

THE BIBLE AND HOMOSEXUAL CONDUCT

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I. Introduction

Unless you just awoke from a ten-year coma, you know that homosexuals and their allies are aggressively pushing the claim that the *church* should, even must, receive into its fellowship those who are actively and impenitently engaged in homosexual conduct. For example, in his recent book, *God and the Gay Christian*, Matthew Vines declares (p. 178, emphasis supplied): "As more believers are coming to realize, affirming our gay brothers and sisters [meaning affirming their same-sex relationships as moral] isn't simply one possible path Christians can take. It isn't just a valid option. This kind of love and affirmation - regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity - is, in fact, *a requirement of Christian faithfulness.*"

Most, at least for now, limit the claim to those engaging in homosexual conduct in the context of a committed, monogamous relationship, but that does nothing to lessen the gravity of this issue for the church. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote recently:

Evangelical Christians in the United States now face an inevitable moment of decision. While Christians in other movements and in other nations face similar questions, the question of homosexuality now presents evangelicals in the United States with a decision that cannot be avoided. Within a very short time, we will know where everyone stands on this question. There will be no place to hide, and there will be no way to remain silent. To be silent will answer the question.¹

Ultimately what is at stake in this conflict is Scripture's place in the life of the church. Will the Bible stand as an objective revelation from God, something to which the church conforms in its submission to Jesus, or will the Bible be made to conform to the church, be made to say whatever we want it to say? In the latter case, it ceases to be the word of God and becomes the word of man masquerading as the word of God. Imputing our will to God under the guise of interpreting the Bible is an attempt to tame rather than serve the Almighty.

Proponents of a homosexualist reading of Scripture never put the matter quite so plainly, but some of their statements reveal clearly that their interpretation is driven not by a desire to hear what the Bible says but by a desire to justify a prior conclusion that homosexual conduct is

¹ R. Albert Mohler Jr., "God, the Gospel and the Gay Challenge: A Response to Matthew Vines" in R. Albert Mohler, Jr., ed., *God and the Gay Christian? A Response to Matthew Vines* (Louisville, KY: SBTS Press, 2014), 9.

not wrong. They are groping for a way to dress their acceptance of homosexual conduct in biblical legitimacy. Consider, for example, the following blog post (April 7, 2013) titled "An Open Letter to the Church from My Generation" by a young woman named Dannika Nash:

My whole life, I've been told again and again that Christianity is not conducive with homosexuality. It just doesn't work out. I was forced to choose between the love I had for my gay friends and so-called biblical authority. I chose gay people, and I'm willing to wager I'm not the only one. I said, "If the Bible really says this about gay people, I'm not too keen on trusting what it says about God." And I left my church. It has only been lately that I have seen evidence that the Bible could be saying something completely different about love and equality.²

Catholic scholar Luke Timothy Johnson, who changed his view after his daughter came out as a lesbian, writes: "I think it is important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good." He clarifies: "We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us" (quoted in Brown [2014], 57).

Mohler observes (p. 11):

There are a great host of people, considered to be within the larger evangelical movement, who are desperately seeking a way to make peace with the moral revolution and endorse the acceptance of openly gay individuals and couples within the life of the church. Given the excruciating pressures now exerted on evangelical Christianity, many people — including some high-profile leaders — are desperately seeking an argument they can claim as both persuasive and biblical.

Those seeking to sanctify homosexual conduct are like those Paul described in 2 Tim. 4:3-4 who "will not put up with sound teaching." Instead they "accumulate teachers for themselves to satisfy their itching ears." They are like those Peter describes in 2 Pet. 3:16 "who twist [Paul's words] to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures."

As I will demonstrate in this study, Scripture clearly and uniformly condemns as sinful all forms of homosexual conduct. In the words of Richard Hays, a New Testament scholar and Dean of Duke Divinity School, certainly not a conservative institution, "Scripture offers no loopholes or exception clauses that might allow for the acceptance of homosexual practices under some circumstances. Despite the efforts of some recent interpreters to explain away the evidence, the Bible remains unambiguous and univocal in its condemnation of homosexual conduct."³ This is echoed by the renowned German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The

² Quoted in Michael L. Brown, *Can You Be Gay and Christian?* (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2014), 33.

³ Richard B. Hays, "The Biblical Witness Concerning Homosexuality" in Maxie D. Dunnam and H. Newton Malony, eds., *Staying the Course: Supporting the Church's Position on Homosexuality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 78.

biblical assessments of homosexual practice are unambiguous in their rejection, and all its statements on this subject agree without exception."⁴ New Testament scholar Ben Witherington likewise declares:

The witness of the Bible is univocal about same sex sexual activity. It is always rejected as sinful. There is no distinction made between homosexual behavior that is part of the consensual acts of adults and other forms of such behavior. . . . For those who indeed intend to continue to recognize the Bible as the normative rule, not only for faith but for ethical practice in the church or the synagogue, we cannot be about the business of making anyone comfortable in their sin, whether a heterosexual or a homosexual person.⁵

For the church to accept homosexual conduct or any other form of sexual immorality in the life of a Christian is for the church to reject the Lordship of Jesus; it is for the church to commit spiritual suicide, to cease being the church. Pannenberg writes:

The church has to live with the fact that, in this area of life as in others, departures from the norm are not exceptional but rather common and widespread. The church must encounter all those concerned with tolerance and understanding but also call them to repentance. It cannot surrender the distinction between the norm and behavior that departs from that norm.

Here lies the boundary of a Christian church that knows itself to be bound by the authority of Scripture. Those who urge the church to change the norm of its teaching on this matter must know that they are promoting schism. If a church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognized homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

Baptist scholar Russell Moore put it more succinctly in a recent article in *First Things*. He wrote: "A church that accommodates itself to the sexual revolution is no longer a church of Jesus Christ."⁶

In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul rebukes the church for tolerating in their midst a man engaging in sexual immorality, specifically having sex with his stepmother. He insists that the man be disfellowshipped and instructs the saints not to associate with anyone who bears the name

⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Should We Support Gay Marriage? NO," trans. by Markus Bockmuehl, available online here: <http://www.virtueonline.org/should-we-support-gay-marriage-no-wolfhart-pannenberg>.

⁵ Ben Witherington III, "Was Sodom Into Sodomy?" <http://www.beliefnet.com/News/2003/07/Was-Sodom-Into-Sodomy.aspx>.

⁶ Russell D. Moore, "Not Yet," *First Things* (11/25/14); retrieved on 12/12/14 from <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/11/not-yet>.

"brother" but who is engaging in sexual immorality or various other sins. He ends his discussion of this subject with the command (v. 13b): *"Drive out the wicked man from among you."*

Paul wrote in Eph. 5:3-5 that sexual immorality and all impurity and covetousness *must not even be named* among the saints, meaning these things should not occur even once in the community of faith or that they should not become acceptable subjects of conversation. He concludes (v. 5): *No sexually immoral or impure or greedy person (who is an idolater) has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.* In Rev. 2:14-16 and 2:20 Jesus chastised the Christians in Pergamum and Thyatira for tolerating impenitent sinners in their midst, and in Rev. 2:6 he praised the Christians in Ephesus for hating the sinful practices of the Nicolaitans, which he also hates (Rev. 2:6).

Those who encourage people to live in sexual immorality by assuring them their conduct is not immoral should tremble at Jesus' words in Mat. 18:6 that *"whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."* They likewise should be put in fear by Paul's rebuke in Rom. 1:32 of those who *approve of* the wrong done by others.

What we see occurring in society at large and in Christian denominations is the result of a deliberate and planned campaign over the last forty years to mainstream homosexual conduct. Though homosexual activists bristle at the claim there is a "gay agenda" that has been implemented, the evidence is overwhelming, much of it documented in Michael Brown's book *A Queer Thing Happened to America* (Concord, NC: Equal Time Books, 2011), 21-51.

The agenda began formulating as early as 1970, but 1987 produced a couple of revealing documents. On September 1, 1987 the nation's most prominent homosexual magazine published an article by Steve Warren, a leader of the homosexual organization ACT UP, titled "Warning to the Homophobes." Warren wrote (quoted in Brown [2011], 31-32):

1. Henceforth, homosexuality will be spoken of in your churches and synagogues as an "honorable estate."
2. You can either let us marry people of the same sex, or better yet abolish marriage altogether.
3. You will be expected to offer ceremonies that bless our sexual arrangements. . . . You will also instruct your people in homosexual as well as heterosexual behavior, and you will go out of your way to make certain that homosexual youths are allowed to date, attend religious functions together, openly display affection, and enjoy each other's sexuality without embarrassment or guilt.
4. If any of the older people in your midst object, you will deal with them sternly, making certain they renounce their ugly and ignorant homophobia or suffer public humiliation.

5. You will also make certain that laws are passed forbidding discrimination against homosexuals and heavy punishments are assessed....

6. Finally, we will in all likelihood, want to expunge a number of passages from your Scriptures and rewrite others, eliminating preferential treatment of marriage and using words that will allow for homosexual interpretation of passages describing biblical lovers such as Ruth and Boaz or Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

Warning: If all these things do not come to pass quickly, we will subject Orthodox Jews and Christians to the most sustained hatred and vilification in recent memory. We have captured the liberal establishment and the press. We have already beaten you on a number of battlefields. You have neither the faith nor the strength to fight us, so you might as well surrender now.

In November 1987, two Harvard-trained homosexual writers, Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen, published an influential article titled "The Overhauling of Straight America."⁷ This article, which was expanded into a book in 1990, laid out a strategy for a large-scale media campaign to change the image of homosexuals in America. The authors declared that the campaign needed to do the following six things, all of which you will recognize have been accomplished.

1. *Talk about gays and gayness as loudly and as often as possible.* In this section they wrote:

When conservative churches condemn gays, there are only two things we can do to confound the homophobia of true believers. First, we can use talk to muddy the moral waters. This means publicizing support for gays by more moderate churches, raising theological objections of our own about conservative interpretations of biblical teachings, and exposing hatred and inconsistency. Second, we can undermine the moral authority of homophobic churches by portraying them as antiquated backwaters, badly out of step with the times and with the latest findings of psychology. Against the mighty pull of institutional Religion one must set the mightier draw of Science & Public Opinion (the shield and sword of that accursed "secular humanism"). Such an unholy alliance has worked well against churches before, on such topics as divorce and abortion. With enough open talk about the prevalence and acceptability of homosexuality, that alliance can work again here.

2. *Portray gays as victims, not aggressive challengers.* This is why the media largely avoid images and stories of homosexuals that do not fit that mold.

3. *Give homosexual protectors a "just" cause.* This is what is behind the attempt to equate their situation with the civil rights struggle of African-Americans. They are so invested in that analogy Crystal Dixon, an African-American, was fired in 2008 from her job as Associate Vice

⁷ The article is available online here: http://library.gayhomeland.org/0018/EN/EN_Overhauling_Straight.htm.

President of Human Resources at the University of Toledo for daring to express her opinion in an Op-ed piece in the Toronto Free Press that homosexuality was not analogous to being black.

4. *Make gays look good.*

5. *Make the victimizers look bad.* In this section they wrote (emphasis supplied):

The public should be shown images of ranting homophobes whose secondary traits and beliefs disgust middle America. These images might include: the Ku Klux Klan demanding that gays be burned alive or castrated; *bigoted southern ministers drooling with hysterical hatred to a degree that looks both comical and deranged*; menacing punks, thugs, and convicts speaking coolly about the "fags" they have killed or would like to kill; a tour of Nazi concentration camps where homosexuals were tortured and gassed.

This is what is behind the labeling of anyone who disagrees with them as "hateful" or "homophobic." It is a political tactic, a way of stigmatizing their opponents so average Americans will want to disassociate from them. But who really loves the homosexual? Is it the one who reinforces his defiance of God and thus helps to pave the road to his eternal condemnation or the one who exposes that defiance in the hope he or she will turn to Christ for eternal life? To ask the question is to answer it. As the Spirit wrote through Solomon, "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy*" (Prov. 27:6).

Jesus said in Mat. 22:39 that the second greatest commandment is "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," which is from Lev. 19:18b. The immediately preceding verse, Lev. 19:17, contrasts hating your brother with rebuking him, the implication being that love demands correction of the erring.

Our culture appreciates the nobility of "tough love" in other circumstances, such as in training rebellious teenagers or dealing with alcoholics, but under the influence of the homosexual agenda it now demonizes tough love of homosexuals as "homophobia." The church cannot be intimidated. As Christ loved sinful humanity enough to endure public scolding in order to bless it, so we as his disciples must love homosexuals enough to do the same. Those who come to the light will be forever grateful; those who refuse will realize on "that Day" that we were acting for their good.

6. *Solicit funds.*

On June 2, 2005, Wayne Besen, founder of a pro-homosexual political organization, wrote an article titled "Visibility is Victory" in which he listed things people could do to further the homosexual movement.⁸ His second item was: "If you are a person of faith, don't let counterfeit Christians such as Jerry Falwell, James Dobson and Pat Robertson hijack religion. Jesus never once mentioned homosexuality. Yet, these phoniest of Pharisees are obsessed with the issue. If you are a Christian, whose priorities do you trust? Jerry Falwell's or Jesus Christ's?"

⁸ The article is available online here: <http://fr.bellacio.org/en/spip.php?article6278>.

No one thinks that all homosexuals share these goals and attitudes – many are just living their lives day to day – but these goals and attitudes are prominent among the activists driving the homosexual political and religious movement. These people are trying, among other things, to delegitimize and demonize the historic Jewish and Christian understanding of Scripture. And do not think any group of believers will be immune. Without vigilance all can be swayed by cultural trends, some more quickly than others.

Homosexuals have gone on the offensive, demanding that the church embrace sexual immorality. They are attacking us by insisting that the unanimous understanding of Jews and Christians for thousands of years is wrong. We must defend the truth of God whenever smooth talkers seek to confuse people and should make no apology for doing so. On the contrary, righteous indignation is fitting when false teachers endanger the saints. We must call this for what it is: heresy. And we must in love rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine.

