

Gender & Sex in Ancient Greece

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So, we've been tracing the fight for gay marriage on our reform line starting when it first became a mainstream popular fight in 1989. I've said before that this was not immediately a popular fight even among the gay community. I gave one example of that, it was the Civil Rights organization that is meant to represent LGBT people. When three couples began to sue the state of Hawaii in 1991, LAMBDA (Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund) refused to assist or represent them. That's how much the gay community itself has changed since pre 1989-2015. It's been a radical transformation. In 1991, it was a white male heterosexual who took up the case and fought for them. I say that to illustrate how much has changed within the last 32 years. Even when we come to 2010, gay marriage is an issue in the United Kingdom. In the UK in 1989, a charity was set-up called the Stonewall Charity and as of today they are the largest LGBT lobbying group in Europe. So, in 2010, people are fighting for gay marriage in the UK and the head of the Stonewall Charity goes public and he says we have not given a position of gay marriage and we won't now. History is so complicated because it's never one nice and neat storyline with good guys and bad guys. The Stonewall Charity ended up changing their tune because of the amount of angry responses to that statement. This is how much has changed since 1989. We traced it through 1989, 1991, 1996 and 2001, 2004, 2009 and 2012. As we would expect, it comes to a crisis point and 2014 is the midpoint. It's a turning point year in its own right but it's also a midpoint between two major supreme court decisions that dismantled what had been put into place in 1996, a lesbian couple and a gay couple. From 2015 forward the fight has been largely for gay marriage. I want to share a photo with you that I wanted to share before but I couldn't. This is the wedding of Jim Obergefell and John Arthur shortly before John Arthur passed away. Their state's failure to recognize their marriage was a catalyst in his involvement in that 2015 Supreme Court decision. So, that is the history of homosexual and lesbian rights from 1989-2015. Without

going into details I hope we can understand why the conservative right has become so vitriolic (filled with bitter criticism or malice) since then. This is not the only thing that has bruised them but it is a major one. I want us to go back into ancient history. We understand our immediate history but we need to put it into context. How significant is it? We won't really see the significance unless we go back and see what has existed before. This is the part where I get nervous. I'm just going to put a little more detail in the top line and then we'll erase the bottom. Babylon, the Protestant Reformation, 1888. We're not going to go into this history without leaving it there as reference. When we wanted to understand Adventism, where did we look? To Protestantism. You have to understand the context and what is being imbibed. Most of the time period from May 2020 - present were going back to look at the history of Protestantism. I don't want to go to Protestantism, I want to go to Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Rome. This is where I get nervous because I know that other people have looked into history whether its ancient Pagan Nations or indigenous populations. Individuals I'm sure have come to their own thoughts and conclusions and my concern is that I could very easily end up disagreeing with absolutely everyone. I'm hoping that what I present makes logical sense. I do fear that Media Literacy is still an issue that this Movement struggles with. When you go back and look at history, it's not just the religious right that can manipulate history to suit themselves but the left can do that as well. So, I'm going to go particularly to three Pagan Nations, Egypt, Greece and Rome. We're not going to go through them in that order because we're going to start with Greece. I have by far the most to say about Greece and perhaps that might make sense to you already. They are known for their same sex relationships. As I said before I hope not but I fear that I might end up disagreeing with everyone. When we look at history, first of all we need to find, I would suggest the best sources but also we can't just believe what suits us. If we don't like it then we don't like it, but the facts remain. There's a number of difficulties in going into this history and I want to begin with listing them all. Obstructions are things that are going to obstruct us as we go into history. The first one that we will be covering is a New Subject. Were going to be discussing sex and many people in the movement are still uncomfortable with us discussing sex. Which I don't really understand why.

