



BACKGROUND
ESSAY *on*
BIBLICAL
TEXTS *for*

“Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality”

ARLAND J. HULTGREN AND WALTER F. TAYLOR JR.

INTRODUCTION

Background Essay on Biblical Texts

BY JAMES CHILDS

The Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality is pleased to present this background paper on selected biblical texts as a companion to the study booklet, “Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality.” The authors are the Rev. Dr. Arland J. Hultgren, Asher O. and Carrie Nasby Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, and the Rev. Dr. Walter F. Taylor, Ernest W. and Edith S. Ogram Professor of New Testament Studies at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio.

Dr. Hultgren and Dr. Taylor are both among the most highly respected biblical scholars in the ELCA. Both have written previously on the subject of the Bible and our contemporary discussion of homosexuality from very different perspectives. In this essay they are not engaged in debate. Instead they provide an excellent account of how scholars have interpreted the texts that deal most directly with same-sex activity. In so doing they give us an important analysis of how different scholars studying the same texts, using comparable methods, can come to different conclusions.

We on the Task Force are grateful to Drs. Hultgren and Taylor for their willingness to undertake this project, for their example of collegial collaboration, and for the excellence of their work.

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BACKGROUND ESSAY *on* BIBLICAL TEXTS *for* “Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality”

ARLAND J. HULTGREN AND WALTER F. TAYLOR JR.

That the study of Scripture is essential for the church’s current discussion of human sexuality is an understatement, but it bears repeating. Lutheran Christians, like others, look to the Scriptures for guidance in matters facing the church and the larger world. Moreover, the fact that there are passages within the Scriptures that deal with same-gender sexual relationships makes it necessary.

Unfortunately attention gets focused on those passages as though they alone can bear the weight of the discussion concerning “what the Bible says about homosexuality” and issues related to it. Actually the entire biblical witness has to be borne in mind, for no one passage or cluster of passages should be studied in isolation. Nevertheless, there are certain biblical passages that inevitably, and necessarily, come up in a discussion of homosexuality in the church.

The purpose of this essay is to survey the passages in considerable depth but also to communicate to a broad audience in the church. The writers seek to explore the texts at a sufficient level of exposition, but also go on to discuss how they are interpreted by contemporary scholars insofar as that is possible, given the limitations of space allowed. A basic question posed to the writers, when they were asked to take on this task, was: How is it that biblical scholars, studying the same texts and using comparable methods of interpretation, come to different conclusions?

The discussion begins with Old Testament narrative passages (Genesis 19:1–11 and Joshua 19:16–30), goes on to Old Testament legal passages (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13), and then to the three New Testament passages (Romans 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; and 1 Timothy 1:9–10) that come under discussion. Since various versions of the English Bible

will be referred to below, we have provided a key to their abbreviations in an endnote.¹

Genesis 19:1–11 and Judges 19:16–30

The stories of Sodom (Genesis 19:1–11) and Gibeah (Judges 19:16–30) are quite similar. Nevertheless, it is important to review them separately. In the first of them, two angels (Genesis 19:1; but called men at 19:5, 10) come to the house of Lot at Sodom. Lot invites them to stay for the night. But “men of the city” surround the house and demand that Lot bring the visitors out that they may “know” (*yādaʿ* in Hebrew) them (19:5)—an expression used elsewhere in the Bible, as here, for sexual intercourse (Genesis 4:1, 17, 25; 1 Samuel 1:19). Lot begs that they not be so wicked and offers his two virgin daughters instead, saying that they may do to them as they please (19:8). He protects the visitors, saying that “they have come under the shelter of my roof” (19:8). The “men of the city” refuse the offer and try to break down the door. But the men (or angels) inside the house grab Lot, bring him in, and strike the men blind who are trying to break the door down. In the sequel to the story, Sodom, plus Gomorrah, is destroyed by “sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven” (19:24).

In the second story (Judges 19:16–30) an elderly man invites a traveler into his home at Gibeah to spend the night. But “men of the city” surround the house and demand that the traveler be brought out that they may “know” (*yādaʿ*) him (19:22). The elderly man begs that they not do this and offers his virgin daughter and the traveler’s concubine to do with them as they wish. At first the “men of the city” refuse, but the traveler gives them his concubine, and “they wantonly raped her, and abused her all through the night” (19:25). In the early morning the woman fell at the door of the elderly

man's house. Her master (the traveler) rose and commanded her to get up, "but there was no answer" (19:28), indicating that she had died (which the Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate versions say explicitly). The story ends with the traveler taking the body home, cutting it into twelve pieces, and sending the body parts "throughout all the territory of Israel" (19:29).

The fact that the two stories are so similar at the core,² in spite of some differences in their ending, has led some interpreters to suggest that they could be two versions of the same story.³ Others have concluded that one of the stories might be dependent on the other. Those who hold this latter view differ on which was the earlier. Some suggest that the story of Gibeah has an earlier origin,⁴ while others think that the story of Sodom was earlier and has influenced the telling of the story of Gibeah.⁵

How do these stories relate to the topic of homosexuality? Although the "sin of Sodom" is commonly thought to be homosexual activity, that is not the way the biblical writers interpreted it. Walter Brueggemann has written the following:

Of late, special attention has been given to the nature of the sin of the men of Sodom. Aside from the popular name of "sodomy" from Sodom, the text does not give much help in determining the offense....

It is likely that interpretation can go in a more general or a more specific direction. It is possible that the offense of Sodom is understood with specific reference to sexuality. But if such a reading is accepted, the turbulent mood of the narrative suggests gang-rape rather than a private act of either "sodomy" or any specific homosexual act.

However, the Bible gives considerable evidence that the sin of Sodom was not specifically sexual, but a general disorder of a society organized against God. Thus in Isa. 1:10; 3:9, the reference is to injustice; in Jer. 23:14, to a variety of irresponsible acts which are named; and in Ezek. 16:49 the sin is pride, excessive food, and indifference to the needy.

It is likely that interpreters will disagree about the "sin of Sodom," but the evidence in any case shows that the Bible did not agree that the sin was homosexuality. The use of the term "outcry" in [Gen.] 18:20–21; 19:13 argues in the direction of a general abuse of justice. (Cf. Isa. 5:7 without any explicit indictment. Cf. also Luke 10:8–12.) It may be that sexual disorder is one aspect of a general disorder. But that issue is presented in a way scarcely pertinent to contemporary discussions of homosexuality.⁶

There are several references to Sodom (and Gomorrah) in the New Testament (Matthew 10:15; 11:23–24; Luke 10:12; 17:28–29; Romans 9:29; 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7; and Revelation 11:8). What is typical of these passages—with two exceptions—is that they do not usually provide any explanation for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The result is that they do not thereby identify Sodom's particular sin. One exception is at Luke 17:28–29 where Jesus says that the destruction of Sodom "in the days of Lot" was due to divine judgment upon the people's indifference to God's claim upon their lives; they were simply consumed with eating, drinking, commerce, planting, and building. The other exception is Jude 7. The author writes that "Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality (*ekporneusasai*) and pursued unnatural lust (*apelthousai opisō sarkos heteras*), serve as an example by undergoing a punishment by fire" (NRSV). The latter Greek phrase can be translated more literally as "went after flesh other than their own."⁷ That does not refer to same-gender sexual activities, for "the Greek...does not tolerate this" meaning.⁸ Rather, the term "strange flesh" refers to the angels at Genesis 19:1 (and mentioned in the previous verse, Jude 6),⁹ and so the phrase in its entirety refers to the lust of the men of Sodom after the angelic visitors to the house of Lot, which is branded as a case of sexual immorality. The point that the author of Jude is making here is that Sodom and Gomorrah serve as illustrations of God's destruction of people who do not believe and are disobedient (along with other examples, such as Israel in the wilderness and the rebellious angels mentioned in verses 5 through 7).

The story of Gibeah has even less bearing on contemporary discussions of homosexuality. While intended sexual violence of males against males is prominent in the story of Sodom (even if not carried out), “it appears only briefly in Judg. 19, but is irrelevant and does not produce any effect, given that the toughs are content to rape the woman (v. 25).”¹⁰ The ending of the story (cutting up the woman’s body and sending the parts throughout Israel), in fact, calls attention to the sexual violence of the men of the city against the woman who is raped and killed: “the action is clearly intended to arouse the horror and indignation of all against those who had perpetrated such an outrage.”¹¹

Whether gay or straight, anyone who reads the stories of Sodom and Gibeah in a thoughtful way finds them repugnant and terrifying. They are stories of violence, not of homosexual attraction or activity. Since that is so, these stories are often set aside as irrelevant in discussions about homosexuality—at least in the case of consensual homosexual activities.¹² An exception is in the work of an interpreter who says that there is no essential difference between consenting homosexual intercourse and coerced homosexual intercourse, except that in the first case both participants degrade themselves, while in the second case one of the parties is forced into self-degradation.¹³ But that point of view overlooks the purpose of gang rape of males by males. Its purpose—particularly in a patriarchal society, but even when it occurs today—is to disgrace and humiliate the victim. It is not a matter of expressing a homosexual attraction (much less an “orientation”). “Rape—homosexual or heterosexual—is the ultimate means of subjugation and domination, the reverse side of which is the fear of being raped.”¹⁴

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

Male same-gender sexual relations are prohibited in two Old Testament laws.

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (Leviticus 18:22)

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them. (Leviticus 20:13)

Because for many Christians over the centuries these two verses have been understood as a straightforward and universally valid prohibition of homosexual activities, they have been studied closely during current discussions about the Bible and homosexuality. They have also been evaluated in widely differing ways.

