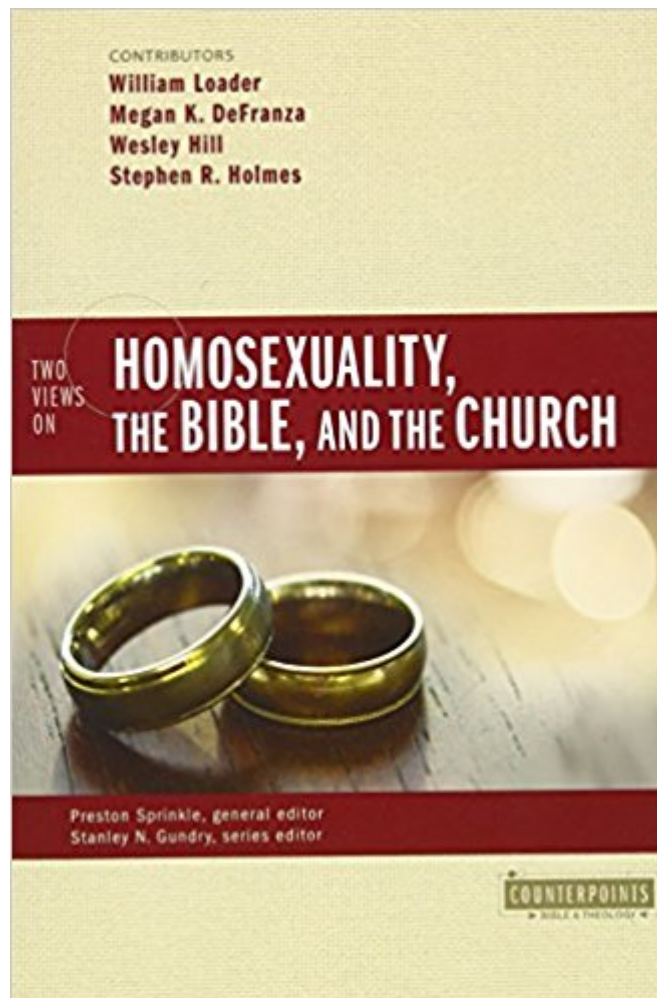




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Two Views On Homosexuality, The Bible, And The Church (Counterpoints: Bible And Theology)



Synopsis

No issue is more divisive or more pressing for the church today than homosexuality. *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church* brings a fresh perspective to a well-worn debate. While Christian debates about homosexuality are most often dominated by biblical exegesis, this book seeks to give much-needed attention to the rich history of received Christian tradition, bringing the Bible into conversation with historical and systematic theology. To that end, both theologians and biblical scholars—well accomplished in their fields and conversant in issues of sexuality and gender—articulate and defend each of the two views: Affirming view William Loader Megan K. DeFranza Traditional view Wesley Hill Stephen R. Holmes Unique among most debates on homosexuality, this book presents a constructive dialogue between people who disagree on significant ethical and theological matters, and yet maintain a respectful and humanizing posture toward one another. Even as these scholars articulate pointed arguments for their position with academic rigor and depth, they do so cordially, clearly, and compassionately, without demeaning the other. The main essays are followed by exceptionally insightful responses and rejoinders that interact with their fellow essayists with convicted civility. Holding to a high view of Scripture, a commitment to the gospel and the church, and a love for people—especially those most affected by this topic—the contributors wrestle deeply with the Bible and theology, especially the prohibition texts, the role of procreation, gender complementarity, and pastoral accommodation. The book concludes with general editor Preston Sprinkle's reflections on the future of discussions on faith and sexuality.

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Customer Reviews

Preston Sprinkle (PhD, Aberdeen) is a teacher, speaker, and New York Times bestselling author. He has written several books including *People to Be Loved*, *Living in a Gray World*, *Charis*, and *Erasing Hell*, which he co-authored with Francis Chan. Preston has held faculty positions at Nottingham University, Cedarville University, and Eternity Bible College. He and his family live in Boise, Idaho, and he currently helps pastors and leaders engage the LGBTQ conversation with thoughtfulness and grace.