I am well aware that since the 1960s homosexuals have referred to themselves as "gay," but I prefer the descriptive term homosexual – meaning same sex – over their euphemism because the euphemism carries the false connotation that the homosexual lifestyle is a kind of merry, carefree, fun-filled existence. That is not true, and I do not want to encourage the false perception. Why should I help propagandize a way of life that draws people from God?

I titled the paper "The Bible and Homosexual *Conduct*" because the question is not whether the church should receive into its fellowship those who simply are attracted to the same sex. One who experiences an involuntary impulse or desire to do something forbidden by God has not thereby sinned. Rather, he or she is being tempted to sin. As James says in Jas. 1:14-15a, "*Rather, each man is tempted by being dragged away and enticed by his own desires. ¹⁵Then the desire, after conceiving, gives birth to sin.*" If unchecked, our desire to do wrong will lead us beyond temptation into actual sin.

So the impulse or desire to do wrong is not the same as doing wrong. The desire to do wrong only gives birth to sin when one chooses to yield to that desire. In the sexual realm that may be either by lusting in one's heart or physically engaging in illicit sexual relations. So, for example, a man who is attracted to his sister or to another man's wife has not sinned by virtue of that attraction, but if he pursues the desire in his heart, fantasizes about it or plans to act on it, or if he actually engages in sexual activity with the woman, his desire has then blossomed into sin. The same goes for the man or woman with same-sex attraction.

The question, of course, is not whether God loves homosexuals. The cross of Christ proves forever the depth of God's love for all mankind. His love for them is not in doubt. The question is whether the homosexual will love God. One cannot love God and live in defiance of his commandments (Jn. 14:15, 14:21-24, 15:10, 15:14; 1 Jn. 2:4-6, 5:3; 2 Jn. 6). Whether that is comfortable or not, it is true, and it is helpful to no one to pretend otherwise.

I will be going into a fair amount of detail in this study, but that is necessary to expose the sophistry of those pushing the homosexual agenda in Christian circles. They do not have a leg to stand on, but if one does not know the details one does not know *why* their claims are

defective, and if one does not know why their claims are defective one remains vulnerable and unable to help others see through the smoke.

II. Homosexual Conduct in the Old Testament

A. Gen. 2:18-24 - Creation of Woman

In Gen. 2:18, God declares that it is not good for the man to be alone and then announces his intention to make a helper who is *fit for*, or *corresponds to*, or *pairs up with* Adam. In 2:21-22 he fulfills that intention not by independently creating another man but by building a woman, a sexual counterpart to the man, from the bone and flesh he removed from Adam. The woman was created *from* Adam (see 1 Cor. 11:8), and she is a complementary fit to him, what New Testament scholar Robert Gagnon calls "a complementary sexual 'other.'"⁹

When the woman is brought to Adam he acknowledges her in 2:23 as being right or suitable for him, having been made *from him*. The very next verse, Gen. 2:24, declares, "*Therefore* (For this reason) a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." It is because of the complementary fit of man and woman based on the fact the woman was created out of the man that man and woman join back together in the sexual union of marriage. Male and female are "perfect fits" from the standpoint of divine design and blessing; male and male, or female and female, are not.

As we will see, this justification for male-female union – this complementarity that is rooted in the woman coming out of the man – is a thread running through criticisms in Scripture of same-sex intercourse as "contrary to nature," meaning contrary to God's creative design and intention. From this foundation in Genesis, the Bible is a thoroughly heterosexual book. As Gagnon summarizes the matter, "Indeed, every narrative, law, proverb, exhortation, poetry, and metaphor in the pages of Scripture that has anything to do with sexual relations presupposes a male-female prerequisite for sexual relations and marriage" (quoted in Brown, 90).

The Lord Jesus appealed to this Genesis text in Mat. 19:4-6 (Mk. 10:6-9) in responding to the Pharisees' question about divorce. He says it is *because* God created two sexes in the beginning, made mankind male and female, that a man and woman are joined by God in the one-flesh union of marriage, and having been so joined are not to be separated by divorce. According to Jesus, marriage and the sexual intimacy that are part of it are intended by God to be between the two sexes he created in the beginning.

It is interesting that those who are intent on having the church embrace homosexual conduct generally limit their claim to persons engaging in homosexual conduct in a committed, monogamous relationship. That is where they draw a line; even they accept that those engaging

⁹ Robert A. J. Gagnon is perhaps the world's leading scholar on the subject of the Bible and homosexual practice. He has published a vast amount of material on the topic, including two books: *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001) and, with Dan O. Via, *Homosexuality and the Bible – Two Views* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003). A wealth of information is available at his website: <http://www.robagnon.net/>. My debt to him will be obvious to anyone familiar with his work.

in homosexual conduct outside of something analogous to a marriage commitment are sinning. I say it is interesting because these advocates agree that God approves of sexual relations *only* in the context of a committed and exclusive relationship, but how do they know that? They know it from the fact the one-flesh marriage relationship God established in the beginning with Adam and Eve involved only two parties, Adam and Eve. So they pick the exclusive commitment aspect of that relationship as something that is clear and binding but reject the heterosexual aspect of that same relationship which is no less clear and binding.

God's aversion to any obscuring of the male and female sexual differences that he established at creation is evident in the prohibition of cross-dressing in Deut. 22:5. It states: *A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.* If the male-female distinction is so fundamental that disregarding or camouflaging it by dressing like the opposite sex is sinful, then certainly disregarding the male-female distinction by taking the role of the opposite sex in sexual intercourse is sinful.

B. Lev. 18:22, 20:13 – Laws

These laws are unqualified and absolute. Lev. 18:22 states: *You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination* (ESV). Lev. 20:13 states: *If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them* (ESV).

The verses say if a man lies *with a male* as with a woman, not if a man lies with a neighbor or a boy or a cult prostitute or a slave or a stranger or someone he does not love. The determining factor in the condemnation is the sex of the participants not their social status or relationship. The offense is a man lying *with a male*, treating a man sexually as a woman, which is a violation of God's creative design and intention that only complementary sexes, male and female, join together in a one-flesh union. It is not a matter of gender *status* (male honor or hierarchy) but a matter of distorting gender itself as created and ordered by God.

In the words of Old Testament scholar Michael Grisanti: "This practice of a man lying with another man 'after the manner of lying with a woman' (Levine, 123) was abhorrent to Yahweh because it perverted the heterosexual relationship ordained by him (Gen. 2:24, 4:1)."¹⁰ The late Brevard Childs, the longtime and influential professor of Old Testament at Yale University, observed:

The recent attempt of some theologians to find a biblical opening, if not warrant, for the practice of homosexuality stands in striking disharmony with the Old Testament's understanding of the relation of male and female. The theological issue goes far beyond the citing of occasional texts which condemn the practice

¹⁰ Michael Grisanti, "תעב," in Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:316.

(Lev 20: 13)... The Old Testament views homosexuality as a distortion of creation which falls into the shadows outside the blessing.¹¹

And these laws say if a man *lies with* a male as with a woman, not if a man rapes or otherwise coerces a male into sexual relations. "Lies with" simply is a way of saying has sex with, just like we use the phrase "sleeps with" in our culture. Everyone understands that "lies with" carries no connotation of coercion in its other uses right in Leviticus 20, where condemnation is announced on the man who "lies with" his father's wife (v. 11) or "lies with" his daughter-in-law (v. 12). No one argues that *these* commands prohibit only rape or coercive sex, that they somehow exempt voluntary sex, so there is no reason to think the condemnation of a man who "lies with" a male carries some such restriction. That notion must be imposed on the text.

Indeed, the fact both participants are to be put to death, *their own blood being upon them*, means they both are culpable. They each earned God's judgment, which confirms that the texts are referring to voluntary sex between the men.

The gravity of the sin of homosexual conduct is evident in the description of it as "an abomination" (*to'evah*) in both Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 and in the specification of the death penalty for it. A standard Hebrew lexicon (Koehler-Baumgardner) offers these additional definitions of the word translated "abomination" -- "an abhorrent thing," "something detestable, loathsome, utterly repugnant, disgusting" (Gagnon, [2001], 113). H.-D. Preuss says the word "refers to something in the human realm that is ethically abhorrent, either as an idea or an action; above all it is irreconcilable with Yahweh, contrary to his character and his will as an expression of that character, an ethical and cultic taboo."¹²

Though a number of sexual sins (and other sins) are mentioned in Leviticus 18 and 20, including incest, adultery, bestiality, and child sacrifice, the homosexual act is the only sin specifically designated an "abomination." Collectively, they are all called "abominations" (plural) but that designation is attached separately, in the singular, only to homosexual conduct. It is an abomination par excellence. That is an indication of the degree of divine revulsion associated with this.

If I may digress briefly, the idea that all sins are equally offensive to God in all respects, that they all are equally bad, simply is not true. In Mat. 23:23 Jesus refers to "weightier things of the law," more important things, in the will of God. He earlier spoke of lesser commandments (Mat. 5:19) and the greatest commandment (Mat. 22:36-38; Mk. 12:28-31). The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is called "very grave" in Gen. 18:20, Israel's sin with the golden calf is called a "great sin" in Ex. 32:21, 30, the sin of Eli's sons is called "very great" in 1 Sam. 2:17, and the sin of the northern kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam is called "great sin" in 2 Ki. 17:21. God speaks to Ezekiel of "great" and "greater" abominations in Ezek. 8:5-15. And the Apostle Paul leaves no doubt in 1 Cor. 5:1-2 that incest in the form of a man having his father's wife was a particularly great offense.

¹¹ Brevard Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), 194.

¹² H.-D. Preuss, "תוֹעֵבָה," G. Johannes Botterweck and others, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 15:602.

No aspect of God's will is trivial, but some things are more central, more important. The fact all unforgiven sin will exclude one from eternal life with God does not mean that all sins are equally offensive to God in all respects. Looking at a woman with lust is sinful, but it is a less serious sin than raping her. Stealing a tomato from your neighbor's garden is sinful, but it is a less serious sin than torturing his child. Being angry with a brother is sinful, but it is a less serious sin than chopping him into pieces.

Homosexual activists sometimes attempt to put the church on the defensive and to weaken its resistance to their sin by claiming the church is wrong to distinguish homosexual conduct from any other sin. But not only is that sin distinguishable from other sins by the fact there is an organized attempt to redefine homosexual conduct as *not* being sinful, but as Robert Gagnon points out, "[t]he Bible gives many indications that homosexual practice is regarded as a particularly severe sexual offense."¹³

1. Not a Temporary Purity Regulation

Some advocates of homosexual unions try get around these Levitical prohibitions by claiming they were temporary purity regulations for the people of Israel during the era of the Mosaic Covenant, a matter of ritual contamination for Jews rather than a matter of immoral conduct, but that is incorrect.

It is true that some of the commands in the Mosaic Law were peculiarly covenantal and as such were in force only for Israel and only until the coming of Christ, but there also are many commands that reflect the permanent moral desire of God. For example, Leviticus 18-20 includes prohibitions against idolatry, witchcraft, stealing, lying, adultery, incest, bestiality, child sacrifice and commands to honor one's parents and love one's neighbor, all of which are recognized as having ongoing and general applicability. The Levitical prohibition against homosexual conduct is like those moral prohibitions and unlike ritual prohibitions such as touching the carcass of an unclean animal. This is clear from the following.

First, the prohibition of homosexual conduct is grounded in the creation order, in the differentiation between male and female in Gen. 2:18-24. As Tikva Frymer-Kensky observes, "the extreme prohibition of homosexuality by the death penalty (Lev. 29:13 [sic], cf. 18:22), not inherited from other ANE [ancient Near East] laws, is best explained as a desire to keep the categories of 'male' and 'female' intact."¹⁴ That is foundational and obviously predates the formation of Israel and the giving of the Mosaic Law.

Second, the Levitical laws proscribing homosexual conduct are grouped with prohibitions of incest, adultery, and bestiality, offenses that are recognized as having ongoing and general applicability. This grouping creates at least a presumption that the prohibition of homosexual

¹³ Robert A. J. Gagnon, "It's Silly to Compare Homosexual Practice to Gluttony" (July 29, 2012), p. 5, retrieved online on 12/12/14 from <http://www.robgagnon.net/articles/homosexGluttony.pdf>. He lists seven such indications.

¹⁴ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Sex and Sexuality" in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:1145.

conduct likewise has ongoing and general applicability, and there is no contrary evidence to dispel that presumption.

Third, the prohibition against homosexual conduct is universal and not something that applied only to the people of Israel. This is clear from the fact God in Lev. 18:22 calls homosexual conduct an abomination and then in Lev. 18:24-30 explains that he punished the Canaanites, vomited them out of the land, for engaging in all of the aforesaid abominations, which he specifically labels in v. 25 "*iniquity*" (or "sin" or "guilt" or "wickedness"), a word having *moral* connotations. God does not judge the nations for eating unclean animals or sowing their fields with different kinds of seeds – for violating those covenantal requirements specific to Israel – but he does judge them for engaging in sexual sin like homosexual conduct.

Fourth, the fact engaging in homosexual conduct warranted the death penalty under the Mosaic Covenant shows it is a grave moral offense and not merely a matter of ritual contamination. As William Webb notes, "The placement of homosexuality on the death penalty list argues strongly for the ongoing applicability of divine displeasure against this act in any culture and at any time."¹⁵

This, by the way, does not mean that Christians must support the death penalty for homosexual conduct. Since the church, the people of God, are no longer a nation-state like Israel but are scattered among many nations throughout the world, the obligation imposed by God on Israel to mete out certain penalties for various sins does not apply to the church. That obligation was tied to Israel's identity as a nation, a civil government.

