


Was Jesus Okay With Homosexuality? (5 of 6)

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In this post I want to summarize our findings about Jesus and homosexuality from my last three posts and evaluate three possible counter-arguments from the Gospels. Did Jesus say some people are born gay? Did he heal a centurion's male lover? And what about Jesus and his "beloved disciple"?

I will finish answering the question "Was Jesus okay with homosexual behavior?" Then my final post will address the question "Is Jesus okay with homosexual behavior now?"

In this series on homosexuality, I have focused on Jesus, discussing other biblical witnesses primarily in relation to him. There are at least two reasons for this focus.

First, I believe that being a Christian starts with following Jesus. It certainly does not end there (see my "[Red Letter Reductionism](#)" essay), but it is never less: "Whoever says he abides in him [Jesus] ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" ([1 John 2:6](#)). If we can learn directly from Jesus how we ought to think and act regarding homosexuality, let us do so.

Second, Jesus is often seen as the "weak link" in the Bible's stance against homosexual behavior. If the idea that Jesus approved of "loving same-sex relationships" turns out to be historically unbelievable, then this illusion of a weak link is removed, and the witness of all of Scripture is seen to be consistent.

In discussing Jesus' views of homosexual behavior, I have also presented much of the other biblical evidence on the topic. But I have not directly asked valuable questions like "Must Christians obey the Leviticus laws against homosexual behavior?" Nor have I attempted a detailed exegesis of Paul's teachings against homosexual activity. Rather, **I have placed these biblical passages alongside other ancient texts and looked for consistent patterns, with one guiding question: *What light do these passages shine on what Jesus himself believed?***

What, then, did we find?

Our Findings So Far

First, we examined Jesus' apparent silence on homosexuality. Jewish teachers in Jesus' day who mentioned homosexual behavior consistently condemned it, and it was nearly unknown among Jews at the time. It was something "out there" that non-Jews did, and no Jewish rabbi had to stake out his public position on the topic. If any rabbi had been suspected of disagreeing with this Jewish consensus, he would have been rapidly rejected by fishermen and Pharisee alike.

Given this historical evidence, ***there was little reason for Jesus to specifically mention homosexual behavior, and every reason to assume he agreed with the Jewish consensus.***

Second, we asked if Jesus' emphasis on love is proof that he approved of loving homosexual relationships.

Does "love your neighbor" mean Jesus affirmed "gay love"? Ancient Jews saw no contradiction between commanding neighbor-love and condemning homosexual activity (see [Lev. 18:22](#) and [Lev. 19:18](#)). Paul likewise paired these teachings in his letters to Rome and Corinth (e.g. [Rom. 1:24-27](#); [13:9](#)). Unlike our culture, the New

Testament actually *contrasts* love and sexual indulgence (e.g. [Eph. 5:2-3](#)). In Jesus' view, "Love your neighbor" is the "second" commandment, subordinate to the "most important" commandment, "Love the Lord your God" ([Mark 12:28-31](#)). Thus, it is not truly loving to help your neighbor violate God's will.¹

Given this ancient context, ***Jesus' emphasis on love is not proof that he approved of "loving homosexual relationships." If anything, it is the opposite.***

Third, we considered three ways that Jesus' original Jewish audience would have understood him to be addressing the topic of homosexual behavior, despite never explicitly naming it. Jesus taught "You shall not commit adultery" ([Matt. 5:27; 19:18](#)), a command that was understood by ancient Jews to also prohibit, by implication, all other unlawful sexual behaviors. Jesus taught against *πορνεία* (*porneia*, "sexual immorality," [Matt. 15:18-19](#)), which "was universally understood in Judaism to include same-sex intercourse"² And Jesus warned against *ἀσέλγεια* (*aselgeia*, "debauchery," [Mark 7:21-22](#)), "a word that Jesus... could easily turn to as a synonym for homosexual activity and other similarly shocking behavior forbidden by the Jewish law,"³ a word used in [2 Peter 2:7](#) to describe the "filthy conduct" (NKJV) of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

What might Jesus' Jewish listeners say if they heard the claim that Jesus said nothing about homosexual activity? "Of course he did! We clearly heard him mention adultery, πορνεία, and ἀσέλγεια!"

But Is There Counter-Evidence?

Despite this evidence, some still point to several events in Jesus' ministry as proof that Jesus affirmed homosexual behavior, as long as it was loving and consensual. Here are three examples that are perhaps most often mentioned. It is my impression that relatively few scholars find the following arguments significant, but some do, so I will address them.

Counter-argument 1: Jesus said some people are born gay.([Matt. 19:12](#))

This argument uses Jesus' words about eunuchs:

For **there are eunuchs who have been so from birth**, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it. ([Matt. 19:12](#))

Clearly Jesus affirmed that some people are born as "eunuchs." But what is a eunuch (*ευνούχος*)?

