

The Apostle Paul and Homosexuality—Answering Homosexual Objections (Part 2)

The New Testament book of Romans is one of the most profound literary works to ever elaborate upon the Christian worldview.

Chapter 1 of the apostle Paul's theological masterpiece contains the most explicit description and denunciation of both male and female homoerotic sexual behavior. This explains why many liberal revisionist theologians and "gay apologists" have gone to great lengths to sow confusion and undermine the plain meaning of key portions of this critically important book. More specifically, Romans 1:26-27 has become the target of the most vociferous and voluminous attacks by those striving to subvert hetero-normalcy. For this reason, a more extensive defense of the Scriptural foundation of sexual ethics is warranted.

Romans Chapter 1 very specifically describes the downward moral spiral of any society that suppresses the clearly evident truths of God's existence, power and nature (vss. 18-20). As a result of this inexcusable rebellion against God and his principles, the dark descent into depravity inevitably commences. God eventually gives these individuals over to a reprobate mind "for the degrading of their bodies with one another" through "unnatural" homosexual behavior (vss. 24, 28).

From this point, the moral free fall leads to all types of contemptible and condemnable conduct (vs. 29-31). The apostle Paul then proceeds to reveal that the Lord's consequent judgment hangs over those who engage in such behavior when he

refers to “God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death” (vs. 32).

Dr. James R. White and Jeffrey D. Niell write in *The Same Sex Controversy* that “this presentation is one that confirms, beyond question, the essential correctness of the view Christians have held from the beginning: that Paul singles out homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27 as an illustration of the judgment of God upon those who refuse to acknowledge His lordship over their lives.”

The passage in question reads as follows: “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.”

Objection # 1: Romans 1 is not describing true homosexuals, but heterosexuals who practice homosexuality against their natural inclinations.

In *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, the late “gay” Yale University professor John Boswell contends that “the persons Paul condemns are manifestly not homosexual; what he derogates are homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons.”

More recently, “gay” apologist Matthew Vines explained in his viral video, “Those who are naturally heterosexual should not be with those of the same sex, so, too, those who have a natural orientation toward the same sex should not be with those of the opposite sex.” (NOTE: Homosexuals typically deny the obvious implications of 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 by inaccurately claiming that the apostle Paul had no concept of sexual orientation. However, when considering Rom. 1:26-27, they conveniently attempt to reinterpret these verses on the

basis that Paul's same-sex prohibition applies exclusively to those with a heterosexual orientation. It's a classic case of speaking out of both sides of their mouths—denying Paul's understanding of sexual orientation in one case, but appealing to that exact concept in another instance.)

This objection basically argues for a subjective double standard, in which homosexual behavior is forbidden only for certain individuals (those with heterosexual proclivities). Based upon the same faulty reasoning, would theft be permissible for those with kleptomaniacal tendencies or would polygamy be wrong only for those without monogamous predispositions? White and Neill astutely identify this homosexual interpretation as an unwarranted "extra-contextual assertion" and the strained imposition of an "anachronistic definition" into the text. So too, Bishop Bennett Sims pointed out the obvious flaw with this rationale during an interview with *Christianity Today* magazine: "The logical effect of the exemption argument is to suggest that, given the proper motivation, there are loving ways to be 'full of envy, murder, strife, malignity' ... this is moral absurdity." The phrase "consumed with passion" also makes it very unlikely that Paul is referring to heterosexual experimentation with homosexuality. Through the conflating of attractions with actions and the apparent denial of free will, this theory additionally perpetuates the patently false assertion that homosexuals have no choice when it comes to their sexual activity.

Furthermore, the entire premise of this objection is basically based upon the ridiculous notion that naturally-occurring urges, as is argued in the case of homosexual impulses, do not need to be restrained because they simply constitute a morally neutral, innate characteristic of one's God-given identity. Such a contention dangerously ignores the seductive allure of *all* sin as illustrated by Paul's discussion in Romans 7. Every single person is born with an intrinsic inclination or

tendency towards all types of temptations and transgressions, not as an inherited “gift” from God, but as a spiritual consequence of the Fall of mankind (Gen. 3), which has significantly impaired and diminished our moral and ethical capacities. Yet, despite humanity’s predisposition or natural desire towards sinful indiscretions, like lust (Matt. 5:28) or worry (Matt. 6:25-33) or homosexuality (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10), we are still considered culpable and held accountable before God for these actions. For a God-inspired, biblical author like Paul, a propensity to act in a certain way was never considered an automatic excuse or an indication of the permissibility of said conduct. In fact, the Scriptures command us to “deny ourselves” or to put it another way, to resist our inherent, personal desires, including with regards to sexual matters (Luke 9:23).