Both verses are part of a larger document, the book of Leviticus. In turn they are also both part of a smaller portion of Leviticus comprised of chapters 17–26 and designated as the Holiness Code or the Law of Holiness. Although there is no reference in the Bible to a document by that name, the special language and topics contained in these chapters identify them as material that belonged together even prior to the writing of the book of Leviticus itself.

The literary setting of both Leviticus and the Holiness Code is clear: within the context of God’s giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, God details various prohibitions dealing with the dangers of entering the land of Canaan (1:1; 18:1; 20:1). Much more debated is the historical setting of when the material was written.

The first position regarding the time of writing argues that our material comes from the fifth to fourth centuries B.C. God’s people had been in exile in Babylon, but they have now returned home and need to separate themselves from non-Israelites and draw clear boundaries between themselves and their neighbors.¹⁵ Such work was particularly the work of the priests. A shorthand label for this position is that the Holiness Code is post-exilic.

The second position (the exilic) maintains that the Holiness Code was produced during the sixth-century B.C. exile itself, probably during its last years.¹⁶

The third position is that the Holiness Code is pre-exilic; that is, it was written before the exile to Babylon.¹⁷

A final position bridges the first three. The Holiness Code, in this view, contains many older elements, perhaps very old, but the document itself is best understood as having been produced during the end of the pre-exilic period and then edited after the exile. The Code thus evolved over time and is to be viewed as a collection of materials rather than as one document written at one time.¹⁸

Whatever the exact date of writing, the purpose of chapters 17–26 is clear and is summarized in 19:2: “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.” Israel’s God is a holy God, and therefore Israel, too, is to be holy. The Holiness Code outlines the parameters of life that make such holiness possible. Therefore, the people are to live in ways different from the people of Canaan and are to follow God’s “statutes and ordinances” (18:1–5); the result is life and well-being. One important dimension of such living is proper sexual behavior (18:6–30; 20:10–24), which becomes one of the ways that the people show that they have been “separated ... from the other peoples” to be God’s (20:26).

The laws of the Old Testament, therefore, were not understood by those who lived under them as arbitrary. Rather, “God’s laws manifest a basic concern for the life, health, and good order of the community; put negatively, they are concerned to shelter the community from disease, instability, and death.” More specifically the laws of Leviticus 18 and 20 have as their goal “a stable sexual community.”¹⁹

Thus the context of the two laws includes sexual behavior other than male same-gender relations. Specifically, the context in each case is that of forbidden sexual relationships: incest (18:6–18; 20:11–12, 14, 17, 19–21), intercourse during a woman’s menstrual period (18:19; 20:18), adultery (18:20; 20:10), and bestiality (18:23; 20:15–16). Each chapter also includes a prohibition against sacrifice of children to Molech (18:21; 20:2–5). Chapter 20 is often seen as a further development of chapter 18, in part because the laws in 18 are formulated in apodictic form; i.e., they are absolute prohibitions and do not specify punishment. The laws in chapter 20, on the other hand, are casuistic, i.e., they are case laws, “if a man does this, he shall be cut off from the people.” The social situation described in chapter 18 also seems to describe the three-generational extended family typical of Israel’s earlier history, whereas the concern in chapter 20 is the immediate family and the broader community.²⁰

One further difference and one point of commonality need to be noted before we move to interpretation. In 18:22 punishment is not detailed for both people involved in same-gender sexual activity; it is addressed

to the one person, “you,” who commits the act. In 20:13 both people “have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death.” Both partners seem to consent to the act in 20:13, at least part of the time.²¹ So who is punished varies between the two laws.

A constant, on the other hand, is that the action is an “abomination” (Hebrew: *tô’ēbāh*). The root meaning of the term is “to hate” or “to abhor.” It has a strongly negative meaning, and in its theological use refers to things that are incompatible with God’s nature and are thereby rejected by God.²² The gravity of the term can range widely, but in this case its gravity is such that its punishment is death (20:13). The activity that is condemned in this case must be anal intercourse, since the language in the two laws implies penetration or being penetrated. That activity results in a confusion of gender roles, since one male is acting as though he were female and the other is acting as though the partner were female. That kind of “transgression of boundaries” “constituted a threat to the purity of the land.”²³

How have people seen these laws as applicable or non-applicable to today’s questions regarding same-gender behavior? Several approaches have been proposed.

(1) *The laws deal with cultic prostitution and are therefore not relevant.* The presupposition of this view is that various fertility cults in Israel’s world practiced sacred male prostitution as part of the worship of their gods. Because that ancient religious situation no longer exists (male same-gender relations have nothing to do with the worship of such gods nor do many argue that prostitution is positive), the prohibitions related to it are no longer applicable.²⁴

Others object. Martti Nissinen doubts the existence of sacred prostitution and points to a growing consensus on that view; in addition to the “scanty evidence” for cultic male same-gender activity, he thinks the evidence does not permit limiting the two laws from Leviticus to the sacred sphere.²⁵ For those who believe there is some evidence that Canaanite fertility rites did involve female and male prostitutes, it is unclear how same-gender relations could have been understood to promote fertility. Derrick Bailey writes, “It is hardly open to doubt that both the laws in Leviticus relate to ordinary homosexual acts between men, and not to ritual or other acts performed in the

name of religion.”²⁶ In addition, the larger context for the two laws is sexual conduct within family and community.

(2) *The laws deal with the crucial issue of procreation in the life of ancient Israel, but that issue is no longer a factor.* According to this view, the purpose (or at least the primary purpose) of sexual intercourse in ancient Israel was procreation, thereby carrying out the command to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). Sexual activity between males resulted in the waste of semen (*zēraʿ*, translated in various contexts as “seed,” “semen,” and “offspring”) which was considered the “seed” that transmitted life; for a woman to conceive was, literally, “to receive seed” (Numbers 5:28). Several arguments have been put forth to support this view,²⁷ of which only two will be reported here. The first is that the prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 concern males only; nothing is said about sexual relationships between women. Second, at the time that the Levitical laws were given their present form, numerous Canaanite clans lived upon the land that Israel inhabited, and Israel was surrounded by other populations.²⁸ Therefore it is “understandable that Israel was obsessed with increasing its birth rate without endangering harmonious relations within the extended family.”²⁹

If this is in fact their basis, the laws in Leviticus can be considered to have been valid (and understandable) for a particular time and place. They should not, however, be universalized for all times and places, particularly in light of the population explosion in modern times.

Nevertheless, this view (like others listed here) is contested. Its critics have pointed out that “nowhere does the Bible explicitly put forth this type of argument in speaking against any sexual behavior.”³⁰

(3) *The laws deal with Israel’s purity concerns and are therefore not relevant.* In its setting of boundaries over against surrounding nations, Israel established many laws designed to keep its own people pure or clean. Some scholars conclude that the laws on same-gender relations are not ethical but rather are ceremonial or ritualistic only. So for John Boswell, the two laws do not deal with actions that are “intrinsically evil, like rape or theft,” but with ritually unclean actions.³¹ Nissinen concludes that the laws serve as a polemic against a non-Israelite cult (but grants that little is known about “cultic homoeroti-

cism”) and that, consequently, they serve to maintain Israel’s distinct identity from the other nations.³²

Commentators also point to the fact that many of the purity distinctions seem quaint and antiquated. So in 19:19 we read, “You shall not let your animals breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials.”

Others question whether the distinction between ethical behavior and ceremonial purity is a valid distinction for the Holiness Code. That distinction may work well in contemporary Western societies, but in Israel the two were not normally set over against each other (Hosea 6:6 being an exception). Moreover, no one today would argue that the laws against incest and bestiality are void simply because they are found in a section that deals with cultic matters or together with materials that are quite specific to the culture within which they were formulated. In addition, the word “abomination” points to the ethical seriousness of same-gender relations.³³ Even apart from those considerations, Robin Scroggs maintains in discussing 18:22 that the law in its present form does not show a cultic context and “is a general prohibition of male homosexuality.”³⁴

(4) *The laws deal with Israel’s understanding of creation and are therefore relevant.* In partial response to the third position and keyed by attention to the kinds of laws evident in 19:19, scholars have sought to probe beneath the laws themselves to discover why it is that a piece of clothing could not be made from two different kinds of material. The answer is that, while Israel’s theological thinkers could conceive of God’s ongoing creative activity, they also thought of creation as fundamentally fixed and ordered. Everything in creation had a place, and the proper location of everything was in that God-designated place. Anything out of place needed to be restored to its original and proper place. The various purity laws of Israel were designed to do just that. By restoring things to their proper place the laws also restored the holiness of the people and of the land.

In this view, the problem with male same-gender relations is that they violate God’s creative intent for human sexuality by “mixing” two things that were not intended to be mixed.³⁵ That male and female were intended to be “mixed” is clear both from the Genesis creation accounts and from human physiology.³⁶ In

contrast, to lie “with a male as with a woman” is, on the part of one male, to act as though the partner were a woman, and on the part of the other male, to act as though he were a woman. Both actions are considered, implicitly, contrary to human nature as established by God. Because, for Leviticus, this activity so violates the gender boundaries God established at creation it is, as we have seen earlier, an “abomination.” At that point, some argue that such behavior also is idolatrous, not because the persons worship another god, but because they deny the God-created intention for their sexuality.³⁷ Perhaps that is why the two laws in Leviticus are so absolute: there is nothing about status differential between the two males, nothing about age differential, nothing about exploitation or abuse. Any such contact is an abomination.

