

Essay Series
Homosexuality:
The Case For & Against

A Biblical Case Against Homosexuality

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KEY WORDS

| Homosexuality | Gay-Lesbian | Relationships |
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ABSTRACT

Homosexuality has become more and more accepted in western society. Churches have also become more accepting of this practice. Many Christians argue that the Bible allows homosexual behavior. This article explores various passages regarding the question of whether the Bible actually does condone homosexual behavior. The most pertinent passages of the Old and New Testaments are examined on the topic. Objections from scholarly homosexual advocates are presented along with responses to those objections. The conclusion of the article is that the Bible in fact does not condone homosexuality.

INTRODUCTION

There are those who believe that the Bible does not teach that homosexual relationships are necessarily sinful. They argue that each of the texts implicitly or specifically addressing homosexuality in both the Old and New Testaments, as well as the general approach to ethics taught by Paul and Jesus, reveal that rather than condemning homosexuality in general the Bible's teaching is focused on culturally conditioned concerns. As John Ankerberg and John Weldon explain, "For homosexuals, the fundamental argument is that when the Bible is 'understood properly,' it does not condemn homosexuality. At most, it condemns only homosexual promiscuity—typically related to ancient cultic prostitution. The argument [in

the Bible] is 'culturally conditioned' and no longer relevant for Christian sexual ethics of the present."¹ The Bible does not, pro-homosexual interpreters conclude, forbid contemporary homosexual practices between consenting partners in a monogamous homosexual relationship.

This article critiques the arguments used to promote the view that homosexuality is an acceptable behavior in some circumstances, arguing that rather than endorsing certain homosexual relationships, the relevant texts in the Old and New Testaments, and the

1 John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on Homosexuality*, (Chattanooga, TN: ATRI Publishing, 2011), Kindle location 863.

ethical teachings of Paul and Jesus teach that homosexual behavior is not acceptable in any circumstance. Six biblical passages are considered, three from the Old Testament and three from the New Testament, as well as the relevant ethical principles related to love and grace in the teachings of Paul and Jesus.

KEY OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS

Genesis 1:27; 2:18, 21-22, 24

Those who argue for the validity of homosexual relationships interpret these foundational passages in light of their perceived silence about homosexuality. Daniel Helminiak states that Genesis 1 and 2 are “a lesson in religion, a lesson about God’s way and [human] sin... The example in this case that is by far the most common in human experience: the man, the woman, their relationship with one another... [The text] is not a lesson in sexual orientation. Nothing in those two chapters suggests that heterosexuality, in contrast to homosexuality, was a concern in the author’s mind.”² The text is silent on homosexuality, so it has nothing to do with homosexuality.

Joe Dallas summarizes another dimension of the pro-homosexual argument from silence on these passages, stating, “The Genesis account does not forbid homosexuality; it simply doesn’t refer to it, for obvious reasons. A gay couple could hardly begin the population process. But these verses cannot be seen as a model for all couples. Many heterosexual couples are childless... Are they in sin because they do not conform to the Genesis account?”³

2 Daniel A. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* (Tajique, NM: Alamo Square Press, 2000), Kindle location 2087.

3 Joe Dallas, *The Gay Gospel?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2007), Kindle location 2855.

The pro-homosexual argument for these verses fails insofar as, although not explicitly addressing homosexuality, these passages do provide the foundation for the Bible’s two-fold approach to heterosexuality and marriage, carrying with it an implicit rejection of homosexuality. First, the diversity of sexes as male and female is an expression of God’s intention in imaging himself, and second, the diversity of sexuality is essential to constitute a one-flesh union whereby the man and woman are joined together in consummating and living the marital relationship. As Kenneth Mathews comments, “[H]uman sexuality expresses both...individuality as gender and...oneness with another person through physical union... [Based upon Adam and Eve,] heterosexual marriage was always viewed as the divine norm from the outset of creation.”⁴

God’s creation of man and woman reflects the essential sexual diversity humanity has in revealing God’s image, and God’s giving of woman to man in order to make “one flesh” demonstrates that in a male and female relationship the full image of God is demonstrated. Homosexuality, therefore, misrepresents the image of God fully revealed in the relationship between man and woman, both in terms of the complementarity of their biological makeup and their suitability as partners in marriage. Thus, even though the accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 do not explicitly address homosexuality, their content implicitly rejects it as failing to properly reveal the image of God in humanity as male and female and as intended for heterosexual marriage including a one flesh union. There are, therefore, boundaries for sexuality in the Genesis text, viz.

4 Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1—11:26*, vol. 1A of *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 223-224, Kindle.

that man and woman are made for sexual union within marital covenant; and the boundaries here being man and woman (both in terms of gender and maturity [the latter resulting in an exclusion of pedophilia, as well, since man and woman is not man and girl, or woman and boy]). Rather than an argument from silence, the heterosexual interpretation builds from what is explicitly stated and draws good and necessary conclusions.