As Tim Keller has noted, "The church is not a civil government, and so sins are dealt with by exhortation and, at worst, exclusion from membership. This is how Paul deals with a case of incest in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5:1ff. and 2 Cor. 2:7-11). Why this change? Under Christ, the gospel is not confined to a single nation---it has been released to go into all cultures and peoples."¹⁶ (Note that the very offense committed in Corinth, having sex with one's stepmother, was a capital offense under the Mosaic law – Lev. 20:11.) Moreover, it is quite possible that, with the exception of premeditated murder, perpetrators of capital crimes under the Mosaic Law could have their death sentences commuted by offering a "ransom" or "substitute." This is the implication drawn from Num. 35:30-32 by many Old Testament scholars, including Walter Kaiser, Raymond Westbrook, Jacob Finkelstein, and Joseph Sprinkle.

Robert Gagnon summarizes his rejection of the ritual impurity claim this way:

I would summarize the matter as follows. The framers of the sexual prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20:

1. specifically refer to the forbidden sex acts as "*iniquity*" or "sin," not just ritual uncleanness (18:25);

¹⁵ William Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 177.

¹⁶ Tim Keller, "Making Sense of Scripture's 'Inconsistency,'" available online here: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/article/making-sense-of-scriptures-inconsistency/>.

2. do not permit absolution merely through ritual acts;
3. do not treat the sexual offenses in chapters 18 and 20 as making the participants contagious to touch;
4. do not penalize persons for events without willful intent;
5. give an implicit rationale for each prohibition;
6. apply the prohibitions not just to Jews but to resident aliens (Gentiles) as well.¹⁷

Finally, on top of all that, the fact the prohibition against homosexual conduct is repeated in the New Testament, as we will see, establishes conclusively that it is part of God's ongoing or continuing will and not a temporary requirement for Israel during the Mosaic Covenant. It is blindness to claim otherwise.

2. Not Based on Mingling of Semen and Excrement

Nevertheless, some try to pull the prohibition into the temporary ritual category simply by asserting that it was based on the fact homosexual intercourse mingles semen with excrement, which were ritually defiling substances. Given that ritual defilements were temporary regulations, they allege there is no basis for applying the prohibition today. The problem is that the premise of the argument is false. The prohibition against homosexual conduct makes no mention of excrement but rather speaks explicitly of gender discomplementarity ("as though lying with a woman"). Moreover, things are prohibited that have nothing to do with commingling of semen and excrement, such as adultery and incest, and heterosexual anal intercourse, which *would* mix semen and excrement is *not* mentioned, a mystifying omission if the rationale for the prohibition was avoidance of this commingling.

3. Not Inapplicable by Analogy to Ban on Sex with Menstruating Women

Others attempt to deny the undeniable, to deny the fact the ban on homosexual conduct continues into the New Covenant, by arguing that the prohibition of homosexual conduct is analogous to the prohibition of having sex with a woman during her period in Lev. 18:19 and 20:18. They claim that those two offenses are the same in the relevant particulars, and since the prohibition of having sex with a menstruating woman no longer applies in the New Covenant then neither does the prohibition of homosexual conduct. Put a bit more formally, the argument is:

- The proscriptions of having sex with a menstruating woman and engaging in homosexual conduct are sufficiently similar that they must be treated the same in terms of their applicability under the New Covenant.
- The proscription of having sex with a menstruating woman has no applicability under the New Covenant.

¹⁷ Robert Gagnon, "The Scriptural Case for a Male-Female Prerequisite for Sexual Relations" in Roy E. Gane and others, eds., *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), Kindle Edition.

- Therefore, the proscription of engaging in homosexual conduct has no applicability under the New Covenant.

As I just noted, the ban on homosexual conduct is applied repeatedly in the New Testament. So we know for certain that it was not a temporary, Jewish-specific element of the Mosaic Covenant but a matter of moral instruction that continues in effect in the New Covenant. Therefore, the conclusion of this argument is false. It is like the argument: All men have red hair; Ashby is a man; therefore, Ashby has red hair. One can see that I do not have red hair so one can know before analyzing the premises of the argument that they necessarily are unsound because they lead to a false conclusion. In the case of the argument analogizing homosexual conduct to sex with a menstruating woman, neither of the premises can be established as true, so either one may be where the argument goes off track so as to end up at the false conclusion.

Contrary to premise 2 of the argument, many Christians, Old Testament scholars Michael Brown and Roy Gane being two examples, believe the prohibition in Lev. 18:19 and 20:18 of having sex with a woman during her period does indeed continue in effect under the New Covenant. When that position is properly qualified, I think it probably is correct.

There is no doubt that the sexual relations with a menstruating woman that are under consideration in Lev. 15:24 involve only a ritual defilement. The man is rendered "unclean" for a period of seven days. This parallels the ritual uncleanness that a woman has by virtue of her period. Just as the furniture on which she lies and on which she sits during that time is rendered unclean (Lev. 15:19-23), so the man who lies with her during that time is made unclean. It is no more a matter of sin than the uncleanness that resulted under the Law from ordinary marital intercourse (Lev. 15:18; cf. Ex. 19:15).

If that were the only text, we clearly would be dealing with a matter of ritual contamination under the Mosaic Covenant, something that has no ongoing applicability in the New Covenant. But the prohibition in Lev. 20:18 of having sex with a menstruating woman does not speak of uncleanness and makes no reference to purification by the passage of seven days or by washing. Rather, it speaks more ominously of the participants being "cut off" from among their people, which most understand as a reference to some kind of punishment administered directly by God in his own way and in his own time, perhaps referring to the extinction of one's lineage.

The point is that there seems to be a difference between the situations in Leviticus 15 and 20, though both involve sex with a menstruating woman. What makes the most sense is that Lev. 15:24 refers to *inadvertent* intercourse with a menstruating woman, her condition being unknown beforehand, whereas Lev. 20:18 addresses *knowing and willful* intercourse with a woman during her period.

Ezekiel 18:5-9 groups approaching a woman in her time of menstrual impurity with other obligations and prohibitions that are generally accepted as having ongoing validity: ⁵ "If a man is righteous and does what is just and right-- ⁶ if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife or **approach a woman**

in her time of menstrual impurity, ⁷ *does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment,* ⁸ *does not lend at interest or take any profit, withholds his hand from injustice, executes true justice between man and man,* ⁹ *walks in my statutes, and keeps my rules by acting faithfully-- he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord GOD.*

Ezekiel 22:6-12 is similar: ⁶ *"Behold, the princes of Israel in you, every one according to his power, have been bent on shedding blood. ⁷ Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you. ⁸ You have despised my holy things and profaned my Sabbaths. ⁹ There are men in you who slander to shed blood, and people in you who eat on the mountains; they commit lewdness in your midst. ¹⁰ In you men uncover their fathers' nakedness; in you they **violate [humble] women who are unclean in their menstrual impurity.** ¹¹ One commits abomination with his neighbor's wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; another in you violates his sister, his father's daughter. ¹² In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take interest and profit and make gain of your neighbors by extortion; but me you have forgotten, declares the Lord GOD.*

These associations, the seriousness of the penalty that accompanies the prohibition in Lev. 20:18 (being "cut off"), and the fact the offense is there grouped with prohibitions of certain degrees of incest suggests it is an ongoing and transcultural moral concern. It is something rooted in the link between life and blood, not simply a matter of ritual contamination or something intended to separate Israel from her neighbors like the food laws.

Contrary to premise 1 of the argument, there are things that distinguish the prohibitions of homosexual conduct and having sex with a menstruating woman so that the two offenses need not stand or fall together in terms of ongoing applicability. Indeed, those making this argument recognize that the proscriptions of adultery, incest, and bestiality do not stand or fall with the proscription of having sex with a menstruating woman, so they must establish that homosexual conduct is more analogous to the latter than to the former. This they cannot do.

In Lev. 20:10-17 the sexual sins that carry the death penalty are grouped together. These are adultery, various degrees of incest, homosexual conduct, and bestiality. None of the other sins identified in the chapter carries the death penalty, which suggests homosexual conduct is more closely analogous to adultery, incest, and bestiality than it is to having sex with a woman during her period.

Adultery, incest, bestiality, and homosexual conduct all involve violations of absolute sexual prohibitions that are tied to the *identity* of the persons or things involved. There is no circumstance under which a man can have sex with his neighbor's wife, his father's wife, or with an animal; they are strictly off limits. The prohibition against having sex with one's wife when she is menstruating, on the other hand, is a matter of timing in the normal and proper sexual relationship of a marriage. It does not carry the same sense of "unnaturalness." That seems to put it in a different category.

It may be, as many think, that the demand in Acts 15 that the Gentiles "abstain from blood" is made only as an accommodation to Jewish sensibilities. If so, it indicates that the ban

on consuming blood is not applicable under the New Covenant; that conduct is only to be abstained from voluntarily so as not to inhibit table fellowship with Jewish Christians. If that "blood command" from Lev. 17:10-14 was only temporary, it may be that the "blood command" regarding a menstruating woman likewise was temporary. (It is not certain, however, that the requirement that Gentiles "abstain from blood" functioned merely as an accommodation to Jewish sensibilities. As Ben Witherington has argued, it may be that the set of prohibitions imposed on Gentiles in Acts 15, abstaining from blood being one of them, was collectively a way of commanding them not to participate in pagan feasts at idol temples, as Paul commanded in 1 Corinthians.)

The bottom line is that the argument is unsound. Both of its premises are questionable for the reasons given, and we can be certain one of them is false because they lead to a conclusion that is patently false, namely that the ban on homosexual conduct does not continue under the New Covenant. We know the ban continues because Paul makes that clear, as we will see.

4. Not Limited to Idol Worship

Some have tried to avoid the Levitical prohibitions of homosexual conduct by claiming they apply only to homosexual conduct engaged in as part of worshipping an idol. In other words, they claim that homosexual conduct itself is not condemned in Leviticus but only homosexual conduct when mixed up with pagan idolatry.

Few today give this argument any credence and for good reason. The fact the prohibition of homosexual conduct in Lev. 18:22 follows a verse proscribing child sacrifice does not mean the ban on homosexual conduct is restricted to cases of idol worship as symbolized by child sacrifice. After all, the ban on adultery comes right before the verse proscribing child sacrifice and nobody thinks that means adultery is wrong only in contexts of idol worship.

Moreover, the prohibition of homosexual conduct in Lev. 20:13 is nowhere near the reference to child sacrifice. Rather, it is sandwiched between prohibitions of adultery, incest, and bestiality. None of these sins is thought to be restricted to contexts of idolatry, so there is no reason to think that is the case with homosexual conduct. And as I have already pointed out, the prohibition in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 is a man having sex with a *male* not a man having sex with a male cult prostitute. If the writer had intended to limit the prohibition to a male cult prostitute he easily could have said so plainly.

So it is not the least bit surprising that Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 were never understood to be restricted to idol worship. Gagnon writes:

*[I]n the history of the interpretation of these Levitical prohibitions they are never construed as indicting only homosexual acts in the context of cult prostitution. On the contrary, they are taken in the broadest possible sense. For example, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus explained to Gentile readers that "the law [of Moses] recognizes only sexual intercourse that is according to nature, that which is with a woman. . . . But it abhors the intercourse of males with males" (*Against Apion* 2.199). There are no limitations placed on the prohibition as regards age,*

slave status, idolatrous context, or exchange of money. The only limitation is the sex of the participants.¹⁸

Even scholars who support homosexual relationships admit that the Levitical prohibitions are absolute and not limited to idolatrous forms of homosexual conduct. According to William Loader, who has written more on the issue of sexuality in ancient Judaism and Christianity than any other scholar, "the wider context [of the Levitical prohibitions] . . . goes beyond the cultic, as does the verse about bestiality which follows. Most [scholars] conclude that Lev 18:22 does condemn same-sex anal intercourse between males in general and is not restricted to particular settings," a consensus that Loader accepts.¹⁹ Gerald Sheppard, another supporter of homosexual unions, states:

I do not think that the texts in Leviticus can be read from a historical perspective as applicable only to cult prostitution because they stand in the context of other laws regulating general immoral conduct such as incestuous relationships, adultery, and bestiality. I find Edwards's historical speculation concerning the restriction of the abomination formula to cultic violations weak and unconvincing.²⁰

Indeed, the fact Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 are a blanket prohibition of all homosexual conduct is evident from the fact homosexual relations are not addressed in the numerous laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 against incest. A man is specifically prohibited from having sex with his mother, his sister, his daughter, his granddaughter, his aunt, and his daughter-in-law, but nothing is said about a man having sex with his father, his brother, his son, his grandson, his uncle, or his son-in-law. That omission only makes sense if the prohibition of homosexual conduct is absolute, carries no exceptions. If that were not the case, if some homosexual conduct was permissible – say voluntary sex between adults – then incest would need to be excluded from the universe of permissible homosexual conduct. It is the absoluteness of the ban in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 that explains the silence regarding homosexual incest.

5. Not Based on Lack of Procreative Potential

Some have asserted that the Levitical prohibitions were based on the fact homosexual intercourse "wastes seed" and could not lead to procreation. Given the acceptance of non-procreative sex (contraception) among Jews and Protestants, they argue that the basis for the prohibition of homosexual conduct no longer holds. But there is no reason to accept the premise that the prohibition was based on wasting seed or on the non-procreative aspect of homosexual conduct. Nothing is said about that, and things are prohibited in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26) that *can* lead to procreation, such as incest and adultery. On the other hand, some things that

¹⁸ Robert A. J. Gagnon, "An Open Letter to Justin Lee, Author of *Torn*: I Do Not Believe Lev 18:22 and 20:13 Indict Only Idolatrous Forms of Homosexual Practice," available online here: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/philosophicalfragments/2013/03/28/bible-condemn-idolatrous-homosexual-practice-gagnon-lee-torn/#comments>.

¹⁹ William Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 25.

