

THE BIBLE AND HOMOSEXUAL CONDUCT

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I. Introduction

A. With the recent Supreme Court decision holding that the Constitution forbids the outlawing of homosexual conduct and the recent ordination of a practicing homosexual as a bishop in the Episcopal Church, homosexuality is a hot topic. There is a push to get the states to recognize homosexual marriages, and the media are filled with homosexual activists arguing that people are wrong for thinking there is anything wrong with what they do.

B. Lest any of you start to think they have a point, I want to review with you some of what the Bible says on this subject and to expose some flaws in the recent attempts to dodge the meaning of these texts.

HOMOSEXUAL CONDUCT IN THE O.T.

I. Gen. 2:18-24 - Creation of woman

A. In Gen. 2:18, God, declaring that it's not good for the man to be alone, announces his intention to make a helper who is fit for or corresponds to Adam. And in 2:21-23 he fulfills that intention, not by independently creating another man, but by building a complementary being, a woman, from a part of Adam. The woman is not simply "like Adam" but "from Adam." She is a complementary fit to him. As Robert J. Gagnon puts it in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001) "[s]he is a complementary sexual 'other.'"

B. And for that reason, according to Gen. 2:24, a man shall leave his father and mother, as powerful as that bond is, and become attached to his woman/wife and the two will become one flesh. Only a being made *from* man can and ought to become someone with whom man longs to *reunite* in sexual intercourse and marriage, a *reunion* that not only provides companionship but restores man to his original wholeness. Only a being made *from* man can be a suitable and complementary counterpart to him. Male and female are "perfect fits" from the standpoint of divine design and blessing. Male and male, or female and female, are not.

C. As we'll see, this justification for male-female union -- their physical, interpersonal, and procreative sexual complementarity -- is a thread running through criticisms in Scripture of same-sex intercourse as "contrary to nature."

II. Gen. 9:20-27 - Ham's act and Noah's curse

A. You recall the episode in Gen. 9:20-27 where Noah was sleeping drunk in his tent and Ham "saw his nakedness." When Noah awoke and knew what Ham "had done to him" he cursed Ham's descendant Canaan.

B. Many scholars, past and present, Jewish and Christian, are convinced that Ham's offense was not literally seeing his father naked but raping him. There are a number of clues that point in that direction: (1) Ham was apparently in the tent and not merely at the entrance, (2) it seems Ham brought Noah's outer garment (which served as a blanket) to his brothers outside the tent, which makes sense if he was using it as proof of what he'd done, (3) the statement that Ham had *done* something to Noah is an odd way of referring to his seeing him, (4) "uncovering" and "seeing the nakedness of" is similar to phrases used elsewhere to denote sexual intercourse, (5) there is evidence from Mesopotamia and Egypt that homosexual rape was seen as a way of emasculating, disgracing, and demonstrating one's power over a rival, which fits if Ham was attempting to usurp the authority of his father and elder brothers, (6) Shem and Japheth's refusal even literally to see their father's nakedness is a contrast to Ham's metaphorical "seeing," (7) rape explains the curse on Canaan, both its severity and the fact it was on a descendant rather than Ham himself (what he'd done with his "seed" fell on his "seed"), and (8) incest and homosexual conduct are given in Leviticus 18 and 20 as reasons for God vomiting the Canaanites out of the land; they share in their ancestor's immorality.

C. If this is correct, then given the prohibition against same-sex intercourse spelled out elsewhere in the Pentateuch (e.g., Lev. 18:22, 20:13), certainly the homosexual element was part of the outrage, a compounding factor leading to the curse. Indeed, you see a lesser degree of revulsion expressed in Gen. 19:30-38 over heterosexual incest, where Lot's daughters took advantage of their inebriated father.

III. Gen. 19:4-11 - Sodom and Gomorrah

A. God has determined to destroy the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. As two angels in the form of men are heading for Sodom, God agrees not to destroy the city if ten righteous people can be found in it. Lot extends hospitality to the angels, taking them into his home, and then men from the city surround his house and demand that the visitors be brought out so they can have sex with them. Lot labels their demand "wicked." The angels pull Lot back into the house and blind the men. The next day Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain (except Zoar) were destroyed.