Genesis 19:1-29

Genesis 19 is the narrative of Lot's experience in Sodom when angelic visitors came to deliver his family from judgment. The pro-homosexual interpretation of these verses concludes that the sin of the men of Sodom was their inhospitable behavior towards Lot's guests. That the guests threatened homosexual behavior is secondary, if it is even what they really intended by "know[ing] them carnally." David Rosman argues this way, concluding that the intention of the men in Sodom was to conduct an interrogation or gang rape of the visitors in the context of responding to the visit as a potential act of war. Rosman asks, "Did the men of Sodom simply want to talk to the two agents of God? Did they want to have consensual sex with them? Did they want to gang rape the two envoys of God? It appears that the first or third translations may be closer to the story line and that neither would designate a homosexual relationship."⁵ Peter Aelred draws a similar conclusion, stating that "the 'sin' for which [Sodom was] destroyed was not homosexuality, but inhospitality. Genesis 18 records the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah towards three angelic visitors, and Hebrew theologians noted the explicit contrast in the

following story of Sodom...Trying to gang-rape angelic guests is hardly a Martha Stewart-style welcome, especially in an ancient Semitic culture that vowed to protect visitors at any and all costs."⁶

The pro-homosexual interpretation errs by focusing on inhospitality and excluding homosexuality, since Sodom's sin of inhospitable behavior does not dismiss the fact of the homosexual behavior attending the inhospitality. The former was the context for the latter, and both were judged by God, but the point is that *both* were judged. As Kevin DeYoung states, "While the violence [inhospitality] associated with the behavior in Sodom certainly made the offense worse, the nature of the act itself contributed to the overwhelmingly negative assessment of the city. Sodom...[was] guilty of a great many sins; [the argument] does not have to prove that homosexual practice was the only sin to show that it was one of them."⁷

Ezekiel 16:47-50 lists, among other sins, an "abomination" done before the Lord by Sodom. The word for abomination is *toebah*, the same word used in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 to address homosexual sins. As DeYoung explains, "Several sins in the Holiness Code of Leviticus are described as abominations, but only this one is singled out by itself as an abomination. The use of *toebah* in Ezekiel, with reference to Sodom's sin, is an echo of Leviticus 18 and 20. Sodom's sins were many: pride, social injustice, *and* pursuing homosexual behavior."⁸

Jude 7 also describes Sodom's sin in

5 David Rosman, *The Clobber Passages: The Biblical Arguments against Homosexuality in the United States* (Columbia, MO: Ink and Voice Communication, 2014), Kindle location 3763.

6 Peter Aelred, *To Melt a Golden Calf: An Evangelical Christian Case for Same-Sex Relationships* (North Charleston, SC: Create Space Publishing, 2013), 42-43, Kindle.

7 Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 38, Kindle.

8 *Ibid.*, 35, Kindle (emphasis in original).

terms of sexual perversity. In the immediate context Jude is reminding his readers of God's judgment on apostasy, stating in verse 7, "Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire."⁹ Regarding the interpretation of Sodom's sin of going after "unnatural lust" (from the Greek *σαρκὸς ἐτέρας*, strange flesh), Thomas Schreiner explains that, rather than the text referring to an attempt by the men of Sodom to engage in sexual relations with angels, a position posited by several pro-homosexual interpreters who recognize the potential difficulty Jude poses for their understanding of Genesis 18, "Their sin consisted in their homosexual intentions and their brutal disregard for the rights of visitors to the city...The term [strange flesh] more naturally refers to a desire for those of the same sex; they desired flesh other than that of women."¹⁰

Were the men of Sodom inhospitable? Yes, and they were judged for their inhospitality. However, as the broader biblical context from Leviticus, Ezekiel, and Jude demonstrate, the sin of the men of Sodom was more than inhospitality. God judged them for the sin of homosexuality.

Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

These two verses are found within the Holiness Code given to Israel. Leviticus 18:22 declares what the code is, stating, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination." Leviticus 20:13 prescribes the punishment in

Israel for breaking the code, stating, "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them."

The pro-homosexual interpretation of these verses emphasizes the culturally distinct aspect of the entire Holiness Code as related to God's desire for separation from the pagan nations in which Israel was placed. It is an ancient near-eastern prescription that has no bearing on today in any of its specifics. Further, the male with male sexual aspect is not about homosexuality, per se, but about domination of one person over another, one man over another. John Dwyer explains, "Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 were written for a certain time period...Much of sex and sexual relations as we understand them in the 21st Century are different from what was experienced and understood when Leviticus was written. Much of the sexual conduct was about taking, power, and what we would consider, in most instances today, rape."¹¹ Following this same culture-bound approach to interpretation, Dan Via states, "The pertinent point [in Leviticus 18 and 20] is that the condemnation of homosexuality...categorizes it as a source of uncleanness rather than as a sin."¹² What about a cultic context? That it was homosexuality in the context of pagan worship?

The pro-homosexual interpretation concludes that the Holiness Code's concern with homosexuality in Leviticus 18 and 20 is not a matter of God rejecting homosexuality in all instances, but a matter of God's desire to keep Israel clean and holy in relation to the pagan nations surrounding her. What was true for Israel then is not appropriately carried

9 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the NRSV.

10 Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 452-453, Kindle.

11 John F. Dwyer, *Those 7 References: A Study of 7 References to Homosexuality in the Bible* (North Charleston, SC: Create Space Publishing, 2007), 40, Kindle.

12 Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), Kindle location 137.

forward for Christians today.