²⁰ Gerald Sheppard, "The Use of Scripture Within the Christian Ethical Debate Concerning Same-Sex Oriented Persons," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* (1985), 22.

cannot lead to procreation are not prohibited, such as heterosexual sex with a "barren" woman or during a woman's pregnancy. In addition, this cannot account for the level of revulsion expressed in the proscription, and lesbianism, which obviously does not involve wasting seed, is proscribed in Rom. 1:26.

Again, the primary problem of homosexual intercourse is that it violates sexual boundaries established by God at creation. Gagnon writes ([2001], 138):

The particularly "abhorrent" character of homosexual intercourse cannot be explained solely or primarily by its lack of procreative potential. Rather, it is to be traced to its character as a flagrant transgression of the most fundamental element of human sexuality: sex or gender. Homosexual intercourse requires a radical "gender bending" of human sexuality by the very creatures whom God placed in charge of the good, ordered creation.

6. Not Restricted to Male Homosexual Conduct

Some have even argued that, since Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 specifically address only intercourse between *men*, other forms of homosexual contact, such as lesbianism, are permitted. But as Gagnon says ([2001], 143), "Such a conclusion is akin to arguing that, because any particular corpus of law in the Old Testament explicitly proscribes only penetrative intercourse in the case of incest, adultery, fornication, rape, and bestiality, we can assume that fondling one's stepmother, or a neighbor's wife, or a virgin, or an animal would be acceptable behavior in ancient Israel." There are several possible reasons why female-female sexual conduct was not specifically addressed in Leviticus, and as we will see later, Paul in Rom. 1:26 leaves no doubt that sexual relations between two women is forbidden.

Others have tried to dismiss not only the Levitical prohibitions but all biblical condemnation of homosexual conduct by claiming that people in the ancient world were unaware of what they call homosexual "orientation." That is nonsense and does nothing to avoid the biblical proscription as I will explain in the discussion of the Apostle Paul's writings.

C. Gen. 18:16–19:11 – Sodom and Gomorrah

We see in the latter part of Genesis 18 that God had determined to destroy the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. They were paragons of wickedness. The Lord says in 18:20 that the outcry against the cities is great and their sin is very grave. As two angels in the form of men are heading for Sodom, God agrees, in response to Abraham's plea, not to destroy the city if only ten righteous people can be found in it. That is how bad the city was.

In Genesis 19 the two angels arrive in Sodom in the evening, and Lot takes them into his home. All the men of the city, young and old, surround Lot's house and demand that the visitors be brought out so they can have sex with them. Lot begs the mob not to "act so wickedly," and even offers them his two virgin daughters to dissuade them from raping the men, who

unbeknownst to them are angels. The angels pull Lot back into the house and blind the men. The next day Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain (except Zoar) were destroyed.

The question for our purpose is whether the homosexual aspect of the intended rape is presented as a compounding offense, something in addition to the rape and the violation of hospitality that shows these men to be particularly heinous, or whether the male-male aspect of the intended rape was incidental to the story, something that was not to be seen as part of the overall wickedness of the people that justified their destruction by God. In other words, is the story like hearing about someone who raped his own mother, where one would recognize the incest as something that multiplied the evil, or is it like a rape with no aggravating elements?

Before answering that, I should note the claim of some that the demand of the people of Sodom "to know" the visitors was simply a request to get acquainted. That is silly. "To know" often serves as a euphemism for sexual intercourse, and the immediate context makes that meaning clear (19:8, his two daughters had not "known" a man). A desire to get acquainted would not qualify as acting "wickedly," as Lot describes it in 19:7, and a request to get acquainted would not prompt Lot to offer his virgin daughters. That just shows the extent to which some people will go in trying to dodge what God is saying.

We can know the homosexual aspect of the intended rape was expected to be seen as a compounding offense from several lines of evidence. First, the heterosexual prerequisite for sexual intercourse expressed in the creation texts and the prohibitions of homosexual conduct in Leviticus 18 and 20 establish that God views homosexual conduct as a serious offense against his created order. So there is no reason to think Moses intends that element to be overlooked in the Sodom story.

Second, according to Ezek. 16:49-50, Sodom "did not take hold of the hand of the poor and needy. And they grew haughty and committed an abomination (*to'evah*) before me and I removed them when I saw it." That Ezekiel is here distinguishing between their neglect of the poor and needy and their committing an abomination is supported by his distinction in Ezek. 18:10-13 between oppressing the poor and needy (fifth vice) and committing an abomination (ninth vice). They are different offenses. And there is good reason to believe the offense of "committing an abomination" refers to male-male intercourse because that is what the phrase refers to in Lev. 20:13. So, as Gagnon concludes, "Ezekiel in 16:50 was apparently interpreting the Sodom episode through the lens of the absolute prohibition of man-male intercourse in Lev 18:22 and 20:13, indicating that he understood the same-sex dimension of the rape to be a *compounding* offense."²¹

Third, Jude 7 says that God judged Sodom and Gomorrah because they "indulged in sexual immorality and went after different flesh," so sexual immorality certainly was part of their guilt. The claim that what was sexually immoral about their attempt to have sex with the visitors is that the visitors were angels not that they were men stumbles on the fact nothing in Genesis 19 suggests the men of Sodom *knew* the visitors were angels. The angels appeared simply as men, and it was the desire to have sex with them *as men* that constituted sexual immorality. Indeed,

²¹ Robert A. J. Gagnon, "Why We Know That the Story of Sodom Indicts Homosexual Practice Per Se," available online here: <http://www.robagnon.net/homosex7thDayAdvArticleSodom.htm>.

"flesh" is not a natural word to apply to angels, "different flesh" more likely referring to that flesh which is unnatural for a male to pursue, the flesh of other men. This is the view of most commentators. For example, Peter Davids writes, "In that none of the other [Jewish references to the sin of Sodom] is at all concerned that the 'strangers' involved were angels, it is more likely that Jude too is thinking of homosexual activity as the 'different type of flesh' (different, not from themselves, but from the women they were supposed to desire). This would be in line with the general Jewish rejection of homosexual relations."²²

Thus, Douglas Moo concludes in his commentary, "Probably, then, the usual interpretation is correct: Jude associates God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah with the homosexual practices of its inhabitants."²³ Thomas Schreiner states:

[I]t would be strange to designate a desire for angels as a desire for "other flesh" (*sarkos heteras*). The term more naturally refers to a desire for those of the same sex; they desired flesh other than that of women. For various reasons some are attempting today to question the view that homosexuality receives an unqualified negative verdict in the Scriptures. Such attempts have been singularly unsuccessful. The biblical writers and the Jewish tradition unanimously condemned homosexuality as evil.²⁴

But even if one understands "different flesh" to refer to angels that need not mean they were sexually immoral *by* going after angels. As Gagnon explains, "a paratactic construction in Greek can just as easily make the first clause subordinate; in this case, 'by (or: *in the course of*) committing sexual immorality they went after other flesh.' In other words, in the process of attempting the sexually immoral act of having intercourse with other men, the men of Sodom got more than they bargained for: committing an offense unknowingly against angels."²⁵

Fourth, 2 Pet. 2:6 likewise speaks of God's incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah and then v. 7 says Lot was distressed by "the conduct of the lawless in [their] *licentiousness*." So the destruction is associated with the people's "licentiousness," and the word "licentiousness" (*aselgeia*) refers generally to a lack of self-constraint that leads to conduct beyond all bounds but speaks especially of *sexual* excesses. So Peter interprets the Sodom story as involving sexual impropriety. Moo comments (p. 105), "As Peter points out, Genesis 19 suggests that Lot did not participate in the rampant homosexuality that characterized the cities and was, indeed, 'distressed' by it."

Fifth, ancient Jewish interpreters recognized that Sodom's wickedness included the homosexual element of the men's intended action. Philo, a first century Jew, wrote in *Abraham* 133-137 (translation by F. H. Colson):

²² Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 53. See p. 52 for assertion that most commentators interpret "different flesh" as referring to the flesh of men.

²³ Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 242.

²⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 453.

²⁵ Robert A. J. Gagnon, "Why We Know That the Story of Sodom Indicts Homosexual Practice Per Se," available online here: <http://www.robgagnon.net/homosex7thDayAdvArticleSodom.htm>.

The land of the Sodomites, a part of the land of Canaan afterwards called Palestinian Syria, was brimful of innumerable iniquities, particularly such as arise from gluttony and lewdness, and multiplied and enlarged every other possible pleasure with so formidable a menace that it had at last been condemned by the Judge of All. . . . Incapable of bearing such satiety, plunging like cattle, they threw off from their necks the law of nature and applied themselves to deep drinking of strong liquor and dainty feeding and forbidden forms of intercourse. Not only in their mad lust for women did they violate the marriages of their neighbours, but also men mounted males without respect for the sex nature which the active partner shares with the passive; and so when they tried to beget children they were discovered to be incapable of any but a sterile seed. Yet the discovery availed them not, so much stronger was the force of the lust which mastered them.

...

But God, moved by pity for mankind whose Saviour and Lover He was, gave increase in the greatest possible degree to the unions which men and women naturally make for begetting children, but abominated and extinguished this unnatural and forbidden intercourse, and those who lusted for such He cast forth and chastised with punishments not of the usual kind but startling and extraordinary, newly created for this purpose.

Josephus, a first century Jew, wrote in *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.200-201:

Now when the Sodomites saw the young men to be of beautiful countenances, and this to an extraordinary degree, and that they took up their lodgings with Lot, they resolved themselves to enjoy these beautiful boys by force and violence; and when Lot exhorted them to sobriety, and not to offer any thing immodest to the strangers, but to have regard to their lodging in his house; and promised that if their inclinations could not be governed, he would expose his daughters to their lust, instead of these strangers; neither thus were they made ashamed.

Earlier Jewish texts that speak condemningly of Sodom's "fornication" presumably include the homosexual element as part of the offense. *Jubilees* was written in Hebrew between 135-105 B.C. It contains the following:

(16:5-6) And in this month the Lord executed his judgments on Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Zeboim, and all the region of the Jordan, and He burned them with fire and brimstone, and destroyed them until this day, even as [lo] I have declared unto thee all their works, that they are wicked and sinners exceedingly, and that they defile themselves and commit fornication in their flesh, and work uncleanness on the earth. And, in like manner, God will execute judgment on the places where they have done according to the uncleanness of the Sodomites, like unto the judgment of Sodom.

(20:5) And he told them of the judgment of the giants, and the judgment of the Sodomites, how they had been judged on account of their wickedness, and had

died on account of their fornication, and uncleanness, and mutual corruption through fornication.

The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* were written between 109-106 B.C. One of those testaments, the *Testament of Benjamin*, includes the following:

(9:1) And I believe that there will be also evil-doings among you, from the words of Enoch the righteous: that ye shall commit fornication with the fornication of Sodom, and shall perish, all save a few, and shall renew wanton deeds with women; and the kingdom of the Lord shall not be among, you, for straightway He shall take it away.

And finally, early Christian writers routinely emphasized the homosexual aspect of the Sodom story. David Wright states: "Many fathers emphasized the homosexual lust of the Sodomites [cites as examples Methodius, John Chrysostom, Macarius, Augustine, and Gregory the Great]. Some criticized other aspects of their depravity, but no patristic source excludes a homosexual interpretation of their conduct."²⁶

D. Judges 19:22-25 - Rape of the Levite's Concubine

In Judg. 19:22-25 a Levite from Ephraim was returning there from Bethlehem with his concubine. They stopped in Gibeah (in Benjamin) and were finally taken in by an old man who was himself originally from Ephraim. Just as in Sodom, men from the city come and demand that the old man bring out the male visitor so they could have sex with him. The old man urges them not to act "wickedly" and not to do this "disgraceful thing." The old man offered his virgin daughter and the concubine rather than have them do such a shameful thing to the Levite, but the men were unwilling. The Levite then shoved his concubine out the door, and she was raped and murdered. This became a national outrage, which triggered a civil war in which the tribe of Benjamin was defeated.

Given the condemnation of homosexual conduct elsewhere, one cannot reasonably claim that the homosexual aspect did not add to the dimension of horror for the old man, the Levite, and the author. "Repugnance for male penetration of males must have been a significant factor in twice designating the demand for intercourse with the Levite as a ["disgraceful thing"] much greater than that involving intercourse with the old man's daughter and the Levite's concubine" (Gagnon, [2001], 95). It was an even greater evil than the outrage of raping the women. It underscores just how rebellious or deviant these people were.

E. Homosexual Cult Prostitution in Israel

The worship of false gods by the Canaanites and the nations surrounding ancient Israel sometimes included prostitution. Devotees of the deity, both women and men, would offer

²⁶ David F. Wright, "Homosexuality" in Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 543.

themselves to male worshipers as a way for them to connect with the gods so as to induce their blessing. They commonly are called temple or cult prostitutes.

In Deut. 23:17-18 Moses issues a warning to the Israelites about cult prostitution as they are about to enter the Promise Land. He says: *None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute.* ¹⁸ *You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the Lord your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God.*

There is no doubt that cult prostitution was offensive to God for a number of reasons, but notice that a male cult prostitute is given the label "dog" in v. 18, which was a pervasive slam in the ancient world. Various translations (NRSV, NET, CSB, TNIV, NIV '11) make clear that "dog" here refers to the "male prostitute" by translating it "male prostitute." The fact that epithet is applied to the male prostitutes is in keeping with God's consistent and strongly negative view of homosexual conduct throughout Scripture.

III. First-Century Judaism's View of Homosexual Conduct

Before examining the New Testament evidence, it will be helpful to see how homosexuality was viewed in first-century Judaism. Since Jesus, the Apostles, and all writers of the New Testament (except Luke) were Jews, we can assume, unless there is evidence to the contrary, that they shared the Jewish view of things. Being aware of this religious and cultural context will help us interpret the New Testament correctly.

Extrabiblical Jewish writings before, during, and after the first century are unanimous in the rejection of homosexual conduct, which comes as no surprise given the condemnation of that conduct in the Old Testament. In the following writings, ranging from 200 B.C. to A.D. 200, homosexuality is condemned: *Letter of Aristeas*, *Sibylline Oracles 3*, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *Sibylline Oracles 5*, *Mishnah Sanhedrin 7:4*, three writings of Philo, two writings of Josephus, and depending on how it is dated, *2 Enoch*. Here are a few examples.

