

## Women and Gender in the Bible and the Biblical World

William Loader\*

# Social Justice and Gender

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0115>

received March 11, 2020; accepted April 21, 2020

**Abstract:** This article examines the impact of the widespread pattern of unequal age at marriage which led men to conclude that not only were their wives less experienced and mature, they were also inferior by nature. It examines the ideological underpinning for the view of women's inferiority in Plato and the Genesis creation stories, especially in their Greek translation. It then traces the way this value system found expression in the traditional allocation of gender roles, women taking responsibility for the internal affairs of the household and men for the external affairs, including public discourse. There were exceptions both within Judaism and within the early Christian movement. These and the egalitarian thoughts in Christian beginnings had the potential to subvert these norms, over time, but a long time.

**Keywords:** sexuality, gender, New Testament, women, St. Paul

Women are not the same as men. Men are more experienced, more capable of controlling their emotions, more suited therefore for leadership in the public arena, and women are better taking on roles in the household. This appears to have been the assumption of most men in the Greco-Roman and Jewish social world of the first century.<sup>1</sup> It was a natural conclusion to draw, since most people married, and most men married women significantly younger than themselves, i.e. the man around 30 and the woman in her teens, sometimes half his age.<sup>2</sup> Add to this the vulnerabilities related to frequent pregnancies and observations of physical strength, the male logic drew the following conclusion: women are inferior to us – flawed male reasoning which has survived well into our own day.<sup>3</sup>

It was not without its ideological underpinning. In the *Timaeus*, Plato depicts the first human beings as male. Females emerged as failed males and began a downward evolution of inferiority, reaching its lowest level with worms on the ground (41D). While the influence of the *Timaeus* on the Septuagint of the

<sup>1</sup> On the common assumptions about marriage and roles within marriage in Greco-Roman and Jewish society, see Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, who notes: "Jewish writers during the Second Temple period had entirely conventional assumptions about the purpose of marriage, assumptions that they shared with much of the Greek and later Roman intelligentsia" (p. 20). See also Treggiari, "Marriage and Family in Roman Society," 132–82; Baugh, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Greek Society," 103–31; Krenkel, *Naturalia non turpia: Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece and Rome: Schriften zur antiken Kultur und Sexualwissenschaft*, 113; Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature*, 32–74.

<sup>2</sup> On this, see Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 106–109. He writes: "In Palestine and the West, a man married when he was around thirty to a woman ten to fifteen years younger. By waiting until he was thirty a man was able to establish a household, a crucial assumption underlying Palestinian and Western marital ideology" (132); see also Kraemer, "Typical and Atypical Family Dynamics: the Cases of Babatha and Berenice," 130–56, 140–41. We see this typically reflected in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (T. Iss. 3:4; T. Levi 11:8; 12:4) and in Philo who cites Solon's advice with approval that men at the age of 29–35 (*Opif.* 103, 104). Luke also reflects this assumption is depicting Jesus as aged 30 when he embarked on his ministry (3:23), as does Plutarch when he advises husbands to treat their wives as daughters to be educated not just as lovers (*Conj. Praec.* 48).

<sup>3</sup> For discussion of research on men and women in community and leadership in the early Christian movement, as reflected in the New Testament literature, see Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality*, 339–429.

\* Corresponding author: William Loader, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia, e-mail: w.loader@murdoch.edu.au

creation stories is a matter of debate,<sup>4</sup> the Greek text with its subtle changes in translation also assured men they were right. Using ἄνθρωπος to translate אָדָם worked initially but was soon replaced in the text by Adam, a man's name, supporting the view that the first human was a man.<sup>5</sup> The creation of woman, here not through failure but by divine intent, comes through in the Septuagint as an initiative paralleling the creation of the man. Thus, in 2:18 "I shall make" in the Hebrew (אֶפְשָׁר) becomes like 1:26, "Let us make" (ποιήσωμεν) and the translator enhances the echo by using the word likeness (καθ' ὁμοίωσιν 1:26; ὅμοιος αὐτῷ 2:20; cf. κατ' αὐτόν 2:18; Hebrew for 2:18 and 20: (יִצְחָק)).<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, man was made in the image of God and woman was made in the image of man. That is clearly how Paul reads it in 1 Corinthians 11, men reflecting the glory of God, women reflecting the glory of man (Ἀνὴρ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ὀφείλει κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων· ἡ γυνὴ δὲ δόξα ἀνδρός ἐστίν) (11:7; similarly 11:3).<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the common human experience and the common male assumption found its secondary underpinning for the first-century Jews, including Christ followers, in scripture itself. Men and women are seen positively as the work of the creator, including their position in creation, i.e. men to rule creation and women not equal to men but nevertheless valued and respected.

