest in maintaining slavery that it shows in maintaining a male-female prerequisite for sexual relations. It tolerates slavery in a society where there was no social welfare net and where selling oneself into slavery was sometimes the only alternative to starvation. The Bible doesn’t present slavery as a pre-Fall structure that God called “good.” A number of texts in Scripture show a critical edge toward slavery: mandatory release dates, right of immediate redemption by kin, setting aside sanctuaries for runaway slaves, warnings against treating fellow Israelites as slaves, and injunctions to remember that God had released Israel from slavery in Egypt. Relative to the slave economies that operated in other cultures of the day, the perspective of Israel and the church looks quite liberating. However, as regards the issue of homosexual practice, the countercultural dynamic of Scripture moves in the direction of significantly greater rejection of homosexual practice than what existed in the broader cultural milieu. Unlike slavery, a male-female prerequisite is clearly ensconced in the creation texts and strongly affirmed throughout Scripture, early Judaism, and early Christianity. Indeed, it is treated as a key distinguishing mark in sexual ethics between pagans and believers.

If Miller were really interested in analogical reasoning done with integrity she would opt for close analogies over far analogies. She would pick something like the Levitical laws against **incest**, which bear many points of resemblance to the prohibition of homosexual practice. Like homosexual relations, sexual relationships between close blood relations (1) involve acts of sexual intercourse; (2) can be conducted in the context of monogamy and adult commitment; (3) are nevertheless proscribed in Scripture with a similar degree of absoluteness, pervasiveness, and severity; and (4) are rejected for similar reasons; namely, too much structural or embodied sameness among the participants and not enough complementary difference.

Good analogical reasoning adheres to a basic point; namely, that the best analogies are those that bear the greatest number of substantive correspondences to the thing being compared. When Miller ignores the closest analogues to the Bible's prohibition of homosexual practice in favor of more remote analogues, it is clear that her argument is being driven more by a preconceived ideological objective than by a sincere desire to go where the evidence leaves.

### ***David and Jonathan***

Miller cites the relationship of David and Jonathan as an example of the "enduring love between men," adding: "What Jonathan and David did or did not do in privacy is perhaps best left to history and our own imaginations." That is tantamount to saying, "What Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi did in the bedroom is best left to our own imaginations," as if the Bible could possibly be condoning a case of incest; or even tantamount to saying that whether Jesus' saying about "let the little children come to me" had any positive implications for sex with children is "best left to our imaginations." When the text of Scripture understood in its literary and historical contexts gives little or no basis for "our own imaginations" to conjure up sexual activity, it is irresponsible to grant or take imaginative license. Such is the case with the relationship of David and Jonathan.

Homosexualist interpretations of David and Jonathan mistake non-erotic covenant/kinship language for erotic intimacy. For example:

(1) The statement that "the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1) can be compared to the non-erotic kinship language in Genesis 44:31 ("[Jacob's] soul is bound up with [his son Benjamin's] soul") and Leviticus 19:18 ("You shall love your neighbor as yourself"). It can also be compared to formulaic treaty language in the ancient Near East, such as the address of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal to his vassals ("You must love [me] as yourselves") and the reference in 1 Kings 5:1 to King Hiram of Tyre as David's "lover."

(2) Similarly, the remark in 1 Samuel 19:1 that Jonathan “delighted very much” in David can be compared to the non-erotic references in 1 Samuel 18:22 (“The king [Saul] is delighted with you [David], and all his servants love you; now then, become the king’s son-in-law”) and 2 Samuel 20:11 (“Whoever delights in Joab, and whoever is for David, [let him follow] after Joab”).

(3) When David had to flee from Saul, David and Jonathan had a farewell meeting, in which David “bowed three times [to Jonathan], and they kissed each other, and wept with each other” (1 Sam 20:41-42). The bowing suggests political, rather than sexual, overtones. As for the kissing, only three out of twenty-seven occurrences of the Hebrew verb “to kiss” have an erotic dimension; most refer to kissing between father and son or between brothers.

(4) In 1 Samuel 20:30-34, Saul screams at Jonathan: “You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse [David] to your own shame and to the shame of your mother’s nakedness?” Here Saul is not accusing his son of playing the passive-receptive role in man-male intercourse with David (cf. 2 Sam 19:5-6). Rather, he charges Jonathan with bringing shame on the mother who bore him by acquiescing to David’s claim on Saul’s throne.