The *Letter of Aristeas* dates from 130-70 B.C. and possibly older. It states (151b-153a): "[W]e have been distinctly separated from the rest of mankind. For most other men defile themselves by promiscuous intercourse, thereby working great iniquity, and whole countries and cities pride themselves upon such vices. For they not only have intercourse with men but they defile their own mothers and even their daughters. But we have been kept separate from such sins."

The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides (190-192), which was written between 50 B.C. and A.D. 100, states: "Do not transgress with unlawful sex the limits set by nature. For even animals are not pleased by intercourse of male with male. And let women not imitate the sexual role of men."

Mishnah Sanhedrin 7:4, which dates around A.D. 200, states, "These are [the felons] who are put to death by stoning: He who has sexual relations with (1) his mother, (2) with the wife of

his father, (3) with his daughter-in-law, (4) with a male, and (5) with a cow [or a beast], and the woman who brings an ox [or beast] on top of herself."

The complete and uniform rejection of homosexual conduct in ancient Judaism is beyond dispute. Robert Gagnon writes ([2001], 160), "As we shall see, the evidence suggests that early Judaism was unanimous in its rejection of homosexual conduct. We are unaware of any dissenting voices." Jackie Naudé writes, "The uniform conviction of the Israelites was that coitus should be heterosexual as part of the order of creation."²⁷ And Craig Keener writes (citations omitted), "Ancient Judaism regarded homosexual activity and bestiality as subcategories of the larger issue of sexual immorality. . . . Jewish people usually viewed homosexual behavior as a pervasively and uniquely Gentile sin; they regarded homosexual behavior as meriting death or punishment by God in the afterlife."²⁸

According to the *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*:

The rabbis deemed the biblical prohibition against homosexuality to be one of the Seven Noachide Commandments, which apply to all nations of the earth (B. Sanhedrin 57b-58a). Further, like Romans, rabbinic law explicitly extends to women the biblical prohibition against homosexuality, forbidding sex between women under the general prohibition against following the abhorrent practices of the Canaanites (Sifrei Aharei Mot Parashah 8). At the time, at least as far as Jews were concerned, the rabbis apparently saw homosexuality and lesbianism as almost unthinkable and only infrequently referred to such practices.²⁹

Old Testament scholar Michael Brown declares, "[I]n first-century Jewish culture homosexual practice was explicitly prohibited and forbidden. In fact, ancient Jewish texts from the last centuries BC and the first centuries have some *very negative* things to say about homosexual practice and *not one single positive thing* to say." He restates the point a few pages later: "[A]s I stated above, every single reference to homosexual practice in the ancient Jewish world is 100 percent negative – sometimes in the strongest terms – and there is not a single positive reference to be found" (Brown [2014], 129, 132).

James Dunn states:

But Jewish reaction to [homosexuality] as a perversion, a pagan abomination, is consistent throughout the OT (Lev 18:22; 20:13; 1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2Kgs 23:7), with the sin of Sodom often recalled as a terrible warning (e.g., Gen 19:1-28; Deut 23:18; Isa 1:9-10; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:43-58). In the period of early Judaism, abhorrence of homosexuality is not just part of the reaction against Greek mores, since we find it also in those most influenced by Greek

²⁷ Jackie Naudé, "Sexual Ordinances" in Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:1209.

²⁸ Craig Keener, "Adultery, Divorce" in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 14-15.

²⁹ "Homosexuality" in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 299.

thought (Wisd Sol 14:26; *Ep. Arist.* 152; Philo, *Abr.* 135-137; *Spec. Leg.* 3.37-42; *Sib. Or.* 3:184-186, 764; Ps. Phoc. 3, 190-192, 213-14; Josephus, *Ap.* 2.273-75); note also the sustained polemic against sexual promiscuity and homosexuality in *T. 12 Patr.* (particularly *T. Lev.* 14.6; 17.11; *T. Naph.* 4.1) and in *Sib. Or.* (e.g., 3.185-187, 594-600, 763); see further Str-B, 3:68-74. In other words, antipathy to homosexuality remains a consistent and distinctive feature of Jewish understanding of what man's createdness involves and requires.³⁰

David Wright states:

Homosexuality was largely unknown in Judaism, but Christianity inherited unqualified condemnations of male homosexual practice in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. (The import of these verses cannot be limited to behavior associated with pagan cults, any more than the prohibition of child sacrifice in 18:21 or bestiality in 20:15.) Postbiblical Judaism stressed the homosexual element in the Sodomites' attempted rape of Lot's male guests (Gen. 19:4-5; cf. Judg. 19:22), and Hellenistic Jewish writers denounced homosexuality as frequently as any sin.³¹

Jews, like Greek and Roman critics of same-sex intercourse, rejected homosexual conduct as something "contrary to (or against) nature." Only male-female intercourse was considered "natural" or "in accordance with nature." The two primary *extrabiblical* indications of this cited by Jewish authors were that semen produces life only in heterosexual intercourse and that the female body part was the obvious receptacle for the male body part. The point is that men and women have been stamped by God with a fundamental biological complementarity that reflects God's intention for their exclusive coupling and which is violated by same-sex intercourse.

"That same-sex intercourse [in the pagan world of that day] customarily involved a mature man as the active partner and teenage boys as passive recipients is stated or clearly implied in most of the texts, but it is not central to the rejection of same-sex intercourse. The focus is generally on the transgender aspect of the intercourse rather than on the age disparity" (Gagnon [2001], 182).

IV. Jesus' View of Homosexual Conduct

Those seeking to legitimize homosexual conduct sometimes argue that Jesus said nothing about the subject, and so we have no reason to believe he opposed it. There are many things wrong with this.

³⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, WBC (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 1:65-66.

³¹ David F. Wright, "Homosexuality" in Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 542.

A. Silence Is Not Support

First, even if Jesus made no reference to homosexual conduct, his silence cannot reasonably be construed as an endorsement of that behavior. Given that he is a Jew and Jews unanimously rejected same-sex intercourse, his silence would mean that he felt no need to challenge or alter the status quo. If he felt there was something wrong with the status quo, how would anyone realize it from silence? That is like saying Jesus was approving of bestiality by not addressing it. It is absurd in principle. Moreover, as we will see, the Apostle Paul clearly disapproves of homosexual conduct. To interpret Jesus' alleged silence as approval of homosexual conduct in the face of its disapproval by Paul is to create a contradiction between Jesus and the Spirit who inspired the Apostle.

B. Homosexual Conduct Addressed Implicitly

Second, Jesus referred implicitly to homosexual conduct in Mk. 7:21-23 (Mat. 15:18-20), where he included "sexual immoralities" (or "fornications"), "adulteries," and "licentiousness" in a list of things that are evil and defiling. In later Judaism, meaning after the close of the Old Testament period, the use of *porneia* broadened out "to include not only fornication or adultery but incest, sodomy, unlawful marriage, and sexual intercourse in general."³² It is thus defined broadly in the standard Greek lexicon to mean "unlawful sexual intercourse."³³ Notice how it is used in 1 Cor. 5:1 and 6:18 to describe the sins of incest and having sex with a prostitute, respectively.

Gagnon rightly states ([2001], 191), "No first-century Jew could have spoken of *porneiai* (plural) without having in mind the list of forbidden sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 20 (incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, bestiality)." He notes, "In this particular saying, the sin of adultery is listed separately so the plural likely has incest most in view, along with same-sex intercourse and bestiality, probably also fornication and prostitution."

If one insists, despite the broad meaning and fact it is used in the plural, that *porneiai* refers only to a form or forms of *heterosexual* immorality certainly "licentiousness" covers the rest of the waterfront in terms of sexual immorality. I pointed out previously that the word *aselgeia* means self-abandonment or lack of self-constraint, especially in regard to sexual excesses. 2 Peter 2:7 says Lot was distressed by the *licentious* conduct of the lawless men of Sodom and Gomorrah, which as Moo notes (p. 105), points to "the rampant homosexuality that characterized the cities." Why think that when Jesus used the term, he was somehow excluding homosexual conduct? No Jew who heard him would have thought he was excluding it unless he said so.

C. Appeal to Gen. 1:27 and 2:24

³² Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged in one volume by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 919.

³³ Walter Bauer and others, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 854.

Third, Jesus in his discussion of divorce in Mk. 10:1-12 appealed to both Gen. 1:27 ("God made them male and female") and Gen. 2:24 ("for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh") and then added the comment, "So they are no longer two but one flesh; thus what God joined together, let no one separate." This suggests that Jesus accepted the model for marriage and sexual union presented in Genesis 1-2, that he understood that marriage was ordained by God as the union of a man and a woman, not a man and another man, or a woman and another woman. There was no need to comment directly on homosexual unions because the creation texts authorized only one type of sexual union. (Gagnon, [2001], 193-194.)

D. Celibacy Only Alternative to Heterosexual Marriage

Fourth, Jesus in Mat. 19:11-12 responds to the disciples' comment in v. 10 that "it is better not to marry." They made that statement in reaction to Jesus' restrictive teaching in 19:1-9 on divorce and remarriage regarding a husband and a wife. He tells them in v. 11, "Not everyone can receive this saying," referring to their statement that it is better not to marry, "but only those to whom it is given," that is, those who are given the gift of celibacy, the ability to live without sexual intercourse. He explains in v. 12 that some cannot experience sexual relations because of some birth defect (those born eunuchs), some cannot experience sexual relations because they have been castrated (made eunuchs by men), and some cannot experience sexual relations because they have chosen not to marry so as to devote themselves to ministry (made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven). This state is not for everyone but only for those who can by God's gift handle it. Recall Paul's remark in 1 Cor. 7:7.

The point for our purpose is that the only alternative Jesus contemplates to the marriage of a man and a woman in terms of sexual activity is celibacy. There is no third door. That is why he cautioned the disciples regarding their statement "it is better not to marry" by explaining that celibacy is not for everyone, not something everyone can carry out. If sexual relations outside of a heterosexual marriage were available, he would not warn of the difficulty of celibacy for the unmarried because it would not be an issue. They could obtain sexual interaction and release elsewhere.

The claim of some that this *supports* homosexual unions is fatuous. Yes, celibacy is only for those who are able to live that way, but the alternative to celibacy is heterosexual marriage not sexual relations outside of a heterosexual marriage. Jesus certainly is not implying that unmarried men who do not have the gift of celibacy are permitted to fornicate, as though all proscriptions of sexual immorality evaporate if one lacks the gift. It is precisely because one must abstain from sexual immorality that the only choices are a heterosexual marriage or celibacy, all other sexual relations being immoral.

E. Intensified the Moral Obligations of the Old Testament

And finally, Jesus came not to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them (Mat. 5:17), part of which was his intensifying of the moral obligations of the Old Testament by drawing out their deepest intention. Thus, the ban on murder extends to the anger that gives rise

to it; the ban on adultery extends to lusting in one's heart; the ban on false swearing extends to taking oaths; the ban on excessive retaliation extends to turning the other cheek; and the requirement to love one's neighbor is said to encompass loving one's enemies. Given this pattern of intensification of moral requirements, the claim that Jesus did the opposite regarding the ban on homosexual conduct, that he lifted the proscription, requires clear and convincing proof, which does not exist. Instead, we have powerful evidence to the contrary.

Gagnon rightly concludes ([2001], 228):

The portrayal of Jesus as a first-century Palestinian Jew who was open to homosexual practice is simply ahistorical. All the evidence leads in the opposite direction. Why, then, did Jesus not make an explicit statement against homosexual conduct? The obvious answer is that Jesus did not encounter any openly homosexual people in his ministry and therefore had no need to call anyone to repentance for homosexual conduct. He also did not address other sexual issues such as incest and bestiality, but that hardly indicates a neutral or positive stance on such matters. What is clear from the evidence that the texts do offer is that the historical Jesus is no defender of homosexual behavior. To the contrary, Jesus, both in what he says and what he fails to say, remains squarely on the side of those who reject homosexual practice.

V. The Apostle Paul's View of Homosexual Conduct

A. Rom. 1:24-32

Paul's condemnation of homosexual conduct in vv. 24-32 can be appreciated only in its context. So I will comment briefly on the sections preceding those verses. The theme of the letter is given in Rom. 1:16-17. Paul writes: ¹⁶*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to the Jew first and to the Greek.* ¹⁷*For in it the righteousness of God is being revealed, [a righteousness] from faith to faith, just as it is written, "But the righteous from faith shall live."*

Some apparently saw Paul's absence from Rome as an indication that he was ashamed of the gospel he preached (or he was concerned they might see it that way). Maybe they thought he was embarrassed to preach it in such a sophisticated city. As Paul noted in 1 Cor. 1:23, Christ crucified is "foolishness" to Gentiles. Or maybe they thought Paul was embarrassed to preach the gospel in a Christian community where elements suspected it was anti-law or anti-Jewish. That would be a difficult argument to make in light of the old-covenant Scriptures, so maybe some thought Paul was unwilling to face close questioning on those particular issues.

Whatever lay behind the suspicion (or possible suspicion) that Paul's absence from Rome reflected a sense of shame or intellectual intimidation regarding the gospel, Paul flatly declares that he is *not* ashamed of the gospel he preaches. And the reason he is not ashamed of that gospel, the true gospel, is that, however it may appear to the world, it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to the Jew (first) and to the Gentile (Greek).

The gospel is "the power of God for salvation" for in it the "righteousness of God" is being revealed. When righteousness is attributed to God in the Old Testament, it frequently has reference to his saving activity. That is the form that his righteousness takes. E.g., Isa. 46:13 God promises through the prophet: "I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay." Ps. 98:2 says, "The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations." See also, Ps. 35:26-28, 40:10, 51:14, 71:15-16, 71:24, 88:12, 119:123; Isa. 51:5-6, 51:8.