William Loader is professor emeritus at Murdoch University in Perth, Australia, and has written an extensive and highly acclaimed five-volume series on sexuality in the ancient world. Bill concluded the series by publishing a popular level summary of these volumes titled *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Eerdmans, 2013).

Megan K. DeFranza received her PhD from Marquette University, Wisconsin, and is the author of the recently published, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Eerdmans, 2015).

Wesley Hill (PhD, Durham University, UK) is assistant professor of biblical studies at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Zondervan, 2010), *Paul and the Trinity?: Persons, Relations, and the Pauline Letters?* (Eerdmans, 2015), and *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Brazos, 2015). He is on the editorial board for *Christianity Today* and writes regularly for that magazine as well as for *Books & Culture*, *First Things*, and other publications.

Stanley N. Gundry is executive vice president and editor-in-chief for the Zondervan Corporation. He has been an influential figure in the Evangelical Theological Society, serving as president of ETS and on its executive committee, and is adjunct professor of Historical Theology at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary. He is the author of seven books and has written many articles appearing in popular and academic periodicals.

The book *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church* is a welcome addition to the conversation on same-sex relationships. Significantly, it is printed by an evangelical publishing house (Zondervan), signaling recognition that the debate is no longer outside of the evangelical world. The review of the positions below is lengthy, but for those interested in the scholarly issues, I hope it is helpful.

WILLIAM LOADER *fâ€ŒS ARGUMENT (AFFIRMING VIEW)*

Loader is the top scholar on research of Jewish and Christian perspectives on sexuality in the late Second

Temple period. He provides an accurate conclusion: the biblical authors condemned all forms of same-sex behavior including consensual relations. He provides ample evidence, drawing from extra-biblical Jewish writings to demonstrate attitudes toward sexuality at that time period. However, I do have a few quibbles with his arguments:¹ He suggests that Paul's opposition to same-sex relations was not related to anatomical complementarity or procreation (p. 39). Instead, Loader provides a nebulous conclusion that Paul opposed same-sex relations because they "run contrary to how God made male and female to be and relate" (p. 39-40). And, he says Paul's understanding comes from Genesis 1. Oddly, he ignores how Genesis 1 is very much about procreation:

Plant reproduction: "Then God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and . . . The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind.'

Animal reproduction: "God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves . . . God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth' . . . Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind; and it was so.'

Human reproduction: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it.'

Reproduction is one of the most predominate themes in Genesis 1 and the reason given for male and female. Not only that, but much of the Old Testament is concerned with fertility and progeny. In late the Second Temple period procreation was a key factor in understanding sexual relations. Loader does not provide sufficient evidence to show Paul would have been an exception. Paul might not have seen procreation as the *only* reason for sex/marriage, but there is good reason to believe his understanding of contrary to nature included a violation of the Genesis procreative intent for male and female. Elsewhere, Loader seems to clarify that he does see procreation as very evident and part of the biblical authors' understanding of marriage (p. 150). But, it is frustrating that such an astute scholar would be so unclear on the key text in the debate. And disappointing how his explication is already being recycled by folk to suggest that Paul's understanding of sex and marriage did not involve procreation. Many evangelicals have reduced marriage to companionship and "sanctification." But that reduction was certainly not in the minds of the biblical authors when it comes to marriage. Celibacy was the option for minimizing procreation.

