

An Analysis of Brownson's¹ Theological Defense of a Holy Category of Same-sex Sex
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Introduction

Brownson states that fruitful conversation between revisionists and traditionalists will be best gained by answering two questions.² First, what aspect of complementarity is violated by same-sex sex? Second, where in the Bible do you find this notion of complementarity as something normative for marriage? The first is ambiguous and somewhat odd because the issue is not about some aspect of complementarity, but about complementarity itself defined as the male-female essential in the divine design for marriage. So, really it is the second question that needs to be answered and it has the first question within its scope. Conversations on this subject need a definition of marriage upfront as a point of reference by which to understand all of its essentials including complementarity (i.e. that a male-female relationship is *essential* to marriage and to the one-flesh dimension of marriage). So, I will first reply to Brownson's call for a biblically grounded theology of marriage, then draw out some implications for all forms of same-sex sex, question the revisionist theology of love, and evaluate Brownson's major argument.

I. A theology of marriage

Marriage is a covenant of companionship for life between one man and one woman to be husband and wife with the goal of becoming father and mother to fill the earth with a family of image-bearing brothers and sisters. This goal is accomplished by means of a sexual union that is exclusive, and designed to be a symbol of the reality that they are truly one flesh as male and female by creation, designed to be a source of mutual pleasure, and to be a source of procreation.

A. Biblical support for this theology of marriage

1. "Covenant of companionship" has its roots in God's design that man is not to be alone (Gen 2.18) with Mal 2.14, **she is your companion and your wife by covenant** (also, Prov 2.17; 5.18).
2. Jesus shows that it is for life: Mat 19.6b (What God has joined let not man separate).³
3. "*One* man and *one* woman" (monogamy) is from Mat 19.5-6 (two become one).
4. "The sexual union is exclusive" because one man (and by implication one woman) cleaves to his wife (and she cleaves to her husband) to be joined together by God for life; adultery and all sexual sins are defined by this bond of "his wife" and "her husband."
5. That all is for the glory of God is contained in the fact that males and females are image-bearers who bring that role of reflecting the holiness of God into marriage.⁴
6. "To be husband and wife with the goal of becoming father and mother to fill the earth with a family of image-bearing brothers and sisters by means of a sexual union" is from our Lord

¹ James V. Brownson is Professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan and an ordained minister in the Reformed Church of America. The book under review is *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). Page numbers alone in the footnotes refer to this book.

²YouTube presentation on complementarity and the one-flesh principle (July 5, 2014).

³ Granted the topic of marriage is introduced by the question of divorce, but the logical implication of the text is that God's design of marriage regarding male and female image bearers revealed before the fall continues to be normative for marriage after the fall, even with the effects of sin that leads to divorce, and even with the effects of sin that curtail procreation.

⁴ This opens the door to the full richness of the marriage covenant that has marital intimacy of husbands and wives at its core within the mutuality of marriage according to the will of God.

who unites Gen 1.27 (created them male-female) with Gen 2.24 (they become one flesh) in Mat 19.4-5 (the word “therefore” is thus connected with 2.23 and with 1.27), which shows that the creation of male and female (1.27) grounds marriage (2.24) as a bond of husband and wife that is forward-looking for human history and designed for the purpose of filling the earth.⁵ Also, filling the earth is the duty given Adam and Eve in Gen 1.28 in their mutuality as male and female.⁶

II. Implications for all forms of same-gender conduct

Same-sex sex violates the will of God for marriage in three specific ways regarding its *design* as an institution that looks forward from creation to all of human history.