Every Adventist believes that God has things to say about every facet of your life but the one decision that can have the most wide range of consequences, you think that He has nothing to say. If he does, you prefer that it be written so that you can go somewhere private to read it. Everyone has heard Elder Parminder's series on relationships and you know that he has discussed this topic, many aspects of it. So, now it's my turn. This is a disclaimer to begin with, we will be discussing relationships but particularly sex. As you might imagine, historical societies never want to talk about sex. Historical Societies would meet and talk about Ancient Greece but they would just pretend that this was not part of it and that attitude did not change until the late 1970's. I'm not saying this is a new subject for us but that this is a new subject, externally. It's only been really discussed in historical societies till around 1978. When a book that was published that was called "Greek Homosexuality" it opened up discussion in mainstream societies. By the time you get to the 1980's they are finally starting to address this topic. As you might imagine everyone comes to that topic hoping to see what they want to see. Making arguments that fit their present day desires for what they want to see in present day society. That is the difficulty with it being a new subject and a sensitive subject. One of the reasons that I haven't shared many articles on the broadcast about this subject is because it is almost entirely impossible to find a source that isn't influenced by bias. The issue is Foreign Language. When we try to understand an ancient civilization like Greece we're dealing with an ancient language and then it all gets translated into Latin. When we go back to their language they had no word that was a replacement for our modern word Homosexual. In other words, they had no equivalent. So, when we go to a liberal article and they quote Plato, and he says that homosexual relationships are positive, you know that's not what he's saying in a modern day context. First of all he is not using the modern term for homosexual and second he could not be using there equivalent because they had none. So, there's an issue with the translation. The third issue is one I've already touched on which is Bias. When they do that they don't quote Plato towards the end of his life. Towards the end he said that same sex relationships that they did have were essentially an abomination because he changed his

positions over the course of his life. Bias becomes an issue. I will quote from one online source about The Sacred Band of Thebes.

It says, *“3000 years ago in Ancient Greece, being gay or lesbian was not a crime. In fact in certain situations the Greeks even encouraged homosexual relationships.”* That's just wrong. We can't go into a confusing area of history and make it what we want it to be. Because that tiny phrase in certain situations is not big enough to fix how much they've twisted the history. Most liberal sources will take their bias to Greek history as well as conservative ones. The fourth issue is Male Perspective because it's all written from a male perspective. So, if you want to know what a woman's experience was or what a woman thought in ancient Greece or Rome,

generally you're not going to find anything. When they see men describe or illustrate a woman's sexual experience, much like male directors of movies today, they don't end up illustrating a true female experience. They can see this, even in those societies when their illustrating woman having sex. Their disgust is carved and illustrated by men and largely for men. One thing that people have trouble with is that a woman can have pleasure without being penetrated and they didn't like that fact either. So, their sexism shows even in their art. The other issue is Contradictions. Any society has a variety of experiences and perspectives, less back then than now, I would suggest. Because I would suggest even more so back then you belonged to the state. Still if you look at today some of the people who are the most famous, do not represent the lives of normal society. There's the danger of pulling out one case and thinking that somehow it's a representative of general society. We're covering a time period of hundreds if not thousands of years, when you go from Mesopotamia Assyria and to the end of Pagan Rome. All of them have famous legends or famous people that may look outside of the ordinary. What we want to see is the positions of their government and the general society. In the early 1900's or the first decade of the 1900, two women in Spain got married and then fled the country. They are not representative of the general society. 1905 Spain, the conservative faction of the Catholic Church, reveres two women, Lucia and Mary, to a much higher extent than a liberal. What is the experience of normal conservative Catholic women compared to a liberal Catholic woman? Do the conservatives worship of female Goddesses and

Prophetesses make them view ordinary women any better? Just like Papal Rome it's the same as Pagan Rome.

It doesn't matter if their society has Goddesses because it doesn't mean that women in their societies are treated any better. We have to watch out for seeming contradictions and look to general society as much as we can. The last difficulty is the Limitations of Presenting. With this format we can't read a lot and it's similar to how difficult it was to teach parts of Protestantism. I ended up just stating things as fact, because these perspectives had either been gleaned from many different sources or from the audio of a thirty hour book. This is a more difficult subject than the history of Protestantism. Once I started to come to my position on this subject, I found that there were almost no sources that I could agree with, even 80%. In fact in my notes there's one source where I had one sentence because I couldn't bear anything but one sentence. However, I worded the one sentence nicely so I saved it. I know that this is a subject that people have many different positions on. Then when a secular author discusses this and then brings in the Bible, then they make a terrible mess. So, I'll do my best. In Ancient Greece, I want to begin by quoting Aristotle. I've got three quotes. He says, *"The female is as it were a deformed male."* Male = formed, Female = deformed. He says, *"The relation of male to female is by nature a relation of superior to inferior."* *"The male unless constituted in some respect contrary to nature, is by nature more expert at leading than the female."* *"And the elder and complete then the younger and incomplete."* Aristotle is known for his sexism but he's by no means alone. Some of their writers, philosophers and poets had even worse views and some like Plato had better views. But even Plato, when you see him comprehensively, was still quite sexist. They see the male as vastly superior to the female and they talk about reason over emotion, the intellect but especially the body. This is where we need to take ourselves from modern day society and plant ourselves in Greek society and put our modern day brain to one side for the moment. This is a time of hot war and Olympic Games. Muscle, Power and Skill is embodied in the masculine. We could think of women being revered for being able to birth children but remember for many of them they did not think that a woman contributed anything to the offspring. This is where the idea of a seed comes from. You