Here it is easy to get lost down a deep, dark hole, exploring all the ways that the word *ευνούχος* was used. The first thing I want to say is that, yes, the word *ευνούχος* (eunuch) may sometimes have been used to refer to someone who experienced same-sex desires (scholars do not all agree).⁴ However, *ευνούχος* was not a word that specifically referred to homosexuals, and most eunuchs were not homosexual.

[BDAG](#), probably the most respected dictionary of New Testament Greek, lists three uses of the word *ευνούχος*, matching them to Jesus' use in this passage:

1. a castrated male person, eunuch. [Mt 19:12b](#)...
2. a human male who, without a physical operation, is by nature incapable of begetting children, impotent male... [Mt 19:12a](#)...
3. a human male who abstains fr. marriage, without being impotent, a celibate [Mt 19:12c](#)...

Here we need to remember that, in any given circumstance, a word means what it means *in that specific context*, not necessarily what it sometimes means in other contexts. Linguists warn of a word study fallacy called *illegitimate totality transfer*. Blomberg's definition of this fallacy is on point, particularly the second half:

Assuming that a word carries several or all of its possible meanings in each of its appearances when in fact the most probable meaning of any word is that which contributes the least amount of new information to the overall context.⁵

So what does the context indicate Jesus meant by *ευνούχος* (eunuch) in Matthew 19:12?

Well, Jesus actually uses the word in three different-but-related ways. That is, each occurrence of *ευνούχος* has its own immediate context ("from birth," "made... by men," "made themselves"), yet they all share the same larger context within Jesus' discussion. The immediate context for each use is relatively clear; but how does the larger context constrain and specify what Jesus means here (in all three uses) by *ευνούχος*?

In the larger context, Jesus is responding to a question of the Pharisees about divorce. Jesus responds by affirming the creation model of male-female marriage with its "one flesh" sexual union (Matt. 19:3-9). His disciples, dismayed at the strict limitations Jesus places on divorce, suggest a second option: "not to marry" (Matt. 19:10).

Jesus' comments about eunuchs occur within his response to this second option, "not to marry." Jesus and his disciples, as good Jews, do not imagine any third option; the two options are male-female marriage or "not to marry."⁶ Eunuchs, in Jesus' discussion, fall into the latter category—no marriage and therefore, in the Jewish worldview Jesus shared, no sexual union.

Thus, despite the differences between the three categories of eunuchs Jesus describes, the common ground for all three that makes Jesus' illustration work is that *they are people who are not engaging in sexual relationships*.

Other issues like sexual orientation or even reproduction are not the subject of conversation in this passage.⁷ Rather, Jesus is saying that some people fall into the "not to marry" category for three possible reasons: they were born with conditions that leave them unsuited for marriage;⁸ they were castrated; or they voluntarily give up marriage "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven."⁹

So, did Jesus say that some people are born gay? Not really, although his words do indicate that not every male is born suited for marriage. More importantly, however, his words indicate that for everyone, whatever their sexual desires, there are only two options: faithful male-female marriage until death or "not to marry."

Gagnon's summary is on point:



Rembrandt, The Baptism of the Eunuch, 1626.
(From Wikimedia Commons.)

Jesus' comparison of men who make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven with "born eunuchs" shows that Jesus categorized "born eunuchs" as persons not having any sex (Matt 19), for certainly Jesus was not giving the disciples permission to have sex outside of marriage and thereby avoid his newly enunciated standard for marriage. So, from that standpoint, **any argument that is made about "born eunuchs" including homosexual persons (with which I would agree) leads to the view that Jesus did not give homosexually oriented persons the option of sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman.** ¹⁰

Jesus' words about eunuchs are not a blessing on same-sex relationships, but they are a clear reminder to the church to honor those who, whatever their condition as "eunuchs," are faithfully celibate for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.¹¹

Counter-argument 2: Jesus affirmed a gay couple—a centurion and his "boy." (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10)

This argument is based primarily on a story, one historical fact, and two Greek words. The story is the account of Jesus healing a centurion's servant. The historical fact is that, in ancient Greco-Roman culture, it was not uncommon for a master to have a servant who also functioned as his male lover. In addition, the term *παῖς* (*pais*), found in both Matthew's and Luke's accounts of this story, can mean "boy" and was sometimes used to refer to such a lover.¹² Finally, Luke's account describes the servant as being *ἔντιμος* (*entimos*) in the eyes of the centurion—a word that can mean "dear."