(5) When David learns of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan he states of Jonathan “you were very dear to me; your love to me was more wonderful to me than the love of women” (2 Sam 1:26). The Hebrew verb for “were very dear to” is used in a sexual sense in the Old Testament only two out of twenty-six occurrences and a related form is used just three verses earlier when David refers to Saul as “lovely,” obviously in a non-erotic sense. Jonathan’s giving up his place as royal heir and risking his life for David surpassed anything David had known from a committed erotic relationship with a woman; but there was nothing sexual in the act. As Proverbs 18:24 notes (in a non-sexual context): “There is a lover/friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

The narrator’s (narrators’) willingness to speak of David’s vigorous heterosexual life (compare the relationship with Bathsheba) puts in stark relief his (their) complete silence about any sexual activity between David and Jonathan. Put simply, homosexualist interpretations of the relationship between David and Jonathan misunderstand the political overtones of the Succession Narrative in 1 Samuel 16:14 – 2 Samuel 5:10. Jonathan’s handing over his robe, armor, sword, bow, and belt were acts of political investiture, transferring the office of heir apparent to David (1 Samuel 18:4). The point of emphasizing the close relationship between David and Jonathan was to stress the view that David was not a rogue usurper to Saul’s throne. Rather, *he was adopted by Jonathan into his father’s “house” (family, dynasty) as though he were Jonathan’s older brother.* Neither the narrator(s) of the Succession Narrative nor the author(s) of the Deuteronomistic History show any concern about homosexual scandal, because,

in the context of ancient Near Eastern conventions, nothing in the narrative raised suspicions about a homosexual relationship. (For further discussion, see Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 146-54; Markus Zehnder, “Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan and the Debate on Homosexuality,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 69.1 [2007]: 127-74).

## **The Witness of Jesus**

Miller contends that Jesus provides no support for a “traditional” view of marriage because “Jesus was single and preached indifference to earthly attachments—especially family.” “Jesus preached a radical kind of family ... whose bond in God superseded all blood ties.” “There will be no marriage in heaven.” “Jesus never mentions homosexuality, but he roundly condemns divorce.” “Jesus reaches out to everyone, especially those on the margins.” Jesus revealed himself to the woman at the well—no matter that she had five former husbands and a current boyfriend.” “We want, as Jesus taught, to love one another.... What happens in the bedroom, really, has nothing to do with any of this.” “If Jesus were alive today, he would reach out especially to the gays and lesbians among us, for ‘Jesus does not want people to be lonely and sad’” (citing her “friend the priest James Martin”). Here’s the kicker: “While the Bible and Jesus say many important things about love and family, neither explicitly defines marriage as between one man and one woman.”

### ***Jesus and the Creation Texts in Genesis 1-2***

Miller conveniently ignores the fact that Jesus felt so strongly about a male-female prerequisite for valid sexual relations in the context of marriage that he even predicated his insistence on marital “twoness”—i.e. no polygamy or serial polygamy (divorce-and-remarriage)—on the twoness of the sexes, citing back-to-back Genesis 1:27 (“*male and female* he [God] made them”) and Gen 2:24 (“For this reason *a man shall ... be joined to his woman* [or: wife] and the two shall become one flesh”; Mark 10:5-9; Matthew 19:4-9). If the male-female dimension were not essential to Jesus’ point, there would be no reason to cite from Genesis 1:27 just the line “male and female he made them.”

The Essenes at Qumran (ca. 150 B.C. – A.D. 70) provide confirmation for the fact that Jesus was using the twoness of the sexes in marriage, ordained by the Creator in Genesis 1-2, as the foundation for limiting the number of sex partners to two. For the Qumran community also rejected “taking two wives in their lives” because “the foundation of creation is ‘male and female he created them’ [Gen 1:27]” and because “those who entered (Noah’s) ark went in two by two into the ark [Gen 7:9]” (*The Damascus Covenant* 4.20-5.1). Jesus differed from the Qumran community only in extending the principle to negate not just polygamy—specifically, polygyny (husbands having multiple wives) since Israel never

tolerated polyandry (wives having multiple husbands)—but also remarriage after divorce. The logic appears to be: Bringing together the two, and only two, primary sexes ordained by God at creation establishes a self-contained union on the sexual spectrum that admits of no third party.

So whereas Miller thinks that a male-female prerequisite for sexual relations is immoral and prejudicial, Jesus thought it *foundational for sexual relations*. One could choose to opt out of a male-female marital bond, as Jesus himself did. But then the only other option would be to become like “eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb” or “eunuchs who were made eunuchs by humans”; that is, as people who were not having *any* sexual relations (Matthew 19:11-12). Similarly, those who opt out of male-female marriage would be like the angels who “neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Mark 12:25; Luke 20:34-36). If there is no sexual intercourse in heaven it is not necessary to accommodate innate sexual urges in this age when these urges violate formal or structural requirements set in place by God at creation.

Miller uses such texts to argue that Jesus was open to greater “inclusiveness” as regards non-traditional forms of sexual bonds. As it happens, Jesus meant the exact opposite. According to Jesus, it is precisely because a committed sexual partnership is only a penultimate good that God doesn’t have to allow a sexual arrangement other than a lifelong union between one man and one woman. Service of God and sexual purity are higher goods. Sexual relations do not continue in heaven because we get something better: direct access to God. There is thus no such thing as “sexual starvation” in Jesus’ understanding. The new community or family of God now exists to fill the need for companionship in the unmarried. Consequently for Jesus the alternative to marriage between a man and a woman is abstinence from sexual relations, not (as Miller wrongly thinks) a radical reconfiguration of the definition of marriage.

