

Homosexuality & The Biblical Text

By: Dr. J. Alan Branch

On October 6, 1998, Matthew Shepherd, a homosexual University of Wyoming student, was picked up in a Laramie, Wyoming bar by Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson.¹ McKinney and Henderson drove Shepherd to a rural road, beat him nearly to death, then lashed him to a fence in sub-freezing temperatures. Found by a passing cyclist the next day, Shepherd was barely alive and died a few days later on October 12. Outside his funeral, protesters associated with a “preacher” named Fred Phelps from Topeka, Kansas held signs with cruel messages concerning homosexuals. Unfortunately, many people see Christian opposition to homosexuality through the lens of Fred Phelps: another form of hate. On October 12, 1998, Katie Couric of the *Today Show* television program implied as much when she interviewed Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer following Shepherd’s death. Couric asked:

And finally governor, some gay rights activists have said that some conservative political organizations, like the Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council, and Focus on the Family are contributing to this anti-homosexual atmosphere by

¹ There is evidence that McKinney and Henderson were not solely motivated by hatred of homosexuals, but were attempting to steal drugs from Shepherd. Previously, McKinney had actually been caught by police engaging in sexual acts with another man. The standard story-line that Shepherd was killed by two rednecks full of hatred for homosexuals distorts the dynamics of the actual murder, though hatred was certainly a component. See Julie Bindel, “The Truth Behind America’s Most Famous Gay-Hate Murder,” *The Guardian*, October 26, 2014, accessed May 28, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/26/the-truth-behind-americas-most-famous-gay-hate-murder-matthew-shepard>. The drug-deal storyline is rejected by others, though Shepard had small amounts of marijuana, alcohol, and possibly antidepressants in his system, no methamphetamine, cocaine or opioids were found. Julie Heggie, Albany County coroner at the time of Shepard’s death said in 2018, “I honestly believe it was a hate crime.” It is true that McKinney used a number of slurs in reference to homosexuals in his confession. At the same time, Russell Henderson maintains homophobia was not the root of the crime, but their goal was to rob Shepard of money and possibly drugs. See Sady Swanson, “Wyoming Coroner: Matthew Shepard Had No Meth In System When He Was Killed,” *The Coloradan* October 30, 2018, <https://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/2018/10/30/matthew-shepard-autopsy-no-hard-drugs-hand-shaped-bruises-found-wyoming-coroner/1820019002/>. See also Mead Gruver, “20 Years After Killing Matthew Shepard, What Russell Henderson Has to Say,” *Associated Press* October 12, 2018, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2018/10/12/matthew-shepard-killer-russell-henderson-interview-20-years/>.

having an add campaign saying, 'If you are a homosexual, you can change your orientation.'²

Thus, Couric links the barbarous murder of a young man with the evangelical stance on homosexuality.

A concerted and organized effort has been undertaken by homosexual activists to gain acceptance of their lifestyle on a broad public level while marginalizing anyone who disagrees with their new orthodoxy of sexual liberation. The debate over homosexuality is the defining ethical issue of the moment. This debate encompasses a wide number of theological issues relating to competing worldviews, anthropology, and hermeneutics. Furthermore, acceptance of the gay agenda entails far-ranging effects for public policy and religious liberty. A detailed and expansive evangelical response is not an overreaction, but is proportionate to the deluge of pro-homosexual propaganda. As will be seen shortly, if the word "crusade" should be applied to either side in this debate, it more appropriately should be used in reference to the radical gay agenda.

The church faces three significant temptations in this debate: to remain silent, to rage in unholy anger, or to compromise. None of these is acceptable for people seriously committed to the truth of Scripture. Instead of these three wrong approaches, Christians should stand firm on biblical, sexual morality while sharing Christ with as many people as possible. When we talk about homosexuality, we must remember Paul's admonition in Ephesians 4:15 to "speak the truth in love." My intention is to avoid mean-spirited rhetoric. Therefore, I will summarize several passages related to the issue of homosexuality that are informative for Christian convictions while also addressing claims by pro-homosexual groups that the Bible has

² Interview of Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer by Katie Couric, the *Today* show, October 12, 1998; cited in *Family News from Dr. Dobson*, November, 1998, 2, note 3.

been misunderstood on the subject. I suggest the following passages inform a Christian ethical stance concerning the issue of homosexual behavior:³

Genesis 1:26-27	The Gift of Gender
Genesis 2:24-25	Heterosexual Monogamous Marriage
Genesis 19	Societal Advocacy of Homosexual Behavior
Leviticus 18:22	Homosexual Behavior Forbidden
Leviticus 20:13	Homosexual Behavior Forbidden
Deuteronomy 22:5	Cross-Dressing Forbidden
Deuteronomy 23:17-18	Male Homosexual Prostitution Condemned
Judges 19 & 20	Homosexual Behavior and Unrestrained Sexual Appetites
Ezekiel 16:46-59	Sodom and Oppression of the Poor
Isaiah 3:9	Sodom is a Paradigm for Sinful Behavior
Jeremiah 23:14	Sodom is a Paradigm for Sinful Behavior
Romans 1:18-32	Radical Autonomy, Moral Chaos, Homosexuality
I Corinthians 6:9-11	Specific Injunctions Against Homosexuality Along with Promises of Forgiveness
I Timothy 1:8-11	Homosexuality and Lawbreaking
Jude 7	Sexual Sin of Sodom and Gomorrah

I. Creation and God's Purposes for Sex

The proper place to begin an evaluation of homosexuality is not the several prohibitions found in Scripture, but in the creation passages. In Genesis 1 & 2 we discover God's purposes and intentions for sex which prepare us for the prohibitions of various sexual practices, including homosexuality, which come later.

A. Gender as a Gift from God

Genesis 1:27: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

³ Some suggest Ham's sin in Genesis 9:21 – 22 was a homosexual assault of his drunken father. For example, see Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues & Options*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 264 – 265; Robert A.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Text and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 63 – 71. I do not think Ham's sin was homosexual in nature.

Genesis 1:27 teaches us God designed the gender binary, and an informed Christian response to homosexuality begins by affirming the gift of gender as part of the goodness of God's creation. Our sexuality is a good gift from God. While non-Christian approaches to sexuality tend towards androgyny, Christianity celebrates gender uniqueness and differentiation and the appropriate roles for each gender.

B. Gender, Marriage, and Procreation

Genesis 1:28: Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 1:28 teaches that procreation is an expected part of marriage. Apart from the use of modern artificial reproductive technologies (ARTS), it is impossible for homosexual relationships to fulfill the creation mandate to procreate because they are inherently sterile. Lesbian couples must use a sperm donor for one of the women to become pregnant. Homosexual male couples must go further and use a surrogate to have a child fathered by one of the men. For any homosexual couple that uses ARTS, the child will never be *theirs* in a genetic sense.

Homosexuals argue against the point here by saying infertile heterosexual couples are also unable to procreate. But if all things were functioning normally, a heterosexual couple could procreate. Normally, a heterosexual couple is not sterile; In contrast, all homosexual couples are inherently sterile.

C. Heterosexual and monogamous marriage as the proper expression of sexuality.

Genesis 2:24-25: For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Sex is designed by God to be shared in a heterosexual, monogamous marriage covenant between one husband and one wife. Any deviation from this standard is sin. In his teaching about divorce, Jesus Christ reaffirmed Genesis 2:24-25 as the correct starting point for understanding marriage (Matthew 19:4-6). Marriage is intended to be both heterosexual and monogamous.⁴

When taken together, these three principles – our gender is a gift from God, heterosexual marriage is the intended paradigm for producing children, and heterosexual and monogamous marriage is the proper place for sex to be enjoyed – demonstrate that the *prima facie* case against homosexuality in Scripture is found in God’s creative plan for human sexuality.⁵ In the Bible, the normative picture of heterosexual and monogamous marriage provides the positive backdrop against which the Bible’s few emphatic negations of homosexuality should be read.⁶ As we will see later, Paul picks up

⁴ Collins agrees, see C. John Collins, *Genesis 1 – 4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2006), 144 -145.

⁵ Jerry Johnson, “Homosexuality,” in *The Holman Bible Dictionary*, Brand, Draper, England, eds. (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2003), 777.

⁶ Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 390. At several points in my notes on homosexuality, I will quote Hays. I disagree with Hays’ view of the inspiration Scripture, especially his handling of particular passages in Matthew and John. For example, Hays doesn’t believe Jesus said most of the things recorded in John 8, and commenting on John 8:39b – 47, “The scene makes no sense as a realistic account of any event in the life of Jesus; it can be read only as the Johannine community’s frustrated and angry response to Jewish interlocutors who have refused to “continue” in accepting the community’s extraordinary claims about Jesus.” *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 427. It is hard for me to understand why someone with Hays’ low view of Scripture would consider the Bible to be authoritative on any ethical issue, especially one as controversial as homosexuality. The ease with which he discounts passages he doesn’t like as the invention of the early church makes his opposition to homosexuality seem arbitrary. Nonetheless, in his chapter on homosexuality he makes some

this creation argument in the critique of human sinfulness in Romans 1:18 – 32.

II. Sodom & Gomorrah

Richard Hays of Duke University argues that the Sodom and Gomorrah incident is “actually irrelevant to the topic” of homosexuality.⁷ While Richard Hays goes on to affirm the traditional Christian teaching about homosexuality based on other texts, I disagree strongly with Hays at this point and I contend that Genesis 18:17-19:29 gives insight into what happens when homosexual behavior is endorsed on a society-wide level.

Robert Gagnon doesn’t go as far as Hays, but does suggest the Sodom and Gomorrah story has limitations. Nonetheless, Gagnon says the story of Sodom it is not irrelevant to modern discussions about the ethics of homosexuality. He says:

Traditionally, Genesis 19:4 – 11 has been regarded as the classic Bible story about homosexuality. However, to the extent that the story does not deal directly with consensual homosexual relationships, it is not an “ideal” text to guide contemporary Christian sexual ethics. Nevertheless, many go too far when they argue that the story has little or nothing to do with homosexual practice; that, instead, the story is only about inhospitality or rape.⁸

Gagnon goes on to make a strident defense of the traditional Christian understanding of homosexual behavior as sin. As noted above, I believe the creation narratives are actually the most important passages when addressing the morality of homosexual

helpful observations which I will incorporate into my analysis at times. But I am approaching Scripture from the view of plenary, verbal inspiration.

⁷ Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 381.

⁸ Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, 71.

behavior. But I would go further than Gagnon and emphasize the degree to which Sodom and Gomorrah demonstrate the danger of societal advocacy of homosexual behavior.

A. Societal Advocacy of Homosexual Behavior and Complete Moral Meltdown⁹

Genesis 19:4 – 8

Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter. And they [men of the city] called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.”

But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, and said, “Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof.”

The breakdown of social-moral restraints against homosexuality and the flagrant promotion of homosexual conduct was the background against which God chose to explain the need for creating a special covenant relationship with Abraham and his offspring (18:16-20). Based on what happened, it appears that a flood of popularly supported homosexuality threatened soon to overwhelm what remained of right moral understanding in the region of Canaan.

Genesis 19:4 summarizes unsafe dangerous moral environment of Sodom and says, “Before they lay down, the men of the city, the

⁹ I am indebted to Dr. Daniel Heimbach of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary for these insights.

men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter.” This cursory statement demonstrates nature of the entire city. As I note elsewhere, Ezekiel 16 makes clear that Sodom’s sins were not limited to sexual exploitation, but included abuse of the poor. Calvin gets the right picture of how multiple sins combined to create a toxic moral environment, saying, “But when the sense of shame is overcome, and the reins are given to lust, a vile and outrageous barbarism necessarily succeeds, and many kinds of sin are blended together, so that a most confused chaos is the result.”¹⁰

When it came, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for homosexuality was certain and complete, yet God held back until:

1. No social restraint against homosexuality remained.¹¹ (19:4-5)
2. There was no protection for those who resisted pressure to participate in homosexual activity (19:9)
3. There were only four persons left in the entire society who still were distressed by homosexual behavior

The Feinbergs rightly comment on Genesis 19 and say, “What Scripture portrays . . . is a culture so desirous of pleasure that it rejected any sexual restraints.”¹² The crowd at the door is representative of Sodom as a whole. The entire male community – “young and old” – gather at Lot’s door and demand sex from his visitors. This is how the city is behaving. This is what Sodom does.¹³

¹⁰ John Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis*, John King, trans. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 497.

¹¹ Augustine described Sodom as “that place where homosexual practices among males had become as prevalent as any other actions that enjoy customary sanction of the laws.” Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 5, Eva Matthews and William M. Green, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 145, XVI.xxx.

¹² John Feinberg and Paul Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 315.

¹³ Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?* (No City: The Goodbook Company, 2015), 27.

B. Interpretation of the Key Phrase in Genesis 19

The Hebrew verb *yada* is central to understanding Genesis 19. Genesis 19:5 (ESV) says, “And they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know (*yada*) them.”” The specific verb in question is a Qal imperfect of יָדַע (*yada*) which is used in most contexts as “to know” in the sense of “to be acquainted with someone or something.” However, *yada* is used occasionally as a euphemism for sexual intercourse. For example, Genesis 4:1 says, “Now the man had relations (יָדַע / *yada*) with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, ‘I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD.’” Various English versions of Scripture reflect the way the term *yada* is translated in Genesis 19:5:

KJV	“that we may know them”
CEV	“so we can have sex with them”
CSB	“so we can have sex with them”
ESV	“that we may know them”
NASB	“that we may have relations with them”
NET Bible	“so we can have sex with them”
NIV	“so that we can have sex with them”
NLT	“so we can have sex with them”
MSG	“so we can have our sport with them”

The KJV and ESV provide a simple and literal translation of *yada* as “know.” The other English versions try to make clearer in English what may be lost in the simple translation of *yada* as “know,” since modern readers may not be aware of the use of *yada* as a euphemism for sexual intercourse. The same verb, *yada*, is used in Genesis 19:8 to describe the virginity of Lot’s daughters. Lot definitely understood a sexual connotation to the Sodomites’ demand because his immediate response was to offer his two daughters who “who have not known any man” (Genesis 19:8, ESV). In this way, it is clear that the demand

of the crowd in verse 5 to “know” the men in Lot’s house is a demand for homosexual intercourse.¹⁴

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is intricately related to the homosexual demands made by the crowd at Lot’s door. Because the context of Genesis 19 clearly entails a sexual demand by the men of the city, one is left to wonder that R.E.O. White can suggest the view that sees homosexuality as central to Sodom’s sin “depends upon uncertain translation.”¹⁵ White is wrong; the translation that the men at Lot’s door were demanding homosexual sex is not uncertain but is quite clear in context.