Some who promote homosexual relationships among Christians go far beyond these facts (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Jesuit priest John McNeill, for example, translates the centurion as talking about "my beloved boy" and proposes this interpretation:

Here we have the most direct encounter of Jesus with someone who would today be pronounced 'gay,' and Jesus' reaction was acceptance of the person without judgment and even eagerness to be of assistance to restore the '*pais*' to health, and by implication to restore the loving relationship of the two, making possible the renewal of any sexual activity which they would have enjoyed together prior to the illness.¹³



The centurion with his sick servant. (Image copyright www.LumoProject.com. Used with permission from [Free Bible Images](#).)

There are multiple problems with this interpretation. First, *παῖς* (*pais*) usually carries no sexual connotations whatsoever; only other contextual clues can provide this meaning. When used of human relationships in the New Testament and other early Christian literature, *παῖς* refers either to a *boy*, a *son*, or a *servant/slave*.¹⁴ There are no sexual connotations in any of the other places *παῖς* is used in the NT.

Later in Matthew, in a quote from Isaiah, Jesus is described as being God's beloved *παῖς*: "My servant... my beloved" (*ὁ παῖς μου... ὁ ἀγαπητός μου*; [Matt. 12:18](#)). Clearly, a *παῖς* can even be described as "beloved" without there being any necessary sexual connotations, or else such language would not have been used by God about his own servant.

Second, in neither Matthew nor Luke do we find the centurion talking about "my beloved boy" (McNeill's expression). What we have instead is the narrator Luke saying that the centurion's *δοῦλος* (slave/servant) was *ἔντιμος* in the eyes of the centurion.

Much has been made of how the terms *παῖς* and *δοῦλος* are used in Matthew's and Luke's accounts, but no explanation is sure enough to strongly determine our interpretation of the passage.¹⁵ More clearly, *ἔντιμος* fails to support the case for a homosexual relationship. Though the term can be translated "dear," the two main senses of the word in the NT are "honored, respected," and "valuable, precious."¹⁶ "Dear," in fact, is related to the latter sense; it can imply an emotional attachment based on value, without the presence of sexual desire. Most English translations of this verse use a term such as "highly valued." Similarly, Luke's only other use of *ἔντιμος* is usually translated as "distinguished" or "honorable" ([Luke 14:8](#)).

Some argue that it is unreasonable to imagine a Roman centurion would plead for Jesus to heal a mere servant unless that servant were his lover. But are we willing to argue that sexual interest is the strongest possible motivation? If this centurion could possess a faith greater than Jesus had found in Israel ([Matt. 8:10](#); [Luke 7:9](#)), why could he not also possess a great (non-sexual) concern for a valued servant? If the centurion who called for Peter was "a devout man who feared God with all his household," "gave alms generously," and had "a devout soldier... among those who attended him," ([Acts 10:2, 7](#)), why could this believing centurion not likewise sincerely care for "those who attended him"?

Third, if we take into account Luke's assessment of how valuable (*ἔντιμος*) the servant was to the centurion, then we must also consider Luke's report of how valuable the centurion was to the Jews. Luke reports that elders of the Jews "pleaded... earnestly" with Jesus on behalf of the centurion, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue" ([Luke 7:4-5](#)). If "a deeply observant God-fearer [Gentile proselyte] would not practise paederasty,"¹⁷ surely a pious Jew would avoid

supporting it. Perhaps this centurion was not a God-fearer but only a benefactor; nevertheless, ***can we really imagine Jews in Jesus day offering such high praise for someone they know is practicing pederasty? Can we imagine them pleading with Jesus to heal a pederast's "beloved boy"? Can we imagine the Jewish crowds standing quietly by as Jesus took an active pederast and "preached him into the kingdom" (Matt. 8:11-12)?***

In contrast to such scenarios, Green's assessment of the centurion's possible motives is refreshingly reasonable:

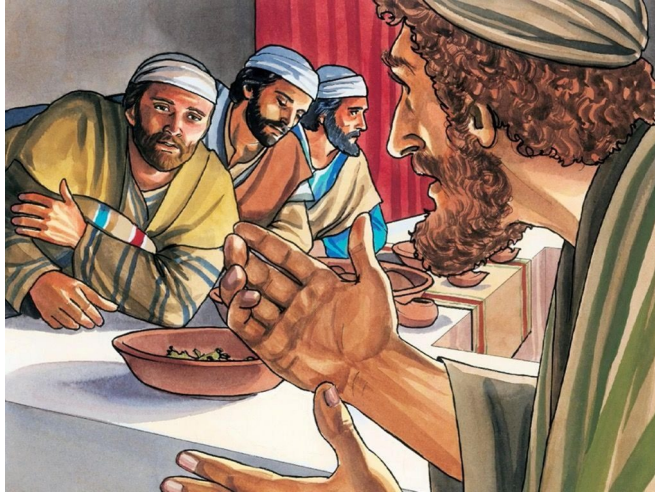
His desire to see his slave returned to health need not imply an extraordinary humanitarian concern on his part, since care for sick slaves was advised in Roman antiquity as a way to prolong their usefulness. At the same time... Luke's language suggests that the centurion not only regarded the slave as useful, but actually esteemed him. There is no socio-historical reason to doubt that, as an urban slave in the home of a wealthy master, this dying man might have enjoyed friendship with the centurion.¹⁸

The hypothesis that Jesus affirmed a gay couple by healing the centurion's "boy" creates far more problems than it solves.

