

FOR THOUGH I GRIEVED YOU

CHRISTIAN ETHICS & HOMOSEXUALITY



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Some twenty years ago, Richard Hays claimed: "...no issue divides the church more sharply in the 1990s than the normative status of homosexuality."¹ Even earlier than that, social psychologists believed homosexuality to be "...an issue of potentially greater magnitude than desegregation."² Since then, the issue of homosexuality in the church has only intensified, climaxing in 2015 when the Supreme Court ruled in favor of gay marriage. By now, most churches are often categorized as "affirming" or "*non*-affirming," though some claim to be wrestling or reexamining the issue. Stanley Grenz has attempted to create more nuanced categories, e.g. "welcoming but not affirming."³ The debate rages on within the church: is homosexuality to be reconsidered, accepted, and endorsed as a viable option for the Christian? Jesus and Paul, for all of their mercy and compassion, taught that *all* sexual relationships are to be held within the contours of monogamous, heterosexual marriage and were not, as some have claimed, either silent or uniformed on the issue.

The Biblical Witness

First, worth noting is that some say there is a scarcity of passages directly linked to the subject of homosexuality.⁴ Actually, there are too many to do a complete analysis and exegesis

¹ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 380.

² Paul Cameron and Kenneth P. Ross, "Social Psychological Aspects of the Judeo-Christian Stance toward Homosexuality," in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 9.1 (1981), 40.

³ Stanley Grenz. *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998.

⁴ Gagnon, however, contends there may be more: Gen. 9:20-27; 19:4-11; Judg 19:22-25; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Ezek 16:50 (possibly too 18:12 and 33:26); Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; "and probably also Jude 7 and 2 Pet 2:7." Robert. A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Text and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 432. Boswell and his ilk, however, dispute Jude 7 and other texts. 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, 2015), 229.

within the purview of this paper. Even if one were to consider the quantity of passages as a “paucity”—such could actually indicate the clear state of understanding on the subject in the first century (i.e., biblical authors and characters did not need to teach repeatedly something that was easily and already understood by their respective audiences. Paul thus needed to be more explicit about homosexuality in gentile Corinth than Jesus did in Jewish Palestine).⁵ Some even contend that Jesus’ *silence* on homosexuality indicates his disinterest or complicity on the matter, so let us first investigate Jesus’ closest teaching on the issue.

*The Non-Silence of the Lamb:*⁶ *Mark 10:1-12, par. Matt. 19:1-9*

Jesus was not as silent on this issue as many interpreters would purport.⁷ Sam Allberry, a pastor and author⁸ who struggles with same sex attraction (SSA), rightly considers Jesus’ teaching on *monogamy* more central to the debate than even Paul’s letters that explicitly mention homosexuality. This is because, per Allberry, “The Bible does not give us a theology of sexuality; the Bible gives us a theology of marriage...Jesus ties marriage to sexual difference.”⁹ Out from this theology of marriage, then, flows the Christian understanding of sexuality:

⁵ On the other hand--and especially at the popular level--some contend that from the alleged scarcity of passages one can deduce the subject’s relative *unimportance*. The same could be said many other subjects that obviously are important for kingdom ethics (e.g., incest). Therefore, such arguments are hardly valid. Richard Hays may be right, however, in suggesting the church still needs to “get the accents in the right place. Hays, *Moral Vision*, 381. Robert Gagnon takes issue with him on that, however: “Even Hays succumbs to the temptation of confusing frequency of mention with importance.” Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexuality*, 434, fn 147.

⁶ This allusion to the movie *Silence of the Lamb* is credited to Gagnon. For this reference and some quality teaching from Gagnon, watch: David Kyle Foster, “Robert Gagnon–Homosexuality and the Bible,” YouTube. Online video clip, <https://youtu.be/MqK9LkqAgw0> (accessed December 2, 2016).

⁷ Fedler admits the difficulty of Jesus’ silence on homosexuality and other sexual ethics Kyle D. Fedler, *Exploring Christian Ethics: Biblical Foundations for Morality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 160ff.

⁸ His small book would be a fine one to hand to curious minds in youth groups or even adult Sunday classes. Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about homosexuality, The Bible, and Same-Sex Attraction* (Purcellville: The Good Book Company, 2015).

⁹ Watch: School of Christian Thought, “SCT – Sam Allberry – Q&A.” Vimeo. Online video clip, <https://vimeo.com/188758814> (accessed December 2, 2016).