plant your seed and everything is in that seed to become an oak and they see sperm as the seed.

In fact when one man killed his mother and one of their poets argued that he couldn't be convicted of killing a blood relative because his mother never contributed to him. So, a mother could not be a blood relative because she was the soil that grew the seed. There was at times a popular view that a woman's period was sperm but because she was deformed she couldn't keep sperm alive and it would exit out of her body through blood. So, you see there weren't very good views of women. Their worship of the physical form was concentrated heavily on the masculine. The Greek ideal of beauty was embodied most perfectly in the male youth. We have to understand that in that way our mindset in the 21st century is a bit different. If you were to ask a lot of people today, what is the embodiment of perfect beauty, the accepted secular answer is Beyonce. She's the queen, she embodies perfect beauty. But back then, true perfect beauty was masculine not feminine because of the construct of their whole society and mindset. It was similar for the Romans; the embodiment of perfection was the male youth and they revered that beauty. To them youth was between 13 or puberty to late 20's. How their society operated generally was with the practice of Pederasty. I'm quoting from the document. *"The ideal Pederastic relationship in Ancient Greece involved an Erastes an older male usually in his mid to late 20's and Eromenos a young male who has past puberty usually no older than 18."* So, we're discussing how society generally operates for the Greeks. What would happen with the following? They would develop relationships between an older male and a young male. Before subscribing to morality we should put ourselves back in their mindset. The Erastes is the Teacher and the Eromenos is the students. There was a form of sex that was involved but this was a teacher student relationship. The teacher is expected to take under his wing a young Greek male and teach him how to be a good Greek Warrior, a good Greek Politician, and a good Greek Citizen. The teacher is in his mid to late 20's and the student had to have just past puberty. It wasn't always strictly this depending on the source, I'll say anywhere from 13-18 or 21. As soon as they could see his height or a beard developing, he would no longer be looked at as a student but instead an adult man. They trace this social

construct back to Crete but there isn't universal agreement of where it came from but they believe it was around 700 BC.

They come out of a Greek male dominated social culture which has delayed marriage for Aristocrats. They also have a common practice of having male conferences where they meet and discuss issues of the day. In other words, it's the prevalence of the social seclusion of women. Both art and literary references show that the Eromenos was at least a teen with ages ranging from about 13-20. In unusual cases it could have lasted until 30. Their most settled age range was about 15-17. The Erastes teacher would see a young boy that he liked and he would start to pursue this young man by offering gifts and praise. He had the responsibility of convincing the young boy and gaining his acceptance. It was meant to be a mentorship program but there was also a sexual component and a relationship or friendship that could last for the rest of their lives. We'll go into detail tomorrow as to what would happen as the child grew into an adult. I believe this is one of the reasons why people start tying what they would say is homosexuality to pedophilia because when they look at this in a modern definition and it's nothing more than pedophilia. Another quote, "The age range when boys entered into such relationships was equal without Greek girls given in marriage, often do adult husbands many years there senior. Boys however, usually had to be courted and were free to choose their mate (Erastes) while marriages for girls were arranged for economic and political advantage at the discretion of father and suter." So, if you wanted to tie this (Eromenos) to pedophilia you would equally have to tie their heterosexual marriages to pedophilia. Except in heterosexual marriages the girls were generally not given a choice. I would suggest the link people draw between what they call homosexuality and pedophilia is a lie, it doesn't hold water. Let's continue reading from Inquiriesjournal.com. Examining Greek pederastic relationships. *"The power dynamics involved in such a relationship with the Erastes always in control ensured that the Erastes kept his dignity as a fully functioning member of Greek society while the Eromenos grew up under the tutelage of such a man and as such could become a great citizen when he reached adulthood. Ideal pederastic couples were once who's relationship directly benefited their Greek*

society.” In other words the older would teach the younger about politics, military and society.