Counter-argument 3: Jesus had a homosexual relationship with his "beloved disciple." (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20)

The disciple "whom Jesus loved" is first mentioned in John's account of the Last Supper. There we read that "one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side" (John 13:23). A more word-for-word translation could read "reclining on the chest of Jesus," but "the position of the Beloved Disciple is not to be understood as resting 'on top of' Jesus."¹⁹ We know this disciple was very close to Jesus, yet not actually on top of him, because later when he wanted to ask Jesus a question (John 13:25), "the easiest way for him to address Jesus was to lean back until his head literally rested"²⁰ on Jesus' "chest."²¹

This physical proximity may make us uncomfortable. Scholars, however, point to abundant evidence that such practices were normal and non-sexual in Jesus' day. For special meals like the Passover, people reclined next to each other on couches to eat.²² If this Last Supper meal followed standard banquet procedure, three people were reclining at the head table—including Jesus and beloved disciple, leaning on his left elbow, just to Jesus' right.



In this image of the Last Supper, Peter (foreground) is addressing the beloved disciple (left), who is next to Jesus (center), with another disciple (Judas?) on Jesus' left. If the beloved disciple wanted a private word with Jesus, he would lean back till his head was next to Jesus' chest. (Image is property of Good News Productions International and College Press Publishing. Used with permission from [Free Bible Images](#).)

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus similarly describes Lazarus lying “on the chest” of Abraham ([Luke 16:23](#)). “One might also lay one’s head on another’s bosom, which in that culture, far more tactile than our own, had no necessary sexual connotations.”²³

Klink reminds us of our own cultural biases:

The Western reader must be immediately reminded that such physical closeness was (and is) quite different in an Eastern context. **In many parts of the world today, men walk down the street holding hands as a sign of friendship, not as a sign of homosexuality.** This is an especially common practice between two men operating together in a business relationship, reflecting mutual respect and trust. With this in view, the actions of the Beloved Disciple become wordless communication that shows mutual trust and respect.²⁴

Some point to an event during Jesus’ crucifixion as more evidence that Jesus had an erotic relationship with “the disciple whom he loved”:²⁵

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. ([John 19:26-27](#))

Keener, however, points to multiple ancient Greek texts in which people either promise to take a friend’s mother as their own if the friend dies or entrust their mother to the care of a friend.²⁶ He also points to texts which “described a disciple’s virtue in terms of caring for the teacher’s family.”²⁷ In this case, there was an additional motivation for Jesus’ choice:

Most important, because Jesus' brothers did not believe (7:5), Jesus entrusted his believing mother to a disciple... This model suggests that the ties of the believing community must be stronger than natural familial bonds, a moral amply illustrated by the Jesus tradition (Mark 3:33-35; 13:12).²⁸

How, then, do we explain this disciple's special title as the one Jesus "loved"? First, the beloved disciple was probably the apostle John, who was indeed part of the "inner circle" of three disciples closest to Jesus. Second, he was probably also the author of the Gospel, and may have used this term as a form of authorial modesty and gratitude for receiving Jesus' love.²⁹ Third, his anonymity invites the reader to interact with him not just as an historical figure, but as an "ideal disciple" to be imitated.³⁰

Whatever the reasons for this title, we should note that John also records Jesus as having special "love" for Lazarus ("he whom you love," John 11:3, 36) and for his sisters Mary and Martha (John 11:5).³¹ Further, "the verbs *agapaō* and *phileō* and their cognates"—the words used for "love" in all these passages—"nowhere in John's Gospel have a sexual connotation."³²

As Keener writes, "given John's Jewish context, any implied sexual relationship" between Jesus and the beloved disciple "would be impossible without the Gospel somewhere indicating a lifting of Jewish sexual taboos."³³ If John's readers would have protested at the idea, so would have Jesus' other disciples.³⁴

The problem with all homosexual interpretations of Jesus and the beloved disciple is revealed clearly in this assertion by Anglican priest Paul Oestreicher: "It would be so interpreted in any person today."³⁵

But Jesus *didn't* live "today," and not in Oestreicher's Western culture, either. **When we read these texts within the historical context of Jesus' own ancient Jewish culture, it becomes clear that no one *then* saw any reason to come to any such homosexual interpretation of Jesus' actions. Why should we imagine we can understand their own culture better than they did?**

Was Jesus Okay With Homosexual Activity?