“But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore (e°neka) a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Mark 10:6-9)

Here, Jesus is answering the Pharisees’ question of whether it is “lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” (Mark 10:2). When Jesus explains later to his disciples why he answered the way he did, readers see that the issue was linked to *adultery* and sexual relations (Mark 10:10-12). As Gagnon notes, Jesus’ response is thus a closing of a loophole in the Mosaic Law, a “revolving door” through which numerous new partners could have come and gone.¹⁰ Polygamy in the Mosaic Law was something like a loose end Jesus tied up in his discussion with the Pharisees, as serial divorce-and-remarriage would result in numerous sexual partners. Jews could basically get away with such behavior and technically still be following the law since it allowed divorce. Based on the clarity of Lev 18:22 and 20:13, though, *no* Jews were practicing homosexuality, for the consequences were clear: capital punishment. Jesus therefore had *no need* to address homosexuality, as it was obvious in the Law. From this perspective of Jesus’ closing the divorce loophole, then, one can only deduce that Jesus’ sexual ethics does not *loosen* compared to the status quo of the Judaism of his day; on the contrary, it actually *tightens*.

Crucial is The Torah text from which Jesus derives his teaching on nuptial/sexual matters: the creation story (Gen 1:27; 2:24).¹¹ His teaching on marriage (and, by implication, all

¹⁰ Robert A. J. Gagnon, “The Gospel of Jesus on Sexual Binaries,” *First Things*, April 4, 2016, accessed Dec 2, 2016, <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2016/04/the-gospel-of-jesus-on-sexual-binaries>. This is an interesting article because in it one sees a trained biblical scholar strongly reprimanding the popular writer, Rachel Held Evans. See: Rachel Held Evans, “The False Gospel of Gender Binaries,” *Rachel Held Evans*, November 19, 2014, accessed December 2, 2016, <http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/gender-binaries>

¹¹ Interestingly, Jesus only quotes one-third of Gen 1:27: “...male and female he created them” (Mark 10:6). This section, by the way, is greatly indebted to Gagnon, especially: Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 56-62, 185-228. For more on natural male polyandry and a behind-the-scenes look at Via’s and Gagnon’s difficult interactions, see: Robert A. J. Gagnon, “A Rejoinder to Dan O. Via’s Response,” *RobertGagnon.net*, November 2003, accessed December 2, 2016, <http://www.robagnon.net/2VRejoinder.htm>.

sexual activity) comes directly from this story, where God's image is somehow reflected through the sexual binaries of male/female. This is not a story of male dominance but rather, a story about complementarity and compatibility. Jesus thus quotes it this way: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." (Mark 10:7-8). The compatibility of male and female is clear in the *two* becoming *one* flesh (via sexual union), just as it is noticeable in the repetition of the man needing a *helper* (Gen 2:18, 20). Male and female reflect different facets of God's own image (Gen 1:27).

Therefore, Jesus himself turns to the foundational text of the Genesis creation story to inform his audience about marriage and sexual ethics, which for Jews obviously took place in a *covenant* between *two people*, one male and one female. Much more could be said about Jesus' teaching on sexual purity, and indeed much more *should* be said in order to flesh out the full scope of the scriptures' teaching on sex, so let us turn now to Paul.

The Apostle to the Gentiles: Nature, Arsenokoitēs, and Porneia

Unlike Jesus, Paul ministered among and wrote to gentile populations in addition to Jewish ones. Romans 1:18-32 is an obvious place to start, as it is the most directly related passage.¹² Full exegesis is not within the purview of this essay, but important to notice are several things. First, as Richard Hays notes, Rom 1:18-23 "is *not merely a polemical denunciation of selected pagan vices; it is a diagnosis of the human condition.*"¹³ All the harsh language is descriptive of what humanity chose for itself instead of choosing God, namely, idolatry. Indeed, they "exchanged" proper worship of God for idols and falsehood (Rom 1:23,

¹² Richard Hays has called it "the most crucial text for Christian ethics concerning homosexuality" and rightly notes that it is the only passage directly mentioning lesbianism. Richard Hays, "The Biblical Witness Concerning Homosexuality," *Staying the Course* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 68. Likewise, Ben Witherington III states that "Vv. 26-27 are about as clear a condemnation of homosexual and lesbian behavior as exists in the NT." Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 69.

¹³ Hays, "The Biblical Witness Concerning Homosexuality," 69. Emphasis added.