The pro-homosexual interpretation rightly emphasizes that there are cultural considerations when interpreting any biblical text, but it fails to demonstrate that such cultural interpretations necessarily preclude viewing the homosexual prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 as relevant for those living in another time and place. Robert Gagnon argues there are several features related to the Levitical prohibition against homosexuality that establish its continued relevance. Two are considered here. First, the broader context includes prohibitions against incest (18:6-18), adultery (18:20), child sacrifice (18:21), and bestiality (18:23), all which “continue to have universal validity in contemporary society” due to their culturally transcendent impact on human relationships and sexuality.¹³ To single out homosexuality as “for then and not now” raises the question of why the pro-homosexual interpreter does not insist on the same conclusion for these other acts.

Second, homosexuality is the only prohibition in the code that is specifically identified as an “abomination” (תּוֹעֵבָה *tow'ebah*).¹⁴ While the chapter summary in 18:24-30 mentions the group of activities as abominable, only homosexuality is individually identified as such, giving it, in a sense, a higher concern as the primary abomination among the abominations. This helps make sense of Paul's

continued prohibition of homosexuality, which, along with his prohibitions of adultery and incest, are consistent with his knowledge of and commitment to the Levitical code. Gagnon concludes that this code is the basis of Paul's condemnation of incest in 1 Corinthians 5:1, of his statement that “those who practice such things deserve to die” in Romans 1:32, use of *aschemosye* in Romans 1:27, *akatharsia* in Romans 1:24, and his use of *arsenokoites* in 1 Corinthians 6:9, which is a compound of the words in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 for “male” and “lying.”¹⁵

Taken together, these features of the Levitical prohibition against homosexual relations demonstrate their continued relevance. Both the way God singularly describes the abominableness of homosexuality, and Paul's bringing the Levitical code into his New Testament teaching reveal that, rather than these prohibitions being culturally bound to ancient Israel, they transcend culture. The prohibitions against homosexuality in Leviticus are for today.

Summary of Old Testament Findings

How do the pro-homosexual interpretations of the Old Testament hold up to careful critique? The answer is two-fold. On the one hand, the pro-homosexual view of the creation of male and female and their coming together in a one-flesh union in Genesis 1 and 2, of the sins of the men of Sodom in Genesis 19, and of the prohibitions against homosexuality in the Holiness Code in Leviticus 18 and 20 bring to light relevant aspects of each text that may be overlooked by other interpreters.¹⁶ Yes, the

13 Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), Kindle location 1569.

14 As Mark F. Rooker discusses in commenting on 18:22, “The next prohibited sexual activity is homosexuality. This offense is characterized as an abomination (*tow'ebah*) a term that occurs five times in this context (18:22, 26, 27, 29, 30; 20:13). An abomination, a term especially frequent in the Book of Deuteronomy, refers to an act that is abhorrent or repugnant, such as idolatry and inappropriate worship of God (see Deut 7:25; 27:15; 17:10 12:31; 18:9–14).” *Leviticus*, vol. 3A, in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), Kindle location 7018.

15 Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, Kindle location 1669-1675.

16 While there is at least one other Old Testament text related to the discussion of homosexuality, Gibeah in Judges 19, the pro-homosexual interpretation and a response to it are fundamentally the same as that of the men of Sodom in

creation of male and female is communicating something more than a simplistic “God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” Yes, the sins of Sodom include egregious violations of ancient near-eastern hospitality norms and other concerns for justice. Yes, the Holiness Code contains certain culturally-bound elements related to Israel’s cultic purity. Such elements deserve attention when interpreting these texts, though, as argued above, the pro-homosexual interpreters have not given such culturally-bound elements their proper contextual assessment. Further, on the other hand, what the pro-homosexual interpreters demonstrate is a consistent failure to take into account how the broader Bible, especially the New Testament, incorporates the teaching of these texts into the New Covenant ethic, and how it does so with a decided concern for the sexual behavior either implied or explicitly addressed therein. The Bible’s interpretation of itself in these matters is concerned with the sinfulness of homosexuality. That is the message of the Old Testament in this regard. What about the message of the New Testament? Three Pauline texts will now be considered in order to answer this question.

KEY NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS

There are several texts in the New Testament (NT) that deal with the issue of sexuality. Most notably for the purposes of this article are Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and 1 Timothy 1:8-11. All are written by the same author (Paul) and have the same basic message: only monogamous heterosexual relationships are condoned by God and Scripture. These texts would prohibit any homosexual behavior.

Genesis 18. Thus, this author chose not to use additional space to restate the argument.

Romans 1:26-27

In Romans 1 Paul introduces, among other things, the fact that all men know about God via nature (vv. 18-20). However, they rejected the truth of God and were left only with a lie. It is

26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

As J. Glen Taylor notes, “Romans 1:26–27 is clearly the most important passage on homosexual intercourse in the NT.”¹⁷ The “reason God gave them up” is because they exchanged the truth they knew about God for a lie (the only option left once truth is rejected). It is vital to note the universal scope of who has knowledge of God “through the things he has made” (20). Who has such knowledge? All people since all have the ability (as long as their faculties are working properly) to see and experience the world and thus know God through it. Paul says, “the wrath of God is revealed against *all* ungodliness” (18).¹⁸ Paul declares that God’s invisible attributes “have been understood and seen through the things he has made” (20). Thus, whoever can know the world can know God. The point is the universal nature of Paul’s language includes all people. The basis for the condemnation is universal and not cultural or individual. Paul says those in question exchanged the truth they knew about God for a lie, focusing on the creation rather than the creator. This is the reason God gave them up. What did he give them up to?