In approaching what the New Testament says about women, we must begin with the world of their discourse. Were all women confined to household roles? By no means. There were exceptions. Queen Salome Alexandra was a famous exception as was the legendary Judith,<sup>8</sup> not to speak of the role of women prophets (Testament of Job 46–51; Luke 2:36; Acts 21:9), and in the Greco-Roman world the sibyl and Sappho.<sup>9</sup> Among Christ believers, there were also exceptions. Paul reflects this in needing to discuss women taking such roles in worship in 1 Corinthians 11, where he nevertheless insists that women not dress beyond their status, but where he also reminds men that while they rightly claim that woman came from man, nevertheless, all of them came from women – their mothers (11:12).<sup>10</sup> Acknowledging the difference in nature and status did not mean any less respect or love.

There are notable exceptions reflected also in Romans 16: Prisca, Mary, Junia ("prominent among the apostles" 16:7), Tryphaena and Tryphosa (16:3–12). It is not altogether surprising in a movement, which had its beginnings not among the male elite but among the poor, that the disempowered would assume roles not normally allowed in the public arena.<sup>11</sup> Women were part of Jesus' itinerant group (Mark 15:40–41; 3:31–35; 10:30; Luke 8:2–3),<sup>12</sup> not just key players in hosting the itinerants in their homes

<sup>4</sup> See Rösel, *Übersetzung als Vollendung der Auslegung*, 72–87, and the discussion in Loader, "Sexuality and Ptolemy's Greek Bible: Genesis 1–3 In Translation: '... Things Which They Altered For King Ptolemy' (Genesis Rabbah 8.11)," 207–32; Loader, *The Septuagint, Sexuality and the New Testament*, 52–6.

<sup>5</sup> On the subtle changes brought about through the LXX translators of the Genesis creation stories, see Loader, *Septuagint, Sexuality*, 27–59.

<sup>6</sup> The LXX translators also used ἡπάτησέν με to translate אָפְשָׁה ("deceived me"), introducing a reading not present in the Hebrew because ἀπατάω can mean "seduce", which Paul, for instance, assumes in 2 Cor 11:2–3 (ζηλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς θεοῦ ζήλω, ἡρμυσάμην γὰρ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἀνδρὶ παρθένον ἀγνήν παραστήσαι τῷ Χριστῷ· φοβοῦμαι δὲ μή πως, ὡς ὁ ὄφις ἐξηπάτησεν Εὐάν ἐν τῇ πανουργίᾳ αὐτοῦ). This implied a further weakness in women as easily seduced and seductive. On this, see Loader, *Septuagint, Sexuality*, 45–6.

<sup>7</sup> See the discussion in Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 368–70, 375–77.

<sup>8</sup> Ilan, "And Who Knows Whether You have not Come for a Time Like this?" (Esther 4:14): Esther, Judith and Susanna as Propaganda for Shelamzion's Queenship," 127–53; Esler, "Ludic History in the Book of Judith: The Reinvention of Israelite Identity?," 107–43, 121; Clanton, Jr., "(Re)Dating the Story of Susanna: A Proposal," 121–40, 135–40. Against those who suggest that Judith was composed to bolster Salome Alexandr's status Mittmann-Richert, *Einführung zu den Jüdischen Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit: Historische und legendarische Erzählungen*, points out that 2:28 must reflect a time before the annexation of the coastlands during the time of Alexander Janneus (103–76 B.C.E). She suggests that together with the political structures reflected in 4:6–8, this makes it likely that Judith was composed during the reign of John Hyrcanus (142–104 B.C.E.) (p. 85). It nevertheless would lend itself to later being used to support Salome's status.