I have discussed the big picture arguments regarding Jesus' "silence" about homosexuality and his ethic of love. I have also evaluated three details from Jesus' life and ministry that have been used to paint a pro-homosexual Jesus. More importantly, we have examined all this evidence within the larger historical context of Jesus' own time and place.

I believe the evidence points clearly in one direction: *The total available historical evidence fits only with the hypothesis that Jesus—the historical Jesus of Nazareth—did not approve of homosexual behavior.*

This fact is not surprising, for **it appears that Jesus built his sexual ethic on the Genesis 1-2 creation account**, as is seen in Matthew 19:3-8. The structure of Jesus' argument in this passage (drawing on God himself) is that *because* God made humans male and female they become one flesh in marriage. Jesus used this creation reality to forbid the separation of male-female one flesh unions. But it is equally relevant to the question of homosexual unions, for the basis given in the creation account for becoming "one flesh" is the same-yet-different duality of male and female.

According to Genesis, Eve was taken from Adam and made to be "a helper" who was "corresponding to him" (Gen. 2:20, CSB). Another male would not "help" Adam, nor was Eve designed to "correspond" to another female. Thus, male-male and female-female unions have no foundation in God's creation design, but actually contradict it. The

fact that Jesus drew on this “from the beginning” creation design ([Matt. 19:8](#)) as the foundation for his answer to divorce strongly indicates he would have done the same in his answer to homosexual behavior—just as other Jews in his day in fact did.

Conclusion

At this point some readers will be more than content, believing that it is clear what Christians today should believe about the ethics of homosexual behavior. Other readers, perhaps agreeing with much of my historical analysis, will nevertheless feel the question of Christian belief and practice is still open. For the latter readers, I have one more post addressing this question: Is it okay for Christians today to affirm homosexual behavior?

For now, however, we should pause to reaffirm what we already know:**While individual pieces of evidence can be used to paint a pro-homosexual Jesus, the total available historical evidence fits only with the hypothesis that Jesus did not approve of homosexual behavior.**

Have you puzzled over the three details of Jesus’ life that we examined in this post? Have I missed other possible counter-evidence that seems strong to you? Are you finding this series helpful? Troubling? Am I scratching where it itches—without merely satisfying itching ears ([2 Tim. 4:3](#))? **If you have a comment, please leave it below.** And thanks again for reading!

1. This is what someone like David Gushee misunderstands when he makes the following statement: “I now believe that the traditional interpretation of the most cited passages is questionable and that all that parsing of Greek verbs has distracted attention from the primary moral obligation taught by Jesus — to love our neighbors as ourselves, especially our most vulnerable neighbors” (David Gushee, “I’m an evangelical minister. I now support the LGBT community — and the church should, too,” Nov. 4, 2014, *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/11/04/im-an-evangelical-minister-i-now-support-the-lgbt-community-and-the-church-should-too/>, accessed Oct. 5, 2019. Gushee’s sentiment is also why I have placed little emphasis on “all that parsing of Greek verbs” in this series. I contend that the basic stance of the Scripture on homosexual activity is clear when simply placed within its overall historical context, without a lot of parsing of individual words. The individual words can only be understood correctly when this larger context is clear. ↵
2. Robert Gagnon, “The Bible and Homosexual Practice: An Overview of Some Issues,” 2003, online article based on an interview with Zenit News Agency, March 21 and 28, 2002, pub. by OrthodoxyToday.org, <http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles2/GagnonHomosexuality.php>, accessed August 28, 2019. ↵
3. G. Thomas Hobson, “ἀσέλγεια in [Mark 7:22](#),” *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 21 (2008), 65, 67, 70, bold added. See here for the full article: https://www.academia.edu/31907497/ASELGEIA_IN_MARK_7_22, accessed September 2, 2019. ↵