A. First, it violates the *theological symbol* of marriage

The narrator unites Gen 2.23 with Gen 2.24, which shows that the reality that Eve is bone and flesh of Adam’s bone and flesh (2.23) is symbolized in the sexual union by which husband and wife become one flesh (2.24). Because the literal sexual union does not make them, even temporarily, into a single physical body (with one heart, one set of lungs, and so forth), the union is symbolic of the reality that exists by God’s creative work. Therefore, the physical union of husband and wife symbolizes the real one flesh union of males and females in the human family; they are one and marital sex is designed by the Lord to picture that fact. In turn, that symbol reinforces the mutual love that ought to characterize the relationship of husband and wife and, by implication, it ought to characterize all other relationships of the human family that are to exist without erotic overtones. Pointedly, it is impossible for same-sex relations (male-male or female-female) to fulfill the normative design of the one-flesh sexual union of marriage to symbolize the actual one flesh bond of male and female that exists by God’s creation of Adam and His creation of Eve from the flesh and bone of Adam. That theology of God’s speech in the very way He created man and woman, revealed in 2.23-24, is contradicted by same-sex sex.⁷

B. Second, it violates the *divinely designated place for mutual sexual pleasure*

The pleasure of marital intimacy focused in the sharing of one another’s nakedness (Gen 2.25) is inextricably grounded in, and gives further amplification of, the one-flesh union (2.24) that serves as the means by which male and female image bearers (Gen 1.27) fulfill the mandate to fill the earth (1.28). It is only by a theology that fragments Gen 1 from Gen 2 (united both in Genesis itself and in the teaching of Jesus) that one can claim that a male-female component does not have an essential place in the delightful bond of marital intimacy by divine design.

C. Third, same-sex sex violates the *procreative goal* that attaches to the literal symbol. The connection of the creation of male and female (1.27) as the ground of marriage (2.24) also grounds the forward-looking nature of the institution of marriage. So marriage contemplates the growth of the human family from generation to generation by the bond of companionship (2.18) that is entered when sons and daughters leave fathers and mothers to form their own exclusive

⁵ Hence, the institution of marriage involves husbands and wives becoming fathers and mothers to produce a family of brothers and sisters who in generational cycles throughout history are to leave their fathers and mothers to become fathers and mothers themselves. These things are cyclical, historical, and perpetual; as such they are normative for marriage and family to the end of history.

⁶ In response to Brownson’s contention that this word about fruitfulness is not a duty but a blessing (114), it is enough here to counter that be fruitful, fill, and multiply are all imperatives. Moreover, the fact that animals are also commanded to fill the earth does not remove man’s duty; it is a figurative way of expressing the “duty” and “obedience” to duty in God’s ordering of His creation, which underscores man’s duty to fulfill that obligation that is delightful and as natural as the reproductive cycles of life in the forward movement of history generation by generation. Brownson loads the question when he asks, “is procreation the essence of marriage?” because the question ought to be, “is procreation an essential of marriage? Further, he creates a false disjunction when he states that fruitfulness is “a blessing rather than... a command.” It is both. The blessing is God’s promise that the delightful and natural duty will be fulfilled, which is encouraging when procreation is understood to involve much work that factors into the larger command to work at subduing the earth.

⁷ Same-gender relations contradict the call to “oneness” that is to exist among image bearers; so, it is a sin against love for the neighbor.

bond. That bond includes the pleasure of becoming one flesh sexually (Gen 2.24) by sharing one another's nakedness (Gen 2.25) in order to fill the earth with more sons and daughters (Gen 1.28). Although affected by the fall, that potentiality abides and the human family continues to fill the earth, even through sinful forms of male-female sexual intimacy (i.e. children born of adultery,⁸ prostitution, rape, incest), and despite sinful forms of erotic behavior that contradict the procreative design (i.e. homosexuality, zoophilia). Effects of the fall also include barrenness due to sickness, aging, and God's providence. The potentiality remains even if that potential is reduced to the impossible, as the case of Sarah shows. It remains the goal of marriage.

Each of these three points separately, and more powerfully together, support the necessity of a male and a female for a marriage to be godly and for the sexual union of marriage to be holy.⁹ In summary then, same-sex sex is categorically sinful for there is no form of erotic behavior between persons of the same gender that conforms to the will of God for marriage generally or for the purposes of marital intimacy specifically.