<sup>9</sup> See also Hylan, "Women διάκονοι and Gendered Norms of Leadership," 687–702, who notes active roles of women in Roman and Greek culture (pp. 690–97).

<sup>10</sup> See Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 368–83, for discussion of literature. See also Marshall, "Paul, Plutarch and the Gender Dynamics of Prophecy," 207–22, who discusses the different ways gender dynamics influence the way each portray woman as prophets.

<sup>11</sup> Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 341.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 352–55.

(Mark 1:29–31; Luke 10:38–42; John 12:1–8). Is Magdala not a place but a nickname “the tower” given by Jesus to Mary, as Jesus gave Simon the nickname Cephas/Petros, “the rock”, as Joan Taylor has suggested?<sup>13</sup> Given the movement’s origins, it is understandable that women played a more significant role in the movement in the early decades than normally allotted to them in society. As Gentiles flooded in, pressure mounted to abandon the biblical requirement of circumcision set out in Genesis 17. They did. We find two independent accounts of the meeting in Jerusalem where they did just that (Gal 2:1–10; Acts 15:1–21), though not without controversy (cf. Gal 5:2–12). Such pressure did not, however, succeed in subverting the norms about women. The pressure to return to normal was too great.

The norm in church gatherings, as Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 14, was for women not to be vocal in public discourse but to remain silent, reflecting the norms of society (14:33b–36).<sup>14</sup> These norms explain not only why the tradition depicts all 12 disciples chosen by Jesus to symbolise leadership of Israel’s 12 tribes in the kingdom as male (Mark 3:14–19; Matt 19:28; Luke 22:28–30), not, I think, because women’s names were suppressed, but also simply because it was so.<sup>15</sup>

The rationalisation for imposing such norms on women is more direct in Paul’s later admirer, who has him cite Eve’s sin in Genesis with its conclusion that men should rule women as further grounds for doing so (1 Tim 2:9–15; Gen 3:16).<sup>16</sup> Women should be happy with the security, which their need to be cared for through the processes of childbirth will bring them – that is their salvation, their security (σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας) (2:15). Other later writings reinforce the household norms which outlined the appropriate behaviour of men and wives, parents and children and slaves and masters (Col 3:18 – 4:1; Eph 5:21 – 6:9; Tit 2:2–5; 1 Peter 3:1–7).

Putting women in their normal place does not imply misogyny. On the contrary, they are also God’s creation. Famously, Paul declared in a context primarily dealing with the Gentile issue: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).<sup>17</sup> We would like it to be a declaration against slavery and discrimination, but as Paul shows in 1 Corinthians 7, it is not. Slaves, for instance, should not seek to be free (7:17–24), but all, despite their differences, which Paul does not deny, including different gender roles, are to be valued. The later household codes are, arguably, not inconsistent with Paul’s view.<sup>18</sup> Love is there, too, and those who argue for gender complementarity affirm the same. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, not, of course, to be applied in the other direction: wives should love their husbands as Christ loved the church. That would not fit the gender inequality presupposed. There is thus no social change in the sense of change of social structures, at the core of social justice.

Male fallacious reasoning about women’s inferiority informed the assumption that the normal place for women was not in public discourse and leadership. That flawed logic was the determinant for New Testament writers, their communities and wider society. The many exceptions in the beginning, around Jesus and the early decades are memories, like the women who followed Jesus to his death (Mark 15:40–41), the Samaritan with whom Jesus conversed in public (John 4:4–42, esp. 4:27), the “sinners” at

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, “Missing Magdala and the Name of Mary ‘Magdalene’,” 205–23.

<sup>14</sup> See Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 383–91, for discussion of the literature, including on the textual issues. See also Neutel, “Women’s Silence and Jewish Influence: The Problematic Origins of the Conjectural Emendation on 1 Cor 14.33b–35,” 477–95, who critiques anti-Jewish influence in many theories of interpolation.

<sup>15</sup> So Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 250–51; similarly, Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, who writes: “So far as our evidence takes us, the absence of women from the twelve was determined by social custom and cultural mores of the time, not by any theological rationale on the fitness or otherwise of women for mission/ministry” (537).

