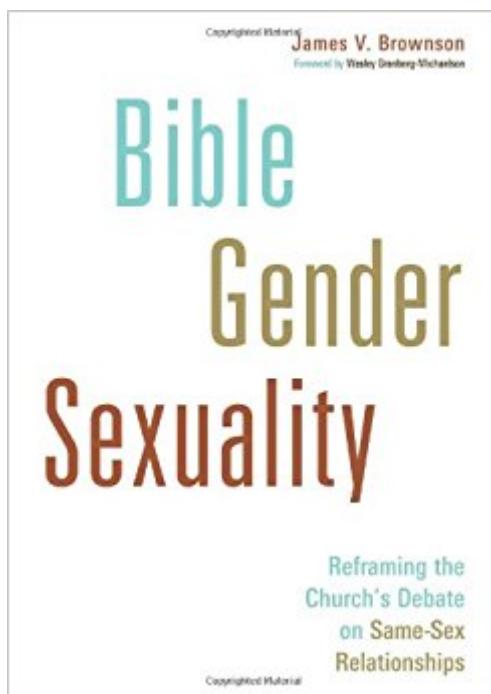


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# Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing The Church's Debate On Same-Sex Relationships



## Synopsis

Grapples conscientiously with biblical texts at the heart of the church's debate over same-sex relationships. This thought-provoking book by James Brownson develops a broad, cross-cultural sexual ethic from Scripture, locates current debates over homosexuality in that wider context, and explores why the Bible speaks the way it does about same-sex relationships. Fairly presenting both sides in this polarized debate — "traditional" and "revisionist" — Brownson conscientiously analyzes all of the pertinent biblical texts and helpfully identifies "stuck points" in the ongoing debate. In the process, he explores key concepts that inform our understanding of the biblical texts, including patriarchy, complementarity, purity and impurity, honor and shame. Central to his argument is the need to uncover the moral logic behind the text. Written in order to serve and inform the ongoing debate in many denominations over the questions of homosexuality, Brownson's in-depth study will prove a useful resource for Christians who want to form a considered opinion on this important issue.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

\*Starred Review\* In an outstanding presentation of academic scholarship to general readers, Brownson, a New Testament professor, does indeed, as the subtitle avers, reframe biblical debate about same-sex relationships. In the first of four parts, he states his intent to reinvigorate "the imagination of the church . . . so that we discover the scriptures' wisdom in the presence of new questions" and points out the shortcomings of both traditional and

revisionist positions on the Bible and homosexuality. The second part educes the “broad forms of moral logic” “patriarchy, the one flesh bond of marriage, procreation, and celibacy” with which the Bible addresses sexuality; the third assesses the boundaries scripture imposes on sexual practices. The last part summarily returns to the heart of the matter—the biblical passages concerned with same-sex relations (e.g., Sodom and Gomorrah, Paul denouncing men who lie with other men)—and analyzes what serious textual scholarship has revealed about those passages ever since gay civil rights activism emerged in the 1950s. Out of rigorous inspection, then, Brownson establishes that what the Bible condemns is same-sex abuse, and that the moral logic that applies to abuse doesn’t speak to the “committed, loving, consecrated same-sex relationships” we see today. Demanding focused but not labored reading, this strikes to the heart of the Bible-versus-homosexuality fracas. --Ray Olson

Search "Brownson's argument is careful and sensitive. . . . An important addition to the conversation on the Church's response to people in same-sex relationships."Books at a Glance "[A] thoughtful, complex and comprehensive work."Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (from foreword) "Instead of being trapped in shallow debates over the meaning of a few isolated biblical passages, James Brownson grounds his approach in foundational biblical understandings of gender and sexuality. He takes the Bible seriously, engaging it faithfully and deeply, and he encourages the reader to do the same. . . . The church needs this book."David G. Myers (author of *A Friendly Letter to Skeptics and Atheists* "With gentle wisdom Brownson reveals an implicit moral logic beneath scriptural teachings about sexuality and same-sex relationships. His insights—which are both prophetic and pastoral—build a much-needed bridge across the sexual divide that separates people of shared biblical faith."Brian McLaren (author of *Naked Spirituality: A Life with God in 12 Simple Words* "Jim Brownson has written what I believe is a 'game-changing' book on the hotly disputed topic of same-sex orientation and relationships in light of the Bible. He approaches the biblical texts with no less care and respect than the most conservative or traditional scholars, but he makes overt and clear what many seem unconscious of—the moral logic that operates in a text. By surfacing and grappling with that moral logic, Brownson can explore the why behind the what of biblical prohibitions. In so doing, he provides not only a masterful work on human sexuality in light of Scripture, but also a model for the kind of robust and faithful biblical hermeneutic that our churches desperately need at this point in our history."Peggy Campolo (speaker, writer, and editor "If

ever a book spoke the good news of the gospel with biblical authority to those children of God who happen not to be straight, it is this book. Brownson addresses with clarity an issue that is tearing the church of Jesus Christ apart, as he gently insists that all of us allow new facts and insights to illuminate our understanding of what Scripture has to say to gay and lesbian Christians."Booklist" (STARRED review) "An outstanding presentation of academic scholarship to general readers. . . . Reframes biblical debate about same-sex relationships. . . . This strikes to the heart of the Bible-versus-homosexuality fracas."Englewood Review of Books "Fascinating and incredibly helpful. It would be hard to suggest that Brownson is anything other than meticulous, transparent, and authentic in his treatment of the issues and of scripture."Studies in Christian Ethics "Perhaps the greatest challenge facing those seeking to argue a biblical basis for same-sex unions is that . . . in contrast to debates over gender equality or war or remarriage after divorce . . . the canonical evidence is uniformly, often strongly, negative.