B. Again, given the prohibition against same-sex intercourse spelled out elsewhere in the Pentateuch, certainly the homosexual aspect of their intended sin is part of the showing that God's decision to wipe the cities off the map is justified. It shows the depth of their depravity. They're attempting to manifest inhospitality in the outrageous form of homosexual rape. Gagnon (p. 78) writes:

To suggest that the story does not speak to the issue of homosexual behavior between consenting adults, even in an indirect way, is misleading. Undoubtedly for the [author], the difference between consenting homosexual intercourse and coerced homosexual intercourse was that in the former both participants willingly degraded themselves while in the latter one of the parties was forced into self-degradation. The burden of proof is entirely on those who would assert otherwise, . . .

C. Attempts to avoid this conclusion fail and sometimes border on the silly:

1. In demanding to "know" the visitors the people of Sodom simply wanted to get acquainted. "Know" is a euphemism for sexual intercourse in other places, and the context makes that meaning clear (19:8, his two daughters had not "known" a man).

2. Ezek. 16:49-50 (ESV) - "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it [text issue - as you have seen]." The argument here is that Ezekiel did not interpret the sin of Sodom in terms of sexual immorality.

a. But the reference to their having done "an abomination" before God may be a reference to their attempt to commit same-sex intercourse. Indeed, in Ezek. 18:12 "commits an abomination" seems to be a distinct act of its own, perhaps so heinous that it could be described only in this indirect way. But even if doing "an abomination" refers to their indifference to the poor and needy, it still may have in view the attempted homosexual rape as a particularly vivid instance of crimes against the poor and needy (the seemingly helpless visitors sheltered by a resident alien).

b. Gagnon (p. 85) summarizes Ezekiel's perspective like this:

Ezekiel thought that the inhabitants of the city became "prideful" and "haughty" as a result of the city's prosperity, and in their prosperity they *both* neglected the poor *and* committed a particularly abominable act of sexual immorality. The two evils are linked by a flagrant disregard of God's own priorities, putting the human at the center of the cosmos. In Ezekiel's view, the overarching rubric for the sin of Sodom is not inhospitality or homosexual behavior but human arrogance in relation to God. The focus is theocentric.

c. Of course, even if Ezekiel is construed as not making a reference to homosexual intercourse, one still would have no basis for concluding that he was neutral about homosexual practice. Ezekiel was a priest, and his message shows the deepest concern for the kinds of purity law enshrined in Leviticus 17-26. If same-sex intercourse was not the issue among his audience, there would have been little need to address it explicitly.

3. Jude 7 says that God judged Sodom and Gomorrah because they "gave themselves up to sexual immorality and going after other flesh." The claim that this meant going after *angels* rather than going after *males* won't work because Genesis 19 does not imply that the men of Sodom knew it was angels they were seeking to have sex with and "flesh" is not a natural word to apply to angels. Thus Moo says, "Probably, then, the usual interpretation is correct: Jude associates God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah with the homosexual practices of its inhabitants."

4. Likewise, 2 Pet. 2:7 says Lot was distressed by the *licentious* conduct of the lawless men of Sodom and Gomorrah. The word refers generally to a lack of self-constraint but especially of sexual excesses. Moo comments, "As Peter points out, Genesis 19 suggests that Lot did not participate in the rampant homosexuality that characterized the cities and was, indeed, 'distressed' by it."

IV. Judges 19:22-25 - Rape of the Levite's concubine

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

B. Given the condemnation of homosexual conduct elsewhere, one cannot reasonably claim that the homosexual aspect did not add to the dimension of horror for the old man, the Levite, and the author. The repugnance for male penetration of males must have been a significant factor in twice designating the demand for intercourse with the Levite as a "disgraceful thing." It was an even greater evil than the outrage of raping the women. It underscores just how rebellious or deviant these people were.