<sup>16</sup> See Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 417–24, for discussion of the literature. On possible female deacons and widows, see pp. 424–29, and the recent discussion in Hylan, “Women διάκονοι”.

<sup>17</sup> See Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 389–94, for discussion of the literature. See also Collins, “No Longer ‘Male and Female’ (Gal 3:28). Ethics and an early Christian baptismal Formula.”

<sup>18</sup> See Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 403–11, for discussion of the literature. Lalitha, *Re-Reading Household relationships Christologically: Ephesians, Empire and Egalitarianism*, observes that “both concepts of mutuality and subordination exist in Eph. 5:21–23 side by side in constant tension” and that the notion of “one-flesh” trends more towards the former (p. 169).

tax collectors' parties (Mark 2:15–16; Matt 11:19//Luke 7:34; Luke 15:1–2; 19:10)<sup>19</sup> and the women at the empty tomb (Matt 28:1–10; Luke 24:1–9; John 20:1–18). Luke's ideal of women performing supporting roles (8:2–3; Acts 9:36) allows, indeed encourages, room for them like Mary also to sit and (perhaps only) listen (Luke 10:38–42).<sup>20</sup>

Is there any wriggle in this system? The trend was to close down the exceptions over time and restore respectable normality as men saw it. But as with comments about slaves as also those whom God loves and for whom Christ died and who, like children, now had a place in worship gatherings, so stories and traditions which affirmed women had the potential to break down the flawed male assumptions which confined women. Those who espouse an approach to scripture which acknowledges its incarnation in the fallibilities of male discourse will break free from such assumptions as did the early church on circumcision. Those who cannot, will do their best with sympathetic constructions of gender complementarity and keep women out of the male preserve.<sup>21</sup> Both approaches are better than pretending that no such social discrimination existed and that, if only we read scripture aright, we will see that all is well and coheres with the positions we hold dear.

Equally significant but noted here only in summary is the clash in Mark between Jesus and his disciples over his rejection of male gender stereotypes in three times declaring he came to serve and even to suffer (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34, 45). Paul was offside with many Christ followers for the same reason (2 Cor 10:1, 10; 1:17). Peter's Messiah is the triumphant male to be served (8:32), a view shared by his fellow disciples (9:34–37; 10:35–37). In Mark, Jesus' throne is a cross, his crown, a crown of thorns. Resurrection does not mean Peter was right after all, as much tradition in practice implies, but that Jesus was right and set a pattern of maleness and personhood to be followed. "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many" (10:45) is so easily subverted to read: "For the Son of Man came not to serve but to be served and to give his life as an example to many". This is something with enormous social justice implications, but over history Peter's position has mostly held sway and not just in that church which claims direct succession. Most have also constructed God after the image of the male stereotype. Men also receive stern warnings about sexual exploitation (Matt 5:27–30; 18:6–9), as current now as then.

The drive to make scripture say what we want it to say comes to the fore in discussions about same-sex or same-gender relations. Convinced by the social evidence and often by personal experience of meeting gay people, and in some instances even finding them in one's own family, some have been doing their best to make a case that in fact Paul had no problems with people being gay. His objection was not what he said it was. It was only against hetero men engaging in same-sex relations or harbouring such desire, not homo men.<sup>22</sup> Or it was only against pederasty, the exploitation of the young and of slaves, a phenomenon which was widespread.<sup>23</sup> Or it was only against such passions when they were excessive.<sup>24</sup> Or it was mainly targeting abuses in the imperial household<sup>25</sup> or by some Stoic teachers.<sup>26</sup> Or Paul was speaking only hypothetically in a rhetorical manoeuvre to enable

<sup>19</sup> On this see Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 346–50.

<sup>20</sup> See Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 359; Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts*, 103–5.