C. Sodom a Biblical Paradigm for Sinful Behavior

Sodom later became the Biblical paradigm for sinful behavior in opposition to God. The public celebration of their homosexuality hastened judgment. The dramatic and complete destruction God brought on the cities was a vivid reminder that God indeed judges sin. In later Biblical history, when someone wanted to emphasize the vile nature of a particular group’s sinfulness, the evil people in question were compared to Sodom. Here are several examples:

Deuteronomy 29:23: All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and in His wrath. (NASB)

¹⁴ It is of some interest to note Calvin’s interpretation of the verb *yada* in Genesis 19:5. Commenting on the verse, he says, “Some expound the word *know* in a carnal sense . . . But I think the word has here a different meaning; as if the men had said, “We wish to know whom thou bringest, as guests, into our city.” John Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis*, 492 – 493. Yet, Calvin also states the men of Sodom perverted the order of nature, clearly indicating that he understood their ultimate goal to be homosexual intercourse. Calvin seems to say the request by the men of Sodom is a sort of ruse intended to gain entry. He then indicates their true desire becomes clearer as the story progresses. Some of Calvin’s interpretation seems inordinately concerned with offering an apologetic for Lot’s cowardly suggestion to offer his daughters to the raging mob.

¹⁵ R.E.O. White, “Homosexuality,” in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 575. White (d. 2003) was the principal of Baptist Theological College in Scotland.

Deuteronomy 32:31 – 33: Indeed their rock is not like our Rock, Even our enemies themselves judge this. For their vine is from the vine of Sodom, and from the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of poison, their clusters, bitter. Their wine is the venom of serpents, and the deadly poison of cobras. (NASB)

Isaiah 1:9: Unless the LORD of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom, we would be like Gomorrah. (NASB)

Isaiah 3:9: The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves.

Jeremiah 23:14 Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; And they strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah.

Jeremiah 50:40: “As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah with its neighbors,” the LORD, “No man will live there [Babylon], nor will any son of man reside in it.”

Lamentations 4:6: For the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands were turned toward her. (NASB)

Ezekiel 16:49-50: Now this was the sin of your Sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were

haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen. (NIV)

Amos 4:11: “I overthrew you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze; Yet you have not returned to Me,” declares the LORD.

Matthew 11:23 – 24: [Jesus speaking] And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.

As these passages indicate, when a Biblical prophet wanted to emphasize the extreme nature of a group’s sin, that group was compared to Sodom. Thus, Sodom became a Biblical paradigm for sinful humanity in rebellion against God.

III. Leviticus 18:22

Key Teaching: Homosexual Acts Are Prohibited

The Levitical prohibitions of homosexual acts in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 both occur in The Holiness Code of Leviticus 17 – 27.16 Two phrases dominate Leviticus 17 – 27: “I am the LORD who makes you holy” or “You shall be holy, for I the LORD am holy” or variants thereof are found ten times in Leviticus 17 – 27 (19:1; 20:8, 26; 21:8, 15, 23; 22:2, 9, 16, 32). A second more common phrase occurring over thirty times in Leviticus 17 – 27 is “I am the LORD” or “I am the LORD your God.” Taken together, these phrases emphasize the manner in which Israel was to distinguish itself from surrounding pagan

16 The Documentary Hypothesis asserts the Holiness Code is a sub-set of the “P” (Priestly) source and often identifies Leviticus 17 – 27 as “H”, a source within the source “P.” Dr. Branch rejects the Documentary Hypothesis.

neighbors (“You shall be holy, for I the LORD am holy”). The ethical obligations of Leviticus are rooted in the holiness of God and His authority, sovereignty, and proprietorship.¹⁷

A. Text

The Hebrew text of Leviticus 18:22:

וְאֶת־זָכָר לֹא תִשְׁכַּב מִשְׁכַּב־אִשָּׁה תוֹעֵבָה הוּא׃

Various English Translations of Leviticus 18:22:

ESV: You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

NASB: You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.

NIV: Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.

NKJV: You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.

The Hebrew text of Leviticus 18:22 is clear and says a man should not lie with man in the way that he lies with a woman. A sexual context for the lying with a man is clearly implied. The Hebrew text uses a word which can mean “place of lying” or “couch.” The same word is also used in Genesis 49:4 to criticize the sexual immorality of Reuben and in Proverbs 7:17 describing the alluring invitation of an adulteress. The word is used in the context of a wholesome relationship in Song of Songs 3:1. But here in Leviticus 18:22 is a prohibition of male, homosexual intercourse.

¹⁷ R. Laird Harris, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, *Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 592. Harris strongly insists that liberal arguments for seeing the Holiness Code as an independent source are vastly overstated.

Leviticus 18:22 describes homosexual intercourse as an *abomination*. The Hebrew word translated abomination is *to'ebah* and it is used five times in Leviticus 18 (vv. 22, 26, 27, 29, 30) and in Leviticus 20:13. It occurs in Deuteronomy 17 times, in Proverbs 21 times, and in Ezekiel 43 times. According to Walter Kaiser, the root from which *to'ebah* comes means “to hate” or “to abhor.” Kaiser adds that the “practice itself, not the person, is despised or hated.”¹⁸ Wenham says, “An abomination is literally something detestable and hated by God.”¹⁹

B. Explanation

The first half of Leviticus (1 – 16) records regulations primarily related to public worship. A distinct shift in emphasis begins in chapter seventeen and the ensuing regulations (Leviticus 17 – 26) address individual morality and religious expression. After addressing individual religious practices in chapter seventeen, chapter eighteen begins to set out the fundamentals of Israelite morality and specifically defines which sexual unions are compatible with worship of the one true God.²⁰ In the midst of the sexual-ethical imperatives of chapter eighteen, the Israelites are reminded seven times (18:3 (2x); 18:24; 18:26; 18:27; 18:29, 18:30) not to imitate the practices of the surrounding nations which worship false gods. This call to separation is emphasized even further by the phrases “I am the LORD your God” or “I am the LORD” six times (18:2; 18:4; 18:5; 18:6; 18:21; 18:30). Wenham captures the relationship between worship of the one true God and sexual morality inherent in Leviticus eighteen when he says, “Israel’s sexual morality is here portrayed as something that marks it off from its neighbors as the Lord’s special people.”²¹ As a component of a sexual morality that

¹⁸ Walter Kaiser, *Leviticus*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1127.

¹⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 259. Abomination is translated βδελυγμα in the LXX.

²⁰ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 250.

²¹ Ibid.

is clearly distinct from the world, God explicitly and categorically prohibits homosexual behavior.

IV. Leviticus 20:13

Homosexual Acts Are Prohibited

Leviticus 20:13 (NASB) “If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.”

Leviticus 20:13 (ESV): 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.

While Leviticus 20:13 basically repeats the prohibition of Leviticus 18:22, there is an important difference in wording. Leviticus 20:13 says, “If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act.” Leviticus 20:13 specifically mentions both parties in male, homosexual intercourse. The act of “lying with a male as with a woman” is categorically prohibited: motives for the act (e.g., “we are in love”) are not treated as a morally significant factor.²² Thus, the prohibition here can’t be written off as merely prohibiting homosexual rape or other forms of forced relationships. Leviticus prohibits consensual homosexual activity in general.

Leviticus 20:13 repeats the command of Leviticus 18:22 and adds the death penalty for this offense under the Old Covenant.^{23 24}

²² See Richard Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 381.

²³ The penalty in Leviticus is different from other ANE documents. One ancient Akkadian monumental inscription offered the following law concerning a man who sodomizes another man: “If a man sodomizes his comrade and they prove the charges against him and find him guilty, they shall sodomize him and they shall turn him into a eunuch” William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, eds., *Context of Scripture*, vol. 2, “The Middle Assyrian Laws: Tablet A,” Martha Roth, trans. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 355.

²⁴ Harris points out, “Notice that the legal format is apodictic in chapter 18 and casuistic here [Leviticus

It can be argued that the concluding phrase of Leviticus 20:13 – “Their bloodguiltiness is upon them” – declares there is no excuse for homosexual behavior based on the idea that one is born with a proclivity to commit homosexual acts. Heimbach says:

This is a very strong statement, and because the speaker is God himself, he is quite literally saying, “No one can ever excuse homosexual behavior by claiming that I made them in some way that excuses same-sex relationships.” No matter what scientists or social engineers ever think or say, God has already denied that claim.²⁵

Leviticus 20:13 insists people participating in consensual homosexual behavior are morally accountable for such acts. The civil punishment was specific for the theocracy and is no longer applicable under the New Covenant in which the local church usually exists in countries ruled by secular governments.

One of the keys to understanding Leviticus chapters 18 & 20 is the Hittite suzerainty treaties. Both chapters 18 and 20 are written in the form of a Hittite treaty, and as such, they emphasize the seriousness of holiness and the danger of the prohibited actions.²⁶ Thus chapter 20 reinforces the treaty structure of chapter 18, both by adding the death penalty as punishment for homosexual actions and by the use of the double nouns אִישׁ (man) and זָכָר (male).²⁷ The intent is to stress that under no circumstances was homosexuality to be practiced.

20:13].” Harris, *Leviticus*, 612.

²⁵ Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 187.

²⁶ Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (San Antonio, TX: Cedar Leaf Press, 2009), 98-99.

²⁷The addition of the death penalty for both the man and the male precludes this from being a passage rejecting pederasty. Otherwise, the victimized child would be executed for the crimes of the predator.

V. Deuteronomy 22:5

Cross-Dressing is forbidden.

Deuteronomy 22:5: A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God. (NASB)

A. Exposition

Deuteronomy 22:5 affirms that men and women should participate in gender-appropriate behavior and abstain from behavior which intends to deceive others concerning one's gender. Specifically, transvestite dressing is forbidden. Keil and Delitzsch comment: "As the property of a neighbor was to be sacred in the estimation of an Israelite, so also the divine distinction of the sexes, which was kept sacred in civil life by the clothing peculiar to each sex, was to be not less but even more sacredly observed."²⁸ Gleason Archer adds, "Deuteronomy 22:5 completely excludes transvestism or any kind of impersonation of the opposite sex."²⁹ Mark Rooker also suggests that the ban on transvestite behavior was related to the ban on homosexuality.³⁰

Earl S. Kalland rejects the idea that transvestitism is in mind in Deuteronomy 22:5 and says, "The prohibition against a woman wearing the habiliments of a man and of a man wearing the clothing of a woman can scarcely refer to transvestitism."³¹ Kalland goes on to say evidence of transvestitism in ancient Canaanite religion is inconclusive. Kalland then suggests the prohibition in Deuteronomy

²⁸C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch: Numbers and Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991 reprint), 409.

²⁹Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 151.

³⁰Mark Rooker, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 3, *Leviticus* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 247.

³¹Earl S. Kalland, *1 & 2 Samuel*, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 135.

22:5 is addressing illicit sexual activity, most likely homosexuality. It seems Kalland's conclusions are a case of special pleading: He wants the text to mean something other than what it plainly appears to mean – cross-dressing is forbidden. It is not difficult to imagine ancient people who blurred the God-ordained distinctions between the sexes, and this type of behavior is forbidden to God's people.

B. Application

God desires for men and women to carry themselves in such a way so that each particular gender is celebrated and easily identifiable. Heimbach says, "Since differences in the way men and women dress vary with culture, time, and circumstance, the enduring wrong prohibited [in Deuteronomy 22:5] is dressing to signify moral rebellion," and "precludes dressing to convey disrespect for the moral value of aligning gender with anatomy."³² This does take into account certain cultural differences for gender-appropriate apparel. For example, Scottish men traditionally wore kilts which resemble skirts worn by modern women. However, in the Scottish context, a kilt is a distinguishable male garment and not worn with the intent to deceive another person. The central idea to keep in mind from Deuteronomy 22:5 is God prohibits "**an intent to deceive**" other people regarding one's gender. Men and women should not present themselves in such a way as to deceive others concerning their natal sex.

VI. Deuteronomy 23:17-18

Male Homosexual Prostitution Condemned

Deuteronomy 23:17-18: There shall be no *ritual* harlot of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel. *You* shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the

³² Daniel R. Heimbach, *Fundamental Christian Ethics* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2022), 395.

house of the LORD your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God. (NKJV)

All forms of sexual commerce were forbidden for Israel (See for example Leviticus 19:29). Ancient Near Eastern Religions commonly incorporated temple prostitutes into their worship. Such activity is inimical to Yahweh worship for many reasons, but at the forefront of cultic prostitution is the mistaken idea that Yahweh seasonally grows weak and needs human stimulus to reinvigorate Him.³³ Yahweh specifically commands Israel not to imitate this behavior. I've used the NKJV here because I believe this translation captures the intent of the author. In verse 17, the word translated "harlot" is *qedeshah* and the word translated "perverted one" is *qadesh*. In verse 18, latter disparagingly referred to as a "dog" (*keleb*), thus the NIV's translation of "male prostitute." The strong inference is that the "dog" is committing sodomy.³⁴

1. Male Prostitution In the Historical Books

Sadly, Israelites later adopted the very practice of religious prostitution, apparently as part of devotion to Ashtoreth (1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7). Rehoboam either introduced or at least tolerated the practice in an effort to consolidate his own position in the Southern Kingdom after the civil war with Jeroboam. 1 Kings 14:22-24 gives commentary on this era in Judah and says:

Judah did what was evil in the LORD'S eyes. They provoked Him to jealous anger more than all that their ancestors had

³³ This observation from Ian Cairns, *International Theological Commentary: Deuteronomy – Word and Presence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 207. I strongly disagree with Cairn's view on the origin of Deuteronomy.

³⁴ Revelation 22:15 says, "Outside are the dogs and the sorcery and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolater, and everyone who loves and practices lying." The Greek term "dogs" (οἱ κύνες) is a derisive term with a spectrum of meanings. But it is at least possible that the combination of "dogs" with "immoral people" in Revelation 22:15 also points to male prostitutes in a manner similar to Deuteronomy 23:18. See Grant R. Osborne, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 791.

done with the sins they committed. They also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree; there were even male shrine prostitutes in the land. They imitated all the abominations of the nations the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites. (HCS)

1 Kings 14:22 – 24 makes the connection between idolatry, sexual chaos, and homosexual religious prostitution. Israel incurred God's wrath because of religious endorsement of sexual immorality in general, including homosexual religious prostitution.