25). God, in turn, “gave them up” (v24, 26) in the “lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves” (v24) and “to dishonorable passions” (v26).¹⁴ This dishonorable passion is described as quite overtly as homosexual practice: “For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion¹⁵ for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.” (1:26-27) Note that Paul describes homosexual practice as contrary to nature (*para physin*), and the root word (*physis*) is used three times within those two verses. *Physis* is the same word Paul uses to say “when Gentiles, who do not have the law, *by nature* do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law” (Rom 2:14).¹⁶ Paul, after all, is probably writing to a mixed audience in Rome, containing both Jews and Gentiles.

The entire passage (Rom. 1:18-23) is full of distinct echoes and allusions to the same scripture Jesus himself quoted during his teaching on marriage: the creation story in Genesis 1-2. In Rom 1:19, for instance, Paul states that the eternal power and divine nature of God have been easily noticeable *apo ktiseōs kosmou*, “since the creation of the world.” Further, the Greek expressions Paul employs in Rom 1:23 parallels that of Gen 1:26-27 in the LXX: *anthrōpos*

¹⁴ So, Thielike: “...Religious confusion also leads to ethical chaos...disorder in the vertical dimension...is matched by a perversion on the horizontal level...” Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics Vol.3: Sex* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 279.

¹⁵ Since women are included in this verse, the phrase “consumed with passion” cannot be taken in an exploitative sense as so many “affirming” commentators would prefer; likewise, lesbianism in antiquity did not entail the exploitative aspects as male pederasty, yet Paul condemns lesbian practice just the same. More discussion on that is below with the 1 Corinthians passage. See: Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 348. On the incongruity between male and female sexuality in antiquity, see: Bernadette J. Broonen, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 360-361.

¹⁶ As Hubbard, a classicist, notes: “Basic to the heterosexual position is the characteristic Stoic appeal to the providence of Nature, which has matched and fitted the sexes to each other.” Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), 383,444. The images from this sourcebook are available online at: <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/ancienthomosexuality/index.php>.

(man), *eikōn* (image), *homoioōma* (likeness), *peteinon* (birds), *herpetōn* (reptiles).¹⁷ Through these straightforward connections one can see that for Paul, the creation account in Genesis remains foundational for the Christian church's sexual ethics. Indeed, just as God's eternal power and divine nature had "been clearly perceived" (Rom 1:20) by even the gentiles,¹⁸ so was the natural complementarity of the sexes a result of the Creator's design.¹⁹

Next, 1 Cor 6:9-11 and 1 Tim 1:10 are important to analyze due to their use of *arsenokoitai* (and *malakoi* in the case of 1 Cor 6:9), translated as: "sodomites"²⁰ (NRSV), "men who practice homosexuality" (ESV), and "practicing homosexuals" (NET). Paul appears to have coined the term *arsenokoitai*, as it does not appear in any Greek literature that predates 1 Corinthians, but it would have been easily understood. The Greek term is a combination of *arsen* (male) and *koitē* (bed). This combination appears to be directly linked to the prohibition of homosexuality in Lev 18:22 and 20:13: "If a man lies with a male as with a woman (meta *arsenos koitēn gynaikos*)..." and certainly indicates Paul's appropriation of the homosexuality teaching in Leviticus' Holy Code.

Malakoi in 1 Cor 6:9 is translated in BDAG as "soft" or "effeminate," but Bible translators have had a difficult time with it: "male prostitutes" (NRSV), "homosexuals" (NKJV)

¹⁷ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 290-291.

¹⁸ "Even by the gentiles" because Paul seems to have had a low view of their ethics in this passage. Everett Ferguson, based on his understanding of the Greco-Roman backgrounds materials, suggests Paul's low view of Gentile morality in Rom. 1:18-32 is justifiable. The large quantity of words available in Greek for sexual practices, for instance, is indicative the society's preoccupation with it. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 70.

¹⁹ The duality of the sexes uniquely reflects the image of God (Gen 1:27). Stanley Grenz goes a bit further: "The thesis of the Genesis creation narratives is that in the beginning God created male and female to live in supplementary relationships and thereby to reflect the image of the triune God." Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 290.