III. Questioning the revisionist theology of love

Put simply, the entire traditionalist theology of marriage simply cannot be true if human experience dictates an absolute and unbreakable truth that a loving form of same-sex sex exists.¹⁰ Thus, Brownson grants that the category of same-gender sex presented in the Bible is mostly sinful, but there is a subset within it, a loving form that is not sinful.¹¹ Remarkably, this important

⁸ Brownson makes much of a notion of adultery as the violation of the father's or husband's rights in a patriarchal setting, but this does not get to the heart of the institution of marriage in Genesis 1-2 that includes the fact of mutual image bearing. He also states that the bonding implicit in becoming one flesh is "the basis for the Bible's categorical rejection of all forms of sexual promiscuity. People are not to say with their bodies what they cannot or will not say with the whole of their lives" (109). This goes well with our point made above that the bodily union is among other things a symbol of the reality that male and female are one flesh by God's creation of Adam and of Eve from Adam's flesh. Persons engaging in same-sex sex cannot speak the truth with their bodies, they cannot embody the truth that they are one flesh as male and female from the Creator's hand. More broadly, by their practice homosexuals do not and cannot say and sexually embody the truth that males and females have a fundamental unity by God's creative design, a unity that yields the duty to be what you are by the bonds of kinship and mutual love throughout the family of brothers and sisters in nonsexual ways.

⁹ The broad goal of the marriage covenant and these three essentials of marriage give a direct reply to Brownson's call to show where in the Bible we find this notion of complementarity as something *normative* for marriage as an institution that remains in place after the fall. By this norm, same-gender erotic behavior is sinful in every context and for all of human history. The prohibition passages make this implicit fact of sin powerfully explicit.

¹⁰ That said, it is reasonable to conclude that taking this kind of moral reasoning *to* the Scriptures is wrongheaded from the start. It is wrong (doubly so if one claims to be a Christian and claims to want to live by the authority of Scripture) to begin with the premise, "there is a loving form of same-gender sex based on experience" and then go to Scripture and limit the range of its applicability claiming that it prohibits all kinds of same-sex sex except "the loving kind based on human experience." That will be done with confidence if one makes the experiences of those who practice same-sex intimacy the ultimate standard of the truth regarding this conduct. For them, experience teaches that this subset exists. That being the case, before they investigate a single prohibition of homosexuality in the Bible, they already know that none of the prohibitions are applicable or relevant to the loving subset of homosexual relations that is known as truth and that functions as a higher authority than Scripture by the dictates of human experience. This shapes the way "gay exegesis" proceeds; it determines that certain things cannot be allowed into the study, especially any alleged fact that denies or implies the denial of a loving form of same-sex intercourse; it simply cannot be a true fact; it must be, it will be, dismissed one way or another. And, the deeper problem is the compromise of *sola scriptura* while claiming to live under it.

¹¹ For revisionists, the pie of same-sex sex may be a huge pie in our contemporary culture, and most of it may be worldly and sinful, but there is a slice of the same-sex sex pie, however small, that is holy. Wherever the same-gender relationship is loving, there you have a slice of the pie to which Scripture does not speak; there the activity is pure and holy. So, persons in the church who practice same-sex sex in a loving committed and exclusive way, practice a loving equivalent of marriage. They do not bring sin into the church like bad apples into a barrel; they do not bring a little leaven into a lump that corrupts the whole; instead, they practice sexual holiness!

claim exposes the fact that there is no Scriptural basis on which to ground this loving subset.¹² Without question then, his basis for a loving form of homosexuality, critical to his theology of marriage, is human experience and not biblical revelation.¹³ In the end this approach can only polarize discussion by undermining the authority of Scripture among Christians, by raising the emotional resistance to any evidence that might lead to the condemnation of gay relationships, and by increasing the willingness to accept bad premises in support of desired conclusions that one already “knows” (assumes) must be true.¹⁴

IV. Evaluation of Brownson’s major argument¹⁵

The major argument is negative ending with this conclusion about the marriage language of Genesis: “Both in its immediate context, and in the wider canonical context, the language of “one flesh” in *Genesis 2.24* does not refer to physical gender complementarity, but to the common bond of shared kinship.”¹⁶ Thus, he concludes that “there is reason to doubt that gender complementarity...represents an essential characteristic of one-flesh unions that would