17 J. Glen Taylor, “The Bible and Homosexuality,” *Themelios* 21, no. 1 (1995): 5.

18 Emphasis mine.

“God gave them up to degrading passions.” Women and men were said to thus commit unnatural intercourse. The natural way for intercourse to take place was with one man and one woman. However, God had given them up to what is unnatural. It is interesting that Paul does not use the typical words for ‘women’ (γυνή) and ‘men’ (άνήρ) here; rather, he uses the words ‘female’ (θηλυς) and ‘male’ (αρσεν). Such could possibly harken back to the creation account as stated in the LXX.¹⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner makes another point for Paul relating this text to the creation account. He claims that “the phrase ‘contrary to nature’ (παρὰ φύσιν) is rooted in Stoic and Hellenistic Jewish traditions that saw homosexual relations as violations of the created order.”²⁰ In the creation account God is seen to have created humankind with a certain nature and telos with the divine plan for man to unite to one woman and procreate (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:24). Such was the natural way God created males and females. This nature is the centerpiece in Paul’s condemnation of homosexual behavior.

19 Cf. note in Grant R. Osborne, *Romans, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* Vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 52 for such an argument. R. C. H. Lenski takes a different view: “Paul does not say ‘women’ and ‘men,’ he says θήλειαι and αρσενες, ‘females’ and ‘males.’ To say that this is done in order to denote sex is too weak, for ‘women’ and ‘men’ would certainly fully denote sex. When women and men are called females and males in a connection of the lowest vices such as this, the terms are degrading. They descend to the brutish level of being nothing but creatures of sex.” R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), 112. C. E. B. Cranfield says this: “The use of the adjectives meaning ‘female’ and ‘male’ rather than the words γυνή and άνήρ is appropriate here, since it is the sexual differentiation as such on which attention is specially concentrated (cf. Gen 1:27; Mt 19:4 = Mk 10:6; Gal 3:28).” C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, International Critical Commentary* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 125.

20 Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Vol. 6, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 95.

As Grant Osborne notes, “The key term here and in the debate today is *nature* (Greek *physis*).”²¹ The term ‘natural’ (φυσικός) only occurs three times in the NT, twice here and once in 2 Pet. 2:12. As Osborne goes on to argue, the idea of nature here has to do with the natural order of creation.²² C. E. B. Cranfield’s words here are instructive:

By φυσικός (here used to describe that which is κατὰ φύσιν) and παρὰ φύσιν Paul clearly means ‘in accordance with the intention of the Creator’ and ‘contrary to the intention of the Creator’, respectively. For this appeal to ‘nature’ in the sense of the order manifest in the created world compare 1 Cor 11:14, where ἡ φύσις αὐτή might almost be translated ‘the very way God has made us.’ That Paul had some awareness of the great importance which φύσις had had in Greek thought for many centuries is not impossible; that he was aware of its use in contemporary popular philosophy is very likely. He was at any rate using a word which—significantly—is not to be found in the LXX except in Wisdom and 3 and 4 Maccabees. But, for all its far-reaching and varied Greek background, the decisive factor in Paul’s use of it is his biblical doctrine of creation. It denotes that order which is manifest in God’s creation and which men have no excuse for failing to recognize and respect (cf. what was said above on vv. 19 and 20).²³

Thus, Paul is saying that the exchanging of heterosexual relations for homosexual ones is against the created order. The very passions in view here are said to be “degrading.”

Douglas Moo, however, notes that “Paul generally uses the word ‘nature’ to describe the way things are by reason of their intrinsic state or birth, and in these cases, while sometimes

21 Osborne, 52 (emphasis in original).

22 Ibid. This is, again, possibly why Paul chose the words ‘female’ and ‘male’ which is the wording of the creation account in the LXX.

23 Cranfield, 125–126.

perhaps implicit, there is no explicit reference to divine intention.²⁴ However, he rightly notes that what Paul likely has in mind here follows not only the Old Testament and Jewish teachers, such as Philo, but natural law.²⁵ In other words, all men share a certain human nature that Paul is saying is being violated by homosexual behavior. However, he writes that some scholars argue that the passage in question does not make homosexuality an issue of God's volition; rather, they say that Paul is simply imposing his Jewish culture.²⁶

Meghan K. DeFranza is an example of one who takes such a position. She states, "As a whole, the passage is meant to describe the depravity of those who have rejected God, not faithful gay, lesbian, and bisexual Christians seeking to solemnize their relationships with the vows of Christian marriage."²⁷ Such a position argues against any universality of prohibition since Paul is writing from a certain cultural perspective. DeFranza thus claims Paul does not have in mind certain acceptable homosexual relationships such as those just mentioned. She further writes, "Romans 1 was not written to provide a universal natural law to ground Christian sexual ethics. More importantly, it provides no guidance for those Christians who have not rejected God but nevertheless experience same-sex attraction."²⁸ In other words, she is saying that the problem Paul has

is not so much the issue of homosexuality, but the rejection of God. Further, she states (a la Neil Elliot) that such prohibitions may have in view certain members of the aristocracy or even temple prostitution.²⁹ She maintains that marriage' today "is not 'biblical marriage of the Old or New Testament. The biblical teaching of the image of God in all people has come to supersede ancient patterns of marriage. The question before Christians today," she says, "is whether 'biblical marriage' can be revised *yet again* to better honor the humanity of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people . . . in ways that honor God, benefit the common good, and promote their own growth in health and holiness."³⁰ However, such a view fails to notice the universal basis for Paul's statement and the way in which the term 'nature' is being used, especially in relation to the created order. The created orders is such that the female and the male unite as one and procreate. Homosexuality violates this natural order and cannot uphold the biblical mandate (naturally) to procreate.³¹ There are no special circumstances in which Paul allows for homosexual behavior. Such can be seen here as well as the other passages that will be explored below. Moreover, given that he is writing from a Jewish perspective, his writing would be consistent with the Old Testament which also universally prohibits homosexual behavior. It is the homosexual relationship itself