In the preaching of the gospel, God's saving action is taking place (being "revealed" in history), and the way it is taking place is through his bestowing a righteous status on those who believe. In other words, the "righteousness of God" here includes *both* God's activity of "making right" – saving, vindicating – *and* the status of those who are made right. It is the act by which God brings people into a right relationship with himself. This saving work of "righteousing" people is, of course, based on the atoning death of Jesus, which is the heart of the gospel.

This saving work of God, this rescuing bestowal of righteousness, is "from faith to faith" in that it expands with the spreading of faith; it tracks the expansion of faith because faith is the means of God's saving work. No one earns a right relationship with God. Hab. 2:4 points out that the righteous are characterized by faith ("The righteous shall live by faith"). Paul's inspired application of this text develops this point by making clear that faith not only characterizes the righteous but is the means through which they are made righteous by the grace of God ("The righteous from faith shall live").

In 1:18-23 Paul raises the matter of humanity's rejection of the revelation of God in nature. ¹⁸*For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,* ¹⁹*because what is knowable of God is evident among them, for God displayed it to them.* ²⁰*For his invisible [attributes] are clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood by the things made, both his eternal power and deity, so that they are without excuse,* ²¹*because having known God, they did not glorify [him] as God or give [him] thanks, but they became futile in their reasonings and their uncomprehending hearts were darkened.* ²²*Claiming to be wise, they became fools* ²³*and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for a likeness of an image of mortal man and birds and four-footed animals and reptiles.*

That God's saving work, his "righteousing" people through faith, is taking place in the preaching of the gospel is of supreme importance *because* ("For") the terrible wrath of God that ultimately is coming is already being previewed in his wrath upon the ungodliness and unrighteousness of human beings. Of course, God's "wrath" is different from human anger. As John Stott says, "It does not mean that he loses his temper, flies into a rage, or is ever malicious, spiteful, or vindictive. His wrath is his holy hostility to evil, his refusal to condone it or come to terms with it, his just judgment upon it."³⁴

Paul makes the point that the wrath of God against sinners, both as previewed in history and completed on Judgment Day, is right or just because God has revealed himself to all mankind through the creation. In Thomas Schreiner's words, "God has stitched into the fabric of the human

³⁴ John Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 72.

mind his existence and power, so that they are instinctively recognized when one views the created world."³⁵ Creation bears witness to God, and yet mankind willfully suppresses that testimony, preferring to go its own foolish way and to create its own gods. Rather than embrace the testimony of creation and give God the glory he is due, humanity culpably represses that truth and substitutes gods of its own making as objects of devotion and reverence. Paul is focusing here on the idolatry of the Gentile world, a world that had a multitude of images that represented their various false gods.

Paul states in v. 18 that God's wrath is now being manifested from heaven against this culpable suppression and substitution. In v. 24-32 he explains the form of that wrath, the divine reaction to human rejection: ²⁴*Therefore, God handed them over in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, so that their bodies are dishonored among them.* ²⁵*They exchanged the truth of God for the lie and worshipped and served the creature instead of the Creator, who is blessed forever, amen.* ²⁶*Because of this, God handed them over to dishonorable passions, for both their females exchanged natural sexual relations for those contrary to nature,* ²⁷*and likewise also the males, having abandoned natural sexual relations with the female, were inflamed with their desire for one another, males with males carrying out shameful acts and receiving in themselves the necessary penalty for their error.* ²⁸*And as they did not see fit to keep God in [their] knowledge, God handed them over to an unfit mind, to do immoral things,* ²⁹*those filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and depravity; full of envy, murder, discord, deceit, and malice; gossips,* ³⁰*slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, boasters, devisers of evil, disobedient to parents,* ³¹*without understanding, without faithfulness, without natural affection, without mercy.* ³²*They, though knowing God's righteous decree that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do them, but also approve of those who practice [them].*

God's wrath is now being expressed in his opening the door to sinful humanity's headlong plunge into wickedness. This foretaste of wrath in these "last days" is God's "handing over" of human beings (vv. 24, 26, 28) to their chosen way of sin and all its consequences. As Stott says (p. 75), "God abandons stubborn sinners to their wilful self-centeredness, and the resulting process of moral and spiritual degeneration is to be understood as a judicial act of God." That is what is behind Friedrich Schiller's famous comment, "The history of the world is the judgment of the world."

As God "hands them over," we see the depths to which humanity sinks. Their lust finds expression in perverted sex, exemplified by homosexual conduct. And Paul says that homosexuals receive in themselves the necessary penalty for their error. The sexual degradation they embrace in their rejection of God is punishment in itself; it is part of God's judgment.

Notice that the sinfulness of homosexual conduct is rooted in the creation account. Verse 20 speaks directly of God's creation, v. 25 refers to God as the Creator, and vv. 26-27 allude to the creation of mankind through the use of the adjectives "male" and "female," as in the creation account, rather than the nouns "man" and "woman." Homosexual conduct is contrary to nature in that it is contrary to God's design of mankind as male and female and his intention for their exclusive coupling. So attempts to restrict Paul's condemnation to exploitative forms of homosexual conduct or to homosexual conduct performed as part of idolatrous worship are groundless.

³⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 86.

Denials to the contrary notwithstanding, humans know at some level that God is God and that he deserves the utmost honor, and despite that knowledge, they continue to rebel against him and to approve of those who do. They know what they do is wrong and that it deserves condemnation by God. This knowledge is probably due both to the revelation of God through creation and to the "law of the heart" referred to in 2:14-15, the basic moral sense that is implanted within us by virtue of our being made in the image of God.

In saying that they *not only* do such wicked things *but also* approve of those who do such wicked things, Paul suggests that their *approval* of wrongdoing by others is even more culpable than their own wrongdoing. C. E. B. Cranfield states:

[T]he man who applauds and encourages others in doing what is wicked is, even if he never actually commits the same wicked deed himself, not only as guilty as those who do commit it, but very often more guilty than they. There are several factors involved. . . . To draw attention to the fact [as does the omitted quote from Apollinarius] that the man who does the wrong will often be under great pressure, as for instance that of passion, whereas the man who looks on and applauds will not normally be under any similar pressure, is not at all to diminish the guilt of the doer, but it is to reveal the greater culpability of the applauder. His attitude will very often be the reflection of a settled choice. But there is also the fact that those who condone and applaud the vicious actions of others are actually making a deliberate contribution to the setting up of a public opinion favorable to vice, and so to the corruption of an indefinite number of other people.³⁶

Paul's unnamed focus in this section is the Gentiles, but he makes clear in the next section that the Jew really fares no better in this regard. They too are under the power of sin. One can imagine some Gentiles claiming that their ignorance of God exempted them from his judgment, so Paul insists that all people have some knowledge of God and his will for them.

1. Not Restricted to Exploitative Sex or Idol Worship

Supporters of homosexual unions claim that Paul was not condemning all homosexual conduct. Rather, he was condemning only coercive or exploitative sex between a man and a boy, a slave, or a prostitute or was condemning only sex in the context of idol worship, but those claims are spurious, an obvious grasping at straws.

As I noted, Paul roots his condemnation of homosexual conduct in the creation account where mankind was created male and female, the one being created out of the other only to be rejoined together in a one-flesh union. Male and female were God's designed and intended sexual counterparts and complements. Heterosexual relations are natural in the sense they comport with God's intention for and design of mankind in the beginning, as is obvious from the fit or complementarity of male and female bodies.

³⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:135.

It is that natural heterosexual relationship that both women and men abandoned, engaging in sexual relations, what he calls "shameful acts," with their own sex. So it is abundantly clear that the problem with homosexual conduct is that it violates God's will for male-female pairing that was established at creation. It does so *inherently*, by the fact it involves sexual activity between members of the same sex, regardless of the participants' status, relationship, or circumstance.

The fact female homosexual conduct is included in the indictment confirms that Paul's concern was broader than exploitative sex with a boy, slave, or prostitute and broader than sex during the worship of idols. It confirms it because, unlike male homosexual conduct, female homosexual conduct in antiquity normally did not involve those kinds of relationships or occur in idol worship. Since lesbianism was not associated with exploitative relationships or with idol worship, the fact it also is condemned shows that the condemnation is rooted elsewhere. Indeed, it is rooted in the creation order, as Paul's allusion to the creation account indicates.

That Paul's condemnation includes voluntary homosexual conduct between willing participants is further supported by his reference to the men being inflamed with desire for "one another." The word translated "one another" (*allēlous*) commonly carries a reciprocal sense meaning the thing being discussed goes both ways. It can be used for some within a group acting on others within the group without a sense of reciprocity (e.g., Lk. 12:1, "they were trampling one another"), but nothing in the context here argues against the common meaning. On the contrary, Paul is illustrating humanity's headlong plunge into decadence as an expression of God's wrath in giving them over to their fallen desires. Restricting the scope of culpability goes against that purpose and thus is not to be expected without some clear indication.

Given that Paul was educated as a Pharisee and that first-century Judaism, based on the Old Testament, condemned all homosexual conduct, one would need good reason to think he was rejecting that understanding. Otherwise, he would be assumed to be in accord with it. Certainly nothing Paul says here points toward such a radical and non-Jewish reinterpretation of God's will, and his teaching elsewhere (1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:8-11) confirms his agreement with the traditional view.

This evidence is so decisive that even pro-homosexual scholars admit that Paul's teaching here was not restricted to coercive or exploitative sexual relationships or to sex in the context of idol worship. For example, homosexual Louis Crompton confesses:

According to [one] interpretation, Paul's words were not directed at "bona fide" homosexuals in committed relationships. But such a reading, however well-intentioned, seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstance. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian.³⁷

³⁷ Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 114.

Similarly, lesbian Bernadette Brooten acknowledged in her influential book, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, "Rom 1:27, like Lev 18:22 and 20:13, condemns all males in male-male relationships regardless of age, making it unlikely that lack of mutuality or concern for the passive boy were Paul's central concerns." ³⁸ She earlier wrote (p. 244), "I see Paul as condemning all forms of homoeroticism as the unnatural acts of people who had turned away from God."

2. Not Made Irrelevant by Sexual 'Orientation' Argument

Others have tried to dismiss not only Paul's proscription but *all* biblical condemnation of homosexual conduct by claiming that people in the ancient world were unaware of what they call homosexual "orientation." In other words, they claim ancient people did not know that some people were innately or constitutionally attracted to the same sex and thus thought that homosexual conduct was something engaged in by people contrary to their attraction to the opposite sex. Homosexual conduct, they claim, was mistakenly viewed as an act of rebellion against one's innate desires and proclivities, not as conduct in fulfillment of those desires and proclivities. If Moses or Paul had only known that some people are constitutionally attracted to the same sex they would have exempted them from the proscription of homosexual conduct. This is nonsense.

First, people in the ancient world were well aware that some people were attracted to those of the same sex and engaged in homosexual conduct in fulfillment of that attraction. Indeed, they knew that these attractions could be so deeply rooted as to constitute what today is called a homosexual orientation. (One wonders how homosexual advocates, who insist that same-sex attraction is a phenomenon set at birth, can at the same time insist that the depth of homosexual proclivities went completely unnoticed in ancient societies.)

For example, Aristophanes, the late-fifth and early-fourth century B.C. Greek dramatist, is reported in Plato's *Symposium* (192A-B) to say of men inclined sexually toward other men that they "are not inclined by nature toward marriage and the procreation of children, yet are compelled to do so by law or custom. Yet it suffices for them to live their lives out with one another unmarried."

In fact, there were a number of theories in the Greco-Roman world offering a congenital basis for some homosexual attraction. They ran the gamut, and though they would be considered primitive today, they were attempts to explain how some could *from birth* be determined for same-sex attraction. That shows that homosexual attraction was understood to be a constitutional or innate aspect of one's identity; that is why they were seeking congenital explanations. Gagnon summarizes the theories ([2003], 102):

Causation factors included a creation splitting of male-male or female-female binary humans, a particular mix of male and female "sperm" elements at conception, a chronic disease of the mind or soul influenced directly by biological

³⁸ Bernadette Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 257.

factors and made hard to resist by socialization, an inherited disease analogous to a mutated gene, sperm ducts leading to the anus, and the particular alignment of heavenly constellations at birth.

William R. Schoedel, who favors homosexual unions, comments, "Both [Bernadette] Brooten and I find problematic the common view that sexual orientation was not recognized in the ancient world."³⁹ William Loader, a scholar who likewise supports same-sex unions acknowledges:

Brooten has shown that people in Paul's time did make observations about different sexual orientation, including lifelong orientation. She points to discussions in medicine, astrology, magical practices, and some philosophical discussion. While they are far from the complex theories of modern times and are at best rudimentary, it is not unlikely that Paul would have had some awareness of them.⁴⁰

Thomas K. Hubbard, a pro-homosexual scholar who has written the definitive sourcebook on homosexuality in ancient Greece and Rome, writes: "Homosexuality in this era [i.e., of the early imperial age of Rome] may have ceased to be merely another practice of personal pleasure and began to be viewed as an essential and central category of personal identity, exclusive of and antithetical to heterosexual orientation."⁴¹

N. T. Wright, a renowned New Testament scholar and expert on the early church, states:

As a classicist, I have to say that when I read Plato's *Symposium*, or when I read the accounts from the early Roman empire of the practice of homosexuality, then it seems to me they knew just as much about it as we do. In particular, a point which is often missed, they knew a great deal about what people today would regard as longer-term, reasonably stable relations between two people of the same gender. This is not a modern invention; it's already there in Plato. The idea that in Paul's day it was always a matter of exploitation of younger men by older men or whatever ... of course there was plenty of that then, as there is today, but it was by no means the only thing. They knew about the whole range of options there.⁴²

Second, even if one makes the highly unlikely assumption that Paul was unaware of homosexual orientation and thus saw homosexual conduct as something engaged in only by those of heterosexual orientation, it would not mean that homosexual conduct by those of homosexual orientation escaped his proscription. There is no reason to think the orientation distinction is relevant to the condemnation. Rather, that condemnation is rooted in the biological sex of the participants based on God's intention at creation.