Moreover, people in antiquity could not think of marriage apart from procreation given the lack of modern contraception (as Loader also acknowledges).² After providing ample evidence that the biblical authors objected to even consensual same-sex relations, he argues that we should affirm monogamous same-sex relationships because Paul did not believe that a person could actually be dispositionally homosexual. He may have known about possible theories of sexual orientation, but rejected them on the belief that God only creates heterosexual males and females (as was the case with Philo). Paul thought people had same-sex desires because their minds were twisted from rejecting God (p. 45). Since we know that many God-fearing people are in fact homosexual dispositionally and not because of lust or apostasy, we should bring that experiential truth into our appropriation of ethics from Scripture. While, this may be a legitimate conclusion, Loader unfortunately, provides an unpersuasive argument for moving in that direction. He argues based on *“fairness”* and *“justice.”* But most conservative evangelicals don’t care about fairness when it comes to perceived sin. They would rather see someone martyred a horrible death before offering any concession. There are much better hermeneutical arguments that are rooted in how we think about appropriating ethics from Scripture and the nature and function of Scripture itself. Loader does not know his opponent well enough and, therefore, is not able to provide a more compelling rationale for incorporating experiential truth.

MEGAN K. DEFRANZA (AFFIRMING VIEW) I was disappointed in Defranza’s essay. Much of it repeats long known affirming arguments, and ones that are not very persuasive (e.g. we don’t really know what any of these terms mean anyway). She rightly acknowledges that much of same-sex relations in antiquity would have been associated with exploitation. Pederasty and use of slaves as sex objects appear to have been much more common than consensual adult relationships. However, she does not adequately address Jewish and early Christian perspectives on sexuality in the late Second Temple period.¹ Defranza attempts to introduce flexibility in sexual relationships by using intersex people as an example that does not fit in the Genesis binary of male and female. She implies that intersex people are simply a normal variation in creation. However, she does not engage with science and the reality of congenital birth defects. Theologically such birth defects could be understood as part of the *“fall.”* She should at least engage this if she wants to be persuasive on this point. She needs to provide evidence for why intersex conditions should not be considered a disability, but rather part of the spectrum of God’s intended created order.² She does not show a clear distinction between Jewish perspectives on sexuality vs. Greco-Roman perspectives (and therefore what Paul means by

"natural" or "unnatural" (p. 86). Also, even if most same-sex relations in antiquity were exploitative in some way, she does not engage with the evidence that Jews of the time rejected even consensual relationships. Nor does she adequately grapple with the fact that neither Leviticus nor Romans show evidence of referring to exploitative practices, but rather consensual acts. Her interpretation that these texts must refer *only* to exploitative practice is conjecture and not derived from the texts themselves.³ Defranza admits that "The unanimous picture of marriage in the Bible is heterosexual" (p. 87). But she argues: "Just because the Bible condemns *certain kinds* of same-sex sexual acts does not mean *all* same-sex sexual acts are therefore out of bounds" (p. 91; emphasis in the original). It is not clear if Defranza is actually suggesting that Paul would have approved of same-sex monogamous relationships. Such an idea is absurd to anyone who has studied early Jewish and Christian perspectives on sexuality. I suspect what she means is that "the Bible does not mention consensual monogamous relationships of the modern flavor. And therefore, silence equals permission. Setting aside the weakness of an argument from silence, she seems to be employing a prescriptive hermeneutic here. That is, the Bible gives us rules of what we can and cannot do and since there is no explicit rule against modern understandings of same-sex relationships, there is no prohibition. Yet, on the other hand, she resorts to a trajectory hermeneutic, indicating that the biblical authors had patriarchal understandings of marriage and we can move beyond them. She needs to clarify her hermeneutical methods.⁴ Where Defranza is stronger is when she simply acknowledges that she does not subscribe to the views of the biblical authors and has moved beyond them on the basis of such helps as science, psychology, and anthropology (p. 93-94). Unfortunately, if she is trying to be persuasive to traditionalists, she does not provide a sufficient hermeneutical framework for her trajectory. For example, she should engage with William Webb who uses the trajectory hermeneutic to show why we can move forward on women's status and slavery, but not same-sex relations.⁵ Defranza's most meaningful contribution in her essay is pointing out how arguments that use Christ and the church as a basis for mandating heterosexual marriage falter (p. 88-90). Specifically, she points out that the metaphors stem from a society where women were deemed inferior to men. An egalitarian view of women complicates using a metaphor that is clearly between a superior (Christ) and an inferior (church). The same is true for metaphors around king and subject or master and slave.