24 Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., 2nd ed., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 125.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Megan K. DeFranza, "Journeying from the Bible to Christian Ethics in Search of Common Ground," in *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, ed. Preston Sprinkle and Stanley N. Gundry, Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 86.

28 Ibid., 92.

29 Ibid., 83-85. She cites Neil Elliot's *Liberating Paul* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 195 in James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 159.

30 Ibid., 90 (emphasis in original).

31 Homosexual advocates retort that some heterosexuals cannot procreate either. However, such is the case only when there is some physical defect with one or both in the relationship, or if one or both are too old. In principle every (healthy) heterosexual couple can procreate; however, in principle no homosexual can naturally procreate. Thus, homosexuals cannot, even in principle, uphold the biblical mandate.

and not the way in which it is committed that is in view. Paul's words only refer to the acts that are committed, not the circumstances in which they take place. The only circumstances mentioned concern the homosexuals' rejection of God and consequent lie they are left with. However, there is no room in this text for appropriate homosexual actions; the actions as such are said to be unnatural. Even John Boswell, a noted advocate for homosexual behavior rejects this view saying

[Th]is view proves to be inadequate. First of all, there is no reason to believe that homosexual temple prostitution was more prevalent than heterosexual or that Paul, had he been addressing himself to such practices, would have limited his comments to the former. Second, it is clear that the sexual behavior itself is objectionable to Paul, not merely its associations. Third, and possibly most important, Paul is not describing cold-blooded, dispassionate acts performed in the interest of ritual or ceremony: he states very clearly that the parties involved "burned in their lust one toward another" . . . It is unreasonable to infer from the passage that there was any motive for the behavior other than sexual desire.³²

Such comments by DeFranza are interesting given these that she made just after:

The unanimous picture of marriage in the Bible is heterosexual. While polygyny and marriage to women captured in war were regulated by Old Testament law, the consistent witness of marriage is nevertheless heterosexual. Even more significant, the covenant between a husband and wife was chosen by the prophets and apostles to illustrate the relationship between God and God's

people.³³

Admittedly, DeFranza notes that the Bible only approves (even if only descriptively) of heterosexuality. The Bible is indeed consistent about this.

In the same work as DeFranza, William Loader, another advocate for homosexual behavior, admits that the Bible is clear in teaching that homosexuality is wrong, at least in the biblical world. Loader recognizes that what Paul means by 'natural' has to do with the creation account and how God designed men and women.³⁴ He further maintains that when "biblical writers address the issues of same-sex relations, the message is relatively clear."³⁵ When it comes to Romans, "Paul sees both the action and the attitude, homosexual passion, as sin."³⁶ While thinking the text is "relatively clear," Loader advocates for supplementing the biblical view to make way for a viable homosexual lifestyle for those who are genuinely homosexual.³⁷

Another objection that Paul is not categorically prohibiting homosexuality claims that "against nature" really refers to heterosexuals who committed homosexual acts. Thus, John Boswell argues that "the persons referred to [as being against nature] were considered by influential early Christian theologians to have been necessarily heterosexual (i.e. 'naturally' attracted to the opposite sex). There was no implication in the passage that homosexual acts, much less homosexual persons, were necessarily sinful."³⁸ Thus, according to Boswell,

33 DeFranza, 86.

34 William Loader, "Homosexuality and the Bible," in *Two Views on Homosexuality and the Bible*, 39.

35 Ibid., 42.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 47.

38 Boswell, 114 (emphasis in original).

32 John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 108.

what was unnatural were heterosexuals acting like homosexuals.

Nothing in Paul's language comes close to such a strained "interpretation." Several points demonstrate that such cannot be the case: (1) Paul uses the relationship between males and females as the natural relation, not one's alleged sexual orientation; (2) it is arguably the case that Paul is pointing the reader back to the creation account which states that one man and one woman shall become one flesh, which is a universal foundation for his argument; (3) the other passages in which Paul discusses homosexuality are blanket condemnations of such behavior; (4) such blanket condemnation is consistent with the Old Testament which also makes no exceptions to such behavior; and (5) Schreiner argues

This interpretation should be rejected since there is no evidence that Paul understood the "nature" of human beings in the individualized and psychological sense that is familiar to us in the twentieth century. Instead, in accord with Stoic and Hellenistic Jewish tradition, Paul rejects homosexuality as contrary to the created order—homosexual activity is a violation of what God intended when he created men and women.³⁹

The idea that Boswell has put forth is completely lacking. It is homosexuality as such, not homosexuality in some circumstances, that is condemned.