4. For a positive conclusion, see Robert Gagnon and J., "Jesus, eunuchs, and the allegation of a 'gay Jesus,'" email correspondence with links, dated 1/18/07, <http://robgagnon.net/AnswersToEMails.htm>, accessed September 28, 2019. However, much of the evidence shared in J.'s link refers to ancient concepts of eunuchs in cultures and languages far from Jesus' context, and not specifically to the use of the word *ευνούχος* itself. For a contrasting opinion, see [this article by A. Phillip Brown, III](#), which claims that "the Greek term *eunouchos* is never used to denote a person with intact sexual organs who is intersex, transgender, or engages in homosexual behavior." If *ευνούχος* should indeed be understood to include people with same-sex attractions, it is still a matter of scholarly debate whether such persons were equivalent to what we today call a "homosexual." I agree with Fortson and Grams (in *Unchanging Witness*) that the ancient world did have understandings of sexual desire effectively equivalent to our modern category of homosexual orientation. For a contrasting opinion, here is France's commentary on what "born a eunuch" means: "In the context of modern discussions about homosexual orientation it might be suggested that it also includes those who are psychologically disinclined to heterosexual intercourse and thus debarred from fatherhood, but evidence for such an understanding of homosexuality in the ancient world is hard to find. Most references to homosexual behavior in the ancient world are to what we now call bisexuality, the choice of some who are capable of heterosexual intercourse to find sexual fulfillment also (or instead) with members of their own sex. Such a choice could hardly be described as being 'born a eunuch,' and the idea of an innate and irreversible homosexual orientation belongs to modern Western psychology rather than to the world in which Jesus lived." R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 724-25. ↵
5. Craig L. Blomberg with Jennifer Foutz Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 136. ↵
6. I am indebted to Hugenberger for this observation: "What is notable for our discussion is that as far as Jesus is concerned, there is no THIRD option! One must either be chaste ("a eunuch... for the sake of the kingdom") or one must be faithful in a heterosexual marriage ("male and female" "united to his wife"). Surely if Jesus wanted to affirm life-long committed homosexual unions, here is where he needed to do it because his own disciples were astonished at the radical and difficult requirements he seemed to set before them. But Jesus did not allow that third option" (Gordon Hugenberger, "Homosexuality," June 15, 2004, <https://www.parkstreet.org/teaching-training/articles/homosexuality> (now a dead link), quoted by Aubrey Spears in "The Great Exchange: Same-Sex Sex Attraction," sermon, [https://clovermedia.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/7572d4795b/attachments/Great Exchange The Incarnation 2018.pdf](https://clovermedia.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/7572d4795b/attachments/Great%20Exchange%20The%20Incarnation%202018.pdf), accessed September 24, 2019). ↵
7. It is true that, just as a minority of males "born eunuchs" have homosexual desires, so a minority of males who are castrated experience a change in sexual orientation or desire (*Sex Med.* 2016 Mar; 4(1): e51–e59. Published online March 2, 2016. doi: [10.1016/j.esxm.2015.11.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esxm.2015.11.001)). In both cases, however, *homosexual orientation is not the experience of most eunuchs*. Thus, given both physiological realities and the literary context of Jesus' conversation, it makes little sense to interpret his words as meaning, "Some are born with homosexual orientation, some are made homosexual by others, and some choose for themselves to be homosexual for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." Context similarly suggests that Jesus and his disciples are not narrowly concerned with ability to reproduce, either, as if Jesus were saying, "Some are born unable to reproduce, some are rendered unable by others, and some choose for themselves to not reproduce for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is not discussing varied sexual experiences (fertility vs. sterility) within marriage; rather, he is discussing the option that does not include sexual union: "not to marry." ↵