²⁰ "Sodomites" obviously comes from the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, despite some scholarly over whether or not homosexuality was the main sin in the story in Gen 19. See: Victor Paul Furnish, "The Bible and Homosexuality: Reading the Texts in Context," in *Homosexuality and the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 18-19.

and sometimes even phrases that combine *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*.²¹ All of these miss the *behavioral* aspect, according the NET bible translators, who opt for the more explanative and probably more accurate phrasing: “passive homosexual partners.” This is less about *demeanor* (i.e. being a “sissy” instead of being a characteristic “macho man”) and is instead about actual sexual *practice* and playing the feminine/passive role in such activities. God’s disapproval of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, along with the other types of sinners listed, is made clear: “none of these will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:10).

However, some scholars argue that Paul did not actually know homosexuality *as a sexual orientation/identity* (the way “we” Post-Enlightenment thinkers allegedly do)—the implication being, of course, that Paul’s teaching on the matter should thus be rendered irrelevant today.²² Indeed, this is one of the most significant rebuttals to the traditional, non-affirming view, and the question is worth asking: *did* Paul know about so-called sexual orientation?²³ Answers vary and are somewhat surprisingly *not* determined by affirming/non-affirming positions. Hays, for example, is *non-affirming* yet concedes, “neither Paul nor anyone else in antiquity had a concept of ‘sexual orientation.’”²⁴ Others contend that ancient moralists spoke negatively of homosexual

²¹ “Men who are practicing homosexuals” (ESV) and “men who have sex with other men” (NIV) are kind of catch-all phrases arbitrarily distinguished from one another for the sake of providing an “original” translation in their respective publications, but both translations aim cover *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* and in a single phrase since the two are listed next to each other in the verse and are difficult to translate. A more direct interpretation, as in the NET, is best.

²² Furnish provides four other reasons but lists this one first because it certainly is the strongest and the crux of all of them. Furnish, “The Bible and Homosexuality: Reading the Texts in Context,” 18, 30.

²³ The American Psychological Association defines sexual orientation as “an often enduring *pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions* of men to women or women to men (heterosexual), of women to women or men to men (homosexual), or by men or women to both sexes (bisexual). It also refers to *an individual’s sense of personal and social identity based on those attractions, related behaviors and membership in a community of others who share those attractions and behaviors.*” Emphasis added. “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender,” American Psychological Association, accessed December 02, 2016, <http://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/index.aspx>

²⁴ Hays, “The Biblical Witness Concerning Homosexuality,” 72. Keep in mind, however, that Hays is a biblical scholar and not a classicist or historian; however, his concession here is significant for

practice only because they thought it was due to *excess passions* (of heterosexuals).²⁵ Many nuances of this identity issue could be stated, but the strongest, simplest argument from the affirming side along those lines is the thesis that: *Paul did not know that some people are born with a “natural” homosexual orientation*. This hypothesis, however, is falsifiable via archaeological and literary evidence.²⁶

First, consider a form the homosexuality everyone agrees existed in the ancient Greco-Roman cultural milieu. Pederasty (Greek *pedo*, child) involved an older man penetrating a young boy, and it was common, often involving male teachers and students. As noted in the discussion of Romans 1:18-23, one of the oldest arguments from the affirming authors was that Paul only condemns *exploitative* and *pederastic* forms of sexual behavior and not simply homosexuality in a broad sweep. Both affirming and non-affirming Christians agree that pederasty is immoral, so that is not the issue. Paul and his contemporaries, however, actually did not think about homosexual practice solely (or even primarily) in these terms, as will be seen in the discussion below on sexual identity.²⁷ Before examining this evidence, though, please note the problem that

scripture-emphasizing Christians.

²⁵ This is especially argued when treating Romans 1:18-23. Boswell comments on Paul and Chrysostom taking this “excess passion/desire” view: “Like Paul, he [Chrysostom] alleged that immoral homosexual acts arose not from “perversion” but from excess of desire (i.e., not as a replacement for heterosexual outlets but *in addition* to them). Since, however, he realized that many people were inclined to limit themselves to one sex or the other, Chrysostom had difficulty explaining why some should fall into this trap while others did not. The excess of desire, he concluded, must be a result of God's abandonment of the people in question because of some heinous sin. And what was the sin? Excess desire.” Boswell, 299. See also: Furnish, 26-27; Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014), 60-67, 70-73. For five reasons why this “excess passion” view in particular is incoherent, see: Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 384-92.

²⁶ One is tempted to argue here that this whole issue about *orientation* is actually a red herring to distract from the fact that Paul does not take feelings, inclinations, or by extension—*orientation*--into account in any situations of sexual immorality (e.g. situation of incest in 1 Cor 5). The *behavior* is that which is condemned, not the *desire*, per se. Nonetheless, this orientation argument is popular and needs addressing.