2. Male Prostitution in the prophets

An allusion to homosexual prostitution may also be found in Isaiah 57, though we must avoid dogmatism here. Isaiah strongly condemns the people of his day for religious compromise and says:

You have placed your bed
on a high and lofty mountain;
you also went up there to offer sacrifice.
You have set up your memorial
behind the door and doorpost.
For away from Me, you stripped,
went up, and made your bed wide,
and you have made a bargain for yourself with them.
You have loved their bed;
you have gazed on their genitals. (Isaiah 57:7 – 8 HCS)

The word translated "genitals" by the HCS in Isaiah 57:8 is יָד (yad) in Hebrew, a word which means "hand." German Old Testament scholar J.C. Döderlein (1745 – 1792) first put forward the idea that the word "hand" in this context is a euphemism for the penis. Oswalt says "hand" was used in this way in Egyptian, and appears to have

been used in this way in Ugaritic as well.³⁵ If this is correct, then Isaiah, among other things, is criticizing his listeners for visiting male prostitutes and pagan shrines.

VII. Judges 19 & 20

Judges 19 – 20 documents a revival of homosexual behavior during the period of the judges. A Levite from Ephraim had traveled south to Bethlehem to retrieve his concubine who had run away from him. On the return journey, they stopped in Gibeah in Benjamin to spend the night in the home of a man who offered them shelter. During the night, a group of men from Gibeah pounded on the door and demanded to have sex with the Levite. In an act of gross cowardice, he pushed his defenseless concubine out to the crowd of ravenous men who subsequently raped her until she died. The terrible exploitation of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19 is one of the most "grotesque and horrifying" events in the Old Testament.³⁶ The Levite's concubine was treated as chattel and dehumanized.

Judges 19:22 (HCS): While they were enjoying themselves, all of a sudden, perverted men of the city surrounded the house and beat on the door. They said to the old man who was the owner of the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him!"

Judges 19:22 (ESV): As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the

³⁵ John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah 40 – 66* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 480. Döderlein was also one of the first to argue that Isaiah 40 – 66 was written by someone other than Isaiah during the exile, perhaps by someone living in Babylon around 550 BC. See Gary Smith, *New American Commentary: Isaiah 1 – 39* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2007), 58.

³⁶ Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues & Options*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 291.

master of the house, “Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him.”

Concerning homosexuality, Judges 19:22 has a grammatical construction similar to Genesis 19:5 and also uses of the word יָדָא (yada) in a sexual connotation. The NJKV captures the sexual intent of their request and translates the men of Gibeah’s request as follows: “Bring out the old man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally.” In the translations above, the ESV translates *yada* literally as “know,” using the word as double entendre for sex. The HCS translates what is implied, sexual intercourse, in an explicit manner. In flagrant, willful violation of God’s moral law, Gibeah revived the ways of Sodom. In the context of Judges 17-21, their behavior is closely related to radical moral autonomy as these chapters are bracketed by the phrase, “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25). In this way, unrestrained sexual appetites and homosexual lust are identified as characteristics of radical moral autonomy.

VIII. Ezekiel 16 and Sodom

Ezekiel 16 disparages Jerusalem – symbolic for all Judah / Israel – using some of the most lurid and sexually graphic language found in the Bible.³⁷ Jerusalem is described in a parable as an adulterous wife, and Ezekiel 16:15 goes further and calls Jerusalem a prostitute, setting the stage for a series of sexually charged descriptions. The overt sexual language in the chapter should be kept in mind when interpreting Ezekiel 16:49 – 50 where all of this sexually charged language culminates when Jerusalem is compared to Sodom:

³⁷ Brian Neil Peterson, “Identifying the Sin of Sodom in Ezekiel 16:49 – 50,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61.2 (June 2018): 309/

Ezekiel 16:49 – 50: Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.

Ezekiel makes clear that Sodom's sin was not limited to sexual perversion, but also included class exploitation of the poor and needy. This text does not preclude sexual immorality as the phrase "detestable things" can include sexual immorality, though it does not exclusively refer to sexual sin. Furthermore, in context, Ezekiel is reminding the Jews in Babylonian exile that God had brought judgment because of sin. He emphasizes the specific nature of Israel's sin in 16:43 when he says, "Did you not add lewdness to all your other detestable practices?" The word *lewdness* is *zimma* (זִמָּה). According to Wold, *zimma* refers to premeditated sexual crimes (Lev. 18:17, 20:14, Judges 20:6, Ezekiel 16:27, 58, 22:9, etc), is applied to deliberate sin, and sometimes stands parallel to words for lust and harlotry in Ezekiel. Ezekiel's purpose is not to diminish the sins of Sodom, but to illustrate the seriousness of Israel's rebellion. In context, he is referring to Jerusalem's lewd sexual behavior, thus making a reference to Sodom most appropriate.³⁸

The prophet Ezekiel parallels the moral chaos of Pre-exilic Israel with Sodom. Evidently, the moral confusion of Sodom and Gomorrah was not limited to sexual immorality alone, but extended to the exploitation of poor people by those who were more economically privileged. Calvin commented on the pervasive moral chaos in Sodom that Ezekiel describes and said, "But when the sense of shame is overcome, and the reins are given to lust, a vile and outrageous

³⁸ Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 88.

barbarism necessarily succeeds, and many kinds of sin are blended together, so that a most confused chaos is the result.”³⁹

IX. Romans 1:18-32

Idolatry, radical autonomy, and moral rebellion.

Romans 1:24-27 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function [use] for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function [use] of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. (NASB)

A. Background of Roman Culture

While the ancient Greeks and Romans had some awareness of exclusive, same-sex attraction and behavior, that was not their most common form of homosexual behavior. R. T. France said, “Most references to homosexual behavior in the ancient world are to what we know call bisexuality, the choice of some who are capable of heterosexual intercourse to find sexual fulfillment also (or instead) with members of their own sex.”⁴⁰

³⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1, John King, translator (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 497.

⁴⁰ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 725.

1. Homosexuality in Ancient Greece

Before addressing Paul's statements about homosexuality, it is important to remember that homosexuality was practiced in ancient Greece. Hundreds of ancient Greek ceramic vessels have been found with scenes depicting adult males making sexual overtures to youthful boys. Homosexuality was also a theme in Greek mythology, such as Zeus's abduction of Ganymede, a handsome young shepherd. Though there are different versions of the myth, it was not uncommon for the stories to claim Ganymede was taken away to be Zeus's lover. Ganymede's Latin name was *Catamitus* from which the English word *catamite* is derived.

Homosexuality in ancient Greece was not limited just to pederastic forms;⁴¹ adult men also had relationships together. In other words, there were non-abusive same-sex relationships extending into the New Testament era: It is incorrect to state that Paul only knew about homosexuality in the context of pederasty. For example, the Greek poet Agathon (448 – 400 BC?) was reputedly the lifelong lover of another male named Pausanias.⁴² Also, The Sacred Band of Thebes was a group of around 300 warriors composed, apparently, of homosexual lovers.⁴³

Homoerotic encounters between women are described by the Greek female poet Sappho of Lesbos (c. 620 – 570 BC). She claimed these relationships were a component of the education of young girls

41 The existence of pederasty in ancient Greece has been a fact known for a long time. Even David Hume commented on the practice among the Greeks and he surmised, "The origin I assign to paederasty from the frequency of the gymnastic exercises amongst the Greeks." David Hume, "Letter to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, February 18, 1751," *Letters of David Hume*, vol. 1, J.Y.T. Greig, ed. (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1932), 152. Internet Archive.

42 Aristophanes wrote a comedy titled *Thesmophoriazousae* around 411 BC in which he portrayed Agathon dressed as a woman. However, it is at least possible that this description is Aristophanes' own biting, comedic invention. "Women Celebrating the Thesmophoria": *Thesmophoria* was an ancient Greek celebration of the goddess Demeter.

43 See Plutarch, *Life of Pelopidas*, "The Sacred Band of Thebes," John Dryden, trans., <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/pwh/sacredband.asp>.

from aristocratic families in a circle headed by the poet herself. The island of *Lesbos* serves as the origin for our term *lesbian*. Of interest to New Testament Christians, *Brill's New Pauly* comments on female homosexuality in Greece and says, "From the perspective of male authors, homoerotic ambitions of women are mostly judged as being contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν) and used as a sign of debauchery."⁴⁴ This is the same term -- παρὰ φύσιν -- used by Paul in Romans 1:26.

2. Homosexuality in Ancient Rome

While male homosexuality was not particularly unusual in ancient Rome, the dominant and passive partners in male homosexuality each received a different moral evaluation. Among Romans, the passive male partner in a homosexual encounter was looked upon with disdain, but the dominant male in such an encounter was not viewed negatively. Romans believed that men should always be dominant, both socially and sexually; as long as a male was seen as prevailing in a sexual encounter, his masculinity was not questioned.⁴⁵ But as one standard reference source explains, this view of dominance equally virility contributed to the Roman view of male homosexuality:

Like the Greeks, the Romans, too, differentiate analogously in regard to the status of the partners between active and passive sexual behavior. The latter was indeed fitting for women, but for a man it was considered to be an indication of unmanliness, the negative evaluation of which can be seen from the characterization of the men as *mollis* (soft) as well as from the

⁴⁴ Elke Hartmann, "Homosexuality," *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopedia of the Ancient World*, vol. 6, Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 470.

⁴⁵ The British Museum, "Hadrian: Life and Legacy," accessed November 7, 2018, https://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/themes/leaders_and_rulers/hadrian/life_and_legacy.aspx.

pejorative terms borrowed from Greek – *cinaedus* and *pathicus*.⁴⁶

Roman assumptions about male homosexuality characterized the passive partner as weak and feminine and men who took the

submissive role in homosexual sex were despised and risked losing their citizenship.⁴⁷

Ancient Romans did not have a word which corresponds synonymously with our modern word homosexual, though Roman literature described numerous homosexual acts. A Roman man was free to choose sexual partners of either gender. But the significant point for Roman males was to stay dominant in a sexual encounter. As long as he remained the dominant partner in any sexual encounter and was not the one being penetrated, a Roman man's masculinity was not in question. Examples of Roman homosexuality can actually be seen in some Caesars. During Paul's lifetime, Nero had been famous for his unrestrained sexual appetites for men and women. Several decades following Paul, the Emperor Hadrian (ruled 117 – 138 A.D.) was infamous for his homosexual relationship with a young, Greek male named Antinous.⁴⁸

Male homosexuality in the Roman Empire was closely associated with the expansive presence of slavery in the First Century. Young slave boys were often abused for the sexual pleasure of their male masters. One of the more famous archeological finds

46 Elke Hartmann, "Homosexuality," 470.

47 Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 346; Nigel Rodgers, *Roman Empire* (New York: Metro Books, 2008), 495.

48 Justin Martyr makes a somewhat veiled reference to this and says, "And it is not out of place to mention here Antinous, who was alive but lately, and whom all were prompt, through fear, to worship as a god, though they knew both who he was and what was his origin." Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995 reprint), 172.

regarding this practice is known as the “Warren Cup,” a silver cup of Roman origin dated from the first century which is decorated with depictions of sexual acts between a master and his male slave. On one side, a small boy peeks through a door, observing the homosexual act in progress. Kyle Harper comments on the little boy’s presence on the Warren Cup and says the most compelling interpretation of the cup

suggests the young boy “is catching a glimpse of his future life course.”⁴⁹

3. The Overall Context of Romans 1

In Romans 1:18-32 Paul details humanity’s rejection of God (1:18-23) and the ensuing consequences of this rejection (1:24-32).⁵⁰ The severity of God’s judgment on fallen humanity is emphasized by three-fold repetition of the phrase “God gave them over” (1:24; 1:26; 1:28). Romans 1 emphasizes that our desires themselves are terribly affected by the fall. Homosexual activist Chris Glaser is an example of how this point is missed, ignored or rejected. In a prayer, Glaser says:

Most intimate Friend,
The church says no to homosexuality in any form while my
body seems to say yes to it in every form,
And my soul cautions there must be a middle way.
Why do I let either the church or my sexual urges distract me
from an integrity of sex and spirit?⁵¹

⁴⁹ Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 26.

⁵⁰ Cranfield says, “That in this sub-section Paul has in mind primarily the Gentiles is no doubt true. But it may be doubted whether we shall do justice to his intention, if we assume—as many interpreters seem inclined to do—that these verses refer exclusively to them.” C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 1 – 8*, rev. ed., *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001), 105.

⁵¹ Chris Glaser, *Coming Out to God: Prayers for Lesbians and Gay Men, Their Families and Friends* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1991), 38.

Glaser's comments reveal a common flaw among many people about sexual desires: If I have strong and continual desire to participate in a particular sexual act, how can it be wrong? But the point of Romans 1:18ff is that these very desires are broken and idolatrous.

B. Idolatry

1. Suppression of Truth

Romans 1:18 – 19 (NASB): For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who **suppress the truth** in unrighteousness, because what is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

Central to man's fallen nature is an innate tendency to suppress the truth about God and our own sin nature.

2. God's Revelation

Romans 1:20 (NASB): For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Paul insists that natural revelation provides essential information about God. Merely the existence of creation in its immensity and complexity points toward the existence of God. In particular, the power of God is manifest in creation along with central aspects of God's nature. This prepares us for Paul's appeal to homosexuality being a perversion of God's design for males and

females, something Paul suggests is as obvious as the existence of God Himself. A large body of Christian thought has interpreted Paul here to mean that when human thinking is functioning properly, humans naturally believe in God in some way.⁵² Christians argue that a basic, intuitive perception of God's existence is generated in all men through their encounter with the providential ordering of the world.⁵³

3. Idolatry

Romans 1:21 – 23 (NASB): For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

While belief in God should be natural in men, the Fall has negatively affected human cognitive abilities, and the ensuing result is idolatry. In Romans 1:21 – 23 Paul describes the absurdity of idolatry: Men reject the creator and worship things made by the creator such as images of man and animals. Before we move to Romans 1:24 – 27 and Paul's specific comments on homosexuality, it is vital to remember that he is emphasizing the sinful and idolatrous nature of humanity. He then moves to the prime ethical example of idolatry – homosexual behavior.⁵⁴

C. Homosexual Behavior Condemned

⁵² In the *Institutes*, Calvin said, "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity (*divinitatis sensum*).” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. I, John T. McNeill, ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), I.iii.1, 43. The concept is usually called *sensus divinitatis*.

⁵³ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 279.

⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that Paul also mentions idolatry in the vice list of 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 11 where he specifically condemns male homosexual intercourse.

Romans 1:24 – 27 (NASB): Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

1. Female homosexual acts condemned

Romans 1:26: For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural.