³⁹ William R. Schoedel, "Same-Sex Eros: Paul and the Greco-Roman Tradition" in *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 47 n. 5.

⁴⁰ William Loader, *The New Testament and Sexuality* (Eerdmans, 2012), 322.

⁴¹ Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Document* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 386.

⁴² John L. Allen, Jr., "Interview with Anglican Bishop N.T. Wright of Durham," *National Catholic Reporter Online* (May 21, 2004) (<http://www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/word/wright.htm>).

Even those who claim to be exclusively homosexually oriented recognize the biological determination of essential maleness and femaleness in that they are not satisfied with a person of the opposite sex no matter how gender-nonconforming he or she may be. In other words, a homosexual man is not satisfied with a woman no matter how masculine she may be, and a homosexual woman is not satisfied with a man no matter how feminine he may be. They are only satisfied with someone of their *same sex*, which shows they know the difference between mere gender nonconformity and the actual maleness and femaleness of biological determination.

As Gagnon states ([2001], 110), "The bottom line for biblical authors: it did not matter why people willingly engaged in same-sex intercourse, just as it was unnecessary to parse the motivations of those who participated willingly in incest, bestiality, adultery, fornication, or heterosexual prostitution." The issue was the fact they were the same sex. The irrelevance of the orientation distinction is acknowledged by supporters of homosexual unions.

William R. Schoedel claims that "some support" exists in Philo, *Abraham* 135 for thinking that Paul might be speaking in Rom 1:26-27 "only of same-sex acts performed by those who are by nature heterosexual." But he then dismisses the suggestion:

But such a phenomenon does not excuse some other form of same-sex eros in the mind of a person like Philo. Moreover, we would expect Paul to make that form of the argument more explicit if he intended it. . . . Paul's wholesale attack on Greco-Roman culture makes better sense if, like Josephus and Philo, he lumps all forms of same-sex eros together as a mark of Gentile decadence.⁴³

Martti Nissinen, another pro-homosexual scholar, states:

Paul does not mention *tribades* or *kinaidoi*, that is, female and male persons who were habitually involved in homoerotic relationships, but if he knew about them (and there is every reason to believe that he did), it is difficult to think that, because of their apparent 'orientation,' he would *not* have included them in Romans 1:24-27. . . . For him, there is no individual inversion or inclination that would make this conduct less culpable. . . . Presumably nothing would have made Paul approve homoerotic behavior.⁴⁴

Bernadette Brooten states:

Thus, both arguments fall short (that Paul condemns only heterosexuals committing homosexual acts and not homosexuals per se, and that the distinction between sexual orientation and sexual acts would have made no sense to him). Paul could have believed that *tribades* [the active female partners in a female homosexual bond], the ancient *kinaidoi* [the passive male partners in a male homosexual bond], and other sexually unorthodox persons were born that way

⁴³ William R. Schoedel, "Same-Sex Eros: Paul and the Greco-Roman Tradition" in David L. Balch, ed., *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 67-68.

⁴⁴ Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1998), 109-12.

and yet still condemn them as unnatural and shameful. . . . I see Paul as condemning all forms of homoeroticism as the unnatural acts of people who had turned away from God.⁴⁵

Third, if sexual orientation is the critical distinction in the acceptability of homosexual conduct and if it was unknown by mankind until recently that some people are oriented toward the same-sex, why would God, who knows all things, move Paul (or anybody else) to write what would *necessarily* be misunderstood to condemn what God approves? Whatever one makes of the human element of Scripture, to deny the divine element is to deny the essence of Scripture, which is that it is God-breathed.

Finally, the morality of a behavior is not determined by whether the desire to engage in it is innate. The depth of a desire and the fact one would prefer not to have it does not mean it is God's will for one to act on that desire. Greed, pride, sexual lust, envy, jealousy, and selfishness are urges that we do not choose to experience but do experience. They are part of who we are as fallen human beings, and the fact they are innate does not sanctify them. Rather, they are desires and impulses to which Christ calls us not to yield. We honor him in our struggle against them not in justifying our wallowing in them. Gagnon remarks ([2003], 105), "Humans are not robots or mere animals. Their choices are not limited to enslaving impulses of the flesh. God's moral will cannot be held hostage to human sexual libidos. Jesus – not any alleged constitutional predisposition – is Lord." Noted New Testament scholar Ben Witherington likewise remarks:

[U]nfortunately the heart cry of all sinners is this "please dear God, tell me I am alright just like I am, so I won't have to change. Please can't we just sing a few more choruses of 'Just as I Am' and then I can return to being just what I am inclined to be. Please dear God tell me that I was even born this way, so I can say 'God made me this way', and blame you for my flaws and foibles, and stop wrestling with the troubling possibility that I was born with innate tendencies to self-centered, self-indulgent desires and behaviors." Yes, that really is the heart cry of sinners a good deal of the time, all sinners. Unfortunately, "I was born this way" doesn't mean it's good or God-sanctioned. We were all born with flaws, and sinful inclinations.⁴⁶

3. Not Made Irrelevant by the Misogyny Argument

Some have tried to get around Paul's teaching (and that of other inspired writers) by attributing his negative view of homosexual conduct to his culture's low view of women. The claim is that what Paul objected to was not the creation-violating gender discomplementarity of homosexual relationships but the fact a man assuming the sexual role of a woman (or a woman assuming the sexual role of a man) threatened the cultural concept of male dominance or superiority. Gagnon succinctly eviscerates this argument:

⁴⁵ Bernadette Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 244.

⁴⁶ Ben Witherington, "A Searching Book— Rachel Held Evans' 'Searching for Sunday,'" (April 15, 2015) (<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2015/04/15/a-searching-book-rachel-held-evans-searching-for-sunday/>).

First, in Greco-Roman debates about the superiority of male-male love or male-female love, proponents of male-female love are generally much less misogynistic than the proponents of male-male love. The former tend to have a higher valuation of women as suitable life-mates for men. Misogyny is more a hallmark of advocates for male homosexuality in antiquity than it is of advocates for heterosexuality. Second, even in the Greco-Roman world absolute nature arguments that had little to do with misogyny were sometimes used to reject homosexual behavior. Third, since the most intense opposition in the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman Mediterranean basin appeared in ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity advocates of the misogyny theory would have to presuppose that the ancient Jews and Christians were the biggest misogynists of their day - a patently absurd conclusion. Fourth, the more pronounced affirmation of women's roles in early Christianity did not bring with it any lessening in the intensity of opposition of homosexual practice. To the contrary, it only made someone like Paul be more explicit about the implicit opposition to lesbianism in the Old Testament.⁴⁷

B. 1 Cor. 6:9-10 and 1 Tim. 1:8-11

1. The Texts

Paul includes among the impenitent sinners who will not inherit the kingdom of God those who in Greek were called *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. He writes in 1 Cor. 6:9-10: *⁹Or do you not know that unrighteous men will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor **malakoi** nor **arsenokoitai** ¹⁰nor thieves nor greedy persons nor drunkards nor revilers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

In 1 Tim. 8-10 he refers to *arsenokoitais* in a list of those he describes as lawless and rebellious, godless and sinful, and unholy and irreligious: *⁸Now we know that the law is good, if anyone uses it lawfully, ⁹knowing that the law is not laid down for a righteous man but for the lawless and rebellious, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their father and those who kill their mother, for murderers, ¹⁰fornicators, **arsenokoitais**, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching ¹¹according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I was entrusted.*

The words *malakos* and *arsenokoitēs* refer to the active and passive participants in male homosexual conduct. The attempt to generate confusion over the matter has failed. I provide below a survey of standard Greek-English lexicons and theological dictionaries as well as the renderings of standard English versions and the remarks by leading commentators on 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. They speak for themselves, and speak with such power that honest

⁴⁷ Robert A. J. Gagnon, "Going in the Wrong Direction: A Response to David Atkinson" (June 23, 2008), available online here: <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/articles/going-in-the-wrong-direction-a-response-to-david-atkinson/>.

pro-homosexual scholars concede the point, as illustrated in the two quotes that close this section.

2. The Lexicons on *malakos* and *arsenokoitēs*

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1889):

- *malakos*: "effeminate, of a catamite, a male who submits his body to unnatural lewdness, 1 Co. vi. 9."
- *arsenokoitēs*: "one who lies with a male as with a female, a sodomite: 1 Cor. vi. 9; 1 Tim. i. 10."

Gingrich's Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament (2nd ed. 1979):

- *malakos*: "effeminate, of the passive partner in a same-sex relationship. 1 Cor 6:9."
- *arsenokoitēs*: "one who engages in same-sex activity, sodomite, pederast 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Ti 1:10"

Louw & Nida's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (2nd ed. 1989):

- *malakos*: "the passive male partner in homosexual intercourse - 'homosexual.' . . . As in Greek, a number of other languages also have entirely distinct terms for the active and passive roles in homosexual intercourse."
- *arsenokoitēs*: "a male partner in homosexual intercourse - 'homosexual.' . . . It is possible that *arsenokoitēs* in certain contexts refers to the active male in homosexual intercourse in contrast with *malakos*, the passive male partner."

Friberg's Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament (2nd ed. 1994):

- *malakos*: "especially of a man or boy who submits his body to homosexual lewdness *catamite, homosexual pervert* (1C 6.9)"
- *arsenokoitēs*: "an adult male who practices sexual intercourse with another adult male or a boy *homosexual, sodomite, pederast*"

Bauer, Danker, Arndt & Gingrich's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (3rd ed. 2000):

- *malakos*: "pertaining to being passive in a same-sex relationship, *effeminate* esp. of *catamites*, of men and boys who are sodomized by other males in such a relationship, opposite *arsenokoitēs*. . . . 1 Cor. 6:9 ('male prostitutes' NRSV [and NIV] is too narrow a rendering; 'sexual pervert' REB [and RSV] is too broad)."
- *arsenokoitēs*: "a male who engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex." Regarding its use in 1 Cor. 6:9 it states: "of one who assumes the dominant role in same-sex activity, opposite *malakos*. . . . Paul's strictures against same-sex activity cannot be

satisfactorily explained on the basis of alleged temple prostitution . . . or limited to contract with boys for homoerotic service."

3. Theological Dictionaries on *malakos* and *arsenokoitēs*

New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (1976):

- *malakos*: no entry
- *arsenokoitēs*: "male homosexual, pederast, sodomite"

Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (1990):

- *malakos*: "The vice catalog of 1 Cor 6:9 mentions the *malakoi*, *soft people/weaklings*, as reprehensible examples of passive homosexuality"
- *arsenokoitēs*: "Referring to a male who engages in sexual activity with men or boys"

New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis (2014)

- *malakos*: quotes NIV '11 note explaining that the word refers to the passive participant in homosexual acts and comments "This understanding is supported by BDAG."
- *arsenokoitēs*: "someone who practices homosexuality" noting that many believe it has the more specific meaning of "a man who assumes the dominant role in homosexual activity."

4. Standard Versions on Subject Words in 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10

Notice how the NIV'11 abandoned the rendering "male prostitute" from the earlier NIV and TNIV.

1 Cor. 6:9:

- (KJV, 1611) - effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind
- (ASV, 1901) - effeminate, abusers of themselves with men
- (RSV, 1952) - sexual perverts (combines both)
- (NEB, 1970) - one guilty of homosexual perversion (combines both)
- (NASB, 1971) - effeminate, homosexuals
- (NKJV, 1982) - homosexuals (fn. catamites), sodomites
- (NIV, 1984) - male prostitutes, homosexual offenders
- (NJB, 1985) – the self-indulgent, sodomites
- (REB, 1987) - sexual pervert (combines both)
- (NRSV, 1989) - male prostitutes, sodomites
- (NASU, 1995) - effeminate, homosexuals
- (ESV, 2001) - men who practice homosexuality (fn. The two Greek terms translated by this phrase refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts)

- (CSB, 2004) - any kind of homosexual (combines both; fn. Lit . . . *passive homosexual partners, active homosexual partners*)
- (TNIV, 2005) - male prostitutes, homosexual offenders
- (NET, 2005) - passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals
- (NIV '11) - men who have sex with men (combines both; fn. The words *men who have sex with men* translate two Greek words that refer to the passive and active participants in homosexual acts)
- (ESV '11) - men who practice homosexuality (fn. The two Greek terms translated by this phrase refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts)

1 Tim. 1:10:

- (KJV, 1611) - them that defile themselves with mankind
- (ASV, 1901) - abusers of themselves with men
- (RSV, 1952) - sodomites
- (NASB, 1971) - homosexuals
- (NEB, 1970) - perverts
- (NKJV, 1982) - sodomites
- (NIV, 1984) - perverts
- (NJB, 1985) - homosexuals
- (REB, 1987) - perverts
- (NRSV, 1989) - sodomites
- (NASU, 1995) - homosexuals
- (ESV, 2001) - men who practice homosexuality
- (CSB, 2004) - homosexuals
- (TNIV, 2005) - those practicing homosexuality
- (NET, 2005) - practicing homosexuals
- (NIV '11) - those practicing homosexuality
- (ESV '11) - men who practice homosexuality

5. Commentators on Subject Words in 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10

1 Cor. 6:9:

- Grosheide (NICNT, 1953): "passive and active homosexuals respectively"
- Barrett (HNTC, 1968): "the passive and active partners respectively in male homosexual relations"
- Bruce (NCBC, 1971): "denoting the passive and active roles [in homosexual relations] respectively"
- Conzelmann (Herm. 1975): "The sins of sexual immorality are made specific by the introduction of both passive . . . and active homosexuality."
- Fee (NICNT, 1987): "male prostitute" and "homosexual offender"
- Winter (NBC, 1994): "the participants in male homosexuality"