Some advocates of homosexuality argue that Paul only has in mind pederasty. For example, in reference to Paul's reference to "men committing shameless acts with men," Robin Scroggs writes that Paul does not necessarily "have anything in mind other than pederasty, any more than Philo, who can use the 'male and male' terminology when he is explicitly referring

to pederasty."⁴⁰ In harmony with the argument presented here, James D. G. Dunn notes that while Scroggs makes this assertion, viz., that "Paul has in mind here pederasty in particular," such is false since "Paul's indictment seems to include all kinds of homosexual practice, female as well as male, and was not directed against one kind of homosexual practice in distinction from another."⁴¹ Paul could have mentioned such practices, but instead says that such relations between females and males is what is the "error." Age (or social status) had nothing to do with it—gender and human nature did. Paul gives no qualification to when and how homosexual behavior is permissible; rather, it is against nature as such.

In summary of this passage, the prohibition of Paul's condemnation of homosexuality is best seen as rooted in the creation account and is applicable to all regardless of age, consent, culture, etc. Paul's words to describe such acts include "degrading passions," "unnatural," "shameless," and an "error." According to Paul, such behavior is simply unnatural and against the way God created males and females. The following is a clear and accurate summary of this passage: "Paul's attitude toward homosexual behavior could hardly be more adversely expressed. For he condemns it totally—as did also all Jews and all Jewish Christians of his day."⁴²

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:8-11

First Corinthians 6:9-10 is another important

40 Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1984), 115.

41 James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, vol. 38A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1988), 65.

42 Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 217.

39 Schreiner, 95-96.

passage on the issue of homosexuality. The text reads:

9 Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, 10 thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.

The context of this passage concerns the use of Christians bringing lawsuits against each other. Paul seems to think that their actions are like wrongdoers who will not “inherit the kingdom of God.” Paul expands who will not inherit the kingdom of God to include many others, notably what the NRSV calls “male prostitutes” and “sodomites.” The dispute over the meanings of these words has been great. “Male prostitutes” is translated from the Greek word μαλακοί. According to BDAG such a translation by the NRSV “is too narrow a rendering [while other translations such as] ‘sexual pervert’ REB is too broad.”⁴³ The first definition in BDAG for this word is “soft,” while second definition, which contains this passage as an example of this meaning, says the word pertains “to being passive in a same sex relationship.”⁴⁴ *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* states, “The vice catalog of 1 Cor 6:9 mentions the μαλακοί, soft people / weaklings, as reprehensible examples of passive homosexuality.”⁴⁵ *The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* claims the word refers to “the passive male partner in homosexual intercourse—

43 William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. μαλακός.

44 Ibid.

45 Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, LTD, 1978-1980), s.v. μαλακός (emphasis in original).

’homosexual.’”⁴⁶

Both μαλακοί and the word for “sodomites” (ἀρσενοκοίται) are difficult to translate, especially due to the paucity of their usage. According to Gordon D. Fee:

What makes “male prostitute” (in the sense of “effeminate call-boy”) the best guess is that it is immediately followed by a word that almost certainly refers to male homosexuality, especially to the active partner. This word (arsenokoitai), however, is likewise difficult, in that this is its first appearance in preserved literature, and subsequent authors are reluctant to use it, especially when describing homosexual activity⁴⁷

The word μαλακός is used by Matthew (11:8) and Luke (7:25), but ἀρσενοκοίται is used exclusively by Paul—only here and in 1 Tim. 1:10. BDAG says ἀρσενοκοίτης refers to “a male who engages in a sexual activity w. a pers. Of his own sex,” and lists 1 Cor. 6:9 as an example of such a use.⁴⁸ Alan F. Johnson notes, “This latter term [ἀρσενοκοίτης] refers to men and boys who take the more active role in homosexual relations. Behind Paul’s rejection of these practices are Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, which he sees as still valid for the Christian community.”⁴⁹

One of the most popular objectors to this is John Boswell. Regarding μαλακός, he says that

46 Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2nd ed. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), s.v. μαλακός. Of course, one could point to other lexicons or dictionaries that have a somewhat different definition, but these are standard works and at least show there is a strong case for these definitions and this meaning of the text.

47 Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., rev. ed., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 268–269.

48 BDAG, s. v. ἀρσενοκοίτης.

49 Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, vol. 7, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 97.

it has a wide variety of meanings, but never having to do with homosexuality.⁵⁰ He notes that ἀρσενοκοίται “is quite rare, and its application to homosexuality in particular is more understandable.”⁵¹ However, he argues that it is better translated “male prostitute.” The word is a compound (“ἄρσην ‘male’ + κοίτη ‘bed’”).⁵² Fee notes, “There is no question as to the meaning of the *koitai* part of the word; it is vulgar slang for intercourse (which probably accounts for its seldom being found in the literature).”⁵³ Fee notes that what is not clear is whether “male” is the subject or object in this compound word. If “male” is the subject it would mean “males who have intercourse”; whereas if it is the object it would mean “intercourse with males.”⁵⁴ Boswell states that the first word’s “relationship to the second half of the compound” is ambiguous.⁵⁵ This would mean it is not clear if “male” is the subject or the object. However, after examining other ways in which the word ἄρσην is used as a prefix, he states that “no words coined and generally written with the form ἄρσηνο- is the prefix demonstrably objective.”⁵⁶ He concludes that ἀρσενοκοίται “then, means male sexual agents, i.e. active male prostitutes, who were common throughout the Hellenistic world in the time of Paul.”⁵⁷ It is interesting that Boswell moves from the word being “ambiguous” to being fairly sure of what it means. Such is quite a leap of logic. If it is ambiguous, even for him, then he cannot conclude that the word cannot

possibly mean homosexual. Fee avers,

His argument, however, seemed to be a case of “divide and conquer.” What may be true of the words individually is one thing. But here they are not individual; they appear side by side in a vice list that is heavily weighted toward sexual sins. Although one cannot be certain, and even though it is quite impolitic to suggest as much in our contemporary culture, it is very likely that the original NIV had moved in a generally right direction by rendering the two words “male prostitute” [μαλακός] and “homosexual offender,” [ἀρσενοκοίται] with the proviso that “male prostitute” most likely denoted a consenting homosexual youth.⁵⁸