In short, I can’t think of a figure in history for whom the argument made by Miller’s priest friend would have had less of an impact; namely, the spurious claim that we must disregard Scripture’s sacred male-female prerequisite for marriage or else homosexual persons will be “lonely and sad.” This is simply holding hostage God’s clear and strong will for sexuality in Scripture to whatever innate sexual desires and orientations humans might claim. No commandment of God was ever predicated on humans first losing all desires to violate the commandment in question (although Miller seems to think otherwise). On the contrary: It is precisely because there are humans who want to do what God deems wrong that God issues prohibitions—prohibitions intended for our own greater good.

A side point has to do with Miller’s statement: “Jesus never mentions homosexuality, but he roundly condemns divorce.” The first response should be obvious to Miller. Jesus doesn’t have to mention homosexual practice explicitly because (1) there is no Jew in first-century Palestine known to be engaging in it

(we have no attestation of such conduct within centuries of the life of Jesus among Jews, either in Palestine or even in the Diaspora); and (2) there is no Jew advocating for the acceptance of homosexual relations, committed or otherwise (every mention of homosexual practice by Jews within centuries of the life of Jesus regards the act as a supreme sexual offense, superseded only by bestiality and not even by incest). Telling his audience in first-century Palestine that men should stop having sex with other males would have been met with perplexity since the point was too well known, too foundational, and too strongly accepted to merit mention. I myself have never been in a church where the pastor explained why believers shouldn't be in a sexual relationship with their parent, child, or sibling or shouldn't enter a polyamorous relationship. I have never thought that the reason for this is that the minister was open to incest or polyamory of an adult-committed sort.

The second response has to do with Jesus' reasons for mentioning divorce/remarriage. Jesus takes time to condemn divorce/remarriage not because it is a more serious violation of God's sexual norms than homosexual practice—or than incest or bestiality, two other sexual offenses that Jesus also never explicitly mentions—but because it, along with lust of the heart, was a remaining loophole in the law of Moses that needed to be closed. The law already clearly closed off any option for engaging in homosexual practice, incest, bestiality, and adultery, whatever the excuse. Every Jew knew that such offenses were extremely serious. Indeed, they warranted capital sentencing (on Jesus' reworking of this see the discussion below). Jesus dealt decisively with divorce/remarriage because, in his view, it was one of the few remaining problems in the area of sexual purity for first-century Jews. If Jesus based his view of marital monogamy and indissolubility on the twoness of the sexes ordained by God at creation for sexual pairing, he could hardly have regarded the violation of the foundation through homosexual practice as less grievous than divorce/remarriage. Indeed, it was surely the reverse, as texts in the Old Testament, early Judaism, and early Christianity all confirm.

Jews in the ancient world frequently distinguished their sexual behavior from the sexual immorality common among Gentiles, including as regards homosexual practice. From what we know of the Greco-Roman milieu they were correct in their assessment: Gentiles were more likely to engage in sexually immoral acts. This is why Paul, *the* apostle to the Gentiles, had to give more attention to sexual purity concerns than Jesus did, including explicit prohibition of homosexual practice. Paul had a primarily Gentile audience; Jesus a Jewish audience. Consequently when Paul addressed to his converts issues of how to behave (ethics), he frequently led off with the issue of sexual morality and warned converts that persistent sexual immorality could get them excluded from the kingdom of God and eternal life (for example, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; 1 Corinthians 5-7; always first or second, after idolatry, in Pauline vice lists, as in Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Romans 1:19-31; Ephesians 5:3-5).

Later, in the rabbinic period, when the question came up as to whether two unmarried men could sleep in the same cloak, most rabbis permitted it on the grounds that “Israel is not suspected” (*t. Qid.* 5:10); that is, the likelihood of any Jew engaging in homosexual practice of any sort was so miniscule that it could be discounted. It was simply not necessary for Jesus to give any explicit attention to homosexual practice.

For a discussion of why changes in divorce/remarriage are not a good analogy for embracing homosexual unions, see my discussion [here](#) (pp. 110-22).

### ***Miller’s Argument about the ‘Sexually Inclusive’ Jesus***

Miller cites approvingly Brueggemann’s false claim that *as regards marriage matters and sexual activity* the Bible is consistently “bent toward inclusiveness.” Miller adds without thought for the logical absurdity of her claim: “The practice of inclusion, even in defiance of social convention, the reaching out to outcasts, the emphasis on togetherness and community over and against chaos, depravity, indifference—all these biblical values argue for gay marriage.”