¹² Defenders, since Brownson’s 2013 book, in a number of works written in 2014 share this belief as a dictate of human experience: Vines, Gushee, Achtemeier all stumble around the fact that in Scripture there is no positive statement regarding same-sex sex; no commendation, no approval, no acceptance, no putting on of a form of same-sex sex in the place of what is universally in Scripture the sin of same-sex that is to be put off. In the end, in contrast to Brownson, what is to be put on is a virtuous form of sexuality: either celibacy marked by holiness or marriage marked by a one-flesh intimacy that can only be fulfilled in a sexual union of male and female (and of course, within the boundaries of the exclusive covenant of companionship for life). Also, I should stress that this is not denying that much affection and caring exists between many homosexuals but love must be defined by “keeping the commandments.” So, if much affection and caring exists in a bond that breaks God’s law, as in a loving bond between persons engaged in premarital sex, or as in a loving longterm incestuous bond between a brother and sister, then it cannot be loving the neighbor or God according to His commandments. Thus, because homosexual behavior is sinful, it cannot be loving. Judgments about love based on some experience ought not to *control* what Scripture can or cannot say about that experience.

¹³ Brownson reveals his stance on this point by speaking early on and repeatedly of Christians that practice homosexuality “who seek to live in deep obedience to Christ. Many of these gay and lesbian Christians seek, not to suppress their sexual orientation, but rather to sanctify it, thus drawing intimate gay and lesbian relationships into the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (11). For Brownson, these gays who profess to be Christian are accepted as such because along with their profession they seek to live in loving relationships that are not given to excess. This is the essence of his moral reasoning in discussion of Romans 1: that problem text for the revisionist is inapplicable to loving gay relationships because it refers exclusively to matters of excess, which are not characteristic of loving committed relationships. For example, regarding Lev 18.18 and 20.13, he says the conduct condemned is reprehensible, even abominable, but the texts say nothing about loving gay relations, i.e. about “contemporary committed Christian gay and lesbian relationships” (273).

¹⁴ So, Scripture must allow for the truth of a loving form of same-sex sex on this basis; the condemnations of homosexuality cannot be categorical and thus condemn all types because a loving type exists and being loving, it cannot be contrary to love. In turn, if loving then it is in accord with commandment keeping and is therefore holy. The small circle circularity is evident and the entire argument begs the question because this important conclusion in need of demonstration is assumed to be true throughout. Now, without losing sight of the potential influence of the ultimate standard of human experience in revisionist theology, we should still consider the biblical grounds on which Brownson builds his theology of marriage to test and see if his premises are sufficient to sustain his conclusions.

¹⁵ His argument runs on two tracks, one major and the other minor. Whereas track one is negative, track two is positive ending with a conclusion that is tentatively expressed: “there are some arguments that might suggest that same-sex unions (i.e. the loving kind) could be understood as one-flesh unions” (106). He hopes that his exploration opens a way “for further dialogue about the meaning of the one-flesh union-and the place of same-sex unions in such an understanding. It [his exploration] suggests that same-sex committed unions might have a strong analogical similarity to heterosexual one-flesh unions, particularly when the underlying forms of moral logic are clearly considered” (108). Acknowledging that this is not the last word, he makes the stronger claim that “a reasonable case can be made, under this rubric [of one flesh], for a wider consideration of the kind of intimate relationships that might fulfill the deepest intents of the divine purpose” [that man not be alone and that two become one flesh] (108). Because the second track is so tentative and because it depends on the major argument for its validity, I will only give time to the major track.