8. Here is a sample of explanations of this first category of “eunuch” in commentaries: “The impotent” (Hagner); “those born without sexual organs or impotent” (Osborne); those “born without the capacity for sexual relations, such as those born without properly developed genitalia” (Wilkins); “people without fully functioning sexual organs” (Blomberg); “those who are physiological incapable of procreation” (France); “those who were born without sexual organs” (Keener); “those who are naturally impotent” (Luz). See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 33b (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1995), comment on [Matt. 19:12](#); Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament, Kindle Edition, comment on [Matt. 19:12](#); Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary, Zondervan, Kindle Edition, 645; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (B&H Publishing Group), Kindle Edition, 294; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 724; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Eerdmans), Kindle Edition, comment on [Matt. 19:10-12](#); Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 501. ↵
9. Almost all English Bible translations that avoid the word “eunuch” (or the older equivalent “gelding”) in this passage are in essential agreement with my paraphrase here. Bible Gateway lists seventeen such translations ([of sixty total in English](#)). About seven of the seventeen mirror the NABRE: “Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” Another five differ mainly by focusing on reproductive ability, as with the NCV: “There are different reasons why some men cannot marry. Some men were born without the ability to become fathers. Others were made that way later in life by other people. And some men have given up marriage because of the kingdom of heaven.” Another four simply use “chaste” or “celibate” as in GW: “Some men are celibate because they were born that way. Others are celibate because they were castrated. Still others have decided to be celibate because of the kingdom of heaven.” The final one, The Message, is just plain wonky on this verse! ↵
10. Robert Gagnon, from email to “J,” January 16, 2007, shared at “Answers to Emails,” <http://robagnon.net/AnswersToEMails.htm>, accessed September 26, 2019, emphasis added. ↵
11. The following comments by Wilkins are timely: “Those who have chosen to remain single as the expression of the way that they believe they can best serve God need us as their community of brothers and sisters. Jesus declares that celibacy is an acceptable lifestyle for those for whom it is given by God. Paul expands on Jesus’ statement to indicate that if one remains unmarried, one is in a position to be undistracted by the amount of work that goes into taking care of one’s family responsibilities, and the kingdom of God receives benefit ([1 Cor. 7:27, 39–40](#)). Unfortunately, many of our churches endorse marriage as a sign of maturity, and those who are married tend to get the more ‘responsible’ ministry opportunities in the church. Single people are seen as those who have not ‘settled down’ yet. We should reevaluate the way we view and value single people within our ministries.” Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan), Kindle Edition, 658. ↵
12. Mader explains: “Within the institution of paederasty, *pais* had a rather specific reference to the younger, passive partner in a paederastic relationship” (Donald Mader, “The Entimos Pais of [Matthew 8:5-13](#) and [Luke 7:1-10](#),” online article, Greek Love Through the Ages, <https://www.greek-love.com/antiquity/matthew-luke-loved-boy-pederasty>, accessed September 28, 2019). Mader’s entire article is worth consulting, though I question some of his critical assumptions and disagree with his final conclusion. One factor he fails to consider is how the Jewish elders implored Jesus on behalf of the centurion. See below for more on this. ↵
13. John J. McNeill, *Sex as God Intended: A Reflection on Human Sexuality as Play Including Festschrift Essays Celebrating the Life and Work of John J. McNeill* (Maple Shade, NJ: Lethe, 2008), 63, 65. As quoted in Fortson and Grams, p. 22. ↵
14. These are the three uses listed in BAGD, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., by Walter Bauer et al. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 604. ↵

15. In both accounts the centurion always refers to his sick slave as a *παῖς* but refers to another servant/slave as a *δοῦλος*. Matthew always calls the sick servant a *παῖς*, while Luke always call him a *δοῦλος*. It is hard to know what to make of these patterns. On the one hand, it shows that the two terms have considerable overlap in meaning. On the other hand, it may be significant that the centurion always refers to his sick servant by the term that can imply more emotional connection. Those who argue that a homosexual relationship was present make much of this fact, but *παῖς* could simply hint at a non-sexual closeness. What about the choices of the Gospel writers? It is possible that Matthew, as a Jew writing to a primarily Jewish audience, was able to use *παῖς* to suggest the feelings of a God-fearing centurion toward his servant without considering any possible connotations of pederasty. Luke, however, was probably a Gentile, as were many in his audience; they probably shared a greater familiarity with Greco-Roman practices of pederasty than Jews did. Thus Luke may have chosen *δοῦλος* to avoid any connotations of pederasty for his readers, then added *ἔντιμος* to retain a sense of how the centurion valued his servant. I am indebted to Mader (ibid.) for pointing me in this direction, though the conclusion is my own. ↵
16. These are the glosses provided in BAGD, *ibid.*, 268-69. ↵
17. Mader, *ibid.* Mader states this despite arguing that the account “suggests an attitude of toleration toward a non-exploitive, caring paederastic relationship.” He tries to evade his own observation about God-fearers by arguing that either this God-fearer was not deeply observant or that the factors suggesting piety were added (invented) by Luke. ↵
18. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 286. ↵
19. Edward W. Klink III, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan), Kindle Edition, comment on [John 13:23](#). ↵
20. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 474. ↵
21. Here the ESV has “leaning back against Jesus,” which does not translate the Greek word *στῆθος* (“chest”), but does correctly convey that the beloved disciple was now actually touching (“against”) Jesus. ↵
22. “It is important to note that meals in the ancient world did not involve tables with chairs but involved reclining on couches, usually U-shaped (called a triclinium) around a low table. Participants would support themselves on their left elbows and eat with their right hands” (Klink, *ibid.*) ↵
23. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Vol. II (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 915, n. 184; cf. 915-16, also 900-901. Other scholars agree. Gagnon: “A text in Pliny’s Epistles refers to a senator named Veiento who ‘was reclining... on the chest’ of the emperor Nerva, again without any sexual connotation (4.22.4)... I wrote Dr. Katherine Dunbabin, professor of classics at McMaster University (Hamilton, Ontario) and author of *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and asked her whether the paragraph above reflected her own understanding of the matter. She responded (reproduced with permission): ‘I think the Pliny passage shows incontrovertibly that there is no necessary sexual connotation involved in a diner reclining “on the chest” of another; there is no suggestion whatsoever that Fabricius Veiento had any sort of sexual relationship with the emperor Nerva! What the passage does imply is intimacy; here in the sense that Veiento (whose past history was extremely shady) was being received as a favoured associate of the emperor/host’” (Robert A. J. Gagnon, “Was Jesus in a Sexual Relationship with the Beloved Disciple?” essay, Feb. 10, 2008, <http://robgagnon.net/articles/HomosexBelovedDisciple.pdf>, 5, accessed Sept. 30, 2019). ↵
24. Klink, *ibid.*, comment on [John 13:25](#), emphasis added. Carson: “Westerners may recoil at the physical proximity of two men. In many parts of the world, of course (e.g. the Philippines, the Arab world), men walk down the street holding hands. This is a sign of friendship, not homosexuality. Men and women in such cultures may *not* hold hands in public: that would be a sign of licentiousness.” D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 474. ↵