Romans 1:26 is the only explicit reference to lesbian behavior in Scripture. Same-sex intercourse between females is clearly and unambiguously condemned.⁵⁵

2. Male homosexual acts condemned

Romans 1:27: And in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

⁵⁵ The Greek verb “exchanged” is an aorist active indicative of μεταλλάσσω. A verb with the same root is used in the apocryphal book *The Wisdom of Solomon* (200 – 100 BC?) to describe “disorder in marriages” (Wisdom of Solomon 14:26).

Without equivocation, Romans 1:27 states moral condemnation of male homosexual acts.

D. Homosexuality Distorts God's Creation Order

1. The Creation Standard

Central to Paul's argument in Romans 1:18 – 32 is that homosexuality is a distortion of God's creation order as described in Genesis 1. A God-ordained mutuality between men and women in the sexual relationship is accentuated when the terms for "female" and "male" in Romans 1 are examined. Instead of the more common terms γύνη (woman) and ανήρ (man), Paul uses the terms θηλυς (female) and αρσην (male). In doing so, Paul draws upon the LXX of Genesis 1:27, thus emphasizing the sexual distinctiveness of males and females. Thomas Schreiner adds that the allusion to Genesis 1:27 suggests "that sexual relations with same sex violate the distinctions that God intended in the creation of man and woman."⁵⁶ In fact the creation account stands clearly in the background of all of Paul's critique in Romans 1:18 – 32. Jerry Johnson rightly says, "Paul indicates that both male homosexuality and female lesbianism result from a denial of God."⁵⁷

Paul's appeal to the creation narrative of Genesis in the LXX is also seen in Romans 1:23, where Paul says:

Romans 1:23 (NASB): [They] exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image [εἰκόνας, *eikonos*] in the form [ὁμοιώματι, *homoimati*] of corruptible man [ἀνθρώπου, *anthropou*] and of birds [πετεινῶν, *peteinon*] and four-footed animals and crawling creatures [ἐρπετῶν, *herpeton*].

⁵⁶ Thomas Schreiner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 6, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 95.

⁵⁷ Jerry Johnson, "Homosexuality," in *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2003), 777.

The five highlighted words are also found the LXX of Genesis 1:26:

Genesis 1:26: Then God said, “Let Us make man [ἄνθρωπον, *anthropon*] in Our image [εἰκόνα, *eikona*], according to Our likeness [ὁμοίωσιν, *homoiosin*]; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds [πετεινῶν, *peteionon*] of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping [ἑρπετῶν, *herpeton*] thing that creeps on the earth.”

First Century readers familiar with the Greek translation of Genesis would have seen the connection between Genesis 1:26 and the terms for male and female Paul uses in Romans 1:23.

We must also remember that the rejection of God’s creation standard is closely related to idolatry. In their depravity, humans have simultaneously rejected the Creator’s design and purpose for life and have embraced idols of sex, power, false religion, hedonism, and many other vices. But each of these individual sins are only symptoms of the real disease – rebellion and sin in the human heart. A primary example of this rebellion is homosexual behavior. Richard Hays links rejection of the Creator with the idolatrous aspects of homosexual acts and says:

In Romans 1 Paul portrays homosexual behavior as a “sacrament” (so to speak) of the anti-religion of human beings who refuse to honor God as Creator. When human beings engage in homosexual activity, they enact an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality: the rejection of the Creator’s design. Thus, Paul’s choice of homosexuality as an illustration of human depravity is not merely random: it serves his rhetorical purposes by providing a vivid image of humanity’s primal rejection of the sovereignty of God the

When humanity worships the creature instead of the creator, sexual chaos ensues.

2. Natural Use / Contrary to Nature

Romans 1:26 – 27 (NASB): For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

The emphasis on homosexuality as a distortion of God’s design for creation is further amplified by the contrast between the “natural use” and the “unnatural use” of the human body in sex. The focal phrase occurs at the end of Romans 1:26:

Greek: τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν

Transliteration: *tēn physikēn chrēsin eis tēn para physin*

NASB: the natural function for that which is unnatural⁵⁹

Hays: the natural use for that which is contrary to nature

In ancient texts outside the Bible, there are abundant instances where

⁵⁸ Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 386.

⁵⁹ The phrase “the natural function” in Greek is τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν. The word translated “natural” is the adjective φυσικὴν / *physikēn*, an accusative feminine singular from φυσικός. The word translated “use” is χρῆσιν / *chrēsin*, an accusative singular noun form of χρῆσις / *chrēsis*.

natural (*kata physin*) is contrasted with *unnatural* (*para physin*). Richard Hays says, “In particular, the opposition between “natural” and “unnatural” is very frequently used (in the absence of convenient Greek words for “heterosexual” and “homosexual”) as a way of distinguishing between heterosexual and homosexual behavior.”⁶⁰ An example of using *kata physin* in contrast to homosexual behavior is found Josephus’ *Against Apion*: “The Law recognizes no sexual connections except for the natural (*kata physin*) union of man and wife, and that only for the procreation of children. But it abhors the intercourse of males with males, and punishes any who undertake such a thing with death.”⁶¹ With this background in mind and in context of Romans 1, homosexual acts are an unnatural use of God’s design for the human body.

Different English translations capture the nuance of this contrast between the “natural use” as opposed to the “unnatural.”

KJV: For even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature.

ESV: For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature.

HCS: For even their females exchanged natural sexual intercourse for what is unnatural.

NASB: For their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural.

NIV: Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

⁶⁰ Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 387.

⁶¹ I’m following Richard Hays’ translation of this quote from Josephus. Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 387. See Josephus, *Against Apion*, The Loeb Classical Library, Josephus, vol. 1, J. Thackeray, trans. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1926), 2.199, 372 – 373.

NLT: Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other.

The idea of “use” or “using” here in Romans 1:26 infers a degree of mutuality, meaning that males and females have a natural sexual use for each other, a use distorted by homosexual acts.⁶²

So how do we summarize all of Paul’s references to creation and sexual ethics here in Romans 1:18 - 32? Don’t miss the way the word “exchange” is used repetitively in this passage. Romans 1:22 says fallen humans have “*exchanged* the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.” Romans 1:25 says they “*exchanged* the truth of God for a lie.” Romans 1:26 says the suppression of God’s truth was demonstrated in their behavior when “their women *exchanged* the natural function for that which is unnatural.” Paul’s reference to homosexuality in Romans 1:18 – 32 does not mean he thinks it is the worst sin imaginable, but instead homosexuality is a clear example of the point he is making: Distorted and perverse thinking (the *exchange* of the worship of God for the worship of things God has made) leads to distorted and perverse behavior (the *exchange* of natural relations for unnatural ones. Vaughn Roberts comments on Romans 1 and the deadly *exchange* it describes and says, “We show our rebellion against God in a particularly obvious way when we refuse to go along with the way in which he has made the world, such as in the division of the sexes.”⁶³

E. Homosexual Acts are Form of Impurity.

One of the first consequences of rejecting God as described in Romans 1:18 -23 is sexual immorality, with specific reference to homosexuality. The Greek word translated “impurity” in verse 24 is

⁶² Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, 237.

⁶³ Vaughn Roberts, *Transgender: A Talking Points Book* (Epsom: The Good Book Company, 2016), 53.

ακαθαρσία / *akatharsia*; it carries a clear moral sense, with special emphasis on sexual immorality. This is clearly seen in Galatians 5:19-21, where impurity/ ακαθαρσία is placed between “sexual immorality” and “debauchery” among the works of the flesh. Paul’s position is unambiguous: In Romans 1:24-27, homosexual acts are a form of impurity.⁶⁴

F. Homosexuality is a Form of Idolatry

Paul began this section by stressing the idolatrous nature of human sinfulness. In context, homosexuality serves as an example of how this idolatry is lived out in ethics. Idolatry inverts the creation order and worships things made by God instead of God Himself. Similarly, homosexuality is a rejection of the clearly complementary sexual design of men and women and chooses to misuse God’s creation. Gagnon rightly states that same-sex eroticism functions as a particularly poignant example of human enslavement to passions and of God’s just judgment precisely because it parallels in the horizontal-ethical dimension a denial of God’s reality like that of idolatry in the vertical-divine dimension.⁶⁵

Karl Barth (with whom I strongly disagree on many issues!) catches Paul’s idea of idolatry in Romans 1 and says that when humanity rejects the Creator and worships the creation, “Everything then becomes Libido: life becomes totally erotic.”⁶⁶ In the final conclusion, Romans 1:18-32 teaches that sexual immorality, of which homosexual behavior is a subset, is both a form of idolatry and a result of idolatry. Furthermore, Paul’s critique is closely related to the view of gender presented in Genesis because advocacy of homosexuality by a society is a sign that that culture as a whole has been worshipping idols and that its God-given male-and-female

⁶⁴ James D.G. Dunn agrees that Paul is unambiguous here. See James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a, *Romans 1 – 8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 74. Dunn is convinced Paul was influenced by Stoic philosophy in his moral critique, a claim I find unpersuasive.

⁶⁵ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 254.

⁶⁶ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed., Edwyn C. Hoskyns, trans. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 52. I reject Barth’s overall Neo-orthodoxy schema.

order is being fractured as a result.⁶⁷

Why does Paul choose to place strong emphasis on homosexuality in this passage? Thomas Schreiner answers this question and says Paul addresses homosexuality here because it functions as the best illustration of that which is unnatural in the sexual sphere. He says, “Idolatry is ‘unnatural’ in the sense that it is contrary to God’s intention for human beings. To worship corruptible animals and human beings instead of the incorruptible God is to turn the created order upside down. In the sexual sphere the mirror image of this ‘unnatural’ choice of idolatry is homosexuality.”⁶⁸

G. Homosexuality Is a Sign of God’s Judgement: “God Gave Them Over”

The phrase “God gave them over” is repeated three times in Romans 1:24 – 28:

Romans 1:24 (NASB): Therefore **God gave them over** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

Romans 1:26 (NASB): For this reason **God gave them over** to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural.

Romans 1:28 (NASB): And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, **God gave them over** to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.

The central Greek word in in the phrase “God gave them over” is

⁶⁷ I’ve borrowed this language from N.T. Wright, *The New Interpreters Bible*, vol. X, *The Letter to the Romans* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 435.

⁶⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 6, *Romans*, 94.

παρέδωκεν (*paredōken*),⁶⁹ a word with the basic meaning of “deliver up, give up, or hand over.” In the NT the word commonly means “deliver up to judgment and death.”⁷⁰ In each of the three uses in Romans 1:24 – 28, God is the subject and the verb is in the active

voice on each occasion. S. Lewis Johnson stresses the ethical implications of the grammar in the phrase when he says:

It is not that God permitted rebellious men to fall into uncleanness and bodily dishonor; He actively, although justly in view of their sin, consigned them to the consequences of their acts. It is His divine arrangement that men by their apostasy should fall into moral impurity, sin being punished by further sin, and He [God] himself maintains the moral connection between apostasy and impurity by carrying out the judgement Himself.⁷¹

The idea is that God does not merely hand people over to the natural consequences of their sin, but He is actively and judicially involved – God actively hands men over in His perfect justice to their own passions and lusts. Charles Hodge forcefully and succinctly said, “Those who abandon God, he abandons.”⁷² Hodge also says, “God does not impel or entice evil. He ceases to restrain. He says of the sinner, ‘Let him alone.’”⁷³ In this light, it becomes evident that homosexual behavior not only brings God’s judgment, but homosexual behavior is itself a judgment from God. The force of the three-fold repetition of the phrase “God handed them over” is that homosexual behavior itself is a judgment of God.

⁶⁹ A third person singular aorist active indicative from παραδίδωμι.

⁷⁰ H. Beck, “παραδίδωμι,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 367 – 368.

⁷¹ S. Lewis Johnson, “God Gave Them Up: A Study in Divine Retribution,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129.514 (April – June 1972): 127.

⁷² Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle To the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1993), 45.

⁷³ Ibid.

The forceful language of “God handed them over” is very important for a correct understanding of Romans 1:18 – 32. Some have argued that Paul is only driving at an inevitable law of “cause and effect” which exists in a moral universe. While it is certainly true that Scripture teaches negative consequences follow from sin, the text in Romans 1:18 – 32 is saying much more. Leon Morris lays the right emphasis on God’s activity in judgment in Romans 1:18 – 32 and the language of “God handed them over, saying:

But in these very verses we find the personal activity of God brought out, for when St. Paul might well say that the sins of the heathen produced inevitable results, or might make use of some similar impersonal expression, he seems to go out of his way to lay stress upon the divine activity. . . . It is true that sin has its consequences; but for St. Paul this does not take place apart from God, for His activity is to be discerned in those consequences.⁷⁴

Indeed, we should remember that the entire section begins with, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness.” (Romans 1:18) Taken as a whole, Romans 1:18 – 32 and the thrice repeated emphasis that “God handed them over” is sobering and demonstrates the grave consequences for active disobedience to God, consequences for both this life and the life to come. Paul’s critique of homosexual behavior in Romans 1:24 – 27 is not merely associated, as some liberals claim, with abusive patriarchy, outdated gender roles, nor is it merely limited to pederasty. The Greco-Roman culture of Paul’s day didn’t even have the proper moral language to say what Paul is saying: Homosexual acts are sin.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 184.

⁷⁵ My thoughts influenced here by Branson Parler, “Worlds Apart: James Brownson and the Sexual Diversity of the Greco-Roman World,” *Trinity Journal* 38 (2017): 198 – 199.

Romans 1:18 – 32 is not merely a passage about homosexuality, but warns us about the broken nature of human desires in general. The passage insists that humans engage in all sorts of behavior that seems fulfilling, pleasurable, and consistent with our deepest, persistent desires. And yet our deepest, persistent, pleasurable desires are fractured by sin. Among many griefs attached to sin is that the act we desire most can be completely antithetical to God’s revealed will in Scripture. Sin and sinful desires can *feel natural*. C. S. Lewis addressed the dangers of uncritically following our desires when he said, “The most dangerous thing you can do is to take any one impulse of your own nature and set it up as the thing you ought to follow at all costs. There is not one of them which will not make us into devils if we set it up as an absolute guide.”⁷⁶

X. I Corinthians 6:9 - 11

1 Corinthians 6:9 – 11 teaches it is possible to cease participation in homosexual behavior.

I Corinthians 6:9-11: Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters nor adulterers nor *male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders* nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. (NIV)

A. Background

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 is part of the larger textual unit of 1 Corinthians 6:1-11 in which Paul chastises the Corinthians for

⁷⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2000, reprint 1952), 11.

bringing disputes between Christian brothers before pagan courts. David Garland summarizes the way 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 fits the larger context when he says, “In the concluding segment (6:9-11), Paul reminds them that the unjust, who include the judges in these courts, will have no part in the kingdom of God.”⁷⁷ In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul lists ten vices that are characteristic of the wicked. The list here repeats some vices Paul has already mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:10-11, and it bears resemblance to the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-21. The non-Christian nature of these vices is further emphasized by the way Paul uses the phrase “kingdom of God” to bracket the list. If “kingdom of God” basically carries the idea of the reign and rule of God, then these ten vices are illustrative of what a life outside of God’s reign looks like.⁷⁸ It is significant that nine of the Greek words found in this vice list are also found in the LXX and one other is clearly derived from the LXX.⁷⁹ Thiselton forcefully argues that here in I Corinthians 6:9-11 (as well as in Romans 1:26-31) Paul is making common ground with Deuteronomy 27-30, Hosea, and many other parts of the Old Testament which teach the axiom “that idolatry corrupts holy identity, which in turn leads to moral collapse.”⁸⁰

B. Two Key Words: *μαλακοι* and *αρσενοκοιται*

Two words occur in the vice list which have specific relevance

⁷⁷ David Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 194.