<sup>21</sup> Köstenberger, *Jesus and the Feminists: Who Do They Say That He Is?*, makes an evangelical non-feminist case for complementarity based on her understanding of Scripture as "the inspired account of God's revelation" (p. 220), and see the critique in Giles, *What the Bible Actually teaches on Women*, also arguing within an evangelical frame of reference.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, 111–14; Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible," 33–49, 34–37.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate*, 99–139. Jennings and Liew, "Mistaken Identities but Model Faith: rereading the Centurion, the Chap, and the Christ in Matthew 8:5–13," 467–94, speculate that the centurion's servant may have been a pederastic pet. On sexual exploitation of slaves, see Jewett, *Romans*, 181.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, 149–78. See also Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*, 54, 56; Boswell, *Homosexuality*, 111–12.

<sup>25</sup> On this, see Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire*, 79–82; see also Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 157. See also Jewett, *Romans*, 171.

<sup>26</sup> So Swancutt, "The Disease of Effemination: The Charge of Effeminacy and the Verdict of God (Romans 1:18–2:16)," 193–234, 205–206; Swancutt, "Sexy Stoics and the Rereading of Romans 1.18–2.16," 42–73, 43, 70–72.

him to change the focus onto other sins and in fact he had no problems with same-sex relations and passions at all.<sup>27</sup> Or Paul's concern was such behaviour when it occurred in association with pagan cults<sup>28</sup> or was only the act or only the act and the desire to act, not the orientation itself.<sup>29</sup>

These all make sense in the light of the widespread acceptance that some people are genuinely gay and that we have done such people a serious injustice for placing them under a cloud of condemnation over the centuries. This is an issue of social justice, I certainly agree. I have not, however, found the explanations briefly outlined above as at all convincing.<sup>30</sup> As with gender issues in relation to women, it is better to acknowledge what is there in the New Testament and not in the name of love or social justice to fudge the issues.

Taking scripture seriously, taking anyone seriously, means hearing what they are saying in their language and context. In Paul's Jewish context did people address the issue? Yes, they did. Our most extensive evidence is in Philo who condemns such relations outright, mostly focusing on pederasty, but also including adult consenting relations, male and female,<sup>31</sup> views shared also by Paul.<sup>32</sup> On what basis? The Leviticus prohibitions (18:20 and 20:13; cf. Philo *Spec.* 3.37–42). Whatever their original intent, possibly only to forbid men taking a wife's role in someone else's marriage bed, as Jan Joosten has recently suggested,<sup>33</sup> both Philo and others before him, such as Pseudo-Phocylides, took them as a basis for forbidding all same-sex relations, including those between women (Ps.-Phoc. 3, 190–192, 210–214).<sup>34</sup>

Foundational to Philo's approach was also his reading of Gen 1:27, according to which God made them male and female, or as some have popularly glossed it, Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. Accordingly, all people are heterosexual. Philo, therefore, agrees with Plato, in rejecting the aetiological myth of sexual origins which Plato put on Aristophanes' lips, namely, that the originally three kinds of human beings, male, female, and bisexual, were sliced in half by Zeus for their impudence and have ever since been seeking their other halves, accounting for gay and lesbian orientation and action (Philo *Contempl.* 50–63; cf. Plato *Symp* 189–193).

<sup>27</sup> Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today* 109, 122; similarly Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, 77–83; Hanks, "Romans," 582–605, 586.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Boswell, *Homosexuality*, 108, Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity*, 255–60; Hanks, "Romans," 594.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Gagnon, "The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Key Issues, and Response to Dan O. Via," 40–92, 99–105, 81, 92; and Gagnon, Notes to Gagnon's Essay in the Gagnon-Via *Two Views* Book, 82, 136.

<sup>30</sup> See the detailed discussion in Loader, "Reading Romans 1 on Homosexuality in the Light of Biblical/Jewish and Greco-Roman Perspectives of its Time," 119–49; and earlier: Loader, "The Bible and Homosexuality;" and Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 293–338.