Why should Miller stint herself and insist on monogamy? Traditional and nontraditional forms of adult-committed polyamory (polygamy) can be part of this inclusiveness. Polyamory by definition is inclusive (it allows more than one other partner to join the union). Those who engage in polygamy today are certainly social outcasts in Western society. Didn’t Jesus’ outreach include polygamists too? And adult-committed polyamory arguably results in *more* “togetherness and community.” Doubtlessly Miller would protest that polyamory involves coercion and oppressive dominance. Yet such negative characteristics are no more intrinsic to adult-committed polyamory than are (1) high numbers of sex partners over the course of life, (2) sexually transmitted infections (STIs), (3) very short-term unions, and (4) mental health issues such as depression and substance abuse intrinsic to all homosexual activity (they exist at disproportionately high rates owing significantly to the absence of a true sexual complement but they are not intrinsic). If Miller disregards the foundation on which Jesus bases his opposition to polygamy, namely, a two-sexes prerequisite, then she has no reasonable basis in her argument about inclusivity, defiance of social convention, love, and the building of community for rejecting loving, adult-committed, polyamorous bonds. Certainly polygamy cannot be proscribed on the supposition that a person can only truly love one other person at any one time. When parents have a second and third child they don’t love the first child any less and people often have more than one intimate friend. Why should erotic love be any different from non-erotic love on this score, especially since Miller argues that wanting “to love one another for our own good” is sufficient justification for a sexual relationship?

By the same token, Miller’s inclusivity-nonconformity-love-community argument, consistently maintained, would be great for promoting adult-committed incest.



Indeed, Miller stresses that Jesus “preached indifference to earthly attachments—especially family” and “preached a radical kind of family ... whose bond in God superseded all blood ties.” If blood ties are now a matter of indifference *as regards forming sexual relationships* (for this is how Miller applies her own argument) then it is obvious that an adult-committed sexual relationship between close kin (two siblings or an adult child and parent) should be acceptable to Miller. She would protest: But this would make children in a family unit unsafe or would result in birth defects. Once more such a counterargument is not an absolute argument that rejects incest categorically; it rather rejects only incest with an underage kin or incest where procreation would likely arise. One can certainly conceive of forms of close-kin sexual relationships that such a counterargument would not indict (including incestuous relationships between same-sex consenting adults).

The only *absolute* or *categorical* argument that one could make against incest would be a philosophical argument from nature; namely, that persons who are too much structurally alike, here as regards kinship, are not good matches for a sexual union. The birth defects that are typical but not intrinsic for such relationships are the symptoms of the root problem of too much embodied sameness. Yet such an argument would also invalidate homosexual unions—here the structural sameness is more keenly felt on the level of sex or gender—which is precisely why Miller is unwilling to use it. But that would be an ideological complaint, not a logical objection.

It is hypocritical of Miller to emphasize as a basis for affirming homoerotic unions such things as inclusion of those on the margins, defying social convention, the presence of “mutual joy” and love as a sufficient prerequisite, and building community and togetherness while rejecting out of hand all adult-committed forms of incest and polyamory. She cannot produce any scientific study showing intrinsic measurable harm to all persons who have ever engaged in incest or polyamory. Therefore, given her beliefs, she should be willing to affirm at least some forms of incest and polyamory. Or drop her argument for homosexual practice as absurd.

Why, even Oprah, the guru of millions of women in this country, exclaimed after meeting some bright, well-adjusted, attractive, upper-class women in a polygamous relationship: “The best part of doing this job ... [is that] I come in with one idea and then I leave a little more open about the whole idea. And what I realize ... is that in every situation there are people who give things a bad name. There are difficulties and then there are people who handle those difficulties differently” (2007: “Polygamy in America: Lisa Ling Reports”). Moreover, the “gay” Metropolitan Community Churches, the Unitarian Universalist Church, and homosexual professors of religion in this country have all promoted reexaminations of negative views toward polyamory or “polyfidelity” (go [here](#) and [here](#), pp. 35-45).

Now I am not arguing merely that the kinds of arguments used by Miller and others to promote homosexual practice lead to a “slippery slope,” though Miller and others are clearly supplying both the slope and the grease. I am arguing that if Miller rejects absolutely adult-committed forms of polyamory and incest then she has even greater reasons for rejecting adult-committed homosexual practice, since prohibitions of incest and polyamory are related analogically or foundationally, respectively, to the prohibition of homosexual practice.

It is particularly ironic that Miller uses polygamy as an example of why we should disregard a male-female prerequisite in Scripture. We have changed on polygamy so, she says, we should also be able to change on a male-female requirement. Yet she gets Jesus’ logic backwards. Jesus pointed to a male-female prerequisite given in creation, the natural twoness of the sexes, as the *basis* for eliminating sexual unions involving more than two persons, whether concurrent or serial polygamy. In short *for Miller polygamy is the basis for getting rid of a two-sexes prerequisite whereas for Jesus a two-sexes prerequisite is the basis for getting rid of polygamy.* By arguing that we should do away with any significance to the duality of the sexes in marriage Miller is leaving the door open for a logical return to polygamy.

Jesus accepted the view that the law of Moses was not perfect. But whereas Miller argues for new models of marriage to gratify specific “sexual orientations” Jesus did the reverse, arguing for a new model of marriage that would no longer make concessions to “sexual orientations” that desired what was contrary to “male and female he made them.” Moses had permitted men to have more than one wife, whether concurrent or serial, as a concession to human “hardness of heart,” including the male sexual drive. Jesus said: No longer. His warning about adultery of the heart also moves in this direction. As with the rest of the six antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48), Jesus’ operating principle was: You used to be able to get away with this-or-that; I tell you: No longer. So the issue isn’t merely the *fact* of some change. The issue is as much a question of “In what direction?” And Miller is moving in a direction opposite to that of Jesus.