Nor is the concern solely with creative intent. It is also with living in society, which is the same concern seen in the other laws on sexual behavior in Leviticus 18 and 20. Thus the laws promote “a pattern [of behavior] conducive to the healthy functioning of a people set apart to serve God’s holy purposes.”³⁸ And, as opposed to Western thought, “at stake is the protection of the community and its social structures, a concern which apparently takes precedence, at least in the matters listed here, over the free expression of the individual.”³⁹

As counter to the position based on creative intent, Nissinen emphasizes that the issue is one of gender roles, specifically that the male by engaging in same-gender relations is being reduced to the lower, degraded status of a woman.⁴⁰ Since that view is based on male dominance over women, and since the relationship of women and men in contemporary Western societies is one of equality, the basis of Leviticus’s understanding of same-gender relationships is removed. Bernadette Brooten takes a similar position.⁴¹

(5) *Although the laws deal with Israel’s understanding of creation, that understanding need not be normative today.* According to this view, the complementarity of male and female that is assumed in the laws of Leviticus, based primarily on human anatomy (but also on the self-understanding of most people), does not do justice to what is known about human sexuality in modern times. The concepts of sexual orientation, heterosexuality, and homosexuality were unknown to the biblical writers. In current understanding, however, it is widely recognized that

a person’s genitalia are only one part of one’s sexual make-up; therefore the “anatomical complementarity” that seems so obvious is not the primary clue to any one person’s sexual orientation, even if it is for most persons.⁴² One’s self-understanding as a sexual being is more a matter of the mind than it is of physiological appearances. Accordingly, to absolutize Israel’s understanding of creation in matters of human sexuality and to refuse to consider newer understandings of human sexuality (such as the concept of sexual orientation) is to deny the God-given powers of reason, observation, and experience.⁴³ As Luke Timothy Johnson has phrased it: “For many persons the acceptance of their homosexuality is an acceptance of creation as it applies to them.”⁴⁴ Since the refusal to consider newer understandings is not done in other areas of human inquiry and understanding,⁴⁵ the argument goes, it should not be done here either.

Can this way of thinking be accepted? If so, other issues arise. One is the whole world of the interpretation and application of Scripture. When, where, and how is a “biblical” view of anything normative? When can it be considered time-and-culture bound? How is one to decide? Another issue raised is the question of a Christian anthropology (understanding of the human) for today. What sources shall one use? To what degree does a Christian anthropology depend upon Scripture, and how much does it depend on tradition, scientific observation, and experience?⁴⁶ These questions go to the heart of debates of various kinds that the church faces.

(6) *The laws deal with “abnormal” sexual behavior in the eyes of the ancient Israelites, but that does not settle the matter subsequently.* According to this view, every cultural group has its understanding of what is “normal” and what is “abnormal.” What is reflected in the Levitical laws is an attitude concerning a behavior that is considered dangerous to the community.⁴⁷ The laws represent a “codification of [Israel’s] disdain” for same-gender sexual relationships, but that “in no way represents an unalterable law inherent in human nature.” The condemnation expressed in these laws “derives from fears and taboos” that should not be perpetuated in the present.⁴⁸

This position is the most sweeping of those discussed. The interpreter who adopts it should ask whether it is sufficient to explain the origins of biblical law (in this

case at least) in taboos rather than in theological reflection on the nature of human life.

Finally, apart from arguments regarding the content of the verses in question, can Christians use passages from Leviticus in developing ethical positions today? Many say “no.” Those who reject the Bible in general as a source of ethical direction would, of course, also reject the Leviticus passages. Others who use the Bible as at most the source of guiding principles would find these laws much too specific. But things are seldom that simple. When Christians search the Bible for guiding principles they often highlight “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” a saying that comes from Leviticus 19:18 (part of the same Holiness Code!) and that is used by Jesus (Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27), Paul (Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14), and James (James 2:8). As Erhard Gerstenberger has written, “Leviticus consists of a peculiar mixture of the most primitive taboo regulations, intricately refined purity regulations, and lofty ethical norms.”⁴⁹ Mark Allan Powell poses the dilemma well: “The problem for interpreters is to discern which passages speak of what Christians should regard as enduring or universal standards and which reflect matters specific to the culture of Israel.”⁵⁰ The New Testament church began that process. Thus some purity laws were set aside—most notably those regarding dietary rules and separation of Jews from Gentiles (Acts 10:9–29, e.g.), but others such as the Leviticus laws on incest and adultery have remained in force.

One criterion that the church has used to discern the enduring or universal standards is to see what material is used in the New Testament witness.⁵¹ As we will see, some commentators see that usage in the Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Timothy texts discussed below. As one interpreter has put it, “unlike dietary laws, which are specifically overturned in the New Testament, the proscription of homosexual activity specifically remains in the New Testament.”⁵² On the other hand, as we shall also see, other interpreters have concluded that while the New Testament prohibits certain kinds of same-gender sexual behavior, it is silent on others.

Romans 1:26–27

Like other biblical texts, Romans 1:26–27 should not be read in isolation from its larger contexts, both literary and historical. We shall discuss both of these contexts, beginning with the literary one.

The passage belongs within a rather lengthy portion of Paul’s Letter to the Romans, extending from Romans 1:18 to 3:20. That section begins with the declaration: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth” (1:18, NRSV). It is important to bear in mind that in 1:18–3:20 Paul does not, strictly speaking, carry on a doctrinal discussion. What he is doing (within the larger purpose of the letter as a whole) is exposing the situation of humanity before God, thereby explaining the basis for the wrath of God against all. When he has done that to his satisfaction, he will make a complete turn-about at 3:21 to declare that “but now” the “righteousness of God” has been revealed in the death and resurrection of Christ, by means of which God justifies all who believe in the gospel.

The two verses under discussion here should be read within the context of 1:18–3:20, and more specifically within 1:18–32. The comments that follow pertain to the latter portion.

1. The section has to do with the Gentile world.⁵³ See especially those verses that speak of idolatry (1:23, 25). Paul turns to Jewish accountability before God in 2:17–3:8.

2. The idolatry of the Gentile world has provoked the divine wrath, which expresses itself in God’s abandoning that world to its own destructive behavior. The three-fold pairing of the verbs “exchanged” and “gave them over” (NRSV) in 1:23–24, 1:25–26a, and 1:26b–28 should probably be taken as one dynamic, expressed in three different ways, rather than as a sequence of three occasions.

3. The consequences of the idolatry of the Gentiles—and their being abandoned to their own devices—include foolish thinking and destructive behavior (including such things as wickedness, malice, murder, slander, insolence, rebelliousness

against parents, and much more). Here an interpretive question arises. Does that larger context have implications for our understanding of 1:26–27 in particular? The literary context appears to favor the view that indeed even in those verses a destructive behavior is being referred to. But what that might include is a matter to which we should return in light of historical and philological considerations.

4. In order to make the point that the Gentiles stand before God as condemned because of their idolatry and their consequent behaviors, Paul paints not only with a broad brush but also with extremely dark, vivid colors. The behavior of which he speaks in 1:18–32, including 1:26–27, appears to apply to the Gentiles as a whole and as something typical of them. That does not mean that every single Gentile indulges in any one item listed, but it means that Paul is being indiscriminate in describing how the Gentiles tend to be: idolatrous, immoral, and violent.

5. All through 1:22–27 the indicative verbs in Greek are in aorist (simple past) tense. The effect is that Paul carries on his discourse as though he is talking about something that happened at some point in the past (*in illo tempore*, “in that time” of mythical origins) that explains the present. In effect, he is saying that the way to account for Gentile misbehavior in the present is that “ever since the creation of the world” (1:20) the Gentiles have had the opportunity to worship God, but instead they have been idolatrous; and their misbehavior flows from that.

Once these observations have been made concerning literary matters, a host of interpretive issues arise. Not least of them are historical and philological questions, and the conclusions one draws from the answers to those questions will vary.

One interpretive process might proceed as follows. In order for Paul to paint the Gentile world with a broad brush and with vivid, dark colors, it is convenient and not particularly surprising that he would pick up and use a familiar “topos” in Hellenistic Jewish tradition.⁵⁴ A familiar topos in that tradition is that, when a writer wants to make a sweeping, negative statement about Gentiles, he calls them idolaters and sexual deviants.⁵⁵

Common criticisms of the Gentiles are that they have tendencies toward adultery⁵⁶ and that they indulge in same-gender sexual activities, for nearly all of the known Hellenistic Jewish texts that speak of and condemn same-gender sexual activities are directed against Gentiles.⁵⁷ (Exceptions are texts that refer to prior Old Testament passages.⁵⁸) In fact, such activities were often considered a Gentile vice.⁵⁹ Moreover, instances in intertestamental and later Jewish literature where idolatry and sexual misbehavior are linked together specifically are cases where pederasty is being condemned.⁶⁰ (Pederasty is an on-going relationship between an adult man with a boy, in which the elder assumes the active role, and the latter the passive, in sexual relationships.⁶¹) Interpreters across the spectrum are in virtual agreement that, while pederasty was not the only form of same-gender sexual activity that the Hellenistic Jewish writers criticized, it was the most obvious, most prominent, and most despicable.⁶² It has also been maintained by some that the most public and most severely criticized same-gender sexual activities were not between persons of the same age and class; in fact, according to some historians,⁶³ but not all,⁶⁴ same-gender sexual activities between persons of the same age and class are virtually unknown in the sources (exceptions being adult male prostitution). If it is the case that Paul picks up and uses a “topos” at Romans 1:26–27 to build a case, it can be argued that it is not likely that the apostle envisions actual situations in which two persons of the same gender are committed to one another in a permanent, committed, and loving relationship. Furthermore, the fact that his statement is so sweeping indicates that he is not directing his comments to a small minority of the population who could be regarded as “homosexuals” today (a term not current in Paul’s day); rather, he has the whole Gentile world in mind. There is plenty of evidence in the sources to indicate that various forms of same-gender sexual activity were practiced and tolerated widely among Gentiles—from abusive to non-abusive, one can assume. Paul includes all of it in one category.