¹⁶ 35, italics mine. The author’s use of “gender complementarity” is ambiguous. It is easy to take him to be referring to the traditional idea that male and female have a diversity that combines in a way that enhances qualities of each other and enables the completion of a mutual role (i.e. they provide companionship for each other in doing the work of imaging God; they each provide what is necessary to complete the process of procreation; cf. “the physical complementarity of the genders cannot be in view in these texts that speak of the church as the bride of Christ, 34). However, it appears that by gender complementarity he is referring, at times, to the specific notion of an original androgynous man that was divided at Eve’s creation into two incomplete humans, one male and one female, that find completion and wholeness in the sexual intimacy of marriage (26-32). The latter use regarding an androgynous man is really a red herring.

necessarily exclude same-sex unions.”¹⁷ Further, this is so “when the essential characteristics of one-flesh unions as kinship bonds are held clearly in view” and on this basis he states: “what is normal in the biblical witness may not necessarily be normative in different cultural settings... not envisioned by the biblical writers.”¹⁸ Accordingly, he applies his theology of “one flesh” to Romans 1:

“Therefore, to say that the same-sex erotic acts depicted in Romans 1.26-27 are ‘against nature’ because they violate the physical complementarity of the genders depicted in the one-flesh union of Genesis 2.24 is simply mistaken. This [traditionalist] line of interpretation cannot be sustained, either by a close reading of the Genesis accounts themselves, or by the larger consideration of other wider canonical references to ‘one flesh’ in the creation story, or by other references to... ‘one flesh’ in the Pauline corpus.”¹⁹

Strong claims indeed! So we ask: what is his evidence that “one flesh” refers to kinship *not* complementarity?²⁰ It is fourfold.

A. First, the lexical meaning of the word flesh in Genesis 2.24.

“Flesh” comes under the general lexical heading “relatives” so it means “one kinship group” and he concludes that “the focus” is on the building blocks of human community—the ties of kinship.²¹ Thus, the meaning of man’s declaration that woman is “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” is governed, in Brownson’s eyes, by passages such as Genesis 29.14 (where Laban recognizes his kinship bond to Jacob, saying, **you are my bone and my flesh**) and 2 Samuel 5.1 (where the tribes of Israel declare to David, **we are your bone and flesh**). In all such cases, he claims, “gender distinctions play no role; the focus is entirely on kinship, shared culture, experience, and identity—the same focus that I argued is present in Genesis 2.”²²

In reply to his lexical evidence, why should the use of a word outside the context of marriage govern its use in the context of marriage, the context of its very institution for all time?

¹⁷ 106. Stating that the biblical writers “never imagined that two people of the same sex might seek to be united in a lifelong bond similar to marriage,” he goes on to say that “it remains an open question whether the *consistent* reference to male and female in discussion of the one-flesh union in Scripture should be interpreted in *exclusive* terms” (105). It is a strong statement to say the biblical writers never imagined this slice of the mostly evil homosexual pie that they explicitly describe and condemn. No wonder he has to go underneath and behind their teachings to justify a point laid down by the authority of human experience. Naturally then people who share the same standard of experience are going to read Scripture with that dictate in mind. In turn, they cannot find it within themselves either logically or emotionally to embrace the teaching of Gen 1-2 in their unity that requires a male and female bond in marriage or to embrace the full condemnation of same-sex sex that is categorical.

¹⁸ 109. Referring back to his earlier discussions of one flesh in contrast to the traditionalist view with its male-female essential, he says, “I have argued [in chapters 2 & 5] that the language of ‘one flesh’ refers not to complementarity but to kinship” (109) and “In short, I argue that the Bible neither assumes nor teaches a normative understanding of gender complementarity” (265). Thus, he makes the fine distinction that “To the extent that the Bible views same-sex erotic relationships, then, it does so through lenses other than a normative understanding of biological gender complementarity.” So he acknowledges the connection between complementarity and normativity: if a male and female are essential to marriage, then a male-female relation is normative for marriage (266). Thus, we ask, is marriage instituted for the human family? Is that institution normative for human history in its generations? If that institution is normative for all of history, then should we read the text of Genesis 1-2 as a unit that is normative to the end of time. Yes to all, so, Brownson has to do some delicate surgery if he holds that the marriage text is normative while some discrete elements within it must be separated from the body of truth without damaging the body itself.