### ***Jesus, Love, and Homosexual Practice***

Jesus was not “inclusive” about sexual matters. He took an already carefully circumscribed sexual ethic given to him in the Hebrew Bible and narrowed it even further, revoking the license given especially to men to have more than one sex partner (the sayings on divorce/remarriage) and extending God’s demand for sexual purity even to the interior life (forbidding adultery of the heart; Matthew 5:27-32).

New Testament scholar Walter Wink once argued against my first book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Abingdon Press, 2001; 500 pgs.), that the Bible has no distinctive sexual ethic but only sexual customs or mores that must be

critiqued by Jesus' love commandment. As I indicated in my rebuttal of Wink ([here](#), pp. 77-80) Jesus obviously had a distinctive sex ethic that sometimes arrived at diametrically opposite results from his application of the love commandment. Jesus taught that we should love all with whom we come into contact, including enemies. He universalized the "love your neighbor as yourself" command in Lev 19:18. At the same time, he restricted the number of sex partners lifetime to one other person of the other sex. Obviously, then, one cannot argue for a sexual union on the basis merely of generic concepts of love; for otherwise Jesus would have had to command sex with everyone we meet or at least with everyone with whom we develop a committed relationship. So it is absurd for Miller to argue, as she does, that since "Jesus taught [us] to love one another," "what happens in the bedroom, really, has nothing to do with any of this." The only way to avoid such absurdities is to acknowledge that the love commandment is an *insufficient* (even if necessary) basis for legitimizing *sexual* bonds. Sexual relationships must also entail special requirements concerning the formal (structural, embodied) complementarity of the participants. For sexual intimacy is not merely more intimacy or deeper love.

To move, as Miller does, from the fact that Jesus reached out to sexual sinners to the conclusion that Jesus was not really concerned about "what happens in the bedroom" is to misread completely Jesus' message and mission. Jesus came to call sinners to repentance—and here by sinners Jesus meant those who had egregiously violated the law, including adulterers and economically exploitative tax collectors—lest they be excluded from the kingdom of God that he was proclaiming. Thus he prevented the woman caught in adultery from being stoned—dead people can't repent—while calling on her to "go and no longer be sinning" (John 8:11). The same line appears in John 5:14, followed up with the warning: "lest something worse happen to you," in context, loss of eternal life.

One of Miller's arguments as to why the Bible's views on homosexual practice should be disregarded—an odd line of argumentation given that she often seems to deny that the Bible indicts homosexual practice absolutely—is: "It recommends the death penalty for adulterers (and in Leviticus, for men who have sex with men, for that matter)." And yet we don't find Miller rejecting prohibitions of adultery, man-mother or man-daughter incest, or bestiality—other first-tier sexual offenses in Lev 20:10-16 for which a capital sentence is prescribed. The capital sentencing underscores the severity of the offense. The story of the woman caught in adultery suggests that Jesus would have waived the capital sentencing but on grounds of extending the options for repentance and not because he regarded the offenses in question as light matters. In fact, for Jesus something greater was at stake than a capital sentence in this life; namely, eternal exclusion from God's presence. Therefore every opportunity must be given for the person to repent in this life.

Miller says: "Jesus revealed himself to the woman at the well— no matter that she had five former husbands and a current boyfriend." What Miller fails to

understand is that Jesus is evangelizing the Samaritan woman, first convincing her of the need to believe in him. The obedience to commands will invariably follow, as John 14:15 makes clear: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Without such moral transformation it is impossible to continue to remain in Jesus; one is thrown like an unfruitful branch into the fire (John 15:10).

There can be no doubt about the fact that Jesus took sexual sin with the utmost seriousness. In the Sermon on the Mount, sandwiched in between the two antitheses having to do with sex (adultery of the heart and divorce/remarriage), is Jesus' warning that, if one's eye or hand threatens one's spiritual downfall, one should cut off the offending member for it is better to enter heaven maimed than to be thrown into hell full-bodied (Matthew 5:29-30). Miller doesn't love homosexual persons more because she extends to them a "right" to be married. She loves them less because she has granted an absolution from a form of behavior that God has not permitted and, in so doing, encourages them to do things that Scripture (including Jesus) teaches will put them at high risk of not inheriting God's kingdom. Miller is like a parent telling a child who is about to touch a hot stove: "Go ahead and experiment: It won't hurt you." Such "tolerance" and "love" turns out to be functional hate.