<sup>31</sup> On Philo see Loader, *Philo, Josephus, and the Testaments on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in the Writings of Philo, Josephus, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, 204–16; Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 33. Philo addresses pederasty (*Spec.* 3.37; *QG.* 4.37, 39; *Contempl.* 50–52.59; *Hypoth.* 7.1), exploitation of slaves (*Prob.* 124), same-sex relations between consenting adults (*Abr.* 135–136), both male and female (*QG.* 2.49; *Virt.* 20–21; *Her.* 274). Philo marshals support also from arguments about the shamefulness of men becoming like women, the "female disease" (*Abr.* 136; *Contempl.* 60; *Spec.* 1.325; 2.50; 3.37), the dangers of becoming impotent (*Abr.* 135), wasting semen (*Spec.* 3.37.39), depopulating cities (*Spec.* 3.32–33, 39; *Abr.* 135–136; *Contempl.* 62), by denying the divine command of nature to bear fruit (Gen 1:28).

<sup>32</sup> Some suggest that in 1:26 Paul comes off topic to condemn not same-sex relations between women but rather other disapproved relations such as anal or oral sex or bestiality. See the discussion of the literature in Loader, "Reading Romans," 142. Condemnation of lesbian relations is much more likely. So also Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, 299 but see arguments for the counter position in Murphy, "More Evidence Pertaining to 'their females' in Romans 1:26," 221–40, arguing that *χρῆσις* must imply men's participation. Perhaps Paul used it appropriately against normal usage, as part of his depicting *χρῆσις* between women as unacceptable.

<sup>33</sup> Joosten, "A New Interpretation of Leviticus 18:22 (par. 20:13) and its Ethical Implications," forthcoming and accessible at <https://oxford.academia.edu/JanJoosten>, proposes a translation: "You shall not lie with a male *on the bed* of a woman", implying "prohibition of male–male intercourse with a married man".

<sup>34</sup> 2 Enoch condemns "sin which is against nature, which is child corruption in the anus in the manner of Sodom" (10,2), but also consenting adults: "friend with friend in the anus" (34, 1–2 ms P). The Sibylline Oracles mostly address pederasty (Sib 3.596–9, 764; 4.33–34; 5.166–8, 387) and male prostitution (Sib. Or. 3.185–187).



Paul reflects this standard depiction of same-sex relations as typifying the pagan world's depravity in his opening argument to the Romans because he knows they will affirm it. He was not trying to be controversial, by stating a view they would not share, but by stating one which we know well from Philo and others. Otherwise his rhetoric would not have worked. For he does so, not in order not to retract it, but to set them up for his next move of turning the screws on them by pointing out when they as Jews sin they are no better, so that now both Gentiles and Jews need Jesus' salvation (3:9, 23–26). In just a few verses (1:24–28) Paul follows the logic of Wisdom's argument in depicting corrupt responses to God as generating corruption in the self (Wis 13:1–14:31; similarly T. Naph. 3:1–4:1): senseless darkened minds (ἀλλ' ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία. φάσκοντες εἶναι σοφοὶ ἐμωράνθησαν 1:21–22), having an “unfit mind” (ἀδόκιμον νοῦν), as he puts it (1:28).<sup>35</sup> It is a psychological argument at one level. A perverted response to God leads to perversion in the mind, which displays itself as misdirected passion and its consequences. The concern is, therefore, not just the act, and not even just the intent to follow desire, but the wrongly oriented mind.

His arguments are relatively simple. The messed up mind leads to misdirected feelings and actions which are contrary to nature (μετέλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν, ὁμοίως τε καὶ οἱ ἄρσενες ἀφέντες τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας) (1:26–27), that is, to how God made people – because all people are heterosexual. Paul speaks of burning passion (ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἄρσενες ἐν ἄρσεσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι 1:27), not because he is happy with misdirected passion on a low flame, but because he assumes that such messed up minds produce strong passion which lead to such depravity (Καὶ καθὼς οὐκ ἔδοκίμασαν τὸν θεὸν ἔχειν ἐν ἐπιγνώσει, παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν, ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα 1:28). He also uses the language of shame, because for him, given his gender assumptions, it is humiliating for a man to take a woman's role, the inferior role, as passive partner in such relations (τοῦ ἀτιμάζεσθαι τὰ σώματα αὐτῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς 1:24; πάθη ἀτιμίας, 1:26; τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην 1:27).<sup>36</sup> It is also shameful for both partners since they are acting contrary to how God created them. “For one another” (εἰς ἀλλήλους) in 1:27 shows that he includes mutual consenting relations in his condemnation.