With the possible exception of one citation, all of Paul’s seven references to “nature” (1 Cor. 11:14-15; Rom. 2:14, 2:27, 11:21, 24; Gal. 2:15, 4:8) denote the biological function or the created order established by God. In the case of Rom. 1:26, the specific meaning of “against or contrary to nature” (*para physin*) is unequivocally determined by the immediate context. When Paul refers to the way that women “exchanged” (vs. 26) (*metēllaxan*) and men “gave up” (vs. 27) (*aphentes*) “natural relations” (vss. 26 and 27) (*physikēn chrēsin*) with the opposite sex, any objective and unbiased reader immediately understands what is being described. This passage is unambiguously referring to the perverse rejection of the gendered order of human beings as male and female, and the abandonment of the unique, complementary sexual union that can only occur between the two genders. The Greek word *chrēsin* also points specifically to the biological functionality of the reproductive organs during heterosexual intercourse—an anatomical interaction that absolutely does not, and cannot, occur during homosexual relations.

The apostle Paul’s allusion to the Genesis narrative (vss. 20,

25) lends further support for the connection between God's creative decree and the natural order for the genders. Although some have argued that *para physin* refers to that which is culturally out of the ordinary (unconventional; not typical or normal; deviating from a socially constructed norm) as opposed to a violation of an objective, timelessly-applicable natural law, the larger context of Creation terminology actually indicates that Paul was denouncing behavior which falls outside the bounds of the biological, complementary correlation existing between the two genders. Dr. Robert Gagnon has also noted the obvious connection or "intertextual echoes" between Romans 1:23 and Genesis 1:26 (in the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament).

Notice the strikingly similar choice of several words:

English	Romans 1:23	Genesis 1:26
likeness	<i>homoiomati</i>	<i>homoiosin</i>
image	<i>eikonos</i>	<i>eikona</i>
human	<i>anthropou</i>	<i>anthropon</i>
birds	<i>peteinon</i>	<i>peteinon</i>
reptiles	<i>herpeton</i>	<i>herpeton</i>

Although he typically employs the Greek nouns for "man" (*andres* or *anthrōpoi*) and "woman" (*gynaikes*), the apostle Paul underscores the male-female divinely designed compatibility by following the grammatical style found in Gen. 1:27, opting for the more precise (and rarely used) terms "male" (*arsenes*) and "female" (*thēleiai*) in the Romans 1 text. Aside from Rom. 1:26-27 and Galatians 3:28, Dr. Michael Brown makes the significant observation that "the only other time in the New Testament that the Greek words for 'male' and 'female' are found is on the lips of Jesus when he affirmed His Father's intent for marriage—namely one man and one woman joined together for life" (Gen. 1:27; Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6).

The cultural milieu of the Greco-Roman world provides additional support for the traditional interpretation of the

words *para physin*. Several authors from antiquity utilized this distinctive grammatical construction. Below are several examples:

In Plato's *Laws*, we find this statement: "When male unites with female for procreation, the pleasure experienced is held to be in accordance with nature (*kata physin*), but contrary to nature (*para physin*) when male mates with male or female with female" (636C).

First-century Jewish historian Josephus described male homosexuality as "sexual intercourse with males which is contrary to nature (*para physin*)" and "pleasures which were disgusting and contrary to nature (*para physin*)" (*Against Apion* ,).

Philo condemns homosexual "pleasure that is contrary to nature (*para physin*)" (*Spec. Laws*).