¹⁹ 35. Clearly, when Brownson refers to the moral logic underlying the Pauline and other texts that condemn same-sex relations, he refers to his theology of marriage and his denial that the one flesh texts refer to physical gender complementarity. Thus, he says, “At this point the argument is simple: appeals to a doctrine of physical or biological gender complementarity grounded in the creation narratives do not illuminate the moral logic by which Pauline and other biblical texts condemn same-sex erotic relations”; so gender complementarity is “allegedly taught in the creation narratives...but the texts themselves do not support this claim, as we have seen” (35). The wider canonical witness refers to 1 Cor 6 on prostitution, Eph 5.28-29 on Christ and the church, and Mat 19.6 where Jesus comments on divorce.

²⁰ In a review of the traditionalist position on marriage (ch 2), Brownson says he has cleared away misconceptions (85-86). One is Gagnon’s view of an original sexually undifferentiated being that became Adam and Eve at her creation (26, 32-34); he refers to Gagnon’s *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 57-60. In this refutation, Brownson begins to lay out an argument for his interpretation of what becoming “one flesh” means in Genesis 2.24.

²¹ 33-34

²² 106-107, italics mine

This is an example of reading Genesis 2.23-24 “out of context” (by confusing contexts).²³ Moreover, stating that Brownson confuses contexts is not a denial of a general linkage between the institution of the one-flesh intimacy of marriage and the family of brothers and sisters that come from marital intimacy. It makes total sense for kinfolk to consider themselves to be of the same flesh and blood as their parents and grandparents. The fact that that kinship is to have no sexual overtone is precisely why sexual relations between brother-brother, sister-sister, and brother-sister are all sinful unless a man leaves father and mother to form a new nuclear family with his wife (using *nuclear* to refer to husband and wife in contrast to *collateral* family of all brothers and sisters where husband and wife are brother and sister with all in the human family).

Furthermore, the distinction between a marital union as one flesh and a non-marital union as one flesh gives development to the symbolism of marriage. Becoming one flesh in the nuclear family symbolizes the reality that male and female are a) one flesh by God’s creation, b) they are therefore to image God in due recognition of their fundamental unity as husband and wife, and c) that implies that all males and females of the collateral family are to live that one flesh reality in holiness without erotic relations, which belong exclusively within the marriage covenant.

Accordingly, Brownson’s conclusion that Genesis 2.24 refers to kinship without a necessary male-female component is a simple *non sequitur*. From the fact that there is a wide use of the idea of being the same flesh that has no gender element, it just does not follow that a male-female component is not necessary to the idea of being the same flesh by God’s creative work.²⁴

B. Second, Brownson appeals to the teaching of Jesus on divorce.²⁵

From the Lord, he gets what is central: “the one-flesh union is centrally concerned about kinship obligations, which are established by God in marriage and thus cannot be set aside by human beings.”²⁶ So he claims that Jesus focuses on the “unitive” meaning of “one flesh.”²⁷

In reply, a focus on the unitive meaning of “one flesh” may draw attention to some central aspect of marriage, but that in no way indicates that other aspects, even if not central, are unimportant or nonexistent. This does not inform us that a male-female aspect of marriage is unessential. Furthermore, it is the teaching of our Lord that unites Gen 1.27 with Gen 2.24 in Mat 19.4-5. By this, Jesus teaches that the creation of male and female (1.27) grounds marriage (2.24) as a bond of husband and wife that is forward-looking for human history. Thus, contrary to Brownson, the teaching of Jesus shows that gender complementarity is at the core of being one flesh. But it need not be at the core to be essential because unity and complementarity are not in a strong disjunctive relation; affirming one disjunct does not eliminate the other.

C. Third, from Paul’s reference to 2.24 in 1 Cor 6.16-17, Brownson notes that prostitution “enacts a deeper union (‘one body’) with a prostitute that is completely inappropriate”²⁸ and thus

²³ It bears repeating that it is a serious breach of context to separate Gen 1 from Gen 2, which is the only way that Brownson can comment on 2.24 and firmly state that there is no mention of male-female complementarity in the text necessary to marriage. This is evident, for example, when he says, “We have observed that any concern with procreation is completely absent from the texts dealing with ‘one flesh,’ eliminating that way of understanding gender complementarity as a window into the meaning of one-flesh unions” (106). That can be said if one does not read Gen 1.27-28 as context for 2.24. If we do that then we have to say that Gen 1.27-28 gives the moral logic that underlies the one flesh principle.