⁷⁸ With this in mind, I have some reservations about J.D. Greear’s statement: “Homosexuality does not send people to hell. How do I know that? Because God doesn’t take people to heaven for heterosexuality. He sends people to hell for self-rule and self-righteousness and for thinking they can save themselves.” J.D. Greear, “Preaching Like Jesus to the LGBTQ Community,” *Light: Kingdom, Culture, Mission* 1.1 (Summer 2015): 13. While I concur that no one goes to heaven simply for being heterosexual, the problem with Greear’s statement is that he misses the force of 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 11: The vice list recorded here is exactly what a life of self-rule looks like! Homosexual behavior is a clear indication a person is living outside of the reign and rule of Christ and is being ruled by “self.”

⁷⁹ As we will see, I contend the fifth vice, *arsenokoitai*, is derived from two Greek words which appear in the LXX of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The specific word *arsenokoitai* does not appear in the LXX, but it is clearly derived from the LXX.

⁸⁰ Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 446.

to the issue of homosexuality: *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*: a nominative, plural, masculine adjective from *μαλακός*) and *αρσενοκοιται* (*arsenokoitai*), the fourth and fifth words in the list respectively. The meaning of these two words as well as their relationship to each other has sparked a great deal of debate. The way modern English Bibles translate these words gives one some idea of the nature of debate surrounding the meaning of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* and their relevance for modern ethical debates about human sexuality. The following chart shows different translations of these words:

	<u>μαλακοι</u> (<i>malakoi</i>)	<u>αρσενοκοιται</u> (<i>arsenokoitai</i>)
CEV	Pervert	Behaves like a homosexual
ESV	Men who practice homosexuality ⁸¹	
HCS	Anyone practicing homosexuality ⁸²	
KJV	Effeminate	Abusers of themselves with mankind
NASB	Effeminate	Homosexuals
NET	Passive homosexual partners	Practicing homosexuals
NIV old	Male Prostitutes	Homosexual offenders ⁸³
NIV new	Men who have sex with men ⁸⁴	
NJKV	Homosexuals	Sodomites
NLT	Male Prostitutes	Homosexuals
TNIV	Male Prostitutes	Practicing Homosexuals

Different Spanish translations also reflect the struggle to communicate the first century meaning of these words to modern audiences:

μαλακοι (*malakoi*) αρσενοκοιται (*arsenokoitai*)

⁸¹ The English Standard Version translates the two different words in question by this one phrase.

⁸² Earlier versions of the HCS translated the terms as “male prostitutes” and “homosexuals.” The current HCS translation was apparently revised in 2009.

⁸³ Norman Geisler makes some odd comments based on the NIV’s translation of *arsenokoitai* as two words – “homosexual offenders.” Geisler stresses that “homosexual” qualifies “offenders,” not the reverse and says the phrase speaks “to a homosexual kind of offense, not an offensive kind of homosexual.” While this is certainly true for the English sentence, it really has nothing to do with the original meaning of *arsenokoitai*. The correct understanding of the text in question is understood by exploring the Levitical background of *arsenokoitai*, not the NIV’s particular choice in translation. See Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 285 – 286. Taken as a whole, Geisler’s comments on 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 11 are confused.

⁸⁴ The new NIV contains a translator’s note here that says, “The words *men who have sex with men* translate two Greek words that refer to the passive and active participants in homosexual acts.”

NVI Sodomitas
RVR1995 los afeminados

los pervertidos sexuales
los homosexuales

What are we to make of the two terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*? Which translation best captures their meaning? In what follows, I will show that *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* are mentioned by Paul in this vice

list as a specific condemnation of both the passive and active players in male, homosexual intercourse.

1. Μαλακοι / *malakoi*

In 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 11, the Greek word *malakoi* refers to men who play the passive part in male, homosexual intercourse. Μαλακοι (*Malakoi*) is the plural form μαλακός, a word literally meaning “soft.”⁸⁵ Because the basic meaning of μαλακός, is “soft,” the word acquired a secondary use in ancient Greece and was used in reference to people in a somewhat derogatory manner. The BDAG lexicon notes that when μαλακός was used in reference to a person in the ancient world, it was equating the idea of soft with an “effeminate” male or a catamite, especially of men and boys who are sodomized in such a relationship.⁸⁶ This secondary meaning is why some English versions translate μαλακός as “effeminate,” picking up on the sexual use of the word μαλακός in the ancient world. But the meaning of “effeminate” is not so much about mannerisms or habits of speech, but refers to a man who is “effeminate” to the degree that he takes the “female” or “receptive” role in homosexual intercourse.

⁸⁵ Luke 7:25 is a good example of how the word was used with the meaning of “soft” in reference to inanimate objects when Jesus talks about people dressed in “soft [*malakois*] robes.”

⁸⁶ Frederick W. Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. s.v. “μαλακός,” 613. A catamite is a young boy kept by a pederast. A pederast is a man who practices anal intercourse with young boys. The Second Edition of the BDAG said a *malakos* was a man who allowed himself “to be misused homosexually.” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. “μαλακός,” 488.

As BDAG notes, the *malakos* was also sometimes used in reference to homosexual prostitutes, thus some English versions translate the term as “male prostitutes.” The connection of *μαλακός* / *malakos* / *malakoi* to male prostitution can lead to what I consider a too narrow interpretation of the word in context of the vice list in 1 Corinthians 6:9 - 11. Gordon Fee is one Evangelical commentator who suggests *μαλακός* here should be translated “male prostitutes,” advocating what I consider to be an unnecessarily narrow interpretation of *malakoi* in 1 Corinthians 6:9. Emphasizing the term’s connection to young boys, he says, “It [*malakoi*] also became an epithet for men who were ‘soft’ or ‘effeminate’ [KJV], but most likely referring to the younger, ‘passive partner’ in a pederastic relationship – the most common form of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world.”⁸⁷ Fee then says “male prostitutes” is the best translation and most likely has reference to a consenting youth.⁸⁸

I do not think either of the terms “effeminate” or “male prostitutes” are the best translation of *μαλακοι* in 1 Corinthians 6:9. In modern usage, the term “effeminate” is a broad idea and can be used as an adjective to describe men who are thoroughly heterosexual in behavior, but do not have overtly masculine traits. Furthermore, “male prostitutes” can be misunderstood by some modern people as a reference to men who sell sexual favors to women. In context, it is clear that homosexuality is in mind. Furthermore, limiting the word to primarily young boys seems unnecessarily narrow. Thiselton notes that the evidence for restricting the term to contexts of pederasty linked with male prostitution is at best indecisive and at worst unconvincing.⁸⁹ The proper translation of *μαλακοι* / *malakoi* as the passive male in homosexual intercourse becomes clear when one examines its use in context with the next word in the vice list -- *αρσενικοιται*.

⁸⁷ Gordon Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 243.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁸⁹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 449.

2. αρσενοκοιται / *arsenokoitai*

The Greek word *arsenokoitai* refers to the male who takes the inserting role in male, homosexual intercourse. While the word *μαλακοι* / *malakoi* had history of usage prior to the New Testament, I Corinthians 6:9 is the first documented use of the word *αρσενοκοιται* (*arsenokoitai*). The word *αρσενοκοιται* is a compound of two words: “male” + “intercourse.”⁹⁰ The term is derived from the LXX of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13⁹¹ and is a translation of the Hebrew phrase *mishkav zakur* (“lying with a male”).⁹² The LXX renders these two passages as follows:

Leviticus 18:22 (LXX)

και μετα **αρσενος** ου κοιμηθηση **κοιτην** γυναικος βδελυγμα
γαρ εστιν

Leviticus 20:13 (LXX)

και ος αν κοιμηθη μετα **αρσενος** **κοιτην** γυναικος βδελυγμα
εποιησαν αμφοτεροι θανατουσθωσαν ενοχοι εισιν

Notice that in both Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 of the LXX, the compound word *arsenokoitai* does not appear, but the two constituent terms which compose the word – *arsen* and *koitēn* do appear.

⁹⁰ Geisler’s comments on 1 Cor. 6:9 – 11 and homosexuality lack precision. Geisler is apparently commenting on the NIV translation of *arsenokoitai* as “homosexual offenders” and says, “‘Homosexual’ qualifies ‘offenders,’ not the reverse. It speaks against a homosexual kind of offense, not an offensive kind of homosexual.” Geisler’s error is that he does not seem to recognize that the two English words “homosexual offenders” are a translation of one Greek word, *arsenokoitai*. Geisler’s comments seem to assume the NIV has translated two separate Greek words as “homosexual offenders.” See Norm Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 285 – 286.

⁹¹ A weakness of the Feinbergs’ extended discussion on the words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* is they never clearly explain the LXX background for the word *arsenokoitai*. See Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed., 345 – 356.

⁹² Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 382.

Most likely, ἀρσενοκοιται was a word coined by Hellenistic Jews by combining the two Greek words I have highlighted in bold from each of the preceding verses from the LXX. The Greek word for male is ἀρσενος / *arsenos* and the word for “bed” or “lying” is κοιτην / *koitēn*. The case for a Levitical background for Paul’s use of ἀρσενοκοιται is strengthened by the fact Paul has just condemned the Corinthian church for tolerance of incest, a sin strongly condemned as well in Leviticus 18 and 20. Here, ἀρσενοκοιται is an apparent reference to the “active” partner in male homosexual intercourse. Early translations of Scripture confirm ἀρσενοκοιται was seen as a reference to “men having sex with males.” For example the Vulgate translates ἀρσενοκοιται as *masculorum concubitores* (“men lying together with males”).

3. The Passive and Active Partners in Male Homosexual Intercourse

What do the terms μαλακός and ἀρσενοκοιται mean here in 1 Corinthians 6:9 - 11? It is obvious that a certain form sexual behavior is being condemned, but what exactly do the terms mean in context? One must remember that neither μαλακοι nor ἀρσενοκοιται occur in isolation here, but are mentioned together in a vice list weighted towards sexual sin. In this context, μαλακοι most certainly refers to the passive partner in male homosexual intercourse while ἀρσενοκοιται refers to the active or dominant partner in male homosexual intercourse. Thus, the NET Bible’s translation of “passive homosexual partners and practicing homosexuals” seems to come closest to the idea Paul has in mind. David Garland is even more explicit and translates μαλακοι as “those males who are penetrated sexually by males” and ἀρσενοκοιται as “those males who sexually penetrate males.”⁹³

Understanding of μαλακοι and ἀρσενοκοιται as the passive

⁹³ David Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 214.

and active partners in male homosexual intercourse is strengthened when we remember the Roman context which Paul was addressing. The Corinth of the New Testament was a Roman colony which had been re-established by Julius Caesar in 44 BC. As was noted earlier, among many Roman men, as long as the male remained the active partner in any sexual encounter (including homosexual ones), his masculinity was not in question. As long as a Roman man wasn't the one being penetrated in homosexual sex, he was still considered masculine. Romans believed that men should always be dominant, both socially and sexually. With this in mind, Paul's point seems clear: "It doesn't matter what role you play in homosexual sex: Whether you are the one being penetrated or the one penetrating, it is still sin."⁹⁴

Again, the key to understanding *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* is the Roman attitudes towards male homosexual acts: the passive partner was disparaged, but the dominant partner was not considered to have lost his masculinity. This explains Paul's reference to two specific homosexual sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9. *Malakoi* (NASB "effeminate") refers to the passive partner in male homosexual intercourse.⁹⁵ *Arsenokoitai* (NASB "homosexual") here refers to the inserting partner in male homosexual intercourse.⁹⁶ In other words, Paul is saying, "I know the culture says that if a man is the

⁹⁴ For these reasons, I find Fortson and Grams' argument unconvincing regarding the terms *μαλακοι* and *αρσενοκοιται*. In *Unchanging Witness*, they argue as follows: "The evidence . . . suggests a distinction between those men fully immersed in a feminine way of life – including unrestrained, sexually loose behaviors that could be passive, homosexual, or bisexual – and men engaged in homosexual acts, possibly in secret." S. Donald Fortson and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching On Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 294. The authors have an impressive list of extra-biblical quotations regarding *malakoi* in support of their position. But they seem to be trying to force the entire lexical breadth of the word into 1 Corinthians 6:9 as opposed to asking how it is used specifically by Paul in this passage.

⁹⁵ Frederick W. Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "μαλακός," 613.

⁹⁶ Frederick W. Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., s.v. "αρσενοκοιτης." The lexicon gives the basic definition of "a male who engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex," but then adds that when it is paired with *μαλακός*, it means "one who assumes the dominant role in same-sex activity." Furthermore, the word *arsenokoitai* is clearly a term derived from the Greek translation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, two explicit denunciations of homosexual behavior.

dominant partner in same-sex intercourse then he's still alright. But from God's perspective, it doesn't matter which role you play – passive or active, homosexual behavior is sin.”⁹⁷

Paul's condemnation of homosexual behavior here in 1 Corinthians is consistent with the moral condemnation found in Romans 1 where homosexual behavior demonstrates fallen humanity's worship of creation instead of the creator. Thiselton comments on Paul's emphasis on the dangers of radical moral autonomy present in 1 Corinthians 6:9 - 11 and says, “What is clear from the connection between 1 Cor. 6:9 and Romans 1:26-29 and their OT backgrounds is Paul's endorsement of the view that idolatry, i.e., placing human autonomy to construct one's values above covenant commitments to God, leads to a collapse of moral values in a kind of domino effect.”⁹⁸ Paul's rejection of the radical moral autonomy characterized by all the vices in this list is reinforced when he says in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “You are not your own.” The early church certainly understood 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 11 to mean Christians should not participate in homosexual behavior. The second century Christian Bishop Polycarp (69 – 155 A.D.?) addressed homosexuality in his letter to the Philippian church. Using the same words Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 11, he says, “For it is good to be cut off from the sinful desires in the world, because every sinful desire wages war against the spirit, and neither fornicators or men who have sex with men (whether as the passive or the active partner) will inherit the kingdom of God, nor will those who do perverse things.”⁹⁹ In Greek, Polycarp uses the same words in the same order as those used by Paul to describe homosexual behavior in 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 11: οὔτε μαλακοὶ οὔτε ἀρσενικοῖται.