²⁷ As even Via admits in his debate with Gagnon: “...scholars tend to agree that male homosexuality in the ancient Greek world was primarily, if not exclusively...pederasty...*The Pauline texts, however, do not support this limitation* of male homosexuality...” Dan Otto Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 11. Hereafter, this

some authors, such as Matthew Vines, does not want readers even to consider the full evidence and would prefer everyone *not* take it seriously:

Some non-affirming Christians have acknowledged the existence of same-sex orientation, only to argue that the idea isn't actually new. They often point to *a handful of ancient texts* to support that claim. While this chapter's wide-ranging analysis makes that theory implausible, I have addressed some additional questions in the endnotes. But *ultimately, we don't need to get caught in the weeds of ancient texts to answer this objection.*"²⁸

The so-called weeds of ancient texts (and additionally, inscriptions and icons²⁹) indeed contradict the thesis that sexual identity was unknown to Paul and his contemporaries.³⁰ Historians and classicists are certain the evidence points the opposite direction.³¹

Thomas K. Hubbard, Professor of Classics at the University of Texas, Austin is one such classicist who not only finds clear evidence that sexual preferences existed but moreover the notion that people were *born* that way, along with specific theories as to how sexual preference might have developed, some of which do not differ much from some theories of reparative therapists today:

Close examination of a range of ancient texts suggests...that some forms of sexual preference were, in fact, considered *a distinguishing characteristic of individuals*. Many texts even see such preferences as *inborn qualities* and thus "*essential*" aspects of human

work is referred to as Via and Gagnon, *Two Views*.

²⁸ Vines, 96-97.

²⁹ For only the age-equal homosexual images—not to mention the other wide variety of homosexual practices on other parts of the site—see the online version of Hubbard's Greco-Roman sourcebook: http://www.laits.utexas.edu/ancienthomosexuality/imageindex.php?cat_id=2

³⁰ Vines argues that because there are no Christian texts that assert homosexuals must practice celibacy, today's church cannot insist celibacy upon those who feel they are homosexually oriented. His argument is illogical, however, for the same reason commentators who say Jesus' silence on homosexuality equates to approval: the answer was obvious and needed no explanation. Nobody was practicing homosexuality in Jewish Palestine, and no serious church leaders throughout the ages would have had any need to explain that homosexuality could not be practiced within the church. If one cannot practice heterosexuality within the specified confines of a marriage covenant between one man and one woman, no other options were left. Thus, Vines rather naively insists: "If non-affirming Christians choose to maintain their interpretation of the Bible on homosexuality, they will have to change their interpretation on something else: celibacy." Vines, 97-98.

³¹ Even Via, taking the affirming view in his debate with Gagnon, admits that, "...in certain—perhaps small—circles in the ancient Mediterranean world there was some awareness of a homosexual orientation. Via and Gagnon, *Two Views*, 15.

identity: the earliest philosophical account of male sexual passivity, from the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides...traces it to a *failure of male and female seed to blend properly* at the moment of conception. Other medical writers consider effeminacy in men and masculinity in women to be *genetically determined*. Aristotle and his followers believe that the desire to be penetrated anally arises from *physiological* deformity, either a *congenital* defect or something occurring through “*abuse*” as a child. Similarly, physiognomic writers hold that effeminacy and sexual passivity can be betrayed by visible physical traits, implying that the behavior stems from an *organic etiology*.³²

As one can see, from a mere paragraph of Hubbard’s colossal sourcebook, denizens of Greco-Roman cultures not only *knew* about many forms of homosexuality, but they also in many cases thought of it as genetic and therefore, part of that person’s “natural” identity/orientation—even if it stemmed from hereditary “defects.” Either way, the idea of a sexual orientation simply is not a new one.³³

Important, however, is to distinguish that, in a sense, Vines and followers are right: homosexuality (or even heterosexuality) would not have been a person’s *core* identity in Paul’s day—if indeed that is their point.³⁴ Nor would they have seen *any* sexual orientation as their primary identity, for that is a recent phenomenon developed in the over-sexed, personal-freedom-focused culture of United States subsequent to the sexual revolution of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Not only is this relocating of sexual identity to the core new; it is also misguided. Whatever sexuality one experiences—heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or any point on the Kensey scale—one should not confuse “sexual orientation” with *identity*. This is not a modern “discovery”; rather, it is a modern *construct*.³⁵

³² Emphasis added, primary source citations removed, for they were numbered, not named. Rather than cite those, one can comfortably defer to Hubbard’s massive, carefully researched volume that should indeed become a standard work for many years on homosexuality in Greco-Roman society. Keep in mind that popular, affirming authors such as Vines prefer to sweep such data (which is plentiful, not scarce) under the rug rather than take it seriously. For if Paul knew about homosexuality in the forms that we know it (and he *did*), then he condemns all practicing of it. Hubbard, 2.