Brownson's work asks whether there is `anything inherent in the moral logic that shapes the Bible's discussion of one-flesh unions that not only . . . assumes but also . . . requires' (p.106, italics original) such unions to be male and female. Answering in the negative, he has presented the most thorough case so far that one can still be faithful to the Bible by going beyond its explicit witness in this area and appealing to moral logic and cultural change to argue that `what is . . . normal . . . in the biblical witness'; . . . only male-female sexual unions . . . . `may not necessarily be normative' (p. 109, italics original)."Library Journal "A remarkably thorough, patient, and learned treatment of the knotty questions that surround Christian stances toward same-sex relationships. . . . [Brownson's] writing and thinking are deliberate and clear, and may supply a crucial tool for discussion based neither on impulse nor unexamined cultural tradition."The Bible Today "This thoughtful book bears reading as an example of a civil and earnest discussion of a sensitive issue."Theological Studies "An ambitious challenge to Christians to read the Bible imaginatively if they wish to understand more fully elements found in committed same-sex relationships."Biblical Theology Bulletin "In the ongoing debate surrounding same-sex relationships in general, and same-sex marriage in particular, James Brownson's recent work is a welcome addition, providing a calm and well-reasoned examination of Christian Scripture that can be appreciated by all sides of the debate. Regardless of whether or not a person ultimately agrees with Brownson's conclusions, readers on all sides should find food for thought at numerous points throughout the book."Review of Biblical Literature "This work has taken the church forward in its deliberations regarding the same-sex debate, both in terms of the centrality of Scripture and of the concerns that face us today."Times Literary Supplement "A thorough

discussion. . . . Brownson concludes that it is crucial to frame passages that worry about ancient cultic sexual excess or hierarchical relationships between men and women in the cultural assumptions of their time. These assumptions may be as alien for many today as are those of the ancient Near East on slavery."

Dr. Brownson's examination of biblical texts in the cultural context of the times in which they were written gives the reader a deeper understanding of how the contemporary Christian church is missing the mark in its condemnation of all same-sex behavior. He shows how inaccuracies in translation and a lack of knowledge about the assumptions and beliefs of those who wrote during both old and new testament times, combined with the modern construct of gender complimentary, have led to exclusionary beliefs and practices in modern churches. Brownson has a cool, intellectual style and an almost detached method of making his case for the church to reexamine how it views those individuals who make loving, mutually beneficial, self-sacrificial , lifelong commitments to each other. I think the average reader might find it dry, but I would highly recommend this book to pastors, professors, theologians, church leaders, and Christians who are seeking knowledge about a subject that is tearing apart families and faith communities.

J. V. Brownson tackles a controversial topic with meticulous attention to the underlying Biblical arguments that are rampant in faith communities around the world. A balanced and thorough consideration of many of the issues that come to the discussion.

This is a great book for people who have already been researching this topic and want something with more "meat". The author is knowledgeable about scripture and methodical in laying out his arguments. It is not a quick read, however, because it is densely packed with information. Well worth the time, in my opinion.

Brownson is a Professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary (Reformed Church of America). His book takes an exegetical approach to both sides of the debate, showing the scriptural bases for each side and identifying tensions for both. He does a great job of explaining the texts (1) within their original contexts, (2) alongside other scripture and contemporary ancient texts (for calibration of meaning), (3) within possible hermeneutical connections to today, and (4) within the overall themes of the Bible. It's scholarly but readable, and I found it both engaging and dispassionate. That dispassion was especially key for me, as I never felt like anyone was trying

to convince me of anything while reading. I was challenged to consider evidence, but conclusions are left up to the reader. Ultimately, I found in this book a Biblically sound basis for affirming same-sex committed relationships as blessed by God. That had remained a hang-up for me. The potential "seems right to me" vs "is right to God" tension.

Incredibly thoughtful and thorough look at what the Bible has to say about a topic that has plagued the church for decades.

Glad to read various perspectives on a controversial topic. Book in good condition. Will need this in various religious discussions.

Realistic perspective away from the dominant traditional perspective. If you believe in a fair, honest assessment on a hot issue in the church, you need this book to challenge the traditional beliefs. Many of the original texts are taken out of context while translated, and also culturally at the time it was written. He makes very strong assessments on many verses that make sense. I come from the traditional beliefs, and I've never been in a gay relationship (I am not supporting this book to justify behavior). Very strong book.

Enjoyed it, especially Jim's conclusions in ending chapter - there is an academic and intellectual way of dealing with the issue of homosexuality.

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