²⁴ It is God’s creative work that instituted marriage and gave it normative authority in its wholeness as the bench mark for sexual relations.

²⁵ He does so in chapter 2 (34) and chapter 5 (90-94).

²⁶ 34

²⁷ 90

²⁸ 34

the Corinthians are not to contradict in their bodily actions (by union with prostitutes) the true meaning of the one flesh bond regarding the obligations of marriage.²⁹

In reply, we should grant that Paul is exhorting the Corinthians on the basis of the meaning, even the true meaning, of the one flesh bond. But it is a false alternative to claim, as Brownson does, that if he is referring to the meaning, theology, or symbolism of the one flesh bond, then he cannot also refer to a principle of complementarity. The problem with false alternatives emerges when it could be both rather than one or the other. Interestingly, reference to both is precisely what Paul does in 1 Corinthians because a) when a man has sex with a prostitute, he (the male) becomes one flesh with her (the female) in a physical union, b) when a man does this he contradicts the symbolic meaning of marriage, namely, to use Brownson's words, he contradicts "the kinship ties and obligations of marriage."³⁰ Therefore, it is a disjunctive fallacy to claim that the rich symbolism of the sexual act of marriage informs us that the component of male-female complementarity is unessential.³¹

D. Finally, from Ephesians 5.28-29 Brownson concludes: "Clearly, the physical complementarity of the genders cannot be in view in these texts that speak of the church as the bride of Christ."³² However, contrary to Brownson, Paul grounds the relationship of husband and wife in their sexual bond by quoting Genesis 2.24. Therefore, the unity they symbolize sexually is the unity they really have, male and female, by creation. So, in Ephesians, Paul applies that unity to the entirety of their marriage that is negatively affected by the fall (5.22-30). The union of Christ and the church brings restoration from the fall and renewal to marriage. Paul's application (5.28-29) goes to the larger symbolic meaning without eliminating the narrower meaning that is also true.³³ No disjunction exists between one flesh husband-wife-male-female complementarity and the mysterious union of the church with Christ.

Brownson's four supporting premises in no way give justification for the conclusion that Genesis 2.24 does not refer to physical gender complementarity.³⁴ This is the heart of his revised

²⁹ 34. In chapter 5, in a section on "implications for the debate over gay and lesbian relationships" (104-109), Brownson builds on the kinship theme to develop a positive argument to support the claim that same-sex unions may be regarded as one flesh unions (106). Among other things, this is a culture plus Scripture argument that can be evaluated at some other time in a different context. Here, all that need be said is that given the failure of his arguments from Scripture, there is no reason to whatever to think that same-sex unions may be regarded as the one flesh unions that have their definition in the covenant of companionship for life of a male and female to become husband and wife with the potential of becoming father and mother in the institution of marriage that is forward looking from the beginning of creation to the end of time.

³⁰ 34. This text is also helpful in showing that whatever the marital state may be of the man who sins with a prostitute (whether he is married or unmarried), the marriage text of Genesis is normative regarding his conduct and shows that it is sinful.

³¹ The fallacy is that of affirming one disjunct: premise one, the text teaches either gender complementarity or a rich symbolism of kinship; premise two, it teaches a rich symbolism of kinship; conclusion, the text does not teach gender complementarity.

³² 34

³³ The sexual union of husband and wife symbolizes that they are truly one flesh as male and female by creation (from the rib, Gen 2.22 and therefore flesh of flesh, 2.23). Becoming one flesh in a sexual union symbolizes the one flesh unity that God created. Moreover, it symbolizes the real one flesh union of males and females in the human family; they are all one and God designed marital sex to picture that fact. In turn, that symbol reinforces the mutual love that ought to characterize the relationship of husband and wife, which is the application of the one-flesh text that Paul makes in Ephesians 5.28-29. Also, by implication, the one flesh text teaches that unity and mutual love ought to characterize all other relationships of the human family that are to exist without erotic overtones. Therefore, it goes against the text to put the male-female component into a disjunctive relation to the principle of love that is to exist among all in the family of siblings for this is all reinforced by union with Christ. Hence, same-sex relations violates both the theology and design of marriage.