The person who holds such a view concerning Romans 1:26–27, however, must acknowledge that, when all is said and done, Paul does nevertheless depict same-gender sexual activity known to him or to his tradition in negative terms. Furthermore, he places it at the top of the list of misbehaviors of the

Gentiles.⁶⁵ While that must be granted on all sides of the discussion of human sexuality, the responses will differ. From one point of view, the matter is settled: “both idolatry and same-sex intercourse are singled out by Paul as particularly clear and revolting examples of the suppression of the truth about God accessible to pagans in creation and nature.”⁶⁶ From another point of view, the question remains open whether there is any direct correlation between what Paul knows, envisions, or imagines as same-gender sexual behavior within this topos and what the Church is facing in our time (permanent, committed, and loving relationships between persons of the same gender). Do we have “apples and apples” or “apples and oranges”?

Other interpretive issues, widely debated among interpreters, include the meanings of certain words and phrases in Romans 1:26–27. Even to provide a literal translation of these verses becomes a problem, since the ways that a person translates the words and phrases in question predetermines to some degree how he or she will interpret them. One literal translation of 1:26b–27a would be: “their females exchanged the natural use (*tēn physikēn chrēsin*) for that which is contrary to nature (*para physin*); likewise also the males, putting aside the natural use (*tēn physikēn chrēsin*) of the female were consumed with passion in their lusts for one another.” A comparison of this with other current translations (e.g., the RSV, NIV, and NRSV) shows that there are different ways to go.

There are two translation and interpretive problems to mention in particular. First, what is the meaning of the word *chrēsis* (the dictionary form [nominative] of the accusative used above, *chrēsin*)? Its most basic meaning is “use, usage,” but it is translated as “relations” (meaning sexual relations) in the RSV and NIV and as “intercourse” in the NRSV.⁶⁷ Yet one can wonder about the nuances of the Greek term. The English terms “sexual relations” and “sexual intercourse” imply a reciprocity (or mutuality) that the Greek term does not necessarily imply. Although there were certainly loving sexual relationships among persons in the Greco-Roman world, the literature refers often to sexual activities that were anything but that, and were in fact exploitive and casual.⁶⁸ Exhortations in the New Testament to husbands that they should love their wives (Ephesians 5:25; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7) cannot be passed over lightly.

Having made that point, however, the interpreter can be asked: What term other than *chrēsis* should Paul have used to speak of sexual relationships? He used a term current in the Greco-Roman culture of his day.

The other term under frequent discussion is the word translated “nature” (*physis*), as well as its adjectival form (*physikē*, “natural”) and the phrase translated “contrary to nature” (*para physin*). Here the scholarly literature is mixed. An investigation into Paul’s use of the terminology elsewhere does not finally settle its meaning here. He uses the adjectival form only twice, and both are in these two verses. He uses “nature” (*physis*) seven times other than here. In those instances the term has a wide range of meanings. Accordingly, it can refer to one’s origins (“we who are Jews by nature,” Galatians 2:15); to deny legitimacy to something (“beings that by nature are not gods,” Galatians 4:8); to mean little more than a custom (nature teaches that a man should not have long hair, 1 Corinthians 11:14); and to mean what the NRSV translates as “instinctively” (Romans 2:14; RSV and NIV have “by nature”). In still other places the term refers to what is true to, or consistent with, the order of things (branches grown from their native tree, Romans 11:21, 24; males being born uncircumcised “by nature,” 2:27).

What then would Paul mean when he speaks of natural, unnatural, and contrary to nature in this passage? One response ready at hand among various interpreters is that “nature” in this context refers generally to Genesis 1–2 and the created order.⁶⁹ Consequently, it has been proposed that, for Paul, “nature” in Romans 1:26–27 refers to “the material shape of the created order,” and that sexual activity “contrary to nature” is that which does not fit the norm of “the anatomical and procreative complementarity of male and female.”⁷⁰ Other interpreters have viewed the language at stake here quite differently. It has been held, for example, that for the ancients “nature” expresses essentially that which is conventional, and that “unnatural” is a synonym for what is “(seriously) unconventional.”⁷¹ Similarly, it has been maintained that, specifically in the writings of Paul, “nature” is used in ethical contexts and never in the sense of its meaning in modern natural science. Whatever is in accord with nature is true to its type, customary, or according to the rules.⁷²

Other interpreters have focused not so much on the word “nature” itself, since it has various shades of meaning, but on the phrase translated here as “contrary to nature.” In their view, the translation of *para physin* itself is flawed. It should not be translated “contrary to nature” but as “beyond nature” or “in excess of what is natural.”⁷³ According to this view, same-gender sexual activity was considered to be “the most extreme form of heterosexual lust.”⁷⁴ For those who maintain this view, their point can be supported by giving attention to the words and phrases that follow. The idolatrous Gentiles know no bounds. Since the beginning of time, their men were and have been “consumed in their passion” for one another. The verb translated here as “consumed” (as in the RSV and NRSV, but as “inflamed” in the NIV) is *ekkaiō*, and the noun used for “passion” (RSV and NRSV, but “lust” in the NIV) is *orexis*. Both appear only here in the New Testament. The verb has the meaning of being utterly consumed by fire and can be used metaphorically not only in connection with sexual passion but also in regard to wrath and rage. It appears dozens of times in Hellenistic Jewish texts,⁷⁵ as in Sirach 23:17 (23:16b in English versions): “A fornicator will not cease until fire utterly consumes him.” The noun for “passion” has a pejorative, negative connotation in other Greek sources,⁷⁶ as at Sirach 23:6 where gluttony is called “passion of the belly” (*koilias orexis*). That which is “unnatural” or “beyond what is natural” is therefore regarded as excessive, uncontrolled passion that transgresses normality.

Here again, however, there is no unanimity among interpreters. There are many passages that speak about same-gender sexual activities, using the term “against (or beyond) nature” (*para physin*).⁷⁷ The problem with drawing upon these passages for interpreting Romans 1:26–27 is that they do not brand any one kind of behavior as “against (or beyond) nature.”⁷⁸ In any case, it is certainly a matter of debate whether their authors always had insatiable and addictive passions in mind as they wrote.

This passage in Romans is distinctive in many respects, and one that is especially significant is that it is the only biblical passage that speaks of same-gender sexual activity among females. In 1:26b Paul writes that “their females exchanged the natural use (*tēn physikēn chrēsin*) for that which is contrary to (or beyond?)

nature (*para physin*).” He places that activity prior to the similar activity of the males, and interpreters have made various suggestions for the reason why. One view is that it allows Paul “to give more emphasis to the male perversion by referring to it in the latter part of the sentence” and allows him to deal with the latter “more fully.”⁷⁹ Another is that the female activity he has in mind was more shocking, and so by mentioning it first Paul employed “a rhetorical strategy adapted to his cultural context: lead with one’s strongest suit.”⁸⁰ Whatever the reason, it is again the case that Paul makes a sweeping claim about the Gentiles—not to a small percentage of them that would be identified today as homosexual persons. “Their females,” from early on, behaved and have behaved in disgusting ways. Paul does not spell out exactly what he has in mind. Is he speaking of abusive behavior? Or does he mean that their behavior is “contrary to (or beyond) nature” in the sense that the females of the Gentile world “confounded societal categories of gender that classify all females as passive, subordinate recipients of penetration” and became like males, “trying to transcend the passive, subordinate role accorded to them by nature by attempting to take on a dominant, penetrating role”?⁸¹ In fact, is it possible that he is not speaking here of same-gender sexual activity among females at all? After all, he does not say that the females indulged in same-gender activity, but only exchanged what is customary for what is *para physin*. There are interpreters who maintain that here Paul is referring to an inordinate desire of females within marriage,⁸² although that is certainly a minority view.

The fact that Paul speaks of female same-gender sexual activity in this passage undercuts the claim that the only form of same-gender activity Paul has in mind is pederasty. For some interpreters, that means that in this passage Paul speaks about same-gender sexual activity, male and female, in a comprehensive way and condemns it. Others would nuance that by repeating what has been said above. Paul picks up a “topos” to build a case against the Gentile world, in which all kinds of sexual activity were practiced and tolerated. According to him, they lived in an idolatrous and therefore “false world” inhabited “equally by women as well as by men.”⁸³

One final matter should be touched upon before leaving this text. The closing words of 1:27 speak of “the

due penalty for their error.” According to one popular view, Paul is speaking here of AIDS as a consequence of homosexual behavior. Three things can be said in response. First, if that is the case, one must conclude that these words from Paul could not have been understood by readers until late in the twentieth century when AIDS became a well-known and widespread disease; the verse was meaningless for nearly two thousand years. Second, on the world scene HIV infection has been transmitted more by heterosexual than homosexual activity. And third, it has been spread not only by sexual contact but also by other means as well (infected blood supplies, infected instruments and needles, etc.). As commentaries usually say, “their error” in the phrase most likely refers to idolatry, and the “penalty” to their abandonment to their own destructive behavior.