V. Homosexual cult prostitution in Israel

A. Homosexual cult prostitution existed in Israel during the period of the divided monarchy, and the biblical authors clearly condemned it. These were men whose masculinity was believed to have been transformed into femininity by a goddess and part of whose cultic function was to offer their bodies to other men for same-sex intercourse.

1. Deut. 23:17-18 - "None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute.¹⁸ You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the Lord your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God" (NASB). NIV and

NRSV make clear that "dog" refers to "male prostitute" by translating it "male prostitute." "Dog" was a pervasive term of abuse in antiquity.

2. 1 Ki. 14:21-24 - "Now Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. . . . And his mother's name was Naamah the Ammonitess. ²² Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, . . . ²³ For they also built for themselves high places and [sacred] pillars and Asherim on every high hill and beneath every luxuriant tree. ²⁴ There were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord dispossessed before the sons of Israel" (NASB). This sounds much like the summary in Lev. 18:24-30, which followed a listing of sexual offenses that singled out in particular same-sex intercourse as an "abomination."

B. Those seeking to legitimize homosexual conduct respond, "Okay, these biblical authors were opposed to male, same-sex cult prostitution. But that only tells us what the author believed about consensual homosexual practice conducted in the context of idolatrous cults and prostitution, not the kind of loving expressions of homosexuality we witness today."

1. The problem with this is that in the ancient Near East, the *most* acceptable form of same-sex intercourse – not the least acceptable – was same-sex intercourse in a religious context. Though still looked down upon, male cult prostitutes in Mesopotamia were tolerated because their femininity was the goddess's doing, not their own. Sex with them was seen as a means of accessing the power of the goddess.

2. So when the biblical authors rejected homosexual cult prostitutes – and surely not just because they were connected to Asherah, as the epithet "dogs" indicates – they were in effect rejecting the whole phenomenon of homosexual practice. They were repudiating a form of homosexual intercourse that was the most palatable in their cultural context. If they rejected that particular form of homosexual practice, how much more all other forms?

C. They also argue that we can't know whether male cult prostitutes were "sexually oriented" toward men or were doing what they did for some other reason. But as Gagnon states (p. 110), "The bottom line for biblical authors: it did not matter why people willingly engaged in same-sex intercourse, just as it was unnecessary to parse the motivations of those who participated willingly in incest, bestiality, adultery, fornication, or heterosexual prostitution."

VI. Lev. 18:22, 20:13: Laws

A. Lev. 18:22 - "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (ESV and NRSV). Lev. 20:13 - "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them" (ESV).

1. The lexicon by Koehler and Baumgardner offer these additional definitions of the word translated "abomination" -- "an abhorrent thing," "something detestable, loathsome, utterly repugnant, disgusting." Though a number of sexual sins (and other sins) are mentioned in Leviticus 18 and 20, including incest, adultery, bestiality, and child sacrifice, only the homosexual act is specifically designated an "abomination." Collectively, they are all called "abominations," but that designation is attached separately only to homosexual conduct. That says something about the degree of revulsion associated with this. Deut. 12:31 shows that "an abominable thing" is something God *hates*.

2. These laws are unqualified and absolute. They say if a man lies with a *male* (the general term) as with a woman, not if a man lies with a neighbor (one of equal social status), a boy, or a cultic prostitute.

B. Those seeking to excuse homosexual conduct sometimes argue that the Holiness Code of Leviticus includes things we do not consider binding today, things we recognize were temporary purity regulations for the people of Israel, and that homosexual conduct is in that category.

1. It's true that some of the commands in the Mosaic law were peculiarly covenantal and as such were in force only to the coming of Christ, but there also are many commands that reflect the permanent moral desire of God. For example, Leviticus 18-20 includes prohibitions against idolatry, witchcraft, stealing, lying, adultery, incest, bestiality, child sacrifice and commands to honor one's parents and love one's neighbor. One can't just say, "Well, that's in the O.T. so it is irrelevant," especially given the revulsion expressed over homosexual conduct.

2. The fact the prohibition of homosexual conduct is grounded in the creation order, in the differentiation between male and female, points to its enduring validity. And as we will see, the prohibition against homosexual conduct is repeated in the N.T., so there is no question that it is part of God's ongoing or continuing will.