³⁴ “I’m not saying gay people didn’t exist in ancient societies. I’m simply pointing out that ancient societies *didn’t think in terms of exclusive sexual orientations*.” Vines, 67.

³⁵ Sam Allberry helpfully differentiates between being “gay” and experiencing “same sex attraction.” His homosexual feelings, from his personal experience and perspective, are “part of *what I*

Related to this modern notion of emphasizing sexual identity have been scientific publications that aimed to prove that people have no choice in the matter and indeed are by nature and genetics, “gay.” After some research claimed to find a X-Chromosome-linked gene (Xq28) that carried male homosexual behaviors, which the media had immediately (and loudly) hailed as the discovery of the so-called gay gene, other scientists corrected and disproved it.³⁶ Many still argue loudly and with great passion against gay “reparative” therapy, but they set forth mainly cultural, unscientific arguments that consequently fail to convince. Indeed, *reason* (here, science) itself seems to suggest that more is at work in SSA than *sola* biological, scientific foundations. That is, the evidence suggests sociological factors are essential in the formation of homosexual urges. For males especially, homosexual desires seem to at some extent be grounded in the need to be affirmed in their own masculinity or maleness at a young age; if a father figure or male peers somehow show disapproval of a boy’s masculinity at a young age, the boy can spend his adult life hungry for approval of other males. This desire for male peer approval can manifest itself at the highest level in erotic desires/approval from males they wish to be (like).³⁷ While they may indeed be genetically predisposed toward homosexuality—even strongly or almost completely so--sociological context also plays a strong role.

If one wants to consider further the “natural” argument, one should also note that most men are—“by nature”—polyamorous.³⁸ That is, they have natural urges to have sexual *feel* but are not *who I am* in a fundamental sense. I am far more than my sexuality.” Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 10-11.

³⁶ Rice, et al. provide the corrective study. For the original research that led to the rebuttal, see Hamer et al. G. Rice et al., “Male Homosexuality: Absence of Linkage to Microsatellite Markers at Xq28,” *Science* 284 (1999): 665-67. Hamer et al., “A Linkage between DNA Markers on the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation,” *Science* 261, no. 5119 (1993): 321-327.

³⁷ See: Daryl J. Bem, “Exotic Becomes Erotic: A Developmental Theory of Sexual Orientation,” *Psychological Review* 103 (1996): 320-35. For a critique of this, see Joseph Nicolosi, “A Critique of Bem’s E.B.E. Theory,” <http://www.josephnicolosi.com/a-critique-of-bems-ebe-theory/> (Accessed Dec 1, 2016). Gagnon discusses both: Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 410-413.

³⁸ This right and helpful idea that most men are by nature oriented to polyamory, comes from Gagnon. See: Robert A. J. Gagnon, “Why Homosexual Behavior Is More Like Consensual Incest and

encounters with more than one woman. Even if they are committed, monogamous, Christian men, they probably *naturally* desire multiple women. In the church, however, such behavior is unacceptable, as it should be. Therefore, most monogamous men are not “allowed” to live out their natural sexual identities, either.³⁹ What if a wife *consents* to letting a man love other women physically? The church still rightly rejects such behavior. This leads us briefly back to monogamy, the very idea of which is based upon gender *binaries* (*monogamy* itself *entails* one lover each, hence the total two people, as reflected the Genesis creation story of one man, one woman). This leads us to another very important, popular question.

What about Faithful, Committed (“Covenantal”) Monogamous Homosexual Relationships?

Another common argument from the affirming side is that what really should count is the manner in which same sex practices are had. That is, if homosexuality is set within the boundaries of a committed, monogamous relationship (marriage), then the church should sanction that relationship.⁴⁰ This may be one of the biggest issues for the church, probably being more widespread even than the question of whether or not to ordain people who identify as and act upon their SSA. Many denominations, of course, have moved into this position with much pride of their own acceptance and tolerance towards practicing homosexuals. For this, there is a important New Testament parallel.