In other words, these two words (μαλακός and ἀρσενοκοίται) taken together seem to be evidence for an argument against homosexuality. David E. Garland makes a very interesting argument for this conclusion by saying that it is “likely, however, that it was coined in Hellenistic Judaism, or perhaps by Paul, from the Levitical prohibition against males bedding males.”⁵⁹ Garland cites the LXX version of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 to demonstrate how this could have been done given the similarity in wording:

Lev. 18:22: “You shall not sleep with a male as with a woman, for it is an abomination” (καὶ μετὰ ἄρσενος οὐ κοιμηθήσῃ **κοίτην** γυναικός· βδέλυγμα γάρ ἐστιν, *kai meta arsenos ou koimēthēsē koitēn gynaikos; bdelygma gar estin*).

Lev. 20:13: “Whoever sleeps with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they are liable to be put to death” (καὶ ὃς ἂν κοιμηθῇ μετὰ ἄρσενος **κοίτην** γυναικός, βδέλυγμα ἐποίησαν ἀμφότεροι· θανατούσθωσαν,

50 Boswell, 106-107.

51 Ibid., 107.

52 BDAG, s v. ἀρσενοκοίτης. According to Fee it is a compound of “male” and “intercourse.” Fee, 269.

53 Fee, 269. Boswell agrees with this definition. Cf. Boswell, 342.

54 Fee, 269.

55 Boswell, 342.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Fee, 269.

59 David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, a vol. of the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 212.

ἔνοχοι εἰσὶν, *kai hos an koimēthē meta arsenos koitēn gynaikos, bdelygma epoiēsan amphotoeroi; thanatousthōsan, enochoi eisin*).⁶⁰

Noting the similarity of the usage of the words in these passages, it is easy to see how such a coining of a new term for this instance was fitting. David F. Wright calls this similarity between these two passages and 1 Cor. 6:9 “surely inescapable.”⁶¹ He further notes that this argument is strengthened if such a word group was indeed coined by either Hellenistic Judaism or Christianity, which he argues “seems likely.”⁶² It is arguably the case, then, that Paul is denouncing homosexual activity in 1 Cor. 6:9-10. Such is likely the case since Paul’s guiding authority would have been the OT and it clearly denounced homosexuality as such, not merely in certain circumstances.

1 Timothy 1:8-11

Paul’s third passage that discusses homosexuality is 1 Tim. 1:8-11. The text reads:

8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. 9 This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, 10 fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching 11 that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

The base word for “sodomites” is ἀρσενοκοῖταις, the same word (in a different case) as in 1 Cor. 6:9. The discussion on the meaning of this

60 Ibid., 212–213 (emphasis in original).

61 David F. Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of ἀρσενοκοῖται (1 Cor 6:9, 1 Tim 1:10),” *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Jun 1984): 129.

62 Ibid.

word from the last section applies here. Boswell generally treats these two passages as one argument given the same word usage; although, he does argue that the presence of “πόρνοι” in 1 Timothy suggests very strongly that prostitution [1 Cor. 6:9] is what is at issue.⁶³ In short, the arguments regarding this word in 1 Cor. 6:9 pertain to this passage as well.

Summary of New Testament Findings

It has been argued here that the New Testament does not allow for any homosexual behavior. The texts above thus prohibit any form of homosexuality, even in a monogamous and consenting relationship. In the next section of the article, consideration turns to appeals made by pro-homosexual interpreters concerning an ethic of love and grace in the teachings of Paul and Jesus.

Paul on Love and Grace

The pro-homosexual argument that Paul’s teaching on love and grace allows for homosexual relationships has two basic elements. One, Paul teaches in 1 Cor. 13:4-8 and 13 what godly love is, identifying it as something that is not necessarily romantic but that is certainly a matter of the will in placing the other person first in the relationship. Thus, if a homosexual couple manifests the marks of true godly love based on 1 Corinthians 13, how could God condemn them? Would God tell someone what love should look like and then condemn them for showing it to another person? Certainly not. As Aelred states in his appeal to Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians, “Even the staunchest critic of same-sex relationships would be unlikely to say gay and lesbian couples don’t love each other ... it’s hard to deny they are attempting to love their significant other. So here is the point

63 Boswell, 341.

of tension...How can we label any relationship as sinful, if it approaches God's difficult and exhaustive standard for healthy relationships?"⁶⁴

Two, Paul teaches in Gal. 5:16-23 that the fruit of the Spirit is the opposite of the desires of the flesh. Thus, the argument goes, if he who is homosexual bears in his homosexual relationship the fruit of the Spirit, how could the relationship be considered sinful. To quote Aelred again, "If gay or lesbian couples, both corporately and individually, are exhibiting love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, how can we call homosexuality intrinsically sinful?"⁶⁵

Does Paul's teaching on love and the fruit of the Spirit provide the basis for concluding that some homosexual relationships are indeed good and godly? No. The presence of love in a relationship, even love that resembles the definition of 1 Corinthians 13, or the presence of attributes similar to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, does not necessarily legitimize the homosexual relationship. The pro-homosexual argument at this point falls into the error of the ends justifying the means by assuming that the presence within homosexual relationships of characteristics associated with godly love or qualities associated with the fruit of the Spirit means that homosexual actions are acceptable to God without regard for the actual sexual activity.