As Dr. Gagnon notes, "The classic texts among Greco-Roman authors comes from Plato's *Phaedrus* 250E, quoted in the late-first century in Plutarch's *Dialogue on Love* 751D-E." It reads in part: "The union with males, either unwilling with force and plunder, or willingly with weakness and effeminacy, surrendering themselves, as Plato says, 'To be mounted in the custom of four-footed animals and to be sowed with seed contrary to nature (*para physin*)'—this is an entirely ill-favored favor, shameful and contrary to Aphrodite."

Aristotle, Musonius Rufus and other ancient and Jewish sources also employed *para physin* with the same understanding in mind.

Several "progressive" scholars and theologians from the pro-"gay" perspective have also expressed strong agreement with the traditional viewpoint regarding the meaning of the apostle Paul's words in Rom. 1:26-27.

Professor Abraham Smith, liberal biblical scholar at Southern Methodist University in the Perkins School of Theology, is a

New Testament editor for *The New Interpreter's Annotated Study Bible*, and he specializes in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, and 1 Thessalonians. Among his recent publications are several introductions and annotations for the *Oxford Annotated Bible* and the *Oxford Access Bible*. According to the accomplished Professor Smith, "The statement that such acts are 'against nature' [Rom. 1:26] refers to the created order in Genesis and suggests that these acts show a disruption of the natural subordinate/superordinate relations between male and female ordained by God in creation ... Paul's cultural interpretation of the Genesis traditions would indeed have left him with only one option for sexual relationships—that between a male and a female" (*The New Testament and Homosexuality*, Quarterly Review, Vol. 11, 1991, p. 25).

Lesbian New Testament scholar Bernadette Brooten, Chair of the Dept. of Judaic Studies at Brandeis University, has written one of the most important books on lesbianism in antiquity and its relationship to early Christianity, especially Rom 1:26. In her book *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, Brooten explains, "I believe that Paul used the word 'exchanged' [Rom. 1:26] to indicate that people knew the natural sexual order of the universe and left it behind ... I see Paul as condemning all forms of homoeroticism as the unnatural acts of people who had turned away from God."

William Schoedel, professor emeritus of Classics and Early Christianity at the University of Illinois, writes from a stance that is supportive of homosexual unions. Most significantly, Schoedel refuted the false claim that Rom 1:26-27 refers only to "same-sex acts performed by those who are by nature heterosexual [have a heterosexual orientation/preference]." In this regard, he stated in his book *Homosexuality, Science and the Plain Sense of Scripture*, "We would expect Paul to make that form of the argument more explicit if he intended it ... Paul's wholesale attack on Greco-Roman culture makes better sense if, like Josephus and Philo,

he lumps all forms of same-sex eros together as a mark of Gentile decadence."

Martti Nissinen is the professor of Old Testament at the University of Helsinki, and author of *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, which is considered by many to be the best book on the subject of the Bible and homosexuality from a pro-"gay" perspective. In a moment of refreshing candor Nissinen admitted in *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, "Paul does not mention *tribades* or *kinaidoi*, that is, female and male persons who were habitually involved in homoerotic relationships, but if he knew about them (and there is every reason to believe that he did), it is difficult to think that, because of their apparent 'orientation,' he would not have included them in Romans 1:24-27 ... For him, there is no individual inversion or inclination that would make this conduct less culpable ... Presumably nothing would have made Paul approve homoerotic behavior."

Objection # 2: Paul is only referring to homosexual acts when they occur within the idolatrous context of a pagan temple (same-sex male shrine prostitution).

This is one of the most commonly argued objections by numerous progressive, "gay"-affirming theologians (i.e.: Dale Martin, Letha Scanzoni, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Troy Perry). Since verse 23 describes people who have "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things," pro-"gay" advocates claim that verses 26-27 apply only to homosexual idolatrous behavior. However, Paul is not simply referring to homosexual conduct within the context of male shrine prostitution, but rather the sins of the entire human race when it abandons God. This fact becomes unmistakably clear when he continues with a litany of additional vices – "unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice ... envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness ... gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty,

boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless" (vss. 29-31). Are any of the above listed items only sinful when practiced in the context of idolatry? Like homosexuality, they are symptomatic of our fallen state and are fundamentally immoral under any circumstance. As Thomas Schmidt in his book *Straight and Narrow?* insists, "Paul is not suggesting that a person worships an idol and decides therefore to engage in same-sex relations. Rather, he is suggesting that the general rebellion created the environment for the specific rebellion." In other words, the initial sin of abandoning God inevitably leads to a precipitous moral decline, characterized by all types of moral corruption and reprehensible conduct.