It is helpful in interpreting this passage to ask the question, “Why does Paul bring up the matters he deals with in Romans 1:26–27? Is he aware of behavioral problems in the Christian congregation(s) at Rome?” The answer has to be that that is not likely to be the case. As indicated earlier, these verses must be understood within the larger context of Romans 1:18–32 and then of 1:18–3:20. Paul is discussing the wrath of God against all humanity, Jew and Gentile alike, prior to speaking of the good news of the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ, by which salvation is made possible for all. The verses discussed here are not about “homosexuality” per se but about same-gender sexual activities that are a symptom of a fallen world. The question before the church is whether the activities he envisions as typical and characteristic of the Gentiles are symmetrical with those forms of same-gender sexual activities that are currently under discussion.

1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and 1 Timothy 1:9–10

One passage in 1 Corinthians figures prominently in discussions of same-gender relationships:

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed,

you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9–11)

Paul had founded the congregation in Corinth, Greece, having worked there from approximately the winter of A.D. 50/51 until the summer of 52. Altogether his initial missionary labor in the city lasted eighteenth months (Acts 18:11).⁸⁴ Paul tells us that he is in Ephesus when he writes the letter we call 1 Corinthians: “But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost” (16:8). Pentecost is in the spring of the year. After he leaves Ephesus he plans to travel through Macedonia (northern Greece) on his way to Corinth, where he may spend the next winter (16:5–7). The question regarding the date of Paul’s writing is more difficult, since the only time reference in the letter is that Paul was writing before Pentecost—but in what year? Paul had left Corinth in 52; he left Ephesus in 55. Giving him time to travel to Ephesus and to hear about problems in Corinth, we have 53 as the earliest probable date for 1 Corinthians. Thus Paul wrote somewhere between 53 and 55.⁸⁵

From Chloe’s “people” (slaves or employees; 1 Corinthians 1:11) Paul has received oral reports about divisions in the community. The more immediate reason for writing is a letter he has received from Corinth (7:1). But Paul also has received a delegation from the city (16:17). It is probable that the three men in the delegation (Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus) are waiting for Paul’s letter to take back with them to Corinth.⁸⁶ It is even possible they brought with them the letter referred to in 7:1. With the three men waiting for his reply, Paul dictates 1 Corinthians.

The letter he dictates focuses on two items. First, in the face of various disagreements, the letter is an extended plea for unity. Second, many of the problems relate to behavior, and the Corinthians have raised with Paul a number of questions about how they as Christ-believers should be conducting themselves. The questions deal with real-life issues, including: sexual immorality (someone is having relations with his father’s wife, 5:1–13), lawsuits between followers of Christ (6:1–11), relations with a prostitute (6:12–20), and marital relationships (including instruction to the married, the unmarried, widows, and those considering divorce, 7:1–40). Thus the letter is also an extended admonition on what the Corinthians should and should not do.

The tone of admonition is evident in the first words of 6:9: “Do you not know?” Paul is telling them—once again—what he has told them before.⁸⁷ The introductory words likely point to the fact that this material was used catechetically in the early church, i.e., in instruction for converts and for those already baptized. The word “wrongdoers” (NRSV) is misleading. The actual Greek term is *adikoi*, “unjust” or “unrighteous,” which indicates that the misbehavior also affects one’s relationship with God. And so the persons who are “unjust” “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (6:9). The solemnity of that statement is carried into the warning that introduces the list of activities that disqualify one for the kingdom: “Do not be deceived!” The words can also be translated, “Don’t go astray!”⁸⁸ They introduce a list of ten disqualifying behaviors. Despite the NRSV translation, Paul in the Greek has placed a negative in front of each term: “neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers . . .” This rhetorical device⁸⁹ serves to highlight and draw attention to each individual term.

Of the ten items listed in 6:9–10 three are of particular interest for our topic: *pornoi*, *malakoi*, and *arsenokoitai*. The meaning of each of these words needs comment.

Pornos (the singular form of *pornoi*) means “one who practices sexual immorality, fornicator.”⁹⁰ While *pornos* can be used to refer to a male prostitute, it is a general term that can be applied to a wide range of sexual activities. Later in the same chapter, for example, Paul adamantly opposes a Christian man who would join his body to a prostitute (*pornē*, 6:15–16); such an action is *porneia* (6:13; i.e., immorality, unlawful sexual intercourse), from which the Christian is to flee (6:18). Already in chapter 5 Paul has used the term to label the actions of a man living with his stepmother (*porneia*, 5:1). Since *pornos* is listed first, to be followed by idolaters and adulterers, and since therefore it is not immediately connected with terms referring to same-gender sexuality, it does not seem to refer specifically to same-gender sexual expression.

The next two terms (*malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*) are much more central to discussions regarding same-gender sexual activity. Although some interpreters consider the two words to be unrelated to one another, the usual view is that they are indeed linked (and that is the view expressed here), and therefore each term sheds

light on the other. The word *malakos* (singular for *malakoi*) is the ordinary Greek word for “soft,” and it has that meaning within the New Testament writings (Matthew 11:8; Luke 7:25). The term was also used, however, in a moral sense already by Aristotle to refer to persons who lack moral self control.⁹¹ Beginning with the KJV (1611), the term has also been translated as “effeminate.”

With an eye toward the second of the two words, translators and interpreters in modern times have considered the term to have a sexual connotation. The first edition of the RSV (1946) translated the two terms (*malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*) together, combining them into one term, “homosexuals.” This was revised later so that the 1971 edition read “sexual perverts.” Several other English versions have also combined the two Greek words to designate one thing. The NEB (1961) translated them together to mean persons “guilty of . . . homosexual perversion.” The TEV (1966) has “homosexual perverts.” The first edition of the NAB (1970) has “sodomites” (for the second edition of this version, 1986, see below). The REB (1989) has “sexual pervert.”

Most translations, however, use two terms at this place. Following the various versions in chronological order, the translations are as follows (the first noun referring to *malakoi* and the second to *arsenokoitai*):

- KJV (1611): “nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind.”
- ASV (1901): “nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men.”
- JB (1966): “catamites, sodomites.”
- NASB (1960): “nor effeminate, nor homosexuals.”
- NIV (1973): “nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders.”
- NKJV (1982): “nor homosexuals, nor sodomites.”
- NJB (1985): “the self-indulgent, sodomites.”
- NAB (1986): “nor boy prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals.”
- NRSV (1989): “male prostitutes, sodomites.”

As can be seen, the translations differ widely. It should be pointed out that even when the term “homosexuals” is used, there is a vast difference between “homosexuals,” “practicing homosexuals,” and “homosexual offenders.”

The two Greek terms are no doubt related, but just how they relate is debated. In the standard Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament used today, the term *malakos* is said to pertain here “to being passive in a same-sex relationship, *effeminate*.”⁹² The other term, *arsenokoitēs* (the singular of *arsenokoitai*), on the other hand, is said to refer to “a male who engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex, *pederast*,” referring to the “one who assumes the dominant role.”⁹³ The entries in the lexicon for these terms illustrate how difficult it is to pin down the precise meanings of these two Greek terms. The words “effeminate” and “pederast” (both in bold italics in the lexicon) are considered “formal equivalents” for the terms in question, according to the way the lexicon has been composed.⁹⁴ But there is a big difference between rendering the passage to say that “the effeminate and pederasts” will not inherit the kingdom of God and rendering it to say, in a general way, that persons who are passive and dominant in a same-gender sexual relationship will not inherit the kingdom.

Discerning the meaning of the word *arsenokoitēs* is particularly difficult, since it does not exist in any known sources prior to Paul’s own use. Various interpreters have sought to get at its most likely linguistic origins and meaning. In recent scholarship there appears to be a consensus that the term was coined—either by Paul or within Hellenistic Judaism before him—from the words “male” (*arsēn*) and bed (*koitē*) that appear in each of the two Leviticus verses in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) that have been discussed above. In Leviticus 18:22 two words separate the pair, but in 20:13 the two words occur next to each other.⁹⁵ When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 6:9, therefore, he coined a term—or picked up a current term—that has its background in reflection on those passages in Leviticus. Thus he appears to presuppose the ongoing relevance of the Leviticus passages, giving them an application to what he has observed in his own time.

Interpreters are divided, however, concerning the range of applicability that the terms used here will bear. Some conclude that Paul refers to homosexual activity in a general sense. If that is so, he uses the two terms to speak, respectively, of the passive and active partners in male homosexual relations.⁹⁶ On the other hand, there are interpreters who have concluded that the terms have a more specific meaning in light of the

predominant overt same-gender sexual activity in Greco-Roman culture. According to this view, the *malakoi* were the prepubescent boys used in pederasty, and the *arsenokoitai* were those who kept them for their sexual favors.⁹⁷ Still others suggest that the former were prostitutes (“call boys”), and the latter their customers.⁹⁸ Further, it has been suggested that the former could be male prostitutes, and the latter could be men who engage in same-gender sexual relations in general.⁹⁹ Finally, it has been said that the terms are too vague and should not be used for generalizations beyond Paul’s experience and world.¹⁰⁰

This state of affairs makes it all the more difficult to translate the two terms into modern English. The translation of the terms as “male prostitutes” and “sodomites” of the NRSV and “male prostitutes” and “homosexual offenders” of the NIV illustrate the difficulty. If the term *malakoi* means “male prostitutes,” it does not then refer in general to those who take on the passive role in a same-gender sexual encounter. Likewise, if the term *arsenokoitai* refers to “homosexual offenders,” it does not thereby refer to “sodomites” in general—unless the NIV translators intended to mean that all males who take on the active role in same-gender sexual encounters are “offenders.”