Polyamory Than Race or Gender: A Reasoned and Reasonable Case for Secular Society,” *Robert Gagnon*, May 18, 2009, accessed December 2, 2016, robgagnon.net/homosexIncestPolyAnalogy1.htm

³⁹ *Contra* Vines, who claims he is “uniquely” unable to live out his full sexuality given by nature/God, missing the fact that most Christian men do not get to live out the full sexuality naturally given to them: “Same-sex attraction is completely natural to me. It’s not something I chose or something I can change. And while I could act on my sexual orientation in lustful ways, I could also express it in the context of a committed, monogamous relationship. But based on the traditional interpretation of Scripture, I am *uniquely excluded* from the possibility of romantic love and intimacy.” Vines, 73.

⁴⁰ In fact, this is the main goal of Daniel Kirk’s new book: “My core argument in this book is not simply that some Bible passages have been misinterpreted and others have been given undue weight. My larger argument is this: Christians who affirm the full authority of Scripture can also affirm committed, monogamous same-sex relationships.” Kirk, J. R. Daniel, *Jesus Have I Loved, but Paul?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 270.

The incestuous situation at the church in Corinth may be informative of how churches should react to (at least what was previously considered) quite serious, unrepentant sexual sins (adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bestiality, incest, etc.). First, though, one can note that when Paul hears about the man sleeping with his father's wife,⁴¹ he does not ask whether or not the couple intends to continue this relationship in a loving, committed, covenantal sense or not. Rather, Paul actually rebukes the church for priding themselves in their tolerance and acceptance of it. Paul, contrary to popular ideas of what love means, is the only one who loves the man enough to correct him—however painful it might be (1 Cor 5:5)—lest that man be excluded from the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9).⁴² Although we do not have the full details of the situation in the letter, what is clear is that Paul's sexual ethics have not changed much in the new covenant.

Experience and Scripture

As has been shown, scripture is thoroughly non-affirming of homosexual *practice*. Thorough research, in fact, shows a fascinating picture of affirming scholars and popular writers searching for and employing one argument after another in pursuit of overthrowing the traditional view. All have failed, as respected scholars and theologians are starting to admit publicly. Consequently, in order for the church to affirm homosexuality and sanction it, one has to move outside the realm of scripture and into that of experience, as Luke Timothy Johnson declares:

I think it important to state clearly that *we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good*. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own *experience* and the experience thousands of others

⁴¹ We do not know if the father is still alive, divorced, or what, but Paul and the church did. Importantly, he does not mention it as a major factor in this ethical issue.

⁴² To be sure, Paul's intention is "that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." (1 Cor 5:5b) Likewise, Jesus associated with sinners for the same reason: he knew they were most at risk of not entering God's kingdom because of their sin.

have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us. By so doing, we explicitly reject as well the premises of the scriptural statements condemning homosexuality—namely, that it is a vice freely chosen, a symptom of human corruption, and disobedience to God’s created order...⁴³

Evangelical leaders such as Albert Mohler lament Johnson’s “rejectionist approach” yet while also applauding his honesty.⁴⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson points to Acts 10-15 as a model for the approval homosexual relationships in the church. After all, the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his house—much to the surprise of Peter and other early Jewish followers of Jesus. Johnson and others are essentially trying to say with regard to homosexuality what Peter said regarding the unforeseen inclusion of gentiles: “If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” (Acts 11:17). The difference however, is that the Cornelius story, once brought before the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, proved to be “*hermeneutically illuminating* of Scripture.”⁴⁵ Such has not been the case for the pro-LGBT efforts in Christian scholarship. Couple that with the fact that *experience*, as important as it is, remains the most difficult source for discerning Christians ethics (compared to scripture, tradition, reason), therefore the Acts 10-15 story does not seem to be able to bear the load needed to condone same sex union.⁴⁶ That is not to say experience does not matter; to the

⁴³ Luke Timothy Johnson, “Scripture and Experience,” *Homosexuality and the Church*, Commonweal, June 11, 2007, accessed December 2, 2016, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/homosexuality-church-1>. Likewise, Daniel Kirk admits, “the position against homosexuality has the better of the biblical argument,” yet suggests that it “might not mean that the church has thereby received the last word that God has to say on the subject.” Kirk, 271.