Furthermore as Dr. Michael Brown explains, "There is an idolatry that many 'gay Christians' engage in, and in a sense, it is the ultimate idolatry, the idolatry of self, and it goes like this: 'I have wrestled with what the Bible says about homosexual practice, and I'm not 100 percent sure what to make of it. But I am 100 percent sure that I'm gay—that's who I am to the core of my being—and therefore I will interpret the Word through the lens of me—through the lens of who I am.' Yes, this too is idolatry, putting ourselves and our desire and our needs in the place of God, interpreting the Word based on who we are rather than interpreting who we are based on the Word. This is a surefire path to deception." This perilous, interpretive approach to Scripture is easily detected whenever homosexuals rationalize their lifestyle on the basis of it being "natural to *me*," and therefore not subject to Paul's admonition regarding unnatural relations. It's another tragic example of a theological bias driving the hermeneutical process.

Dr. Gagnon similarly states, "All sins constitute a rebellion against God and an 'idolatry' in the looser sense of supplanting God's intent for one's own." So, no matter how one looks at it, Paul strongly condemns all conduct, including any

type of homosexuality, which involves the rejection of divine design or purpose.

Objection # 3: This passage condemns only exploitative, pederastic (pedophilia) forms of homosexuality.

In her book *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, Robin Scroggs argues as a strong proponent of this viewpoint. However, there is categorically no evidence to make such a baseless claim. If the apostle Paul had intended to solely condemn adult-child sex, there were more precise Greek words to indicate boys or children. Dr. Gagnon writes as well that “had Paul intended to single out pederasts he could have used the technical term *paiderastēs*.” The use of the carefully chosen phrase “for one another” (*eis allēlous*) (vs. 27) when referring to homosexual passions is likewise indicative of the reciprocal, non-exploitative character of the relationship.

From a pro-homosexual perspective, Bernadette Brooten has criticized both John Boswell and Robin Scroggs for their erroneous use of the exploitation argument, “If ... the dehumanizing aspects of pederasty motivated Paul to condemn sexual relations between males, then why did he condemn relations between females in the same sentence? ... Romans 1:27, like Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, condemns all males in male-male relationships regardless of age, making it unlikely that lack of mutuality or concern for the passive boy were Paul’s central concerns ... The ancient sources, which rarely speak of sexual relations between women and girls, undermine Robin Scroggs’s theory that Paul opposed homosexuality as pederasty.”

Since the predominant expression of pederasty in the Greco-Roman world involved an adult male with an adolescent boy, Dr. Gagnon confirms how “the reference to lesbianism in 1:26 casts a wider net than abusive, male, pederastic relationships, in as much as lesbianism in the ancient Mediterranean world was not confined to pederastic models or rigid active verse

passive roles. The fact that Paul segues from lesbianism in 1:26 to male homosexual behavior in 1:27 with the words 'and likewise also' (*homoiōs te kai*) suggests that he rejects both forms of homosexual behavior for the same reasons; that is, on grounds other than their exploitative or oppressive character."

Objection #4: Paul identifies homosexual behavior as dirty, but not sinful.

The most outspoken promoter of this point of view is L. William Countryman, who unpersuasively attempts to distinguish between "dirty" (improper or unusual) and "what is sinful." However, the untenable foundation of this argument becomes immediately apparent when one considers the fact that homosexual behavior is described as "dishonorable passions" (vs. 26), "shameless acts" (vs. 27) and "error" (vs. 27) – not to mention several other negative descriptions of homoeroticism that are presented throughout the larger context of Romans 1. As Dr. Robert Gagnon states, "The plain reading of Romans 1:26-27 makes clear that Paul regarded same-sex intercourse and unrestrained passion for such practices as sin." And in the surrounding context of verses 18-32, the entire catalog of conduct is evaluated as equally sinful with no distinctions being made. Moreover, other significant Pauline texts unequivocally identify homosexuality as a transgression of God's moral law, which bars unrepentant participants from the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10).