⁹⁷ I recognize the extensive debate regarding these terms. For a defense of my stance, see David Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 211 – 215; Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 303- 336.

⁹⁸ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 452.

⁹⁹ “The Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians,” in Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 282, 5:3.

C. Forgiveness and Transformation

Don't miss the force of the first sentence in 1 Corinthians 6:11: "Such *were* some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." The pronoun *you* points to members of the Corinthian congregation who received this letter from Paul, and prior to their conversion they had participated in the ten vices listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 10. This means some recipients of the letter had previously participated in the types of homosexual behavior characterized by the terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. Yet their identity with such behavior was in their past, as Paul says, "Such *were* some of you." The Greek verb translated *were* is ἦτε, an imperfect indicative of εἶμι ("to be")¹⁰⁰ and indicates that in the past they had a continuous habituation in the ten vices listed, including the two specific ones associated with homosexuality. Some translations get at Paul's idea and translate the first phrase in 1 Corinthians 6:11 as "And some of you used to be like this" (HCS) or "And this is what some of you used to be" (NRSV).¹⁰¹ In the past, some of the Corinthians had been habitually identified by participation in homosexual behavior, but these sins were no longer the defining component of their lives. David Garland notes, "Their former life was to be just that, their former life."¹⁰²

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 stresses that homosexual acts can be forgiven by God's grace. Verse 11a acknowledges their prior participation in sinful behavior – "such were some of you" – and then the second clause in 11b celebrates and extols the forgiving power of Jesus Christ, with great joy saying, "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus

¹⁰⁰ The imperfect tense appears only in the indicative mood.

¹⁰¹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 453.

¹⁰² David Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 215.

Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” The disconnect between the sins to which they were attached prior to conversion and their new identity in Christ is amplified by the fact each verb in 6:11b is preceded by the word “but” in Greek (ἀλλὰ, *alla*), thus the syntax emphasizes both the transforming power of Jesus Christ and their break with the past. The verb *washed* is a second person plural aorist middle indicative of the verb of ἀπολούω / *apolouō*, and it means “to wash something away.”¹⁰³ As a compound word, the force of adding the preposition ἀπο to intensify the word λούω,¹⁰⁴ meaning sins *really are* washed away. Some commentators have tried to suggest this “washing” is a reference to baptism, the aorist tense focuses on the event of coming to faith in Christ.¹⁰⁵ The washing Paul has in mind here is not baptism, but Paul is referring to the washing of which baptism is a picture – it is the washing that occurs when a lost sinner believes on Jesus Christ and the blood of Jesus makes us clean. It is the washing William Cowper talked about in 1772 when he said, “There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins; and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.” When the promised washing of 1 Corinthians 6:11 is seen in context of the vice list in 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 10, we see that Christ intends to save same-sex attracted people from their sin and to include them in His body, the church.¹⁰⁶

1 Corinthians 6:11 focuses the competing worldview issues which are underlying so much of modern debate between our LGBTQ neighbors and Christians. That Paul could talk about people who *were* formally identified by any number of different sins and that such people had been cleansed assumes several different worldview concepts which are actually the issues in debate: 1) There is a God to

103 Frederick W. Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., s.v. “ἀπολούω,” 117.

104 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 453.

105 Ibid.

106 Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says About Sexual Orientation and Change* (Phillipsburg, PA: P & R Publishing, 2015), 105.

whom we are accountable for our actions; 2) Humans are not just the results of random time and chance, a sort of ambulatory set of chemicals who have learned to self-reflect, but humans are morally accountable, volitional creatures composed of body and soul; 3) There is such a thing as sin; 4) Humans need to be cleansed from their sin; 5) The God to whom we are morally accountable has provided a way to be cleansed from this sin via the sacrificial death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as certainly as God forgives people who commit adultery or steal, he forgives homosexual behavior. One mark of being a disciple of Christ is the dramatic change that Christ brings in one's life. This includes cessation from homosexual behavior. At the same time, conversion and forgiveness in Christ do not mean we will never face temptation again. For example, the eighth sin in the vice list of 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 10 is drunkenness. Imagine a man who is a drunkard and who is remarkably saved by Jesus Christ. After salvation, he is no longer a drunkard, but becomes a sober, loving father and husband. Perhaps one year after his conversion, such a man might approach a fellow believer and say, "I haven't touched alcohol since I became a Christian. But last night at a baseball game, I passed a beer from a vendor to another fan, and when I held the beer, I wanted very terribly to buy one myself and guzzle it down." Would we suggest such a person is not saved? Of course not! He is a Christian dealing with temptation and we come along beside him as a prayer partner, a friend who helps him endure the strong desire to return to his former destructive patterns. 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 11 does *not* teach that when we are saved God will remove every temptation; 1 Corinthians 6:9 -11 does say we can have our sins washed away and we can have the power to overcome temptation.

My experience with Evangelicals in general and Southern Baptists in particular is that preachers believe homosexuality can be forgiven in the same way other sins have been forgiven and the vast

majority of church members believe this as well. At the same time, it is often difficult for some Christians to show sympathy for someone experiencing homosexual temptation. This derives from the fact this type of temptation is foreign to the vast majority of people, thus it requires great effort to understand. Hannah More said, “Errors which we ourselves have no temptation to commit, we are too much disposed to think out of the reach of pardon; and, while we justly commend innocence, we give too little credit to repentance.”¹⁰⁷ Though homosexuality is very foreign to many Christians, never underestimate power of repentance and faith in the life of someone who has experienced same-sex attraction at various levels. God can do miraculous things in the human heart.

Becoming a Christian doesn’t mean a drunkard will never again be tempted by alcohol. Becoming a Christian doesn’t mean an adulterer will never again be tempted to commit adultery. Likewise, become a Christian doesn’t mean someone who has experienced same-sex attraction will never be tempted in this way again. What being a Christian does mean is we have a new identity: Our identity is in Christ. In Christ, my old self is crucified (Romans 6:6). In Christ, my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). In Christ, I have died to my old life and my life is now hidden in God (Colossians 3:3). In Christ, I am forgiven (Ephesians 1:17). As Christians, our identity is always *in Christ* and anything else we embrace as our identity is a false idol competing for worship.¹⁰⁸

XI. I Timothy 1:8-11

I Timothy 1:8 – 11 We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and

¹⁰⁷ Hannah More, *Christian Morals*, First American Edition from the fourth London edition (New York: Eastburn, Kirk, and co., 1813), 195. <https://archive.org/details/christianmorals00more/page/n3/mode/2up>.

¹⁰⁸ From my own *Affirming God’s Image; Addressing the Transgender Question With Science and Scripture* (Bellingham, WA; Lexham Press, 2019), 142. Yep, I’m quoting myself!

sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and *perverts* [αρσενοκοιται], for slave traders and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. (NIV)

A. A Sign of Lawbreaking

I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10 are the only occurrences of the word αρσενοκοιται in the New Testament.¹⁰⁹ In 1 Timothy 1:8 - 11, Paul includes homosexual behavior under the category of “lawbreaking, rebellion, ungodly, and sinful,” along with a list of other acts and lifestyle choices, including people who kill their parents, murderers, slave-traders, liars and perjurers. Indeed, this is an unholy cast of people! In this passage, Paul has the moral use of the law in mind. When he refers to the “law” in verse 8, he is referring to the moral absolutes found in the Mosaic legislation.¹¹⁰ Here in 1 Timothy, he joins heterosexual immorality (adultery) and homosexual behavior (αρσενοκοιται) under the same moral condemnation.

B. Humility

After giving this list of morally disreputable people in 1 Timothy 1:8 – 11, Paul then comments on *himself* and says in 1 Timothy 1:15 (NASB), “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,

¹⁰⁹ John Stott agrees that the word αρσενοκοιται refers to homosexuality, but says, “‘Perverts’ (NIV, REB) is not the best translation, nor is ‘sodomites’ (NRSV), for both terms nowadays carry assumptions and overtones which could express the kind of ‘homophobia’ which Christians should avoid.” John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus in The Bible Speaks Today*, Motyer, Stott, Tidball, general editors (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 49.

¹¹⁰ I. Howard Marshall concurs with my understanding of the use of the word “law” here, though one should note Marshall’s different opinion on Pauline authorship of the Pastorals. See I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles in The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 375-376.

among whom I am foremost of all.” Paul includes himself as the worst of sinners, and such should be the response of all Christians. When we speak to our homosexual neighbor, our stance is one of humility as fellow sinners who desperately needed God’s grace as badly as anyone described in the vice list in 1 Timothy 1:8 – 11. Burk and Lambert have the right idea on this passage when they say:

Paul calls homosexuality sin. But when he does, he still thinks of himself as the biggest sinner on the planet. In this sense, it does not really matter who the biggest sinner is in reality. In your own heart, you ought to feel like you are the biggest one, the worst of the lot. . . . We do not speak to same-sex attracted people as if we are without sin. We speak as sinners.¹¹¹

Indeed, the fact that Jesus has redeemed each of us from a life of sin should lead us to great humility when we speak with other sinners about their sin.

XII. Jude 4-7

Jude 4 – 7 (NASB): For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

⁵Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, ⁷just as

¹¹¹ Burk and Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality*, 109. Burk and Lambert and I disagree on the helpfulness of some aspects of modern psychiatry and psychology for Christians with Dr. Branch holding an integrationalist view, but I concur with much of their emphasis on spiritual disciplines.

Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

Jude 4 – 7 clearly teaches Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of sexual immorality. This does not contradict Ezekiel 16:49 - 50 which says Sodom was judged for exploitation of the poor. *Both* are true.

A. Context: False Teachers Advocating Lascivious Behavior

Jude’s major concern is for a local body of believers earnestly to defend the established body of truth connected with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. One reason for this concern is that false teachers, people who rejected substantial and vital portions of the Christian Gospel, had infiltrated the church. Their errant doctrine led to unholy ethics. Thus, in Jude 4 says that these false teachers “turn the grace of our God into licentiousness.”

The Greek word translated *licentiousness* is ἀσέλγεια (*Aselgeia*), and *BDAG* defines the term as a “lack of self-constraint which involves one in conduct that violates all bounds of what is socially acceptable.¹¹² The same word is used in other contexts where sexual immorality is condemned. For example, Romans 13:13 says, “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality (*aselgeia*), not in strife and jealousy.” *Aselgeia* is again closely associated with sinful and unrestrained sexual immorality when it is mentioned as one of the first works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19 (ESV): “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality (*aselgeia*).”

¹¹² Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 141.

That Jude refutes false teachers who are exploiting false doctrine as an opportunity to celebrate sexual immorality explains why he references Sodom and Gomorrah a few verses later: The judgment God brought on the two cities pictures the judgment He will bring on false teachers who advocate similar immorality.

B. Sexual Immorality

Jude 7 (ESV) says, “Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.” Jude 7 specifically says Sodom and Gomorrah were judged for sexual immorality. The Greek word translated *sexual immorality* is *εκπορνεύσασαι*, a nominative plural feminine aorist active participle of *εκπορνεύω* (*ekporneuō*). It is a rare compound word composed of *ek* (“out”) and the verb *porneuō* (“to practice sexual immorality”), and means “to indulge in illicit sexual relations or debauchery.”¹¹³ It is a word which carries a strong moral condemnation and implies someone is acting well outside the moral law of God. The *ek* prefix may suggest the men of Sodom and Gomorrah were acting against the course of nature.¹¹⁴

C. Went After Strange Flesh

There is some debate about Jude’s reference in verse 7 to the men of Sodom and Gomorrah going after “strange flesh” (NASB). What does this phrase mean? Comparing various English translations illustrates some of the debate about what the phrase means:

ESV “pursued unnatural desire”

¹¹³ Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 309.

¹¹⁴ Michael Green, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Second General Epistle of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 166, n. 4.

HCS	“practiced perversions, just as angels did” ¹¹⁵
KJV	“going after strange flesh”
NASB	“went after strange flesh”
NIV	“gave themselves up to . . . perversion”
NLT	“filled with . . . every kind of sexual perversion”
RSV	“indulged in unnatural lust”

A long-standing interpretation of the phrase “went after strange flesh” is that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah wanted to have sex with angels. According to this school of thought, Jude 6 is a reference to Genesis 6:1 – 4. Furthermore, when Genesis 6:1 – 4 refers to “the sons of God” and the “daughters of men,” Genesis is referring to angels who had sex with human women. Thus, the men of Sodom and Gomorrah wanted to have sex with the angels, a sin worthy of punishment just as surely as the angels were judged in Genesis 6:1 – 4.¹¹⁶

The idea that “going after strange flesh” in Jude 7 is a reference to trying to have sex with angels has two difficulties which, to me, are insurmountable. First, the specific nature of the sinful behavior described in Genesis 6:1 – 4 is sufficiently vague that all interpreters should approach the text with humility. That said, I have never been convinced that Genesis 6:1 – 4 describes angels copulating with women. Jesus says in Mark 12:25: “For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” The Lord’s statement here seems sufficiently clear so as to exclude the concept of angels having sex with women. If this is true, then Jude does not have this idea in mind either. The second major problem with interpreting “going after strange flesh” as a reference to angels is that this interpretation assumes Jude 6 is

¹¹⁵ The HCS takes an interpretive step by adding the phrase “just as they [angels] did.” Jude 7 begins with the prepositional phrase “in the same way.” The HCS moves this phrase to after “went after strange flesh” and makes “in the same way” a phrase modifying “practiced perversions.” The HCS supplies the word “angels” to the phrase. This reading is unnatural to the text and seems forced.

¹¹⁶ For example, *see* Edwin A. Blum, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, *Jude* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 390.

referring to Genesis 6:1 – 4. In fact, while it is clear that Jude 6 has angels in mind, the specific identity of these angels is uncertain. Perhaps these angels were guilty of some heinous act during Satan’s rebellion, but we simply cannot have certainty about the particular event that led to them being imprisoned. What is clear is that at some point in the past some angels rebelled so grievously that they were imprisoned by God. This is a warning to all humans who rebel against God.