There are larger issues at stake concerning what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. How much can be inferred from the context, both immediate and more broadly in Scripture? According to one approach, the larger context of these three verses helps to explain why such relationships are not allowed, according to Paul. They are not allowed because they are not monogamous, opposite-gender marriages (7:1–6; this is also a typical ancient Jewish approach). For Paul any other genital expression is *porneia* (immorality; 1 Corinthians 6:12–20; 7:2). And why is that so? Paul does not answer that question at the beginning of chapter 6, but in 6:16 he quotes Genesis 2:24 that “the two shall be one flesh.” He thus takes his readers to the Genesis creation stories and perhaps implies that what he says in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 is based on his understanding of God’s will revealed in creation, an argument that is more clearly seen in Romans 1. Jesus, too, quotes Genesis 2:24 as well as Genesis 1:27 (Mark 10:6–9).

According to another approach, the context for these three verses is more limited, and the reference to

Genesis can be seen differently. The context has to do with relationships and behaviors within the Christian community, and that is a sufficient interpretive frame. One person (or perhaps more than one) is taking others to civil courts to settle disputes (6:1–8). Others claim that their presumed freedom from the law allows them to say, “All things are lawful for me” (6:12), and therefore fornication and sexual relationships with prostitutes are permissible (6:13–16). Concerning the latter, Paul insists that Christians are “members” of Christ and are “united” with him. Union with a prostitute entails a union with her (6:16, quoting Genesis 2:24 as support) and, by implication, severance from Christ. Paul’s reference to Genesis 2:24 is seen then as an appeal to a biblical text concerning the consequences of sexual intercourse (an indissoluble union); he does not make use of the Genesis text as a basis for claiming that same-gender sexual activity is contrary to the divine intent for all men and women. (Paul might indeed have thought that way, if asked about it, but he does not make the point here.) In any case, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, like those before and after it (6:1–8, 12–16), is about relationships and behaviors within the Christian community. It consists of a declaration that the “unjust” or “unrighteousness” (*adikoi*, 6:9) will not inherit the kingdom of God. The list that follows illustrates those who belong to the *adikoi* (ten kinds of persons in both the Greek and the NRSV).

Whatever the activity Paul has in mind, he writes, “And this is what some of you used to be” (1 Corinthians 6:11, along with other things listed in 6:9–10). What exactly such previous activities were is the nucleus of the debate over these verses. The more generally one understands the references in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, the more applicable the passage is to today’s situation. The more narrowly one defines the references to prostitution, pederasty, and/or to the call-boy, the less applicable the passage is.

We encounter similar decisions when we turn to 1 Timothy 1:9–10. 1 Timothy is a deutero-Pauline work, meaning that the document was probably written in the 90s of the first century by someone other than Paul to update him for a new era.¹⁰¹

This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless

and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching. (1 Timothy 1:9–10)

The interpretive key is, once more, three words—two of them already encountered in 1 Corinthians: *pornoi*, *arsenokoitai*, and the new term, *andrapodistai*. These three words are translated in modern versions as follows, saying that “the law is laid down” for:

KJV: “whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers.”

ASV: “fornicators, for abusers of themselves with men, for menstealers.”

RSV: “immoral persons, sodomites, kidnapers.”

NASB: “immoral men and homosexuals and kidnapers.”

NEB: “fornicators, perverts, kidnapers.”

JB: “those who are immoral with women or with boys or with men.”

TEV: “the immoral, for sexual perverts, for kidnapers.”

NAB (1st ed.): “fornicators, sexual perverts, kidnapers.”

NIV: “adulterers and perverts, for slave traders.”

NKJV: “fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnapers.”

NJB: “the promiscuous, homosexuals, kidnapers.”

NAB (2d ed.): “the unchaste, practicing homosexuals, kidnapers.”

NRSV: “fornicators, sodomites, slave traders.”

REB: “fornicators, perverts, kidnapers.”

Pornos (the singular of *pornoi*) could refer, as we have seen, to a wide range of sexual behavior. Although it could at times mean “male prostitute,” the more obvious meaning in most places in the New Testament and in the only occurrence of the word in the Septuagint (Sirach 23:17)¹⁰² is that of a sexually immoral person in general—but that will be part of the interpretive crux (see below). We have, in addition, seen that the second term, *arsenokoitēs* (the singular of *arsenokoitai*) is usually understood to refer to the active partner in a male same-gender relationship, although there is not universal agreement on the kind of relationship involved.

The third term is *andrapodistēs* (the singular of *andrapodistai*), which is translated in the standard Greek lexicon as “one who acquires persons for use by others, slave-dealer,

kidnapper.” The editor indicates that for our passage perhaps the meaning is “procurer.”¹⁰³ The term occurs only this one time in the New Testament.

There are two basic approaches to understanding how these three words relate to each other and therefore what, if anything, they have to say regarding same-gender relationships. The first approach is to take the three words together. In this approach the *arsenokoitēs* designates the active partner in the homosexual relationship. He hires the *pornos*, understood as a male prostitute, to satisfy his desires. There is certainly no sense of an equal relationship.

How, then, does the third term fit in? Its basic meanings are slave-dealer or kidnapper. In our world those terms designate two different concepts, but in the first century they were similar in meaning. A person was kidnapped, normally, not for ransom or to avoid a court-ordered custody arrangement, but to be sold into slavery. Moreover, one market for an attractive boy or girl was prostitution. Thus, in this first approach, the kidnapper or slave dealer is the one who provides the *pornos*, who is used by the *arsenokoitēs*. This view, developed particularly by Scroggs, is summarized in his translation of 1 Timothy 1:10: “male prostitutes, males who lie [with them], and slave-dealers [who procure them].”¹⁰⁴ Thus this list in 1 Timothy does not condemn same-gender sexual relationships in general, but only that specific form of pederasty that consisted of enslaving boys or youths for sexual purposes, and the use of these boys by adult males.

The second approach considers the three terms as independent of each other. That will mean that *pornoi* has a more generic meaning. As indicated above, while the term can be used to refer to a male prostitute, it is a general term that can be applied to a wide range of sexual activities.¹⁰⁵ Then too the term *andrapodistai* means simply “kidnappers,” without any connotation of involvement in prostitution. This leaves *arsenokoitai* as the only term needing further consideration. Here, once again, the conclusions of interpreters differ. For some, the term means “homosexuals” (even though the term would not have been understood in antiquity).¹⁰⁶ For others, it does not mean “homosexuals” per se, but refers to persons who are actively engaged in same-gender sexual relationships.¹⁰⁷ And for still others, it refers to persons involved in pederasty.¹⁰⁸

It is common, if not universal, for interpreters to draw attention to connections not only between 1 Timothy 1:10 and 1 Corinthians 6:9 (on which it is most likely dependent for the word *arsenokoitai*), but also between 1 Timothy 1:8–11 and Old Testament law. The author of the Pastorals writes at 1:8–9: “Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient . . .” Specifically, as interpreters have pointed out, those denounced in 1:9–10 are persons who break the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–16). Correlations can be drawn as follows: lawless and disobedient (Exodus 20:1), godless and sinful (20:2), unholy and profane (20:7), parent killers (20:12), murderers (20:13), fornicators and *arsenokoitai* (meaning sodomites, perverts, or pederasts, 20:14), slave traders (20:15), and liars, perjurers (20:16).¹⁰⁹ Whatever the specific meanings of *pornoi* and *arsenokoitai*, they are together considered persons who break the commandment against adultery—whether that means that they break the marriage vow or (by extension) are unchaste.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

The question posed at the beginning was: How is it that biblical scholars, studying the same texts and using comparable methods of interpretation, come to different conclusions in regard to what the Bible teaches concerning homosexuality? In response to this, the following points can be made.

1. As far as we can tell, the biblical writers knew nothing about “homosexuality” as a sexual orientation. The concepts of “homosexuality,” “homosexual,” “heterosexuality,” and “heterosexual” are modern, first articulated in the latter part of the nineteenth century.¹¹⁰ As strange as it may sound, it can be said that the Bible teaches nothing concerning homosexuality.

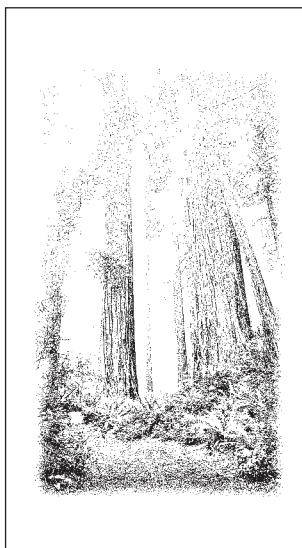
2. Having said that, however, the Bible does have things to say about sexual relationships between men and women and between persons of the same gender. In regard to the latter, the “fault line” between interpreters is a narrow one, but it is very real. On the one hand, there are interpreters who—on reading the texts

with care—conclude that, even if the passages in Genesis 19:1–11 and Judges 19:16–30 are set aside (or at least placed on the periphery), the remaining passages speak clearly of same-gender sexual relationships as inherently prohibited. One need not narrow the matter down to any particular kind or kinds of same-gender sexual relationships. The relationships are themselves “against nature” and contrary to the will of God expressed in creation from the beginning.