### ***Other Evidence for Jesus' Negative Stance on Homosexual Practice***

In addition to arguments already brought forward, the following ten factors confirm the case that Jesus was absolutely opposed to homosexual practice:

1. Jesus' retention of the Law of Moses even on relatively minor matters such as tithing, to say nothing of a foundational law in sexual ethics; and his view of the Old Testament as inviolable Scripture, which Scripture was absolutely opposed to man-male intercourse.
2. Jesus' further intensification of the Law's sex-ethic in matters involving adultery of the heart and divorce (Matt 5:27-32), suggesting a closing of remaining loopholes in the Law's sex-ethic rather than a loosening; also his saying about cutting off body parts, warning that people could be thrown into hell precisely for not repenting of violations of God's sexual standards (Matt 5:29-30).
3. The fact that the man who baptized Jesus, John the Baptist, was beheaded for defending Levitical sex laws in the case of the adult-incestuous union between Herod Antipas and the ex-wife of his half-brother Philip, a woman who was also the daughter of another half-brother.
4. Early Judaism's univocal opposition to all homosexual practice.
5. The early church's united opposition to all homosexual practice (completing the circle and underscoring the absurdity of positing a homosexualist Jesus without analogue in his historical context: cut off

- from his Scripture, from the rest of early Judaism, from the man who baptized him, and from the church that emerged from his teachings).
6. Jesus' saying about the defiling effect of desires for various forms of sexual immoralities (Mark 7:21-23), which distinguished matters of relative moral indifference such as food laws from matters of moral significance such as the sexual commands of his Bible and connected Jesus to the general view of what constituted the worst forms of *porneia* in early Judaism (same-sex intercourse, incest, bestiality, adultery).
  7. Jesus' affirmation of the Decalogue prohibition of adultery, which in its own context and in its subsequent interpretation in early Judaism was regarded as a rubric for the major sex laws of the Old Testament, including a male-female prerequisite for valid sexual bonds.
  8. Jesus' saying about Sodom (Matt 10:14-15 par. Luke 10:10-12), which, understood in the light of early Jewish interpretations of Sodom, probably included an indictment of Sodom for attempting to dishonor the integrity of the visitors' masculinity by treating them as if they were the sexual counterparts to males.
  9. Jesus' saying about not giving what is "holy" to the "dogs" (Matt 7:6), an apparent allusion to Deuteronomic law (Deut 23:17-18) and texts in 1-2 Kings that indict the *qedeshim*, self-designated "holy ones" identified as "dogs" for their attempt to erase their masculinity by serving as the passive-receptive partners in man-male intercourse.
  10. The fact that Jesus appropriated the context of the "love your neighbor" command in Lev 19:18 by insisting on reproof as part of a full-orbed view of love (Luke 17:3-4; cf. Lev 19:17: reprove your neighbor lest you incur guilt for failing to warn him); and defined discipleship to himself as taking up one's cross, denying oneself, and losing one's life (Mark 8:34-37; Matt 10:38-39; Luke 14:27; 17:33; John 12:25), indicating Jesus' willingness to make hard demands of people.

The idea that the historical Jesus provides any basis for affirming homosexual unions represents revisionist history at its worst.

## Concluding Thoughts

In view of the fact that Scripture's male-female prerequisite for sexual relations is more deeply embedded in its sexual ethics than its opposition even to incest, it is foolhardy for Miller to claim that "religious objections to gay marriage are rooted not in the Bible at all" but in personal prejudice. In view of the fact that her appeals to generic love, "mutual joy," inclusion, defiance of social convention, and "community" no more lead to an affirmation of adult-committed homosexual practice than they lead to its corollaries, affirmation of adult-committed incest and polyamory, it is ridiculous for Miller to claim that the Bible supplies her with the "universal truths" that mandate "gay marriage." In view of the fact that Scripture's male-female prerequisite for sexual relations is treated as foundational by Jesus,

it is absurd for Miller to justify endorsement of homosexual relations with the statement, “the Bible is a living document.” Miller’s position on “gay marriage” doesn’t merely continue a trajectory already begun in Scripture; it contradicts a core value in sexual ethics to a degree that the writers of Scripture would have found abhorrent.

Miller says: “We cannot look to the Bible as a marriage manual.” Obviously the Bible has to be read in its historical and literary contexts (incidentally, something that Miller does not do well). Obviously it has to be read with the realizations that it consists of multiple genres (i.e. different types of literature), that individual elements may require modification in different cultural settings, and that not all elements carry the same transcultural weight. Yet Miller goes too far. I’ll let her in on a little secret: the Bible does contain commandments, not just suggestions. A number of these have all the earmarks of enduring relevance for our times. Clear examples in the sexual realm include the prohibitions of same-sex intercourse, incest, adultery, bestiality, fornication, and (according to the New Testament) polyamory (multiple-partner bonds)—the last mentioned one a development premised on a male-female prerequisite for sexual relations.

Lisa Miller’s article is so poorly researched and so badly (and arrogantly) argued that the editors of *Newsweek* should be ashamed of themselves for publishing it. But they are not ashamed. In fact, managing editor Jon Meacham sets up Miller’s cover story in his [“Editor’s Desk”](#) column by writing:

No matter what one thinks about gay rights—for, against or somewhere in between—this conservative resort to biblical authority is the worst kind of fundamentalism. Given the history of the making of the Scriptures and the millennia of critical attention scholars and others have given to the stories and injunctions that come to us in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament, to argue that something is so because it is in the Bible is more than intellectually bankrupt—it is unserious, and unworthy of the great Judeo-Christian tradition.