WESLEY HILL (TRADITIONALIST VIEW) Hill's essay is well-written and sound. He lays out one of the best arguments for retaining the

traditionalist's view. I have little disagreement with the nuts and bolts of his presentation. Though, I might quibble with minor things like his assertion of textual allusions to Genesis in Leviticus (a view that relies too heavily on a canonical reading, rather than the original author's context, ancient text production, and origins of Israelite law codes). The primary weakness in Hill's argumentation is theological projection onto the text without sufficient attention to historical-critical matters. Certainly, canonical readings are valid and important for a confessional use of Scripture. But, I am concerned that he too readily accepts traditional theology when new evidence from science and experiential truth might give cause for at least taking a second look. We need to ask whether the canonical reading that Hill proposes is a "real" or merely a compelling construct. The biblical authors associated marriage with procreation, companionship, covenant loyalty, pleasure, and a safeguard against immorality. Of these, only procreation cannot be exemplified in a same-sex union. So then, must procreation always be a factor in the definition of marriage? Hill would essentially say yes, but leaves room for infertile couples. Even the Catholic church allows exceptions such as if a woman's life would be threatened by pregnancy. In other words, exceptions are made based on mercy. So, also, Augustine allowed for a barren woman to marry for companionship. Hill's argument, then, does not technically hinge on procreation, but rather 1) the notion that same-sex unions are sinful because they violate "created order" of anatomical complementarity (and perhaps gender complementarity); 2) the Levitical prohibition is absolute and not casuistic; and 3) same-sex unions cannot exemplify the iconic metaphor of Christ and the church. But, I am not sure he has made his case. The New Testament presents virtue ethics based on love. So, Paul says: "Against [love] there is no law". And Jesus says all the Law can be summed up in love. This begs the question of whether there is such a thing as a "violation of the created order" as a definition for sin, especially when such violation does not transgress love. And, if there is such a thing, whether it is so absolute that it would not allow for exceptions based on mercy. In Scripture law is subject to mercy and justice. Contrary to many conservative's understanding of the nature of Scripture, laws were not necessarily deemed absolute, even divine law. First, Israelite law codes were not a complete set of laws and were not intended to be. In other words, they are not in Scripture for us to use as a rule book. Law codes in the ancient Near East differed from daily legal records. They appear to have been used in schools for wrestling with possible scenarios or as royal monuments. They symbolize a just society. Thus, actual law in practice was not set in stone and could change over time. The goal was always

justice, and how the biblical authors understood justice changed over time. The biblical authors updated divine revelation. The writer of the Deuteronomistic Code did not have a problem with changing the divine revelation of the Covenant Code to the point of contradiction (e.g. slavery laws). Later editors often tweaked things. Or Paul, for example, made allowances concerning divorce based on his pastoral situation that went beyond what Jesus allowed. And of course, Jesus made allowances to law for purposes of mercy – even a law grounded in the created order (Sabbath). So, I don't think it is possible to assert that even apodictic laws in the OT are always absolute. The biblical authors themselves don't treat sacred text/teaching that way. As for the metaphor of marriage between Christ and the church, I think far too much has been put into this metaphor than is there. It hyper-spiritualizes marriage and projects gender onto the Trinity in a faulty way. I can't imagine God choosing an icon over mercy. Any icon would be for the benefit of humankind, not the benefit of God – a symbol to remind us of Christ's fidelity to us. STEPHEN HOLMES