³⁴ It appears that a number of logical fallacies are interwoven in his argument: false alternative, disjunctive fallacy, and special pleading all apply to how Brownson puts the literal aspect of becoming one flesh in 2.24 in disjunction from its larger symbolic meaning and the larger dimensions of marriage. The literal sexual union of males and females belongs to the covenant of companionship for life; it symbolizes the actual union of male and female as joint image bearers by creation; and, it symbolizes the mutual love that ought to exist between all in the family of siblings (all members of the human family that are brothers and sisters) and it reinforces the call to holiness and sexual purity in the human family that belongs within the nuclear family exclusively. Marriage of the nuclear family therefore gives the standard by which all sexual sins are measured in the larger family of siblings. Sexual immorality is any form of sexual relations between brothers and sisters that fails to conform to the covenant of a male and female that become husband and wife with the potential of becoming father and mother.

theology of marriage and defines what he means by the moral logic that underlies the biblical view of sexuality.³⁵ His failure to establish this core claim shows that his attempt to remove physical gender complementarity from the normative definition of marriage is unwarranted. His idea that a male-female component may be sufficient but not necessary for becoming one flesh in marriage is false. His attempt to remove gender complementarity from marriage is a failed attempt to redefine the context in which we ought to read the prohibitions against same-sex sex.

Conclusion: this critique reveals at least four things at once

1. The biblical doctrine of marriage with the essential component of a male and a female is the normative standard for all sexual relations and is sufficient itself to show that same-sex sex is categorically sinful.³⁶

2. The prohibition texts make explicit what is already implicit in the institution of marriage.³⁷ The moral logic underlying the condemnation of same-gender sex in Scripture is the covenant of companionship of a male and a female to become husband and wife with the potential of becoming father and mother to fill the earth with a family of siblings.

3. So, same-sex sex is not only a sin that misses the mark of the sexual union of husband-wife-father-mother, but it is also a sin that misses the mark of love between all siblings in the human family who are one in descent from Adam and Eve. All “sibs” are to display that unity by mutual love that is without erotic overtones except in the husband-wife covenant. Accordingly, same-gender sex is in principle unloving. It has no loving subset, not when love is defined by the will of God rather than by the authority of human experience that dictates what Scripture cannot prohibit. All forms of same-sex erotic behavior are sinful. They are cases of spiritual incest because they violate the boundaries of mutual love and affection that ought to exist between the collateral family of siblings in nonsexual ways.³⁸

4. Finally, those who practice same-sex sex contradict the love of the Christian family of restored, and being restored image bearers, that anticipates the redeemed family of brothers and sisters in the heavenly Canaan where love will be without sexual relations. These things carry implications for the holiness of the church. They give us the moral logic by which to conclude that there is a difference between brothers and sisters in the church and “so called” brothers and sisters (1 Cor 5.9-11; 6.9-10). All who *practice* sexual immorality, including any kind of same-sex sex whether excessive or affectionate (like any kind of incest whether excessive or affectionate, or like any kind of premarital sex whether excessive or affectionate) must be considered “so called” brothers and sisters. They are to be treated with love, with tough love, with a firm hand of love that includes church discipline according to the principles laid down by the risen Lord and Head of the church-family.

To the glory of the triune God forever, amen

³⁵ 85-86

³⁶ I discuss his take on the specific and most explicit Leviticus prohibition in the philosophy paper, EPS at Moody, Chicago, April 10, 2015.

³⁷ In the most fundamental sense, all types of same-gender sex as well as every other form of sexual immorality is given to us in the simple words “his wife” (Gen 2.24) for marriage is constituted by the bond of man and wife versus same-sex relations, and every other sexual sin violates the exclusivity that “his” wife, and “her” husband implies.

³⁸ The collateral family as “a family of sibs” in distinction from the nuclear family is emphasized helpfully by Anderson and Guernsey, *On Being Family: A Social Theology of the Family* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 158-159.