Let’s see if I understand this: Basing one’s views on the overwhelming witness of Scripture regarding an important issue of sexual ethics, including the witness of Jesus—a witness understood, of course, in its historical and literary contexts—is “unworthy of the great Judeo-Christian tradition”? Does Meacham not realize that obedience to scriptural authority and the teaching of Jesus is precisely how “the great Judeo-Christian tradition” formulated its theology since its inception? And how is a negation of appeals to scriptural authority consistent with the subheading for Miller’s article: “Opponents of gay marriage often cite Scripture. But what the Bible teaches about love argues for the other side”? So as an alternative to submitting to the overwhelming witness of Scripture on moral issues, which includes the voice of Jesus, believers should prefer the sloppy moral reasoning of people like Meacham and Miller?

Here is Meacham's whole case in a nutshell: "Briefly put, the Judeo-Christian religious case for supporting gay marriage begins with the recognition that sexual orientation is not a choice—a matter of behavior—but is as intrinsic to a person's makeup as skin color." Miller makes a similar simplistic observation: "If we are all God's children, made in his likeness and image, then to deny access to any sacrament based on sexuality is exactly the same thing as denying it based on skin color."

The alleged analogy is wrongheaded for two main reasons. First, race is very different from "sexual orientation." Race or ethnicity is a primarily non-emotive condition that is 100% heritable, absolutely immutable, primarily nonbehavioral, and thus inherently benign. Homosexual "orientation"—which is no more than the directedness of sexual urges at a given period in a person's life—is an impulse that is not 100% heritable (i.e. no purely deterministic mechanism for homosexual development has been discovered but at most only congenital or early childhood risk factors), is open to some change (i.e. certainly at least as regards the raising or lowering of the intensity of impulses; if the Kinsey Institute is to be believed, some limited movement along the Kinsey spectrum from 0 to 6 is normal over time), is primarily behavioral (i.e. it is a desire to *do* something), and therefore cannot be regarded as inherently benign.

Second, as even two prominent, homosexualist researchers of congenital causation factors for homosexuality have acknowledged:

Despite common assertions to the contrary, evidence for biological causation does not have clear moral, legal, or policy consequences. To assume that it does logically requires the belief that some behavior is non-biologically caused. We believe that this assumption is irrational because ... all behavioral differences will on some level be attributable to differences in brain structure or process. Thus, *no clear conclusions about the morality of a behavior can be made from the mere fact of biological causation, because all behavior is biologically caused....* Any genes found to be involved in determining sexual orientation will likely only confer a predisposition rather than definitively cause homosexuality or heterosexuality. (my emphasis; Brian S. Mustanski and J. Michael Bailey, "A therapist's guide to the genetics of human sexual orientation," *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 18:4 [2003]: 432)

This is a fairly elementary moral point but Meacham and Miller miss it completely. Studies have shown that it is a cross-cultural (and cross-species) phenomenon that males find monogamy considerably more difficult than females (certainly due in part to high testosterone levels in males). Since men don't ask to think about sex so often throughout the week and don't ask to be sexually aroused by the sight of beautiful women whom they know nothing about, shouldn't society dispense with the monogamy principle for men? Isn't a "polysexual" orientation "as intrinsic to [most men's] makeup as skin color"? It is certainly not a "choice." So in light of this "new knowledge," why not provide marriage benefits to persons in a committed polysexual relationship? Isn't it better for a polysexual person to

be in a committed relationship with each sexual partner than to engage in a series of one-night stands?

Or should we not rather reflect on the words of Dr. Fred Berlin, founder of the Sexual Disorders Clinic at Johns Hopkins, on another sexual orientation? “The biggest misconception about pedophilia is that someone chooses to have it.... It’s not anyone’s fault that they have it, but it’s their responsibility to do something about it.... We’ve learned that you can successfully treat people with pedophilia, but you cannot cure them.” Few immoral impulses, sexual or otherwise, are matters of “choice” in the strict sense. So it makes no sense to formulate a moral argument based on an absence of choice as regards the mere experience of an impulse. “No clear conclusions about the morality of a behavior can be made from the mere fact of biological causation, because all behavior is biologically caused.”

Meacham, consistent with Miller’s article, then adds: “The analogy with race is apt, for Christians in particular long cited scriptural authority to justify and perpetuate slavery with the same certitude that some now use to point to certain passages in the Bible to condemn homosexuality and to deny the sacrament of marriage to homosexuals.” In this faulty line of reasoning Meacham is asserting that it doesn’t matter whether an alleged analogy is in fact an accurate exegesis and application of Scripture. The only thing that matters is that an analogy was attempted, which makes all “similar” analogies wrong, even those that do accurately interpret Scripture. In short, Meacham’s (and Miller’s) reasoning treats as functional equivalents both inaccurate interpretations of Scripture and accurate interpretations of Scripture—an absurd view.