C. Those seeking to justify homosexual conduct sometimes argue that the prohibition was based on a rationale that no longer holds true in the modern context, and therefore the prohibition should not be applied.

1. They've argued that the prohibition of males having sex with males was because of the connection of such behavior with idolatry. In other words, homosexual conduct was not inherently bad but bad because of its typical associations. Few today give this argument any credence because the prohibition in Leviticus 20:13 does not follow the references to child sacrifice but is sandwiched between prohibitions of adultery and incest. Besides, the prohibition is couched in terms of males, not cult prostitutes.

2. They've argued that the prohibition was based on the fact homosexual intercourse "wastes seed" and could not lead to procreation. Given the acceptance of

non-procreative sex (contraception) among Jews and Protestants, the basis for the prohibition of homosexual conduct no longer holds. The problem is that the premise of this argument is false or, at best, unproven. Things are prohibited in the Holiness Code that *can* lead to procreation, such as incest and adultery, and some things that *cannot* lead to procreation are not prohibited, such as heterosexual sex with a "barren" woman or during a woman's pregnancy. In addition, it seems this cannot account for the level of revulsion expressed.

3. They've argued that the prohibition was based on the fact homosexual intercourse mingles semen with excrement, which were ritually defiling substances. Given that ritual defilements were temporary regulations, there is no basis for applying it today. Again, the problem is that the premise is false. The prohibition against homosexual conduct makes no mention of dung but rather speaks explicitly of gender discomplementarity ("as though lying with a woman"). Things are prohibited that have nothing to do with commingling defiling substances, such as adultery and incest, and other things that would mix semen with excrement are not mentioned, such as heterosexual anal intercourse.

D. The primary problem of male-male intercourse is that violates sexual boundaries established by God at creation. It treats a male as a female rather than as a male. This same principle is evident in Deut. 22:5 where cross-dressing is prohibited and described as an abomination. Gagnon writes (p. 138):

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

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

HOMOSEXUALITY IN FIRST-CENTURY JUDAISM AND THE N.T.

I. Homosexuality in first-century Judaism

A. We saw last week that the O.T. condemns homosexual conduct, labeling it an abomination. This morning I want to look at the N.T. evidence, but before doing that, it will be helpful to see how homosexuality was viewed in first-century Judaism. Since Jesus, the Apostles, and all writers of the N.T. (except Luke) were Jews, we can assume, unless there is evidence to the contrary, that they shared the Jewish view of things. Being aware of this religious and cultural context will help us to interpret the N.T. correctly.

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

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

2. *Mishnah Sanhedrin 7:4*, which dates around A.D. 200, states, "These are [the felons] who are put to death by stoning: He who has sexual relations with (1) his mother, (2) with the wife of his father, (3) with his daughter-in-law, (4) with a male, and (5) with a cow [or a beast], and the woman who brings an ox [or beast] on top of herself."

C. David Wright states in "Homosexuality" in the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*:

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

C. Jews, like Greek and Roman critics of same-sex intercourse, rejected homosexual conduct on the ground it was "contrary to (or against) nature." Only male-female intercourse was considered "natural" or "in accordance with nature." The two primary extrabiblical indications of this cited by Jewish authors were that semen produces life only in heterosexual intercourse and that the female body part was the

obvious receptacle for the male body part. The point is that men and women have been stamped by God with a fundamental biological complementarity that is blurred by same-sex intercourse.

D. Sexual desire for persons of the same sex does not change this basic fact. In addition, everyone recognizes that innate urges don't justify behavior. Having innate sexual urges for multiple partners, children, animals, and siblings doesn't justify adultery, pedophilia, bestiality, and incest. And having innate nonsexual urges of selfishness and anger don't justify acting on them.

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

II. Jesus' view of homosexuality

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

B. First, even if Jesus made no references to homosexual conduct, his silence cannot reasonably be construed as an endorsement of that behavior.