“The evidence for the ideal pederastic relationship being the most common in Greece is overwhelming.” However, remember contradictions because there are stand out cases breaking that model. You would know about The Sacred Band of Thebes. The liberals would say look at that beautiful group of 150 gay couples. However, I would argue this is not today's Jim Obergefel and John Arthur because these couples could not be composed of equals. For every couple in the Sacred Band of Thebes, one would have to be an older teacher and one would have to be a younger student. They were likely closer in age than 13 and 30 because this student is fighting in a war. However, regardless of how that Band constructed their Army, they had to have a hierarchical difference. We're out of time and I have not gotten to my point but I just want to say this one thing and then we will revisit it tomorrow in detail. There was a sexual relationship between Erastes and Eromenos. In the vast majority of cases there was a physical component. We have more time so I'll keep reading. *“The Ancient Greeks did not conceive of sexual orientation as a social identifier as modern western societies have done. Greek society did not distinguish sexual desire or behavior by the gender of the participants but rather by the role that each participant played in a sex act. That an active penetrator or passive penetrated. This active passive polarization corresponded with dominant and submissive social roles. The active penetrative role was associated with masculinity, higher social status and adulthood. While the passive role was associated with femininity, lower social status and youth. Given the importance of Greek society in cultivating the masculinity of the adult male and the perceived feminizing effect of being the passive partner, relations between adult men of comparable social status were considered highly problematic and usually associated with social stigma.”* So, what they couldn't tolerate was a John Arthur and a Jim Obergefell because remember they worship masculinity. One of those men would have to be a female and what are women? Nothing good. This social stigma was reserved for only the passive partner in the relationship. So, if you had two equal males and they had sex both of them do not receive the stigma of

society. The person who was the dominant party or the penetrated still retained all of his masculinity and society does not condemn him. Their fine with him because sex for them is not attached to the gender of the participants however, they have gendered the act. I hope this makes sense. They would look at a male penetrating or being dominant to another male as fine, just as masculine. The stigma is reserved for anyone approaching the female characteristics. *“According to contemporary opinion, Greek males who engaged in passive anal sex after reaching the age of manhood at which point they expected to take the reverse role in Pederastic relationships and become active and dominant member there by were feminized or made a woman of themselves. There is ample evidence in the theatre of Aristophanes that derides these passive men and gives a glimpse of the type of biting, social opprobrium and shame heaped upon them by these societies.”* So, liberals look back at Greek society and try to draw out examples of a society that tolerated same-sex relationships. And conservatives look back at Greek societies and try to link Pedophilia to Pederasty, and I would argue that both are wrong. I would argue that Greek society did not tolerate same sex relationships among equals. If you're a middle higher class ranked Greek male pre puberty = life of a child. If you are a puberty male around the age of 13, you become a student of a Greek male adult who will train you. You'll be courted by him, you may have a number of tutors and you will end up choosing one. There is evidence that the Fathers of these boys would hope that they were really pretty and handsome so that they would attract a better teacher. They become an Eromenos. This was mostly education but it was supposed to be restrained; however, there still existed a sexual relationship. Around 18-21 you reach adulthood and then this relationship has to end. You cannot stay in a physical relationship with your teacher. Because you're now an adult and he's an adult so now you're both equal. To continue any physical relationship would mean that one of them would be seen as feminized. So, certainly the education stops as well as any physical relationship. From roughly 21-30, he then becomes an Erastes and finds a young boy, has a physical relationship with him and trains him into adulthood. Then that relationship has to end. At around 30, he then marries a girl of around 13-16. She is not generally given much of a choice.

When we come back tomorrow I want to expand this simple explanation further and look at the similarities and differences to this that existed in Rome and Egypt. The point I'm making is if you want to see the significance of what society began to accept in 1989 it's not like society finally looked back at that good Greek civilization and learned something. Because if John Arthur met Jim Obergefell in a bar, that relationship would have been no more tolerated in Greece than that of conservative American society today because this is not a homosexual or gay relationship. We will come back tomorrow. If you kneel with me well, close in prayer. Dear Lord, we know how complicated history can become but as we look back at the context, we look back and see what you have observed and what existed around Ancient Israel, we pray that we will have a true perspective. That you might guide us into unity in this movement. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.