Paul's judgement in Romans 1, very probably reflected in his use of “male-bedders” (ἀρσενοκοῖται) and “softies” (μαλακοὶ) in the vice list of 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 (cf. also ἀρσενοκοίταις ἀνδραποδισταῖς 1 Tim 1:10),<sup>37</sup> makes good sense, given his assumption that all people are hetero. Some will feel bound by their approach to scripture to agree. If you do not, then you must face the implications of how to respond to the genuinely gay. I do not believe gay people are helped when exegetes with loving fudgery explain Paul away. If our faith allows us, it is better to take scripture seriously, as we should on what it says about women and circumcision, and recognise that its truth also inspires us to deal with new situations and new knowledge in ways consistent with its core value of social justice. There will be howls of protest, as there were against setting circumcision aside, but we will, to my mind, stand in better continuity with Paul and ultimately Jesus on doing so.

## References

- Baugh S. M. “Marriage and Family in Ancient Greek Society.” In *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, edited by Ken M. Campbell, 103–31. Downers Grove: IVP, 2003.
- Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980.

<sup>35</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, rightly challenges interpretations which attribute same-sex orientation to Adam's fall: “The alleged echoes of the Adam stories in Genesis are simply nonexistent,” unlike those to Genesis 1 (p. 274). Cf. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 384, 385, 388; Dunn, *Romans*, 62.

<sup>36</sup> On this, see Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*, 212, 249–51; Vorster, “The Making of Male Same-Sex in the Graeco-Roman World and its Implications for the Interpretation of Biblical Discourses,” 432–54, 449.

<sup>37</sup> See Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 326–34, for discussion of the literature. See also Cook, “μαλακοὶ and ἀρσενοκοῖται: in Defence of Tertullian's Translation,” 332–52, providing solid evidence that Tertullian's reading of the two terms in 1 Cor 6:9 as referring to the active and passive partners in same-sex relations.