D. Jude 4 – 7, Sodom, and Homosexuality

The introductory phrase to verse 7 – “in the same way” – is not trying to say that angels and Sodom both committed the same sin of sexual immorality. Instead, the idea is the angels rejected God’s authority and *in the same way* Sodom and Gomorrah rejected God’s authority as well. The result for both groups – the angels and the residents of Sodom – was God’s wrath.

Jude 4 is clear that Jude himself is concerned for the Christians to whom he is writing because false teachers are advocating sexual promiscuity. Libertine sexual ethics involves rejecting the authority of God. The unspecified angels in verse 6 did the same thing – they rejected God’s authority. In verse 7, Sodom and Gomorrah are human examples of radical moral autonomy. The two cities rejected God’s authority and engaged in sexual immorality. In this context, the phrase “went after strange flesh” follows the phrase sexual immorality. Thus, the simplest understanding of “went after strange flesh” is that it is a reference to violation of God’s creation norms (Romans 1:18 ff) by seeking same-sex intercourse. I think Kistemaker is correct in his summary of Jude 7: “Therefore, when the men of Sodom were interested in sexual relations with men, they perverted the created order of natural intercourse. That is, the men of Sodom

did not desire females; instead, these men demanded homosexual relations with the men who visited Lot.”¹¹⁷

Gagnon takes a slightly mediating interpretation regarding the Sodom narrative. Gagnon rightly insists the men of Sodom did not know Lot’s visitors were angels. When the men of the city gathered outside of Lot’s door, they were demanding sex with Lot’s guest and assumed them to be men just as themselves. However, their vulgar request unknowingly put them in the dangerous situation of requesting to have sex with angels! Gagnon says, “A better understanding [of going after strange flesh] is that in their lust for sexual intercourse with other men, the men of Sodom inadvertently put themselves in the sacrilegious position of pursuing sexual intercourse with angels.”¹¹⁸

XIII. What About AIDS?

AIDS is a deadly epidemic that has caused great confusion and misunderstanding. Partly because of the mysterious origin of the disease, a great deal of misinformation has surrounded discussions of AIDS, including how it is contracted and spread. Christians are called to mercy ministry to all sick people, including people suffering from AIDS.

A. Brief History of AIDS

1. Africa

One theory says AIDS was first contracted via an open wound in a hunter. As the theory goes, somewhere between 1884 and 1924, somewhere near modern-day Kinshasa in West Central Africa, a hunter kills a chimpanzee. Some of the animal’s blood enters the

¹¹⁷ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 381 – 382.

¹¹⁸ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 88.

hunter's body, possibly through an open wound. The blood carries a virus harmless to the chimp but lethal to humans: HIV. The virus spreads as colonial cities sprout up, but deaths are blamed on other causes.

In 1959 in the Belgian Congo, a man visited a Kinshasa clinic suffering from joint pain and fatigue. Some 40 years later, tests of the patient's blood samples, saved by his doctor, revealed the presence of HIV. During the 1960s, many Haitians worked in the Congo. A body of evidence now suggests (I stress – *suggests*) some of these Haitians may have brought AIDS back to the western hemisphere.

2. In the United States

On June 5, 1981 the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR), describing cases of a rare lung infection, *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia (PCP), in five young, previously healthy, homosexual men in Los Angeles. All the men had other unusual infections as well, indicating that their immune systems were not working; two had already died by the time the CDC report was published. This edition of the MMWR marks the first official reporting of what will become known as the AIDS epidemic.

In January 1982, the disease was first called "Gay-related immune deficiency" (GRID) and the name gained currency, though it became an obsolete description when heterosexual Haitians presented with symptoms in Brooklyn hospitals. Hemophiliacs would soon join them in the public's mind as the third "H" group seen to be at any real risk (Homosexuals, Haitians, Hemophiliacs). On July 27, 1982, the disease was renamed "Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome" or AIDS.

In 1983, Pasteur Institute researchers Luc Montagnier and Françoise Barre-Sinoussi isolated a virus from the swollen lymph gland of an AIDS patient. They called it lymphadenopathy-associated virus or LAV. In 1983, University of California, San Francisco researcher Jay Levy independently isolated the AIDS virus. By 1986, the scientific and medical community agreed to call the virus HIV: human immunodeficiency virus.

3. Patient Zero?

AIDS spread rapidly among male homosexuals in the United States in the early 1980s. By tracing sexual contacts, officials at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta in 1982 found a likely candidate for the rapid spread of AIDS among homosexual males: Gaëtan Dugas (1953 – 1984), a Canadian flight attendant who worked for Air Canada. Through his sexual liaisons and those of his bedmates, Dugas could be linked to nine of the first 19 cases in Los Angeles, 22 cases in New York City and nine more in eight other cities -- in all, he was responsible for 40 of the first 248 cases of AIDS in the U.S. The CDC acknowledged his role with an eerie sobriquet: he was called Patient Zero. In 1987, Randy Shilts¹¹⁹ authored *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* in which he identified Dugas as “patient ‘0’” – the person claimed to be responsible for the rapid spread of AIDS among homosexuals in North America in the early 1980s.

Dugas was very promiscuous and visited gay bars and bath houses in the various cities where he had layovers, engaging in sex with a large number of anonymous partners. Dugas was wildly promiscuous, somewhat predatory, and quite unconcerned about the people he infected. An example of Dugas’ role in spreading the virus is seen in New York City. Dugas made his first known visit to the

¹¹⁹ Shilts himself died of AIDS in 1994.

City's gay bath houses on October 31, 1980. All of the early cases of AIDS in New York could be traced to him.

How predatory was Dugas? In June 1980, before the AIDS epidemic had been detected by physicians, Dugas developed Kaposi's sarcoma, a form of skin cancer common to AIDS victims. Told later he was endangering anyone he slept with, Dugas unrepentantly carried on – by his estimate, with 250 partners a year – until his death in March 1984, adding countless direct and indirect victims. At least one of Dugas' victims indignantly hunted him down. Dugas' charm proved unfailing: he sweet-talked the man into having sex again.¹²⁰

While Dugas was a self-centered person with no concern for how his actions were affecting others, he is most likely not the sole cause of the rapid spread of AIDS in the US. However, his lifestyle demonstrates the unrestrained sexual ethics of certain segments of the gay community. His own personal pleasure was of greater concern than the fact he was infecting people with a terminal disease. In a similar way, former NASCAR driver Tim Richmond (1955 – 1989) spread HIV to many women through heterosexual sex.¹²¹

B. AIDS Facts

HIV is a serious and deadly disease. HIV is spread from one person to another through sex and blood-to-blood contact. Most people get infected with AIDS by having sex or sharing needles with someone who is infected with HIV.

¹²⁰ Derived from William Henry, III, "The Appalling Saga of Patient Zero," *Time*. June 24, 2001, accessed April 21, 2014, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,145257,00.html>. Again, I claim no originality for this section and I'm merely providing some basic facts for pastors and church members.
¹²¹ Juliet MaCur, "AIDS Victim Forgives But Can Never Forget," *The Orlando Sentinel* August 13, 1999, accessed July 29, 2017, http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1999-08-13/sports/9908130142_1_virus-aids-tim-richmond.

According to the CDC, 1.1 million people in the US are living with HIV, and 1 in 7 of them don't know it. The number of new HIV diagnoses fell 19% from 2005 to 2014. New Diagnoses for HIV on a yearly basis in the USA are as follows:

2015	39,513
2017	38,739

In 2015, gay and bisexual men accounted for 82% (26,375) of HIV diagnoses among males and 67% of all diagnoses. Black/African American gay and bisexual men accounted for the largest number of new HIV diagnoses (10,315), followed by white gay and bisexual men (7,570).¹²² Most infected people in the U.S. are between 25 and 49 and appear healthy today.

In the U.S., nearly two-thirds of HIV infections resulted from men having sex with men. Half of the remaining cases are attributed to high-risk heterosexual contact (unprotected sex with a drug user), while 16 percent contacted the virus from using dirty needles to get high from illegal drugs.

According to UNAIDS, the joint United Nations program on HIV/AIDS, globally 68 percent of all people living with HIV are in Sub-Saharan Africa and over three-quarters of all AIDS deaths globally occur in this region. Unlike other regions, most people living with HIV in this area (about 61 percent) are women and for them infection results from sex with a man who was infected through dirty needles/illegal drug use, by unprotected paid sex, or from sex with other men. Approximately 22.5 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa are infected with AIDS.

¹²² "HIV In The United States: At A Glance," *Centers for Disease Control*, accessed July 6, 2017, June 9, 2017, <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/statistics/overview/atagance.html>.

In Russia, HIV/AIDS is spreading largely through rampant intravenous drug abuse and sharing of infected needles. UNAIDS calculates that between 2010 and 2015, Russia accounted for more than 80% of the new HIV infections in the entire Eastern European and the Central Asian region. By Russia's own estimates, the epidemic grew 10% per year during that period, with the new infections roughly split between people who inject drugs and heterosexual transmission.¹²³

God designed sex to be enjoyed by a husband and a wife in marriage. Sex outside of marriage is sinful, foolish, and deadly. The Bible also warns about substance abuse and the tendency for drugs to lower one's inhibitions to risky behavior. Christians are called to a higher standard: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). All people have the ability to choose a life controlled by human nature or a life controlled by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-23).

C. Christian Response to AIDS

What are our responsibilities toward people with AIDS? How should we minister to them?

1. Treat AIDS Patients Like You Would Treat Jesus Himself

Matthew 25:44-45: They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or **sick** or in prison, and did not help you?" He will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." (NIV)

¹²³ Jon Cohen, "Russia's HIV/AIDS Epidemic Is Getting Worse, Not Better," *Science* June 11, 2018, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/06/russia-s-hiv-aids-epidemic-getting-worse-not-better>.

We are commanded by Jesus to give all sick people food, drink, clothing, shelter, care and comfort. As followers of Jesus, we should show mercy to people suffering with AIDS.

2. Follow Jesus' Example of Reaching Out to "Untouchables"

In Mark 1:40-43 Jesus touched and healed a leper. AIDS patients are frequently considered modern-day untouchables and often suffer from lack of care. Ministers should know that you cannot "catch" HIV like you do a cold or flu. You cannot get HIV from handshakes, hugs, coughs or sneezes, sweat, tears, mosquitoes, pets or just "being around" an infected person.

3. Treat People Infected With AIDS Like Neighbors

Remember the example of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). God wants us to be filled with pity, give medical care, and address the physical needs of AIDS patients.

XIV. Summary

In a society like the USA which rightly praises equality and freedom of the press (both principles which Baptists embrace), it can be quite difficult to hold to a moral stance regarding homosexuality which is contrary to public opinion. The temptation is to give way to the strong current of the multitude. Christians often find themselves adhering to an opinion on this topic which the majority has discarded.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Writing in 1840, Alexis De Tocqueville commented on the manner in which public opinion in a democracy can be an unusually powerful force against people who hold to unpopular opinions, saying, "The more equal the conditions of men become, and the less strong men individually are, the more easily do they give way to the current of the multitude, and the more difficult is it for them to adhere by themselves to an opinion which the multitude discard." Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Complete and Unabridged vols. 1 & 2, Henry Reeve, trans. (New York: Bantam Books, 2000, 1835, 1840), 636, vol. 2.

A. Biblical Fidelity

The Bible teaches that the proper mode for sexual expression is monogamous and heterosexual marriage. Any deviation from this standard is sin. Homosexual acts, both in male and female expressions, are specifically condemned in the Old and New Testaments. Homosexual behavior is inconsistent with the Christian ethic and is not a legitimate option for a devoted follower of Christ. The rigid condemnation of homosexuality found in Scripture is offensive to many modern people who have become more tolerant of homosexual practices than they have of any critique of these practices.¹²⁵ Violence against anyone simply because of their sexual behavior is clearly antithetical to the New Testament so Christians should not act violently towards homosexuals. But, we are in fact mandated to call people involved in homosexual behavior *along with all other forms of sexual immorality* to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. A sign of surrendering to the rule of Jesus Christ in one's life is separation from homosexual behavior.

As we call homosexuals to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, we should do so with a humble attitude, acknowledging that all Christians struggle with some form of sexual temptation. Thus, we must express our disapproval of homosexual practice in the context of our own sexual fallenness.¹²⁶ Unless we do this, people involved in homosexual behavior will only hear us saying we loathe them. Instead, we want to communicate that we too have needed God's grace to find freedom from besetting sins.

I arrive at my conclusions based on the assumption that the Bible is the inspired word of God. Quite frankly, there is probably no part of Christian ethics that is more vilified in our day than a position which says homosexual acts are sin. President Obama even ridiculed

¹²⁵ I am paraphrasing Walter Kaiser, *Leviticus*, 1127.

¹²⁶ Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), 172.

the moral stance I advocate here and in a speech to homosexual activists he said, “And though we’ve made progress, there are still fellow citizens, perhaps neighbors or even family members and loved ones, who still hold fast to worn arguments and old attitudes; who fail to see your families like their families; and who would deny you the rights that most Americans take for granted.”¹²⁷ I hope you will see that in contrast to the President’s contention that people like me are holding to “worn arguments” and “old attitudes,” I do not arrive at my conclusions lightly but after serious reflection on the text of Scripture.

B. The Human Will

Same-sex attraction and LGBTQ identities bring us into deep discussions about the human will and how the will exercises itself in each person’s life. Augustine, the great theologian of the late Fourth and early Fifth Century, engaged in a long battle with sexual desire prior to his conversion, and at one point he lamented, “I was hesitating about dying to death and living to life, for habitual wrongdoing had more power over me than goodness, which was unfamiliar.”¹²⁸ In context, Augustine is describing the deep dissonance within his own soul concerning whether he should be a Christian or follow his own lusts. He described his lusts as “pinching me gently and whispering softly, ‘Are you going to send us away? . . . from that moment you will not be allowed to do such and such forever.”¹²⁹ And such are the feelings of people who consider becoming a Christian and experience same-sex attraction: The lusts themselves may cry out, “If you follow Christ, you will never get to enjoy us again. Are you really going to send us away?”

¹²⁷ “Remarks by the President at LGBT Pride Month Reception: June 29, 2009.”

www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-LGBT-Pride-Month-Reception/.

¹²⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1, Carolyn J.B. Hammond, ed. and trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 403, VIII.xi.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 405, VIII.xi.

