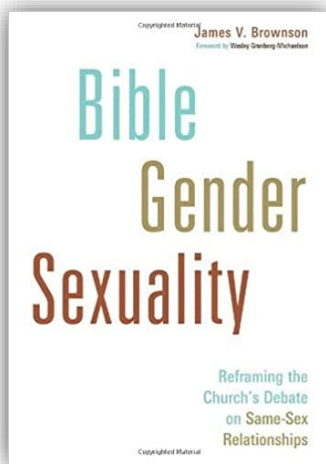


BOOK REVIEW

Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships

By James V. Brownson

Reviewed by Nakia Vongvirath



Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans
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After reading the Forward to this book, I was left with a sense of anticipation for what Brownson may have discovered, and I was willing to look at his findings with an open mind. But as I started to read, I realized quickly I was not going to agree with Brownson's book. Brownson is proposing we break with traditional ways of thinking about what the Bible says about same-sex relationships and look at those scriptures with new interpretations.

James Brownson supports the Revisionist Christian movement. Revisionists believe, according to Brownson, that the interpretations of the Bible are outdated and need to be revised, particularly the ones that pertain to same-sex relationships. He is focused on the issue of same-sex relationships because his own son came out to him and asked for his help and guidance. Brownson, being a Christian and wanting some answers to give his son, researched and wrote this

book. In my review of this book, I will address Brownson's argument and demonstrate why I disagree with it.

Brownson pits the beliefs of traditionalist Christians against revisionist Christians on what the biblical view of homosexuality is. He refers to a 'line in the sand', that traditionalist Christians draw with regard to same-sex relationships as being an abomination to God's plan for sexuality. But, "For revisionist Christians, however, this attempt to draw a 'line in the sand' is fundamentally misguided" (4). Brownson suggests that the rate of divorce, from the revisionist point of view, would greatly decrease if the Church would consecrate same-sex marriages. But traditionalists think, he says, same-sex relationships have the same problems as heterosexual couples, and sanctioning their marriages will do nothing to lower the divorce rate. As I was reading this the same thought went through my mind. Brownson had a judgmental tone in this paragraph implying traditional Christians only have contact with homosexuals who are deeply closeted. But I have spoken to homosexuals who are completely out, and they *do* have issues with fidelity, incompatibility, and separation. Their difficulties are the same as heterosexual couples.

Brownson plainly states this book is about disagreements over how Scripture is interpreted. His argument is based on the belief that the Bible is outdated on this issue. For example, he refers to when the New Testament was added to the Old Testament, nullifying some of the Old Testament laws. For example, Brownson points out that the New Testament cancels out many of the kosher laws of the Old Testament and because of that, Gentiles no longer have to follow them. But these instructions are to deepen our faith and relationship with God, not to make the Old Testament irrelevant. The New

Testament is a continuation of the Lord's story as found in the Old Testament.

Brownson used the term 'imagination' when referring to how Gentile Christians are to interpret the Bible. He states, ". . . imagination does not connote the conjuring up of images or beliefs that have no grounding in reality; rather, it refers here to the ability to see the deeper meanings and patterns that emerge in the context of cross-cultural engagements" (p.10). But the human imagination can err, along with human motives and behavior. We all learn as early as Sunday School, that we are to pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us in the correct interpretation of biblical passages. That way we can hope our interpretations come from God and not ourselves. Brownson compares the Scripture to the writings of Galileo in that Galileo's writings had to be reread to understand the sun and earth's rotation. But the two cannot be compared since Galileo was a mortal man and therefore, fallible. The Scriptures were written by men led by the Holy Spirit. A few sentences earlier Brownson states that the Holy Spirit is what leads you to understanding the Bible. Now, however, he is implying the Holy Spirit isn't needed to discern the patterns and meaning of the Scriptures. He says, "When the apostle James declared, 'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us,' he was not elevating human wisdom to an equivalent status with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but instead underscoring the way the Spirit works through these complex human processes of constructing patterns of discernment, meaning, and vision" (10) . . . thereby dismissing the Holy Spirit's direct work in our understanding. Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Christians are relying on themselves alone to interpret the Bible rather than on God.

Brownson spends a lot of time discussing Romans 1:24-27. In those Scriptures Paul is discussing what happens to a people who will not obey God. "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves" (Romans 1:24). Brownson's argument is that these people were out of control and this Scripture does not include committed same-sex couples. But if you read the Scripture, it describes unclean acts, it does not speak of couples, committed or otherwise. It lays out plainly homosexual behaviors and the judgment of God on those who commit those behaviors. "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Romans 1:32). If you

read the entire chapter the reader will see this is not a Scripture that promotes same-sex couples, it is a warning from God: 'this is how you act if you do not have me!'

Brownson wrote this book in response to his son confessing to him and his wife that he was a homosexual. Through deliberation with his wife and others, Brownson turned to the Bible and received no help or comfort from it. He used the phrase, 'reimagine the Scripture' as it pertains to homosexuality, but the Scripture is not left to the human imagination. It appears Brownson did not allow God to show him the truths of the Word on this point. This book is an attempt to comfort himself and his family about his son's decision. Despite that, he invites scrutiny of this book to encourage the Church to discuss same-sex couples openly in a group setting. I cannot say this book is not interesting to read, but for a new Christian this mindset is dangerous. What makes it dangerous? Believing you can make the Bible say what you want it to say so it fits into your own personal world view, which pushes the Lord's will out and replaces it with your own.



Nakia Vongvirath graduated from Eastern University in 2021 with a master's degree in Theological and Cultural Anthropology. Her research interests are in social anthropology and linguistics. She wants to study what society's reactions are to social issues and the language used to communicate those reactions. She wants to be able to pursue these interests with a Christian frame of mind so as to show a Christian's perspective in her research.

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