James White and Jeffrey Niell also provide further clarification, "Their 'error' is not merely a 'miscalculation' as we might use the term 'error' today. Indeed, a better rendering of this term, which often is used in the New Testament to refer being misled or drawn from the right path, is 'perversion.'" So, whenever this distinct Greek word is used, moral deviancy is certainly in mind.

Finally, Paul writes that homosexuals are in danger of “receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error” (vs. 27). Homosexuality is therefore undoubtedly described as sinful and therefore worthy of the retributive wrath of God (see also vs. 18). Nevertheless, it is being commonly claimed by “gay”-affirming individuals that the Bible has only recently been reinterpreted with an anti-“gay” bias to condemn homosexuality. The historical record, however, reveals strong documented evidence to the contrary. Each of the following Church Fathers clearly and consistently spoke about homosexuality as a breach of the biblical, sexual ethic (bibliographical information included):

- Clement of Rome (d. 99) (*Epistle to the Corinthians, The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 46),
- Irenaeus (c. 130-202) (*Against Heresies, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (TANF)*, vol. 1, 504ff, book 2 and 3).
- Athenagorus (c. 133-190) (*TANF*, vol. 2; *Fathers of the Second Century: Athenagorus*, chapter 34, p. 147).
- Tertullian (c. 160-225) (*TANF*, vol. 3; *Tertullian, The Chaplet, or De Corona*, chapter 6, p. 96).
- Origen (c. 185-254) (*TANF*, vol. 4; *Origen, Against Celsus*, book 7, chapter 49, p. 631).
- Cyprian (c. 200-258) (*TANF*, vol.5; *Cyprian, The Treatise of Cyprian – “Of the Discipline and Advantage of Chastity,”* p. 588).
- Lactantius (c. 240 – 320) (*TANF*, vol. 7; *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, The Divine Institutes*, book 1, chapter 11, 20; and *Of the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died*, vol. 1, chapter 8, pp. 303-304).
- Eusebius (c. 260-340) (*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (TNP NF)*, second series, vol. 1; *Church History of Eusebius: “The Oration of Eusebius Pamphilus, in Praise of the Emperor Constantine,”* chapter 13, pp. 600-603).
- Athanasius (c. 296-373) (*TNP NF*, second series, vol.

4; *Athanasius: Select Writings and Letters, Against Heathen*, pp. 26, 17-18. See also *Select Writings and Letters, "On the Incarnation of the Word,"* vol. 4, section 5, pp. 38-39).

- Chrysostom (c. 347-407) (*TNPNF*, ; *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans – Homily 4 on Romans 1:26-27*, pp. 355-359. See also *TNPNF*, vol. 12; *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians – Homily 26 on 1 Corinthians 11:2*, verse 15, p. 154).
- Augustine (c. 354-430) (*TNPNF*, vol. 5; *Augustine's Anti-Pelagian Works: The Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on the Baptism of Infants—"Sin and the Penalty of Sin the Same,"* book 3, chapter 24, [xxii], p. 129. See also *TNPNF*, vol. 5; *Augustine's Anti-Pelagian Works: On Marriage and Concupiscence – "He Answers the Arguments of Julianus,"* book 2, chapter 35, [xxx]. *What is the Natural Use of the Woman? What is the Unnatural Use?* p. 297).

From the very beginning and all throughout the ages, there have been faithful Christians who have unwaveringly enunciated and staunchly upheld the historic biblical witness regarding homosexual practice. The revisionist claims represent nothing more than a recent development of our morally adrift, postmodern culture. Therefore, we must continue to follow in the footsteps of those who have accurately proclaimed the sinfulness of homosexuality and the need to repent of all such sexually aberrant behavior. The souls of homosexuals literally hang in the balance.

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Author's Note: *The following primary resources were utilized in the writing of this article: The Same Sex Controversy, James R. White and Jeffrey D. Niell; The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics, Robert A.J. Gagnon; Can You Be Gay and Christian?, Michael L. Brown; The Gay Gospel? How*

Pro-Gay Advocates Misread the Bible, *Joe Dallas*.

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