Other interpreters—on reading the texts with care also—conclude, however, that the same passages pose challenges. Those in Leviticus seem to be the clearest at the purely descriptive level, but as the discussion above has shown, some interpreters question their relevance beyond their time and place. There is a broad consensus among interpreters that the term *arsenokoitai* (1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10), used by Paul and by the author of the Pastorals, is based on the two texts in Leviticus, but that would not necessarily mean that the Leviticus passages are picked up as normative for Christians in the New Testament. It is possible that whoever coined the term (Paul or a predecessor) used it in a general way to refer to a specific type of same-gender activity that was highly visible and repugnant in his own time. In the final analysis, “the etymology of a word is its history, not its meaning.”¹¹¹

3. The difference between interpreters should not be understood as a conflict between those who seek to be “true to Scripture” and those who seek to “twist the Bible” to their own liking. The disagreements are genuine. Nor is one approach intrinsically more “conservative” and the other more “liberal.” It is instructive here to recall that in his translation of the New Testament in 1521 Martin Luther translated *arsenokoitai* (1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10) as *Knabenschänder* (“pederasts”), which is often considered today the “liberal” (“innovative” or “revisionist”) rendering of the word, but he translated *malakoi* as *Weichlinge* (which can mean “weaklings,” “soft ones,” even “effeminate ones”), which could be considered the “conservative” (KJV) rendering. This illustrates how labels like “conservative” and “liberal” are both meaningless and inappropriate.

4. The Bible is the primary place to which Christians turn to discern God’s will, but on the basis of the foregoing paragraph, it should be clear that decisions within and for the church concerning “homosexuality” and its attendant issues cannot be arbitrated by biblical scholars alone. Their role must remain modest. They are able to help clarify issues by bringing evidence, arguments, and proposals to the table. But finally their contributions are only one part of a larger discussion among those who seek the mind of Christ in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.



ENDNOTES

¹ American Standard Version (ASV), Jerusalem Bible (JB), King James Version (or “Authorized Version,” KJV), New American Bible (NAB), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New English Bible (NEB), New International Version (NIV), New Jerusalem Bible (NJB), New King James Version (NKJV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Revised English Bible (REB), Revised Standard Version (RSV), Today’s English Version (TEV).

² Their similarities are discussed by Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 297.

³ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library, rev. ed., trans. John R. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 218.

⁴ Westermann, *Genesis 12–26*, 300.

⁵ James D. Martin, *The Book of Judges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 206; J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 288.

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation Commentary (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 164. A similar review of Old Testament texts is made by von Rad, *Genesis*, 217–18.

⁷ Frederick W. Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 102. An explanatory comment is added to the translation: “i.e., as humans soliciting sexual relations with transcendent figures.”

⁸ J. N. D. Kelley, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 258.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 258; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary 50 (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 54.

¹⁰ Soggin, *Judges*, 282.

¹¹ Martin, *Judges*, 206.

¹² Cf. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 385; 381; Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*, trans. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 45–52.

¹³ Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 78. Gagnon adds that the Yahwistic material in Genesis 2–3 “gives etiological sanction only for marriage and sex between male and female.”

¹⁴ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 48.

¹⁵ See *Ibid.*, 37–38; Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 9–11.

¹⁶ This position goes back to the work of Julius Wellhausen in the nineteenth century (*Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* [Berlin: Georg Reimern, 1889]). See also Phyllis Bird, “The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions,” in *Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 149 (n. 16); she acknowledges that both chapters 18 and 20 show stages of growth.

¹⁷ So Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, Anchor Bible 3A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1361–64; and Wenham, *Leviticus*, 13: “A much earlier date [than post-exilic] is required by the evidence.” See also Jan Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code: An Exegetical Study of the Ideational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17–26*, *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 67 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 202–07.

¹⁸ See Martin Noth, *Leviticus*, trans. J. E. Anderson; The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 128. For a brief history of the discussion, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Book of Leviticus,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck; 12 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2002), 1:993–95; and Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 111–12 (n. 179).

¹⁹ Both quotations are from Terence E. Fretheim, “The Old Testament and Homosexuality” (<http://www.thelutheran.org/0105/page55.html>).

²⁰ On chapter 20 as a further development of chapter 18 see Bird, “The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation,” 150–54; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 37; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, trans. Douglas W. Stott; The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1996), 288–89.

²¹ So too Mark Allan Powell, “The Bible and Homosexuality,” *Faithful Conversation: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality*, ed. James M. Childs, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 23.

²² Erhard Gerstenberger, “t’b,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle; 3 vols. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 3:1430. The term is found frequently in Deuteronomy (17 times), Proverbs (21 times), and Ezekiel (43 times).

²³ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 44.

²⁴ See, e.g., George R. Edwards, *Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984), 64–69; H. Kimball Jones, *Toward a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual* (New York: Association Press, 1966), 69; Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? A Positive Christian Response*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 63–66. For additional references, see Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 129 (n. 202). On the existence of homosexual cultic prostitution, see Gagnon, pp. 100–08.

²⁵ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 39 (and nn. 10 and 11), 41.

²⁶ Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1975), 30. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 108–09, uses the existence of male cultic prostitution as an argument against positive same-gender relationships: since cultic relations were the most socially acceptable same-gender relations in the Ancient Near East, he argues, the fact that they were for Israel an abomination highlights how disgraceful Israel considered other same-gender relations.

²⁷ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 132–33, lists five, but he does not himself adopt this position.

²⁸ Milgrom, *Leviticus* 17–22, 1567–68, 1750, 1785. Cf. also Samuel E. Balentine, *Leviticus* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 159. Other interpreters who share this view are listed in Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 132 (n. 208).

²⁹ Milgrom, *Leviticus* 17–22, 1750.

³⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 45; cf. Bird, “The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation,” 151. But Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 142, identifies the “inability to procreate and misuse of semen” as important secondary factors underlying the position of Leviticus.

³¹ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 100–01. So also Victor Paul Furnish, “What Does the Bible Say about Homosexuality?” in *Caught in the Crossfire: Helping Christians Debate Homosexuality*, ed. Sally B. Geis and Donald E. Messer (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 57–66.

³² Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 42–44.

³³ Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming*, 43–44.

³⁴ Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 72.

³⁵ Daniel Boyarin, “Are There Any Jews in ‘The History of Sexuality?’” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1995): 341–48.

³⁶ See the remarks by Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 138–39, 142.

³⁷ Conclusions reached by two advocates of fuller acceptance: Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, 59–60; H. Darrell Lance, “The Bible and Homosexuality,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 8 (1989): 145.

³⁸ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 136; see also Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 42.

³⁹ Frederick J. Gaiser, “Homosexuality and the Old Testament,” *Word & World* 10 (1990): 164.

⁴⁰ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 42–44.

⁴¹ Bernadette J. Broonen, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 294.

⁴² The complementarity of the sexes is the main point for Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, at many places in his discussion, e.g. pp. 142, 254, 256, 257, 264, 266, 488.

⁴³ Reflections are developed along this line by Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 146; Bird, “The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation,” 155; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 123–28; and Alice Ogden Bellis and Terry L. Hufford, *Science, Scripture, and Homosexuality* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002), 75–77.

⁴⁴ Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 146 (italics in the quotation).

⁴⁵ Examples include the modern understandings of the sun as the center of the universe, the age of the earth, the relationships between species, races, and cultures, etc.

⁴⁶ For discussion, see the section “Christian Anthropology in Relation to Natural Science” in Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 79–88; and Philip J. Hefner, “The Human Being,” *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 1:337–39.

⁴⁷ Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 254, 298–99; Choon-Leong Seow, “Textual Orientation,” in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 18.

⁴⁸ Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 298–99.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁰ Powell, “The Bible and Homosexuality,” 24.

⁵¹ Marion L. Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 18: “We must ask whether the New Testament text has similar statements or remarks that would indicate that the earliest Christians preserved particular elements of the Levitical Holiness Code as valid instructions for Christian life and thought.”

⁵² Gaiser, "Homosexuality and the Old Testament," 165.

⁵³ That Romans 1:18–32 is a critique of Gentiles is held explicitly by interpreters across the spectrum. This includes major commentaries: C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975–79), 1:105 ("primarily the Gentiles"); James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentary 38, 2 vols. (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 1:51; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 270; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 33–38. Not all interpreters agree. For the view that the section speaks about all humanity (or the human condition in general), not simply the Gentiles, cf. Brooten, *Love between Women*, 203–14; and Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 385.

⁵⁴ A "topos" (directly from the Greek word *topos*) is a common theme or commonplace in speeches and letters. Cf. David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 172–74, 189.

⁵⁵ Cf. the statement of Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 112: "Paul's thoughts have a background in Hellenistic Jewish tradition and language.... In his criticism of homoeroticism as such, he does not present any independent ideas." For a collection of texts and references in Jewish literature to Gentiles as immoral, cf. Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identifiers: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 54–58.

⁵⁶ Wisdom of Solomon 14:22–27; Philo, *On Abraham* 135.

⁵⁷ Some of the better known texts are: Letter of Aristeas 152; Philo, *Special Laws* 3.37–42; Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.273–75; Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.28–29; Testament of Naphtali 3.3–4; Sibylline Oracles 3.596; 5.166.

⁵⁸ Examples are passages that refer to the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative (Genesis 19:1–11) and Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, such as Philo, *On Abraham* 135–36; Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.200; and other texts. The Mishnah text *Sanhedrin* 7.4 picks up the legislation of Leviticus 20:13 but would have been written down later (ca. A.D. 200) than the writing of the books of the New Testament.

⁵⁹ See Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 94, who cites texts.