25. Jennings asserts, "The plain sense of this episode is to buttress our hypothesis that Jesus is to be understood as having a lover.... The relationship is depicted by the text as a homoerotic one, which is here acknowledged as entailing a loyalty that has consequences even beyond the death of Jesus. ... This scene should be read as underlining not Jesus' love for his mother (which is suggested nowhere in this or any other Gospel) but Jesus' love for his beloved." Oestreicher similarly misreads this text as indicating that "John becomes unmistakably part of Jesus's family." But the text actually says that Jesus' mother went to live in the beloved disciple's home, not that the beloved disciple joined Jesus' family. See Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives from the New Testament* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 26-27, quoted at <https://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/SF/jesus.html>, accessed Sept. 29, 2019; Paul Oestreicher, "Was Jesus Gay? Probably," online article, *The Guardian*, Apr. 20, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2012/apr/20/was-jesus-gay-probably>, accessed Sept. 29, 2019. ↵
26. Keener, *ibid.*, 1144. ↵
27. Keener, *ibid.*, 1145. ↵
28. Keener, *ibid.*, 1145. ↵
29. "If we wonder why the beloved disciple chooses this form of anonymity, two answers are suggested by the emphases of the Fourth Gospel. Just as 'the beloved disciple,' if a self-designation, implies not arrogance (as if to say 'I am more loved than others') but a profound sense of indebtedness to grace ('What a wonder—that I should be loved by the incarnate Word!...'), so the silence as to the identity of the beloved disciple may be a quite way of refusing to give even the impression of sharing a platform with Jesus... At the same time, the author thus serves as a model for his readers: becoming a Christian means a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ, such that he receives the glory." Carson, *ibid.*, 473. ↵
30. "The anonymity functions as a literary device that forces the reader to engage with the Beloved Disciple primarily by his narrativized identity. For the reader then, the identity of the Beloved Disciple is not simply who he is (behind the narrative) but what he is (within the narrative). The anonymity of the Beloved Disciple depicts the "ideal disciple," one having special access and intimate relationship with Jesus... This in no way minimizes the historical reality of the Beloved Disciple, but creates alongside his historical identity a narrativized identity and role that is significant to the message of the Gospel." Klink, *ibid.*, comment on 13:23. ↵
31. Gagnon: "It is interesting that Mary and Martha tell Jesus about their brother Lazarus's serious illness in these terms: 'Lord, see, the one whom you love (phileis) is sick' (11:3). Two verses later we read that Jesus 'loved (ēgapa) Martha and her sister and Lazarus.' He loves all three but nevertheless Lazarus can be referred to simply as 'the one whom you love' (hon phileis). This sounds a great deal like the reference in 20:2 to the disciple 'whom Jesus loved' (hon ephilei ho lēsous), which singles out a specific disciple even though the broader context makes clear that Jesus loves all his disciples (13:1, 34; 14:21-23; 15:9-13). If Jesus' special love for Lazarus is not understood in a sexual sense—otherwise, Jesus would be having sex with more than one person, contrary to his own teaching about monogamy in [Mark 10](#) and [Matthew 19](#)—how can his special love for one disciple be understood in a sexual sense? When 'Jews' saw how Jesus wept for Lazarus and said, 'See, how he loved (ephilei),' they obviously were not drawing the conclusion that Jesus was in a sexual relationship with Lazarus. Rather, Jesus loved Lazarus as though he (Lazarus) were his own brother. The same applies to the references to the beloved disciple." *Ibid.*, 4. ↵
32. Gagnon, *ibid.*, 3. ↵
33. Keener, *ibid.*, 917. ↵
34. Gagnon: "In the context of early Judaism, where homosexual practice of any sort would incur a capital sentence, how likely is it that Jesus would have had sexual intercourse with a male disciple and have done so *without apparently raising an eyebrow among any of his other disciples?*" Gagnon, *ibid.*, 5-6. ↵
35. Oestreicher, *ibid.* ↵