1. Given that he is a Jew and that Jews unanimously rejected same-sex intercourse, his silence would mean that he felt no need to challenge or alter the status quo. If he felt there was something wrong with the status quo, how would anyone realize it from silence? That's like saying, "By not specifically addressing bestiality, Jesus was thereby approving of it." It's absurd in principle.

2. Moreover, as we'll see, the N.T. writers clearly disapprove of homosexual conduct. To interpret Jesus' alleged silence as approval of homosexual conduct in the face of its disapproval by N.T. writers would be to create a contradiction between Jesus and the Spirit who inspired the N.T. writers.

C. Second, Jesus referred implicitly to homosexual conduct in Mk. 7:21-23, where he included "sexual immoralities" (or "fornications"), "adulteries," and "licentiousness" in a list of things that are evil and defiling.

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

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

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

E. Gagnon concludes (p. 228):

The portrayal of Jesus as a first-century Palestinian Jew who was open to homosexual practice is simply ahistorical. All the evidence leads in the opposite direction. . . . What is clear from the evidence that the texts do offer is that the historical Jesus is not defender of homosexual behavior. To the contrary, Jesus, both in what he says and what he fails to say, remains squarely on the side of those who reject homosexual practice. At the same time, the model of Jesus' behavior toward sexually immoral people can be compared with the model of Jesus' behavior toward those who routinely exploit others for economic gain. The church can and should recapture Jesus' zeal for all the "lost" and "sick" of society, including those engaged in homosexual practice. Concretely, this means visiting their homes, eating with them, speaking and acting out of love rather than hate, communicating the good news about God's rule, throwing a party when they repent and return home, and then reintegrating them fully into communities of faith.

III. The Apostle Paul

A. Rom. 1:16-32: ¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to the Jew first and to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is being revealed, [a righteousness] from faith to faith, just as it is written, "But the righteous from faith shall live."

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

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

1. That God's saving work, his "righteousing," is taking place in the preaching of the gospel is of supreme importance because the wrath of God that is ultimately coming is already being previewed in his wrath upon the ungodliness and unrighteousness of human beings.

2. That wrath is now being manifested in his opening the door to sinful humanity's headlong plunge into wickedness. This foretaste of wrath in these "last days" is God's "handing over" of human beings (vv. 24, 26, 28) to their chosen way of sin and all its consequences. It's something like the parent whose effort to bless his child by providing guidance has been despised for so long that he stops locking up his money, which the child then uses to buy heroin and thus to reap his punishment.

a. As Stott says, "God abandons stubborn sinners to their willful self-centredness, and the resulting process of moral and spiritual degeneration is to be understood as a judicial act of God."

b. That is what is behind Schiller's famous comment, "The history of the world is the judgment of the world."

3. Paul makes the point that the wrath of God against sinners, both in history and on Judgment Day, is just because God has revealed himself to all mankind through the

creation. Creation bears witness to God, and yet mankind willfully suppresses that testimony, preferring to go its own foolish way and to create its own gods.

a. As God "hands them over," we see the depths to which humanity sinks. Their lust finds expression in perverted sex, specifically in homosexuality. And Paul says that homosexuals receive in themselves the necessary penalty for their deviancy. The very sin they embrace winds up punishing them, mentally, socially, and physically. It is God's judgment.

b. Denials to the contrary notwithstanding, humans know at some level that God is God and that he deserves the utmost honor, and despite that knowledge, they continue to rebel against him and to approve of those who do. They know what they do is wrong and that it deserves punishment by God. This is probably due to both the revelation of creation and the "law of the heart" referred to in 2:14-15. This "general revelation" is sufficient to make all people culpable, but "special revelation" is required for people to be saved.

4. Paul's unnamed target in this section is the Gentiles, but he soon makes the point that the Jews also are under the power of sin. One can imagine some Gentiles claiming that their ignorance of God exempted them from his judgment, so Paul insists that all people have some knowledge of God and his will for them.

5. As Gagnon points out, "The depth of Paul's visceral feelings toward same-sex intercourse finds parallels not only in the level of disgust toward same-sex intercourse exhibited by other Jewish writers of the period but also in responses to homosexual behavior in Paul's scripture," which we looked at last week.