- Brooten, Bernadette J. *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Brownson, James V. *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.
- Clanton, Jr., Dan W. "(Re)Dating the Story of Susanna: A Proposal." *JSJ* 34 (2003), 121–40.
- Collins, Adela Yarbro. "No Longer 'Male and Female' (Gal 3:28). Ethics and an Early Christian Baptismal Formula." *Journal of Ethics in Antiquity and Christianity* 1 (2019), 27–39.
- Cook, John Granger. "μαλακοί and ἀρσενικοῖται: In Defence of Tertullian's Translation." *NTS* 65 (2019), 332–52.
- Countryman, L. William. *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2nd ed., 2007.
- Dunn, James D. G. *Romans*. WBC 38AB; Nashville: Nelson, 1988.
- Dunn, James D. G. *Jesus Remembered. Christianity in the Making*. vol. 1, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Elliott, Neil. *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008.
- Esler, Philip Francis. "Ludic History in the Book of Judith: The Reinvention of Israelite Identity?" *BibInt* 10 (2002), 107–43.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *Romans*. AB 33. New York: Doubleday, 1993.
- Gagnon, Robert A. J. "The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Key Issues" and "Response to Dan O. Via". In *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, 40–92 and 99–105. Minneapolis: Fortress, and "Notes to Gagnon's Essay in the Gagnon-Via *Two Views* Book", <http://www.robagnon.net/2VOnlineNotes.htm>. Accessed Feb 2009.
- Giles, Kevin. *What the Bible Actually teaches on Women*. Eugene: Cascade, 2018.
- Hanks, Thomas. "Romans." In *The Queer Bible Commentary*, edited by Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, & Thomas Bohache, 582–605. London: SCM, 2006.
- Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 1996.
- Helminiak, Daniel. *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*. Millennium Edition, updated and expanded. New Mexico: Alamo Square, 2000.
- Hylan, Susan E. "Women διάκονοι and Gendered Norms of Leadership." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138 (2019), 687–702.
- Ilan, Tal. "'And Who Knows Whether You have not Come for a Time Like this?' (Esther 4:14): Esther, Judith and Susanna as Propaganda for Shlamzion's Queenship." In *Integrating Women into Second Temple History*, edited by Tal Ilan, 127–53. TSAJ 76. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999.
- Jennings Theodore, W. and Tat-Siong, Benny Liew. "Mistaken Identities but Model Faith: rereading the Centurion, the Chap, and the Christ in Matthew 8:5–13." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123 (2004), 467–94.
- Jewett, Robert. *Romans*. Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007.
- Joosten, Jan. "A New Interpretation of Leviticus 18:22 (par. 20:13) and its Ethical Implications." *Journal of Theological Studies*, 71 (2020), 1–10.
- Köstenberger, Margaret Elizabeth. *Jesus and the Feminists: Who Do They Say That He Is?* Wheaton: Crossway, 2008.
- Kraemer, Ross S. "Typical and Atypical Family Dynamics: The Cases of Babatha and Berenice." In *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, edited by David L. Balch & Carolyn Osiek, 130–56. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Krenkel, Werner. "Naturalia non turpia: Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece and Rome: Schriften zur antiken Kultur und Sexualwissenschaft." In *Spudasmata 113*, edited by Wolfgang Bernard and Christiane Reitz. Hildesheim: Olms, 2006.
- Kuefler, M. *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Lalitha, Jayachitra. *Re-Reading Household relationships Christologically: Ephesians, Empire and Egalitarianism*. New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2017.
- Loader, William. *The Septuagint, Sexuality and the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Loader, William. "Sexuality and Ptolemy's Greek Bible: Genesis 1–3 In Translation: '... Things Which They Altered For King Ptolemy' (Genesis Rabbah 8.11)." In *Ptolemy II Philadelphus and his World*, edited by Paul McKechnie & Philippe Guillaume. Mnemosyne, Supplements; History and Archaeology of Classical Antiquity, 300. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Loader, William. *Philo, Josephus, and the Testaments on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in the Writings of Philo, Josephus, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Loader, William. *The New Testament on Sexuality*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Loader, William. *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.
- Loader, William. "Reading Romans 1 on Homosexuality in the Light of Biblical/Jewish and Greco-Roman Perspectives of its Time." *ZNW* 108 (2017), 119–49.
- Marshall, Jill E. "Paul, Plutarch and the Gender Dynamics of Prophecy." *NTS* 65 (2019), 207–22.
- Martin, Dale B. *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006.
- Meier, John P. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. vol. 3. New York: Doubleday, 2001.
- Mittmann-Richert, Ulrike. *Einführung zu den Jüdischen Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit: Historische und legendarische Erzählungen*. JSHRZ 6.1.1; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000.

- Neutel, Karin B. "Women's Silence and Jewish Influence: The Problematic Origins of the Conjectural Emendation on 1 Cor 14.33b-35." *NTS* 65 (2019), 477–95.
- Rösel, Martin. *Übersetzung als Vollendung der Auslegung*. BZAW 223. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994.
- Satlow, Michael L. *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Scroggs, Robin. *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983.
- Seim, Turid Karlsen. *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts*. London: T&T Clark, 2004.
- Skinner, Marilyn B. *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.
- Swancutt, Diana M. "'The Disease of Effemination': The Charge of Effeminacy and the Verdict of God (Romans 1:18–2:16)." In *New Testament Masculinities*, edited by Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, 193–234. SemeiaSt 45. Atlanta: SBL, 2003.
- Swancutt, Diana M. "Sexy Stoics and the Rereading of Romans 1.18–2.16." In *A Feminist Companion to Paul*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Bickerstaff, 42–73. London: T&T Clark, 2004.
- Taylor, Joan E. "Missing Magdala and the Name of Mary 'Magdalene'." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 146 (2014), 205–23.
- Treggiari, Susan. "Marriage and Family in Roman Society." In *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, edited by Ken M. Campbell, 132–82. Downers Grove: IVP, 2003.
- Vorster, Johannes N. "The Making of Male Same-Sex in the Graeco-Roman World and its Implications for the Interpretation of Biblical Discourses." *Scriptura* 93 (2006), 432–54.
- Wink, Walter. "Homosexuality and the Bible." In *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*, edited by Walter Wink, 33–49. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999.