(TRADITIONALIST VIEW) Holmes holds to the traditional Augustinian view of marriage, including that all marriage must include procreation. In fact, he says that we should recover a "Christian understanding of human sexuality as primarily oriented towards procreation, not towards pleasure . . ." (168).¹ Holmes suggests that the reason the church viewed celibacy as superior to marriage was because of an affirmation of the resurrection. That is true, but he downplays how many church fathers saw sex as the result of sin. One biblical argument used was that in Genesis Adam and Eve are not depicted as having sex until after the fall and therefore sex is in some way the result of the fall. Also, there were traditions that suggested that Mary never had sex even after the birth of Jesus in order to maintain the idea of her holiness. Even Holmes seems to have a lack of appreciation for the pleasure and intimacy of sex given that he thinks human sexuality should be primarily orientated toward procreation and not pleasure – as if pleasure for its own sake is faulty. To his credit at the end of the essay he asks whether the Augustinian view of marriage could be wrong. I would suggest that, yes, making human sexuality and marriage primarily about procreation is a limited view of human sexuality. Though, I think all heterosexual marriages have to be open to procreation simply by virtue that contraception is not always 100%.² Since for Holmes marriage must include procreation, he automatically rules out any possibility for same-sex marriage. He does allow for marriage of infertile people, but never explains his rationale – a frustrating omission. He alludes to "gender complementarity" but never provides evidence or explanation for that as well. Even when DeFranza challenges him on this, he does not provide a

clear response. That diminishes the quality and usefulness of his essay significantly when he does not engage with the very key points of the debate.³ Surprisingly, Holmes suggests the possibility of pastoral accommodation that would allow for monogamous relationships for some gay and lesbian people on a case by case basis. He likens this to the way churches have accommodated remarriage after divorce and polygamous marriages in Africa after conversion (because of the harmful effects of breaking up families). He gives an example of a married gay couple who later come to Christ, and problems with breaking up the family.⁴ Holmes's argument for why a pastoral accommodation should be made is fairly weak. He seems to suggest it has to do with accepting culture where it is at ("present cultural realities" 193). To the ears of conservative evangelicals that sounds like capitulating to the world. The hardship of celibacy would be a more compelling argument with more support from the Bible and tradition. But he doesn't use this. In fact, he downplays the hardship of celibacy, suggesting we do not need sex for human fulfillment. How he can say this in light of church tradition (many voices admitted celibacy was not possible for everyone and so marriage was concession), as well as replete examples of celibate communities struggling (up to 50% of Catholic priest have not maintained celibacy consistently according to some studies). He also ignores science and the reality that our sex and familial drive is one of the strongest drives that we have. Celibacy is an abnormal state. It goes against our biology. The naivety around the sex drive is one of the reasons the church hasn't been able to address chastity well among its own youth where signing "Love Wait" pledges usually only results in an 18 months delay. There is a logical inconsistency within conservative circles where on the one hand young people are encouraged to marry young to avoid immorality and on the other hand saying sex doesn't matter and anyone can just go without it at will. Of course, the struggle is much more than sex, but the familial drive. We are built to want to create our own families.

CONCLUSION The book is worth getting for Loader's and Hill's essays. In fact, I wish the book was these two debating and refining their arguments. What I would like to see more of: the authors attempting to get more in the minds of their opponents so as to provide more persuasive arguments to the other side. It often felt like talking past each other. Also, missing from this conversation and pretty much every book on homosexuality out there is: 1) regardless of one's position on the issue, it has yet to be demonstrated that an entire demographic can actually achieve life-long celibacy (there is evidence that it is not possible for everyone) and 2) the conversation needs to begin with a debate on how ethics are appropriated from Scripture in the first place.

Irenic. Important. Academic. Does not refrain from bringing in pastoral concerns. Worthy of any Christians' consideration. A great model of dialogue.