B. Vice lists in 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10

1. The texts

a. 1 Cor. 6:9-10 (NIV modified): 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 *malakoi* nor *arsenokoitai*¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

b. 1 Tim. 1:10-11 (NIV modified): We also know that law {Or that *the law*} is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers,¹⁰ for adulterers and *arsenokoitais*, for slave traders and liars and perjurers-- and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine¹¹ that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

2. The lexicons

a. Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*:

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

b. Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chi. Press, 2000):

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

c. Louw & Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*:

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

3. The versions

1 Cor. 6:9 - (ESV) men who practice homosexuality (fn. The two Greek terms translated by this phrase refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts); (NET) passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals; (NRSV) male prostitutes, sodomites; (REB) sexual pervert (combines both); (NKJV) homosexuals (fn. catamites), sodomites; (NEB) one guilty of homosexual perversion (combines both); (NIV) male prostitutes, homosexual offenders; (JB) catamites, sodomites; (NASB) effeminate, homosexuals; (RSV) sexual perverts (combines both)

1 Tim. 1:10 - (ESV) men who practice homosexuality; (NET) practicing homosexuals; (NRSV) sodomites; (REB) perverts; (NKJV) sodomites; (NEB) perverts; (NIV) perverts; (JB) those who are immoral with women or with boys or with men (combines several words); (NASB) homosexuals; (RSV) sodomites

IV. Commentators

A. 1 Cor. 6:9 - **Conzelmann**: "The sins of sexual immorality are made specific by the introduction of both passive . . . and active homosexuality." **Grosheide**: "passive and

active homosexuals respectively." **Barrett**: "the passive and active partners respectively in male homosexual relations." **Blomberg**: "the more passive and more active partners, respectively, in any male homosexual act." **Winter**: "participants in male homosexuality" (combines both). **Thiselton**: "perverts, men who practice sexual relations with men."

B. 1 Tim. 1:10 - **Quinn & Wacker**: "homosexuals," adding "There is little to be said lexically for confining the meaning of *arsenokoitai* to 'male prostitutes' or 'call-boys.'" **Liefeld**: "male homosexuals." **Knight**: "homosexuals," adding "The word does not refer, as some have alleged, only to sex with young boys or to male homosexual prostitutes, but simply to homosexuality itself." **Mounce**: "homosexuals." **Best**: "homosexual." **Kelly**: "homosexuals." **Fee**: "a word for male coital homosexuality."

IV. Early church

A. Given the clear condemnation of homosexual conduct in the O.T., extrabiblical Jewish writings, and the N.T., we would expect it to be clearly condemned in the post-N.T. writings of the early church. And that is what we find.

B. David Wright states in "Homosexuality" in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*:

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

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

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

V. The dark reality of homosexuality

A. Homosexuality in our culture is called "gay." Whatever the etymology of that word as a reference to homosexuals, the implication of the label to modern ears is that it's a kind of a merry, fun-filled existence.

B. Jeffrey Satinover has practiced psychiatry for more than two decades. He has degrees from MIT, University of Texas, and Harvard. He is a former Fellow in Psychiatry and Child Psychiatry at Yale University. In 1996 he wrote *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*. In that book (p. 51), he points out that homosexuality is associated with the following problems:

- A significantly decreased likelihood of establishing or preserving a successful marriage
- A twenty-five to thirty-year decrease in life expectancy
- Chronic, potentially fatal, liver disease – infectious hepatitis, which increases the risk of liver cancer
- Inevitably fatal immune disease including associated cancers
- Frequently fatal rectal cancer
- Multiple bowel and other infectious diseases
- A much higher than usual incidence of suicide
- A very low likelihood that its adverse effects can be eliminated unless the condition itself is
- An at least 50 percent likelihood of being eliminated through lengthy, often costly, and very time-consuming treatment in an otherwise unselected group of sufferers (although a very high success rate, in some instances nearing 100 percent, for groups of highly motivated, carefully selected individuals)