"Scripture places boundaries on human relationships," states Dallas, "offering no compromise even if love is present."⁶⁶ Consider, also, Biery's critique of the homosexual approach in this instance, especially as it relates to an appeal to love: "One of the most popular errors in the realm of Christian ethics has been

the effort to make love an omnipotent spiritual quality which has the power to sanctify anything that is done in its name."⁶⁷ Love or what appears to be the fruit of the Spirit is not enough to justify a homosexual relationship, as the ends do not justify the means.

Jesus on Love and Grace

Commenting on Jesus and the Holiness Code specific to homosexuality in Leviticus 18 and 20, Rogers states, "When we see Jesus as the fulfillment of the law (Matt. 5:17), we understand that our challenge is not meticulously to maintain culturally conditioned laws, but rather, with Jesus, to love God and love our neighbor (Matt. 22:36-40). When these texts in Leviticus are taken out of their historical and cultural context and applied to faithful, God-worshiping Christians who are homosexual, it does violence to them."⁶⁸ Rogers dismisses the Levitical passages as "culturally conditioned" since they are in conflict with both his interpretation of what it means for Jesus to have fulfilled the law and with his interpretation of Jesus's command to love God and neighbor. Affirming the Levitical denial of homosexuality would, in Rogers' way of thinking, reverse Jesus's intentions and lead to an unloving and harmful action toward homosexuals, something Jesus would never do. Further, since Jesus is most concerned with showing love, so the pro-homosexual interpreter concludes, Jesus would encourage homosexual relationships between loving, committed people. Again, Rogers emphasizes this higher concern in Jesus which leads to viewing love, as he defines it, as the ultimate goal and good in all considerations: "Whether our interpretation of Scripture results

64 Aelred, *To Melt a Golden Calf*, 86, Kindle.

65 Ibid., 89, Kindle.

66 Dallas, *The Gay Gospel?*, Kindle location 2546.

67 Roger Biery, *Understanding Homosexuality: The Pride and the Prejudice* (Austin, TX: Edward William Publishing, 1990), 176.

68 Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality*, 69-70.

in love for God and neighbor is a practical test of whether our interpretation is correct.”⁶⁹ While one might agree that there is need for interpretation to line up with the command to love God and neighbor, Rogers’ assumption is that doing so, in the case of monogamous homosexuals, allows only an interpretation of the Bible that would permit homosexual relationships. Anything else is unloving and must involve faulty interpretation of the biblical text.

What should one conclude regarding this pro-homosexual argument that appeals to Jesus’ ethic of love and grace as ultimately endorsing rather than condemning homosexual behavior? That the pro-homosexual argument is incorrect. Given that Jesus did not specifically address homosexuality, but did appeal to the Genesis account of Adam and Eve as the normative view of marriage in Matt. 19:4-6, and that Jesus did state his intention was fulfillment of even the smallest aspect of the law in Matt. 5:17-20, calling his followers to a righteousness that “exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees” as prerequisite to entering the kingdom, the burden of proof is on the pro-homosexual interpreters to demonstrate Jesus would teach anything contrary to the Old Testament understanding of homosexuality. As Gagnon states, “Jesus’ ‘silence’ regarding same-sex intercourse is comparable to his ‘silence’ about incest and bestiality. That is, Christ’s silence on homosexuality is attributable to complete agreement with the sole position found in the Old Testament and early Judaism.”⁷⁰ That Jesus taught love for God and neighbor as the summary of the law is not in question. How this teaching somehow abrogates the sexual

teaching of the Old Testament is the question the pro-homosexual interpreters do not answer. Assertion does not an argument make.

Findings Based on Paul and Jesus

The pro-homosexual attempt to find in the teachings of Paul and Jesus an appeal to love and grace that supersedes any condemnation of homosexuality fails insofar as it makes an appeal to something that does not exist. There is no conflict between the explicit condemnations of homosexuality in Paul’s teaching and an ethic of love and grace. There is no conflict between Jesus’ fulfillment of the law, the New Testament’s blanket condemnation of homosexuality, and an ethic of love and grace. Further, the presence of love and qualities similar to the fruits of the Spirit in individual homosexuals and in homosexual relationships does not justify or legitimate homosexuality, as the ends do not necessarily justify the means.

CONCLUSION

The research above has considered the pro-homosexual interpretations of Old and New Testament passages related to homosexuality, as well as the ethic of love and grace found in Paul and Jesus, critiquing the pro-homosexual conclusion that the Bible only condemns homosexual acts associated with pagan temple prostitution or other cultic elements. Rather than supporting the pro-homosexual conclusions, the Bible has been shown to reject all forms of homosexual behavior as inconsistent with, and a sinful rejection of, God’s intention for human sexuality.

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⁷⁰ Via and Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible*, Kindle location 997.

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