This book comprises the affirming view, in which the authors argue that same-sex relationships and marriages among Christians are permissible, and traditional view where they argue that it's not. Each view is written from the point of view of both a theologian and a biblical scholar, so be prepared, this is a somewhat technical read. Although I must say that it's surprisingly readable even for the layman. I will focus this review on the more interesting takeaways I got out of the book. The prohibition passages William Loader begins the book by exploring in great detail the various prohibition passages found in the Bible. So much so that I thought he held the traditional view. If you've got no idea what they are, by the end of it, you'd be very well-versed in them. What I was surprised to find was that he held an affirming view. Get the book to find out why. The intersex Megan DeFranza is an expert on the topic of the intersex and how it intersects with Christian theology. Having read her first book, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, I was very excited when I found out she was a contributor in this volume and I was certainly not disappointed. In her chapter, she points out how the intersex is not alone in nature. Just as amphibians who live both on land and in water, dawn/dusk which blends both day and night, the intersex are neither male nor female. Who are they then to marry? So DeFranza argues that although "Adam and Eve may be the majority story, but they are not the exclusive model for what it means to be human. By extension, heterosexual marriage can be seen as the majority story, not the exclusive model." Also, she expounds on the uses and origins of the word *malakoi* and *arsenokoitais*, explaining that they could mean effeminate and refer to men as being "soft ones" as they were like women and that they lack self-control. This was a big thing in ancient cultures as women were seen to be less than humans and to be associated as one was the greatest insult. Something interesting I learnt was the fact that we might not want to read *arsenokoitai* as a reference to Leviticus 18 and 20 because compound words do not always mean what the sum of their parts suggests. As English speakers, we know that "understanding" has nothing to do with "standing" or location "beneath." Here she quotes from Dale Martin, the author of *Sex and the Single Savior*. I thought she made a strong case for the affirming view. Spiritual Friendship Similarly, I've been a fan of Wesley Hill since he published his first book, *Washed and Waiting*, which was a mini-memoir of his

life as a gay Christian and also includes some theological reflections. I've also read his subsequent one, *Spiritual Friendship*, where he explores the history of friendships of ancient Christians. It also draws from areas of his own life where as a celibate gay Christian man, he is committed to living his life out with a close heterosexual couple, sharing a house together. In *Two Views on Homosexuality*, he elaborates a little bit about what *Spiritual Friendship* is at the end of his chapter and I thought it was a great introduction to something that might be foreign to a great majority of Christians in this day and age where friendship seems ephemeral as people move across a country for work. Stephen Holmes does a good job expounding on the Augustinian view on marriage. Before reading this, I had no idea what this was. Also, he explores the topic of marriage in Christian history in great depth. Finally, I thought it was very gracious of him to admit that even after an extensive study of this topic, he might be wrong about it all. In conclusion I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book even though it was rather technical at certain parts. I would highly encourage everyone to get a copy of this book if they are interested in finding out both the affirming and traditional views of homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church. Also, it provides the common arguments for and against each view and that alone was worth the price of this book. Enjoy!

This was recommended by a friend who appreciated the traditional argument advanced here. I read it inclined to the affirming view and found the affirming argument at least as convincing. In short, this book does justice to the honest biblical and theological wrestling Christians are doing over this important set of challenges. I particularly enjoyed the diversity of thought and the charity with which the contributors engaged with each other in the responses section following each essay. There are, interestingly, too different approaches to Scripture present that find an affirming view, and between the two traditional voices (one of whom is openly gay and celibate) there was a creative diversity of responses offered for Christians committed to the traditional understanding of marriage. My only, mild complaint is that both traditional contributors stand explicitly on Augustine and especially his insistence that sex be procreative. I found that opens the traditional argument to a line of critique that may successfully "defeat" Augustine without dealing more immediately with the canon itself (though the affirming authors certainly do that, too).

i will purchase it from you next time. a present , good product with high quality. For a home product, for the price, this is quite good. I prefer a heavier product altogether, but I was surprised with the quality considering how inexpensive this product is. Coming from a professional background, I'd say

this is a great piece to start with. good quality with low price.

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