⁶⁰ These are in the Testament of Levi 17.11 and in the Sibylline Oracles 3.586–600. Both documents are commonly thought to have been composed in the second century B. C. In the latter text there is a list of national groups that are said to practice pederasty: the Phoenicians, Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, Persians, Galatians, and all the people of Asia Minor! A text commonly regarded as from late in the first century A.D. that connects idolatry and pederasty (or perhaps the

rape of a child) is 2 Enoch 10.4. For texts, see *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983–85), 1:794, 1:375, and 1:118, respectively.

⁶¹ Loving a boy (pederasty) is considered superior to loving a woman, according to Pausanias in Plato, *Symposium* 181b, c. The relationship was usually terminated by the adult male when the youth showed signs of reaching adulthood, particularly the onset of a beard. Cf. David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 88.

⁶² Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 126, et passim; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 96–97; Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 162.

⁶³ Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 16, 202–03; Arno Karlen, "Homosexuality in History," in *Homosexual Behavior: A Modern Reappraisal*, ed. Judd Marmor (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 79; Halperin, *One Hundred Years*, 21 ("reciprocal erotic desire among males is unknown"); and Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 35. Dover writes: "On growing up, in any Greek community, the *eromenos* [the boy in a pederastic situation] graduated from pupil to friend, and the continuance of an erotic relationship was disapproved, as was such a relationship between coevals" (pp. 202–03).

⁶⁴ Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 28–30, 70–87; idem, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villiard Books, 1994), 56–82.

⁶⁵ This point is made in particular by Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 388. Cf. also Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 264.

⁶⁶ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 337.

⁶⁷ The meanings provided by Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1089, are: "use, usage, usefulness, relations, functions," and to the last term the additional words are added: "esp. of sexual intercourse."

⁶⁸ Plato, *Laws* 8.841a (where such acts are said to be followed by a sense of shame); Philo, *On the Virtues* 30; Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 21.4. For additional texts on *chrêsis* in Greco-Roman literature and discussion, cf. David E. Fredrickson, "Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24–27: Paul and the Philosophic Critique of Eros," in *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 199–205.

⁶⁹ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1971), 39; Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:126; Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans*, Interpretation Commentary (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 41; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:65–66; Richard B. Hays,

"Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: The Witness of Scripture concerning Homosexuality," in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, ed. Jeffrey S. Siker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 8; idem, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 387; Brendan Byrne, *Romans, Sacra Pagina 6* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1986), 64, 69. Specific reference to creation and the Creator are found in 1:20 and 1:25. That Paul is not referring here to "creation" or the "created order," see Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 114–15; Victor P. Furnish, "The Bible and Homosexuality: Reading the Texts in Context," in *Homosexuality in the Church*, ed. Siker, 30; and Nissinen, *Homoeeroticism*, 107.

⁷⁰ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 256 and 254. What follows, then, is that by refusing to honor God as Creator, the women in 1:26 and the men in 1:27 deny one of the created purposes for their sexual lives, and they are therefore living out in their bodies their denial of God as Creator.

⁷¹ Nissinen, *Homoeeroticism*, 105.

⁷² Oda Wischmeyer, "Physis und Ktisis bei Paulus: Die paulinische Rede von Schöpfung und Natur," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 93 (1996): 371.

⁷³ Dale Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18–32," *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995): 343; D. Fredrickson, "Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24–27," 205.

⁷⁴ Victor P. Furnish, "The Bible and Homosexuality," *Homosexuality: In Search of a Christian Understanding*, ed. Leon Smith (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1981), 13; D. Martin, "Heterosexism," 342.

⁷⁵ Some examples from the Septuagint include Exodus 21:6; Deuteronomy 29:20; 32:22; Numbers 11:1; Judges 15:5; 2 Samuel 22:9; 2 Chronicles 34:21, 25.

⁷⁶ For examples, see Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 1558.

⁷⁷ Some examples include Plato, *Laws* 1.636c; *Testament of Naphtali* 3.4 (concerning Gentile behavior due to their idolatry); Philo, *Special Laws* 3.39 (clearly a case of pederasty); Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.273; 2.275 (concerning certain "pleasures" among the Greeks regarded as "against" or "beyond nature"). For additional references, cf. Brooten, *Love between Women*, 251 (n. 103).

⁷⁸ For example, according to Brooten, *Love between Women*, 247: "At only three points does Philo use or imply the term 'contrary to nature' (*para physin*): (1) of relations between a man and a woman during her menstrual period; (2) of relations between a man and a boy; and (3) of relations between one species of animal and another." On p. 251

(n. 103) Brooten summarizes various things that are considered *para physin* in ancient sources, including unnatural desires, desire itself (several times in the sources), disease, ownership of slaves, the eating of meat, and more.

⁷⁹ Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:125.

⁸⁰ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 301. Brooten, *Love between Women*, 240, seems to favor this view, but offers other possibilities as well.

⁸¹ Brooten, *Love between Women*, 241; cf. also Nissinen, *Homoeeroticism*, 108.

⁸² James E. Miller, "The Practices of Romans 1:26: Homosexual or Heterosexual?" *Novum Testamentum* 37 (1995): 4–8, 10; and D. Fredrickson, "Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24–27," 201 (n. 15). Miller maintains that it is only when the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality are assumed that 1:26 appears to speak of females having sex with females.

⁸³ Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 115.

⁸⁴ For a discussion of possible dates in relationship to the famous Gallio inscription, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 29–30. For a somewhat earlier date, see Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 71–73.

⁸⁵ So also Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, *Interpretation Commentary* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 5; similarly in Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 32, with other theories on pp. 31–32. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 73, places the writing in 53 or 54.

⁸⁶ Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians, Sacra Pagina 7* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 4.

⁸⁷ For other uses of the formula, "do you not know," see 3:16; 5:6; 6:3, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24.

⁸⁸ Collins, *First Corinthians*, 235.

⁸⁹ The technical name is polysyndeton.

⁹⁰ Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 855.

⁹¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1150a.

⁹² Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 613.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁹⁴ See the editor's "Forward," in *ibid.*, viii.

⁹⁵ The argument is particularly worked out by D. F. Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of *Arsenokoitai* (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 125–53. In addition, Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 445, argues for the Old Testament origin of kingdom of God as well as all ten of the terms listed in 1 Corinthians

6:9–10. He denies, therefore, that the list is simply an ethical catalog taken over from the culture (p. 444); rather each term designates a specific vice at Corinth (pp. 447–48 and the literature cited there).

⁹⁶ These include C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2d ed. (London: A. & C. Black, 1971), 140; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 108; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 23; E. P. Sanders, *Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 112–13; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 529–30; Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 303–339.

⁹⁷ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 243–44; Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 4 vols. Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 7 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991–2001), 1:431–32; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 166; Christian Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 7 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1996), 118; Herman C. Waetjen, “Same-Sex Sexual Relations in Antiquity and Sexuality and Sexual Identity in Contemporary American Society,” in *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 109–10; J. Paul Sampley, “The First Letter to the Corinthians,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Keck, 10:858–59. According to Collins, *First Corinthians*, 236, the term *malakoi* refers to “passive partners, often young boys, in homosexual activity,” but the meaning of *arsenokoitai* is not explored.

⁹⁸ Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 106–09; Victor P. Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul: Selected Issues*, 2d ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 72; Graydon F. Snyder, *First Corinthians: A Faith Community Commentary* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1992), 73; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *1 Corinthians*, Doubleday Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 49; and Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Harper Collins Bible Commentary*, ed. James L. Mays (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 1081.

⁹⁹ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 97.

¹⁰⁰ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 118.

¹⁰¹ On the questions of date and authorship, see Walter F. Taylor, Jr., “1 and 2 Timothy, Titus,” in *The Deutero-Pauline Letters: Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, ed. Gerhard Krodel, Proclamation Commentaries, rev. ed.

(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 59–93. The most notable exception to deutero-Pauline authorship is enunciated by Luke Timothy Johnson, *Letters to Paul’s Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New Testament in Context (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 3–33.

¹⁰² See, e.g., Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, The Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 87.

¹⁰³ Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 76.

¹⁰⁴ Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 120.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 87, 99. For an argument against the term as designating a male prostitute, see William L. Petersen, “On the Study of ‘Homosexuality’ in Patristic Sources,” in *Studia Patristica* 20, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Louvain: Peeters, 1989), 284–85.

¹⁰⁶ A. T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 59; George W. Knight III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 85–86; I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), 378–80; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 29, 39; Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 99, 101. The latter also see 1 Timothy at the least in continuity with 1 Corinthians and likely using it.

¹⁰⁷ Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 33 (“active homosexuals”—which presumably does not include “heterosexuals” [in the modern sense] who might be pederasts).

¹⁰⁸ Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, trans. Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 22; Joachim Jeremias, *Die Briefe an Timotheus und Titus*, Das Neue Testament Deutsch 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 12; Lorenz Oberlinner, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 11/2, 3 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1994–96), 1:22, 27.

¹⁰⁹ Adapted from Arland J. Hultgren, *I–II Timothy, Titus*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 57; see also Dibelius and Conzelmann, *Pastoral Epistles*, 23; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 114; Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 95–96; Collins, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, 30.

¹¹⁰ It is commonly thought that the term “homosexuality” appeared for the first time in the writings of Karoly Benkert (whose pseudonym was “Kertbeny”) of Vienna in 1869. Cf.

Nissinen, *Homoeeroticism*, 143 (n. 23). The earliest entries for both “homosexuality” and “homosexual” in English are from 1892 in the *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., ed. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weinger, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 7:345.

¹¹¹ Quoted from Dale B. Martin, “*Arsenokoitēs* and *Malakos*: Meanings and Consequences,” in *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality*, ed. Brawley, 119, who attributes the point to James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 107–10.