⁴⁴ Albert Mohler. “Homosexuality and the Bible –the Rejectionist Approach,” *Albert Mohler*, August 29, 2007, accessed December 2, 2016, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2007/08/29/homosexuality-and-the-bible-the-rejectionist-approach/>

⁴⁵ Hays, “The Biblical Witness Concerning Homosexuality,” 82.

⁴⁶ Fedler offers two reasons experience is so difficult to use for ethics: two reasons: 1) It is basically impossible to refute someone’s experiences, which often even conflict with other peoples’ experiences. 2) Humans are sinful by nature and therefore have trouble adequately and intuitively judging right from wrong. Fedler, 64. James W. Thompson similarly critiques LTJ’s thesis. See: James W. Thompson, “Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church,” *Restoration Quarterly* 38.4 (1996), 251.

contrary, it matters very much, but it must be a lens through which we can better understand (and not simply reject) scripture as the primary guide for Christian ethics.⁴⁷

Conclusion and Application: Reorientation to The Way of Jesus

The discussion here has only examined a portion of evidence that one could examine on the Christian question of homosexuality.⁴⁸ However, the primary effort of this paper has been to make a case against the sanction of homosexual practice *within the church*.⁴⁹ Much is left, however, to learn and implement within the church regarding ministering to and loving those who struggle with homosexual feelings and behaviors. Already there are many books to aid the church in this regard, written by both Christians and non-Christians.⁵⁰ Perhaps no better education exists, though, than befriending someone who struggles or has struggled with SSA. Even if SSA may be called an “orientation,” the *practice* and *not* merely the orientation is the

⁴⁷ Hays lists five “modes” in which scripture may be used to guide ethical discussions: (1) moral law, (2) principles/ideals, (3) analogies to contemporary experience (4) understanding of the world/humankind (5) understanding God. Romans 1, for example, would be an example of the fourth mode, understanding the world/humanity. See Richard Hays, “Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 14.1 (1986), 206ff.

⁴⁸ This qualification of “*Christian* ethical subject of homosexuality” is both a restatement of the topic of this paper and a nod toward Haurwas’ argument that all ethics are a certain kind.

⁴⁹ The broader cultural war will not be turning around anytime soon; an essay arguing against overturning the Supreme Court ruling in favor of same sex marriage, for instance, would have to address other issues in further detail, e.g. the negatives effects of same sex marriage upon the culture. For an example of a self-described homosexual writing about the devastating effects of same sex marriage on a culture, see: Lee Harris, “The Future of Tradition,” Hoover Institution, June 1, 2005, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.hoover.org/research/future-tradition>.

⁵⁰ Sal Allberry’s book, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, is one of the best to hand someone in the pew. He speaks from personal experience, as many authors on the subject do, and provides insightful ways to love those who “come out.” Another important aspect of gaining insight is listening to stories of those who experience SSA. Wesley Hill, as hinted at by the title of his book *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*, finds two biblical images particularly helpful in his struggles. The first image, that of being *washed*, comes from 1 Cor 6:9-11. The Corinthians’ water baptism ought to help the believers remember that they are no longer what they once were. They are more than the sum of their past sins. Second, the image of *waiting* in Rom. 8:23-25 has helped Hill. *Endurance*--for the redemption of our bodies and for adoption as sons—is a motif that transfers well into the realm of those struggling with *unwanted* same-sex desires. For Hill, as a committed Christian who knows same sex marriage is not a biblical option—remembering that he is washed and not alone in the waiting, helps. Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 48-50.

real ethical issue. Much has been accomplished in regards to helping men (and women) who struggle with pornography, fornication, adultery, and divorce—yet ministries for those experiencing SSA tend to be rare or non-existent in local congregations.

For all members of Jesus' church, following Him means leaving old ways behind, putting Him on, and becoming *new* creations. (2 Cor 5:17) Thus, Paul can say to the church, with all of her sinful past and—even amid current struggles: "... 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 Cor 6:11) Again, much work is needed in terms of learning to love and minister to those within the church who struggle with SSA. Yet, just as much work is needed in correcting the dangerous path many "affirming" churches are taking—of sanctioning homosexual unions and ordaining men and women practicing homosexuality. As difficult as it may be at times to assert the clarity and necessity of the Christian position of heterosexual monogamy, it is necessary. In the end the so-called non-affirming churches might be able to say with Paul, "*For though I grieved you...I do not regret it—though I did regret it...though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance.*" (2 Cor 7:8-9)

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