For anyone who comes to Christ, regeneration reorients the will away from love of self to love for God. Habitual wrongdoing so ingrains itself in the will that the will becomes curved inward. This is true not just for people across the LGBTQ spectrum, but for all humans on the face of planet earth. The only answer is grace: By God's grace through the effectual means of spiritual discipline the will learns to love what God loves and oppose what God opposes. Sin is a kind of disordered love; the desire to love reflects a longing placed within us to know God, but sin turns this love towards the wrong things. With Paul we must learn, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

And the issue of the human will is inseparable from the issue of human desires. The theme of the LGBTQ advocacy groups is, "You have desires and so satisfy them, for you have the same rights as heterosexual, cisgender couples. Don't be afraid of satisfying and even multiplying your desires." This is the modern doctrine of the world. Dostoevsky said, "Interpreting freedom as the multiplication and rapid satisfaction of desires, men distort their own nature, for many senseless and foolish desires and habits and ridiculous fancies are fostered in them."¹³⁰ Though Dostoevsky is discussing materialism, the same type of greed occurs in sexual desires. Satiating them *feels* right, but Galatians 5:24 says, "Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

When asked about our moral stance regarding sexual temptation at any level, no preacher should soft-sell the high claims of Jesus Christ upon the believer's life. Jesus Christ said, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me." (Mark 8:34) This means our sexual desires are surrendered to the Lord, and our prayer is, "God not my will, but thine be done." The Lausanne Covenant says, "In issuing the gospel

¹³⁰ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Constance Garnett, trans. (New York: The Modern Library, 1950, reprint), 376. This entire paragraph is influenced by my reading of Dostoyevsky.

invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship.”¹³¹ If someone asks a pastor a direct question about LGBTQ identities, we should give a frank, compassionate, and considerate answer: The cost of following Jesus includes *not* embracing such identities.

C. Pastoral Care

What should we do if a church member comes to us and says, “Pastor, I think I am homosexual” or “Pastor, I am homosexual”? Stay calm, remain courteous, and move forward as a concerned pastor. Keep in mind, homosexuality is not just a *political* issue, it is a *personal* issue and there will likely be some within your church and family for whom this temptation is a painful struggle.¹³² I am not a therapist nor do I intend to present myself as one. The goal here is to develop pastoral adroitness and sensitivity which can guide us to stand for God’s word while trying very hard to help an individual. I’ve included some questions you may consider asking in such cases. Please remember I am suggesting these questions for use by pastors intent on providing Biblical counsel.

Tell me, why do you think you are homosexual?

When you say, “I am homosexual / gay / transsexual, tell me what you mean by that term?” The category of descriptive terms for homosexuality is quite broad in our current culture, so it is vital to understand what someone means by the terms he or she is using.

How long have you believed you are homosexual? When did this thought first occur to you?

¹³¹ The Lausanne Covenant, “Article 4: The Nature of Evangelism,”

<https://lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>.

¹³² Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-Sex Attraction* (Epsom, Surrey, England: The Good Book Company, 2015), 68.

Beyond the Bible, what sources have you examined concerning this issue?

What do you understand the Bible to say about this temptation?

With whom have you shared your belief that you are homosexual? If you have shared this with other people, how did they respond?

Have you actually engaged in homosexual behavior or have you only been tempted? If the person admits homosexual behavior, a good follow-on question might be (depending on the nature your relationship), "How often have you engaged in homosexual behavior?" The goal here is not to be nosy or to indulge prurient interests, but to get situational awareness about the degree to which the person is involved in a homosexual identity.

Thank you for your openness. What are you hoping from me as your pastor?

As a general category, what do you understand the Bible to say about temptation and how Christians overcome temptation?

Some temptations are much stronger than others. Is your desire to follow God's word regardless of the strength of the temptation?

How do you think this congregation will respond to you if you self-identify as a homosexual?

Context and the leading of the Holy Spirit should guide which of these questions a pastor will ask in any given situation. The answers

to these questions can help the pastor gauge the degree to which a church member is struggling with same-sex attraction. A plan for pastoral care can then emerge after you have better situational awareness.

I also want to give a word of warning to pastors: If a teenager or young adult admits to you that he or she experiences same-sex attraction, do not respond to the person as if they are a gay activist marching in the local pride parade. In our culture war battles, we sometimes wrongly assume someone approaching us on this matter has adopted the entire worldview of homosexual activists. That a church member trusts you enough to share with you his or her struggle regarding same-sex attraction is a good sign, indicating the person believes you are a trustworthy pastor who perhaps can be of help. Don't abuse this trust by yelling or immediately assuming the person wants to enter into a gay marriage. If time reveals such things, there is an appropriate moment for a Godly rebuke in a loving tone, but be patient. The individual is probably terrified when speaking with you.

While as pastors we should strive to create an environment where church members feel safe discussing trials and temptations with us, we should also see to it that someone's major temptation is not the only thing we ever address with the person. This is especially true for people experiencing same-sex attraction. We can become so mono-focused on this issue that we overlook matters important to all Christians such as practicing spiritual disciplines and being involved in Christian service. Sam Allberry suggests,

[Christians experiencing same-sex attraction] may need to be asked about how things are going from time to time, but to make this the main or only thing you talk about with them can be problematic. It may reinforce the false idea that this [same-

sex attraction] is who they really are, and it may actually overlook other issues they may need to talk about more. *Sexuality may not be their greatest battle.*¹³³

In our modern context, Christians feel restrained from talking about faith in Jesus Christ to LGBTQ people because of the ubiquitous message that such identities are normal and good, a message reinforced on college campuses and in corporate settings. To suggest a person should repent of homosexual acts is said to be the height of intolerance and a backwards stance associated with the dark ages. But we are called to share our faith in Jesus with all people. The *Baptist Faith and Message* says, “It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man’s spirit by God’s Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others.”¹³⁴ If we are saved, we will have a love for others and want LGBTQ people to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

D. Can Sexual Orientation Be Changed?

Can someone’s sexual orientation be changed? This is a very controversial question. The standard answer from modern mental health professional agencies is that a person’s sexual orientation cannot be changed and it is wrong to attempt to do so. Yet, there continue to be Christians who insist God has delivered them from same-sex attraction and they no longer identify as homosexual.

I review data concerning sexual orientation change efforts in other writings. The basic trajectory of the data is this: Complete change of sexual orientation is rare and does not occur nearly as frequently as born again Christians would hope. Movement on a continuum of change from homosexual towards heterosexual does

¹³³ Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 69.

¹³⁴ *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, “Article XI: Evangelism and Missions.”

occur more frequently than pro-homosexual advocates and authors will admit, but again such movement doesn't occur as often or as strongly as evangelical Christians would hope. One acquaintance who left the LGBTQ lifestyle explained her experience with same-sex attraction in a good natured and humorous way: "My same-sex attraction used to be like a swarm of killer bees, but now it's more like an annoying group of fruit flies."

In our current environment, many advocates of unqualified acceptance of homosexuality within Christian churches seem to have a form of realized eschatology that equates personal fulfillment with sexual fulfillment and expects this sort of "sexual salvation" now.¹³⁵ As such, it seems to me they are advocating the self-actualization or *therapeutic view* of sexual ethics. Denying someone the opportunity to experience a loving and committed homosexual relationship is seen as denying them something essential to their personhood. In the highly sexualized atmosphere of our culture, the idea that someone would deny themselves a strongly held sexual desire is considered nonsense. Yet, Scripture teaches that it is our desires themselves which are broken.

Our pastoral care must emphasize that for Christians the appropriate arena for sexual expression is heterosexual and monogamous marriage. At the same time, heterosexual marriage isn't the goal for coming out of a gay identity; the goal is identifying my life with the life of Christ. What are we to make of Christians who assert a deep and abiding love for Jesus Christ yet still experience same-sex attraction? Here are several points for consideration:

1. The experience of same-sex attraction by some people is a reminder to all people that we live in a broken world. Since all humans are sinners, all humans need God's grace. Same-sex

¹³⁵ Following Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 402.

attraction is a reminder that God's grace is necessary for every one of us.

2. Though modern mental health professions discount the idea of change in sexual orientation, we should never underestimate the transforming power of Jesus Christ and the amazing things that can occur in a life indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

3. Some Christians who experience same-sex attraction may experience a movement on a continuum of change over a long period of time. While same-sex attraction may never be eliminated, it can become less prevalent.

4. Some Christians may never experience any change in sexual orientation. Perhaps the best outcome that is attainable in some cases will be life of disciplined abstinence, free from obsessive lust.¹³⁶

The sense of internalized self-loathing experienced by LGBTQ people should not be quickly passed over. For anyone to come to faith in Christ, there must be conviction of sin (John 16:8). And yes, our sexual sin is an affront to God. But when we are saved, we are now clothed in the righteousness of Christ and that is the lens through which God now sees us. Many people who self-identify across the LGBTQ spectrum have been to church enough that they have a shame about their identity. They may even think, "God made a mistake! I'm trapped in the wrong body!" Blending this sort of shame and confusion can take a great deal of time to sort out. As a pastor, the goal should be to help people identify the difference between temptation and sin. For reasons we will never fully understand, some people experience same-sex attraction. Healthy pastoral care leads to repentance of same-sex sexual acts and an

¹³⁶ Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 403.

impure thought life, while helping the believer maintain the important distinction between sin and temptation.

E. Thoughts for Parents of a Child Who Announces an LGBTQ Identity

One of the most distressing events in Christian homes is when a child announces his or her identity somewhere across the LGBTQ spectrum. A rush of emotions floods the parents' minds. They think of tender moments when the child was an infant, toddler, or preschooler and happy times of carefree games and deep affection. Where have such happy days gone? Often Christian parents think, "What did I do wrong?" I think it is vital for the pastor to say to the parents, "We can still trust that God is with you and I'm going to be with you as well."

First, it is important to remember that following Jesus Christ often brings division, even division between people in the closest family relationships. In Matthew 10:34, Jesus said, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." Then Jesus went on to speak about the clash of loyalties that might arise within a family when one of its members begins to follow him (Matthew 10:35 – 36), and we should add such a clash of loyalties also occurs when a family member chooses not to follow Christ or embraces ideas and concepts contrary to the Bible. When a child in a Christian family embraces an LGBTQ identity, the parents feel pulled in several directions between what the Bible says about sex, the culture's insistence that they are bad parents if they do not affirm their child, the conviction to stand firm as a Christian without compromise, and a desire to demonstrate love to the child. This is the very sort of division Christ said Christians can expect in life.

Second, parents should find a way to respond with conviction and compassion. Family conflicts will inevitably take place and we should never actively look for them. We have a clear, Biblical duty to love and cherish our children. Likewise, Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9), so our goal should be not only a child’s repentance but to have a relationship that is characterized as much as possible by peace. Though not specifically addressing children who adopt an LGBTQ identity, John R.W. Stott talked about the difficulty of navigating divided loyalties in the home and said, “Since we are called to be peacemakers, we will make as many concessions as we can without compromising our duty to God. Yet we should never forget what Christ said: “Anyone who loves their father or mother . . . son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37).”¹³⁷

How do we make concessions without compromising? Much of this depends on the age of the child. The way we respond to a ten year old will be much different than the way we respond to an adult child living on his or her own. But assuming we are addressing a child who has already reached an age of legal adulthood, we might begin with the following ideas:

You are always going to be my child, and I am always going to love you. As part of my love for you, I want to warn you about the identity you are embracing.

You might also ask open-ended questions in an attempt to gain situational awareness: “Tell me, why do you feel you are _____ [any particular LGBTQ identity]?”

¹³⁷ John R.W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 118.

If a child is a teenager or perhaps in the time of early adulthood (19? 20?) just prior to establishing his or her own residence, a Christian parent might say:

“Embracing an LGBTQ identity does not mean I am forcing you onto the street. I care for you. I want you to have food, clothing and shelter.”

“You will not be harmed in our home. You are in a safe place.”

In any healthy relationship, love always has boundaries. As your parents, we will not be funding or facilitating your new identity.

You can rest assured as our child that we will not call you names, insult you, nor will we vilify you. At the same time, love has boundaries: This is a Christian home, and you cannot vilify our faith nor will we allow you to call us unkind names.

All of us find great hope and encouragement in the story of the prodigal son, but what if *our prodigal never comes home*? In many cases, a child who embraces an LGBTQ identity becomes fixed in that concept, and never repents nor returns home to the Lord. What do we do? First, we have to accept that our children are volitional moral agents, and as much as it grieves us, they make their own choices. Second, we can determine to act towards our children with grace and conviction. We can still express concerns about the common things of life: “How is your job? Are you eating well? [All parents worry about this!] Is your car running well? Is your house in a safe neighborhood?” Third, the child may choose to have little or no contact with Christian parents. In these cases, we can send gifts and letters of love, letting our child know he or she *is still my child*. The adult child may never respond, but we can have a sense of still being a loving parent in a difficult circumstance. Fourth, while some

LGBTQ relationships are stable, there is a level of volatility in these affairs of the heart that is exceptional. Even in a culture where heterosexual relationships are chaotic and unstable, LGBTQ love affairs have unique dynamics which can be unusually difficult to navigate. The point being is that your child may be headed for a tremendous and devastating heartache. Even though we do not approve of LGBTQ relationships, we can still grieve with our child and we can still hurt when our child hurts. Finally, there comes a point for all of us as parents when we must release our children to God. This is true for parents of adult LGBTQ children just as much for adults whose children have left the faith for other reasons. At this point, we are all just *parents* of children who are not pursuing God, and that may be the most difficult grief for any Christian parent to bear. Let us all encourage each other. Perhaps the following prayer may be helpful:

Dear God: My prodigal child has not come home and I fear he / she may never come home. Help me to love my prodigal the way you love me. Please bring my prodigal home. But if he / she never comes home, would you please in your kind providence protect [name your child] as much as is possible from harm? Help me to find the right balance between conviction and compassion in my interactions with [name your child].

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Here are six tentatively offered guidelines concerning how we might help steer our children toward a solid, comfortable gender identification and heterosexuality.

1. Parents must take every opportunity to affirm their child's gender.
2. We must consider the child's identification with the same-sex parent to be absolutely critical.

3. The honest and steady expression of affection by both parents is critical to gender identification.¹³⁸
4. Parents should model a healthy, wholesome love for each other, demonstrating what true romance looks like.
5. If a child expresses the feeling that he or she may be homosexual (or anywhere across the LGBTQ spectrum), stay calm, continue to express unconditional love while affirming God's parameters for morality. Do not engage in name-calling.
6. Do not let children have a smart phone or social media access until age 16.

Last Updated February 24, 2023

¹³⁸Stanton and Brenna Jones, *How and When to Teach Your Kids About Sex* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1993), 112.