Meacham stumbles on: “This argument from Scripture is difficult to take seriously—though many, many people do—since the passages in question are part and parcel of texts that, with equal ferocity, forbid particular haircuts.” No, the forbidding of certain hairstyles is not approached in Scripture with “equal ferocity”—nor with equal pervasiveness across Scripture, nor with the same backing from Jesus, nor with the same absoluteness, nor with the same countercultural force. Any attempt to compare Scripture’s stance on a male-female prerequisite for sexual relations with its stance on “haircuts” shows the complete “intellectual bankruptcy” of the formulator of the argument.

Meacham and Miller also make a comparison with the use of Scripture to promote anti-Semitism, which is absurd given that Jesus, Paul, and virtually the whole of the early church leadership consisted of Jews. Even the comparison with attempts to use Scripture to devalue women runs up against the numerous positive references to women and women’s roles in Scripture. Relative to the ancient Near East or Greco-Roman world the views expressed in Scripture toward women and women’s roles appear positive. But, again, as regards homosexual practice, Scripture’s views are more negative than the surrounding cultures. Scripture’s liberating message there involves freedom from



enslavement to homosexual desires and behaviors. To claim that Scripture is opposed to Jews and women in a manner comparable to its opposition to homosexual practice is to be either ignorant or disingenuous in one's reasoning.

The question must be asked: What is it with the "elite" newspapers and newsmagazines over the past decade? Are they so obsessed with promoting the homosexualist agenda that they have now given up even a pretense to objectivity, balanced research, and good sense? Do they care nothing for destroying their reputation, built up over many years, as credible sources for news and commentary? These news sources are more and more resembling a homosexualist *Pravda*—a different agenda but the same style of propaganda "news" reporting that would make the old Kremlin leadership proud.

We should, of course, continue to dialogue with homosexualist advocates like Miller and Meacham. However, their support for a homosexualist ideology is so brazen and offensive in its blatant misinformation—obviously they are very angry about the passage of Proposition 8 in California—that subscribers to *Newsweek* should give serious consideration to canceling their subscription. For such homosexualist zealots as Miller and Meacham, reasoned argumentation is unlikely to have any major impact. Having lost their ethical compass, they may yet understand the language of money, though. It is clear that, ultimately, Miller and Meacham have little desire to make responsible arguments about the merits of moral appeals to Scripture (their refusal to consider any major argument against their position is evidence enough of this). They have only one objective; namely, to intimidate Jews and Christians who appeal to Scripture for their opposition to homosexual practice. Such persons must either shut up or else be treated as the ignorant religious bigots that Miller and Meacham claim them to be.

A final note: Should believers work to prevent government from foisting the homosexualist agenda on the population? Yes, very definitely so. The withholding of governmental incentives for homosexual practice is as much a civil issue as society's prohibition of incest and polygamy (even of an adult, consensual sort). As Jesus argued, it is the twoness of the sexes that is the foundation for the limitation of the number of partners in a sexual union to two (bringing together the two primary sexes makes a third party both unnecessary and undesirable). Incest, even of an adult-committed sort, is prohibited in Scripture on the basis of the principle that too much structural (embodied, formal) sameness (here, as regards kinship) is problematic for sexual relationships—a principle established by the prior prohibition of sexual relations between persons too much alike on the level of gender or sex. Paul made use of a nature argument in Romans 1:24-27, for those who don't know (or don't care) what Scripture says, alongside of an echo to Genesis 1:26-27. Both Jews and Christians in antiquity viewed the prohibitions of same-sex intercourse, incest, adultery, and bestiality as applicable beyond the sphere of God's people (already in Leviticus they apply also to resident aliens).

We know today that disproportionately high rates of harm attend those who engage in homosexual practice (on average, high numbers of sex partners lifetime and sexually transmitted infections, even for those in “committed relationships”; mental health difficulties and short-term relationships, even when society gives its approval of homosexual unions; go [here](#)). Moreover, there is some evidence that cultural approval can affect the incidence of homosexuality in a population (for which go [here](#); and [here](#), pp. 30-34, 120-25). Today’s people of God should actively oppose governmental imposition of “gay marriage” and homosexual civil unions (marriage without the name). The alternative is to have government penalize you for speaking out against homosexual practice, hold hostage your children in the school systems to homosexualist propaganda, and coerce businesses to subsidize immorality through mandatory health benefits for same-sex couples and “affirmative action” programs for “sexual orientation minorities” (go [here](#)); in short, to have society treat you as the moral equivalent of a virulent racist and attenuate your civil liberties accordingly.

*Postscript (Dec. 31): I have twice sent an email to Editor Meacham informing him of this assessment of Miller's article and requesting an opportunity in Newsweek to write an op-ed piece on the subject of Scripture and homosexuality. Three weeks have elapsed and Meacham has yet to respond.—RG*