- Blomberg (NIVAC, 1994): "the more passive and more active partners, respectively, in any male homosexual act."
- Soards (NIBC, 1999): "probably referring to the so-called passive partner in homosexual activity" and "'male bedders,' perhaps referring to the other partner in the homosexual arrangement"
- Thiselton (NIGTC, 2000): "perverts [or those involved in pederastic practices]" and "men who practice sexual relations with men"
- Garland (BECNT, 2003): "males who are penetrated sexually by males" and "males who sexually penetrate males"
- Johnson (IVPNTC, 2004): "men and boys who take the more passive role in homosexual relations" and "those who lie with males"
- Fitzmyer (ABC, 2008): "male persons who practice different kinds of sexual acts with other males"
- Verbrugge (EBC, 2008): "men who had an effeminate nature and displayed a passive role in a sexual relationship" and "one who lies in a bed with a male"
- Ciampa & Rosner (PNTC, 2010): "those who willingly play the passive and active roles in homosexual acts"

1 Tim. 1:10:

- Kelly (HNTC, 1960): "homosexuals"
- Earle (EBC, 1978): "male homosexuals"
- Fee (NIBC, 1988): "word for male coital homosexuality"
- Knight (NIGTC, 1992): "homosexuals," adding "The word does not refer, as some have alleged, only to sex with young boys or to male homosexual prostitutes, but simply to homosexuality itself."
- Stott (1996): "practicing male homosexuals"
- Marshall (ICC, 1999): "homosexual"
- Liefeld (NIVAC, 1999): "male homosexuals"
- Mounce (WBC, 2000): "homosexuals"
- Quinn & Wacker (ECC, 2000): "homosexuals," adding "There is little to be said lexically for confining the meaning of *arsenokoitai* to 'male prostitutes' or 'call-boys.'"
- Collins (NTL, 2002): "active homosexuals"
- Towner (NICNT, 2006): "denotes, unequivocally, the activity of male homosexuality"
- Köstenberger (EBC, 2006): "those who engage in homosexual acts," adding "[it] is a broad term that cannot be confined to specific instances of homosexual activity such as male prostitution or pederasty"

6. Admissions from Pro-Homosexual Scholars

In an article titled "St. Paul" in the GLBTQ online encyclopedia, an encyclopedia fully supportive of standard homosexual activist positions, Eugene Rice, the late Shepherd Professor of History Emeritus at Columbia University, candidly declares:

The meanings of these Greek nouns have been the subject of lively debate, largely provoked by gay authors anxious to show that Paul and the early church had not intended to condemn homosexuality per se as harshly as has been traditionally supposed, but only a degraded type of pederasty associated with prostitution and child abuse.

Recent scholarship has shown conclusively that the traditional meanings assigned to these words stand. So do the traditional translations: the Latin translation "commonly used in the church," and therefore known as the Vulgate, and the English King James Version (KJV). . . .

Paul's *malakoi*, we can say with certainty, are males – boys, youths, or adults – who have consented, either for money or for pleasure, for some perceived advantage or as an act of affectionate generosity, to be penetrated by men. . . .

Arsenokoitai are therefore "men who lie with males," and the Vulgate's *masculorum concubitores* (where *masculorumis* an objective genitive), renders the Greek exactly to mean "men who lie with males," "men who sleep with males," "men who have sex with males." . . .

The dependence of Paul's *arsenokoitai* on the Levitical *arsenos koitén* demonstrates unequivocally its source and confirms his intended meaning. The word was almost certainly coined by Greek-speaking Jews. Understood in the context of what we know about role playing in most ancient same-sex relationships, *malakoi* are the receptive parties and *arsenokoitai* the inserters in male-male anal intercourse.

William Loader, a scholar who supports same-sex unions, acknowledges:

On balance, then, Paul probably uses the two terms [*malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor 6:9] with reference to men who engage in same-sex behavior, with the first referring to the willing passive partner, whether by private consent or as a male prostitute, 'those who submit to sexual penetration by other men,' and the second referring to 'those who engage in sexual penetration of other men,' which would have a broader reference and include, but not be limited to, exploitation, also by force.⁴⁸

VI. The Early Church's View of Homosexual Conduct

Given the clear condemnation of homosexual conduct in the Old Testament, in extrabiblical Jewish writings, and in the New Testament, one would expect it to be clearly condemned in the post-New Testament writings of the early church. And that is what one finds.

Bernadette Brooten states, "Boswell argued . . . that '[t]he early Christian church does not appear to have opposed homosexual behavior per se.' The sources on female homoeroticism that I present in this book run absolutely counter to [that conclusion]."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ William Loader, *The New Testament and Sexuality* (Eerdmans, 2012), 331-332.

⁴⁹ Bernadette Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (1996), 11.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church states:

In the NT homosexual behavior is mentioned and condemned in 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 1 Tim. 1:10, and most influentially in Rom. 1:27 which many moralists have seen as supporting the view that homosexuality is, with other sexual acts which are not procreative, contrary to Natural Law.

Patristic, medieval, and later Christian moralists have not questioned this judgment, and it is only in recent times that some writers have argued that the quality of a relationship, be it homosexual or heterosexual, is what determines its moral value.⁵⁰

Marion Soards states:

As we saw above, in the earliest period of Christian writing Paul expressed the traditional Jewish rejection of homosexual behavior in the new context of the Christian community. . . . Paul's remarks about homosexual behavior were made in such a way that he simply assumed other Christians would have agreed with him that homosexual acts were not permissible among members of the church. Paul made no attempt to defend or to respond to criticism of his position on homosexuality. Thus, from the limited instances in which earliest Christianity treats homosexuality, we see plainly that homosexual behavior was rejected, that it was considered contrary to the will of God for human life.

The evidence from the time following the decades in which the New Testament was composed yields an equally negative assessment of homosexuality. . . . A range of authors including Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, the participants in the Councils in Elvira and Ancyra, the author(s) of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, John Chrysostom, and Augustine all expressed sharp disapproval of homosexual behavior.⁵¹

David Wright states:

The church fathers universally condemned male homosexual behavior. . . . Although the Levitical prohibition was not frequently cited [Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, and Eusebius being exceptions], no evidence suggests it was felt to be no longer binding or to condemn only ceremonial uncleanness. . . .

Stoic influence reinforced Paul's portrayal of homosexuality as unnatural, and early Christian writers regularly characterized it in these terms [cites omitted]. They clearly regarded it as contrary to the created constitution and function of men and women, and not merely to the dispositions of particular individuals. . . .

⁵⁰ F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 786.

⁵¹ Marion L. Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1995), 35-36.

All the evidence indicates that the teaching mind of the early church unreservedly condemned homosexual activity.⁵²

VII. The Attempt to Analogize Slavery and Homosexual Conduct

Some supporters of homosexual unions claim that the interpretation of Scripture as approving slavery was revised only in the last few centuries when the destructive consequences of slavery became so apparent that slavery was exposed as being incompatible with broader themes of Scripture. The church's understanding of those texts was allegedly "reworked" in light of the painful experience wrought in part by the traditional view. This, they say, is what is happening and must happen with the texts condemning homosexual conduct. There is much wrong with this.

Slavery was a post-Fall human institution not something ordained by God, and nothing in Scripture approves of it as a moral good. Rather, Scripture reveals that God *tolerated a regulated form of Old World slavery* within ancient Israel and the church. It cannot be shown that God was wrong to have done so, as only he is able to weigh all the consequences of mandating the immediate termination of the slavery practiced in a particular social context versus planting seeds for slavery's general and gradual destruction.⁵³

Nothing of what God allowed in the social contexts of ancient Israel and the early church needs to be "reworked," meaning interpreted contrary to the intention of the inspired writers, in order for other forms of slavery, such as the slavery in Colonial America, or slavery in other social contexts to be acknowledged and attacked as an intolerable evil. But denying the intention of the inspired writers is precisely what must be done to claim that Scripture is compatible with any form of homosexual conduct. The proscription of homosexual conduct is not tied to any particular social context but rather is based on God's creation of mankind as male and female and his intention that they join together in an exclusive one-flesh union of marriage. The only alternative to sexual activity within a heterosexual marriage is celibacy (Mat. 19:10-12).

Scripture itself points the way to the ultimate eradication of slavery, but there are no biblical signposts, nothing the least bit comparable, pointing to the eradication of the absolute, creation-based ban on homosexual conduct. The seeds for the dissolution of all slavery were sown in Old Testament texts like Ex. 21:16 ("Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death") and Lev. 25:39 ("If your brother . . . sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave") and in New Testament texts like Philem. 16 ("no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother"), Eph. 6:9 ("Masters . . . do not threaten [your slaves]"), Col. 4:1 ("Masters, provide your slaves what is right and fair"), and 1 Tim. 6:1-2 (masters are "brothers"). Note also that Jesus' teaching about mercy and forgiving debts (e.g., Mat. 6:12, 18:23-34) implies the inappropriateness of debt-slavery. As has been said, where these seeds of equality came to full flower, the very institution of slavery would no longer be slavery.

⁵² David F. Wright, "Homosexuality" in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 542-543.

⁵³ For a fuller discussion of the Bible and slavery, see Ashby Camp, "Answering the New Atheism," 43-49, available online here: <http://theoutlet.us/AnsweringtheNewAtheism.pdf>

Early Christians understood this. They not only demonstrated a radically different attitude toward slaves, dealing with them as they did freemen, but began the practice of freeing slaves one by one as they had opportunity. There are reports of early Christians releasing huge numbers of slaves, regarding which Church historian Philip Schaff has written:

These legendary traditions may indeed be doubted as to the exact facts of the case, and probably are greatly exaggerated; but they are nevertheless conclusive as the exponents of the spirit which animated the church at that time concerning the duty of Christian masters. It was felt that in a thoroughly Christianized society there can be no room for despotism on the one hand and slavery on the other.⁵⁴

Paul Chamberlain writes:

In AD 315, only two years after the Edict of Milan the Christian emperor Constantine took the small step of criminalizing the act of stealing children for the purpose of bringing them up as slaves. Over the next few centuries, Christian bishops and councils called for the redemption and freeing of slaves, and Christian monks freed many themselves. The effects were stunning. By the twelfth century slaves in Europe were rare, and by the fourteenth century they were almost unknown on that continent, including in England.⁵⁵

European slavery was revived by the British in the seventeenth century, followed by the Spanish and the Portuguese. The abolitionist movement of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was led by Christians, people like William Wilberforce, Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Finney, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. This movement was driven by the understood implications of certain of the above biblical texts and the outright condemnation of kidnapping and slave trading in Ex. 21:16 and 1 Tim. 1:10, activities that characterized Colonial slavery.

VIII. Conclusion

Homosexual conduct is condemned expressly and repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments. This has been recognized unanimously by Jews and Christians for millennia. It is only in the last sixty years that homosexuals and their allies claim to have perceived the truth that eluded all others through the ages. Trying one argument after another, they grope for a way to justify the unjustifiable, imposing on Scripture their own desire. Christopher Yuan, a Christian with same-sex attraction, put the matter well in his review of Matthew Vines's book *God and the Gay Christian*, which repeats discredited arguments in yet another attempt to deny what the Bible says about homosexual conduct:

⁵⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church Vol. II Ante-Nicene Christianity*, 9th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 353.

⁵⁵ Paul Chamberlain, *Why People Don't Believe* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 141.

It appears to me that Vines starts with the conclusion that God blesses same-sex relationships and then moves backwards to find evidence. This is not exegesis, but a classic example of *eisegesis* (reading our own biases into a text). Like Vines, I also came out as a gay man while I was a student. I was a graduate student pursuing a doctorate in dentistry. Unlike Vines, I was not raised in a Christian home. Interestingly, a chaplain gave me a book from a gay-affirming author, John Boswell, claiming that homosexuality is not a sin. Like Vines, I was looking for biblical justification and wanted to prove that the Bible blesses gay relationships. As I read Boswell's book, the Bible was open next to it, and his assertions did not line up with Scripture. Eventually, I realized that I was wrong—that same-sex romantic relationships are a sin. My years of biblical language study in Bible college and seminary, and doctoral research in sexuality, only strengthened this conclusion. No matter how hard I tried to find biblical justification and no matter whether my same-sex temptations went away or not, God's word did not change. Years later I found out that the gay-affirming chaplain also recognized his error.⁵⁶

The great irony is that this campaign to distort the Bible is being conducted under the banner of love. Love does not rationalize and encourage behavior that is detrimental to another's welfare. Rather, love tells a person the truth he or she needs to hear even when that person may not want to hear it. Herbert Farmer expressed it this way in his book *The Healing Cross*:

It is clear even from our poor and thin experience, that love meets its most searching test when it is faced with the necessity of deeply estranging the one loved in order to bless him. And the more the love is pure and intense, the severer the test is, the more fierce the temptation to keep friendship at the cost of truth. When love is crying out for fellowship it is the hardest thing in the world deliberately to pursue a course which you know will for the time being destroy it. Yet sometimes it *is* necessary. For a love which is not loyal to the truth, which is not rooted and grounded in the ultimate reality of things, is a perverted and horribly insecure thing.⁵⁷

The church must patiently and lovingly call all sinners to repentance, but it need not be blind to the fact that those trapped in one particular sin are trying to salve their consciences by misrepresenting God and forcing that false teaching into the church. That reality demands a certain emphasis on the sin of homosexual conduct in the teaching ministry of the church. Anything less would be pastoral malpractice. That does not imply that one is accepting of other sins; it says only that one will not be misdirected from a clear and present spiritual danger. My prayer is that this study will be helpful in meeting that danger.

⁵⁶ Christopher Yuan, "Why 'God and the Gay Christian' Is Wrong About the Bible and Same-Sex Relationships," available online here: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/june-web-only/why-matthew-vines-is-wrong-about-bible-same-sex-relationshi.html?start=1>

⁵⁷ Herbert H. Farmer, *The Healing Cross* (London: Nisbet and Co., 1938), 196.