



Views of Homosexuality
Part Two
WFTF Session 5

Introduction & Plan for Views of Homosexuality Part Two

- Brief Recap of Last Week
 - Review of Fundamentals of Biblical Interpretation
 - Old Testament Scriptures Pertaining to Same-Sex Relationships
 - Competing Biblical Interpretations of Traditionalists and Progressives
 - Cultural Factors of Patriarchy and the Status of women in Old Testament
- This Week we Focus on:
 - Cultural Factors of First-Century Living
 - New Testament Scriptures Pertaining to Same-Sex Relationships
 - Competing Biblical Interpretations of Traditionalists and Progressives

The Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

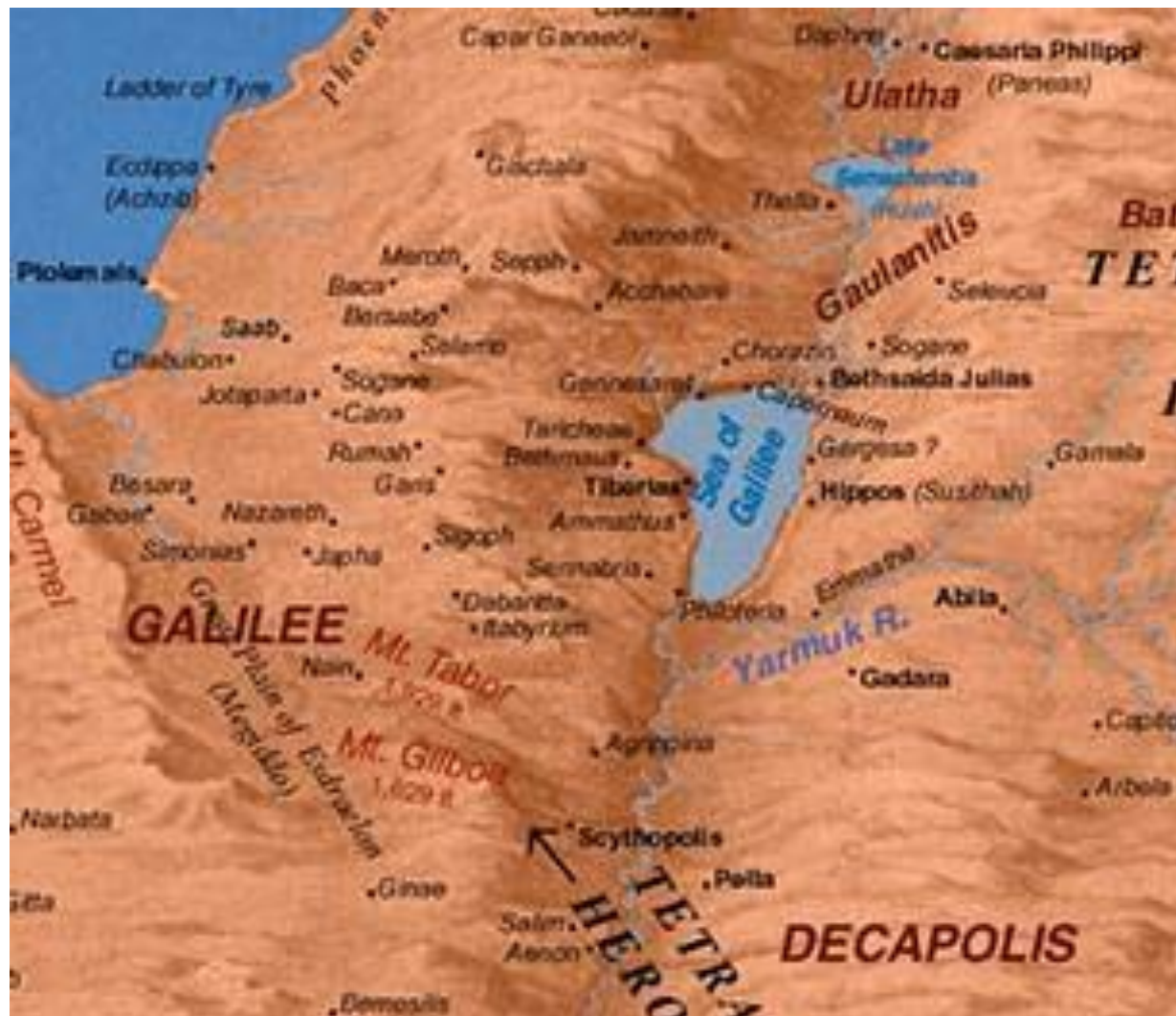


Santo Stefano in Assisi - The legend goes that when Francis died, the bells of this little church began to mysteriously ring. Assisi, Italy

Jesus ministered in Galilee in rural small towns. At the time Galilee had two major cities, Sepphoris just a few miles from Nazareth and Tiberias built on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus spent most of his time in and around Capernaum northeast of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee.

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."
Luke 13:31

New Testament Galilee



Paul, on the other hand, went to the Cities of the Roman Empire ending up in Rome where he was crucified upside down, as legend has it, by the emperor Nero.

Part of our task today is to put ourselves in Paul's time and culture to best as we can understand what he wrote about homosexual behavior.

So, what was it like to be in the first-century Roman Empire



Not an actual photograph

Life in the First-Century Roman Empire: Step into Paul's world

90% of the empire's rural and urban population lived below, at or just above subsistence.

A typical person of the day would be short, more or less malnourished, with rotten and missing teeth, who was lucky to live into their thirties. Half would die before age 10, one third before their first birthday. Death was a common companion.

The cities Paul visited were densely populated e.g. from 44,000 per km² in Ephesus to over 70,000 per km² in Rome. Compare that to Manhattan with a density of 26,000 per km².

Families rented apartments in 5 to 9 story poorly constructed buildings whose upper stories often collapsed.

- The ground floor contained shops, upper floors contained living quarters, most of which were about 450 ft² housing a family of 5 to 7 people.
- Elites would either have their own villas or live on the 2nd floor of these buildings. The basic rule was the higher you went, the poorer and more dangerous your living quarters became.
- Apartments had no heating, running water, cooking or toilet facilities. Human waste was usually thrown into the streets.

Society

Hierarchical Class Structure

Unlike the self-fulfillment, independence and “I did it my way” mentality pursued today, the ancients elites followed a code of accepted expectations, behaviors and practices.

Elite Males

Roman law gave men the dominant rights to flog, imprison and even kill children and slaves; sexually exploit their slaves; and kill, sell or expose their newborns, and demand their wife abort a fetus. Virility and masculinity were highly valued.

Exposure of Newborns

Infants could be exposed in public places such as door steps, temples, cross roads or rubbish heaps where they would perish, or be collected by agents who would sell them into slavery. Most frequently exposed were female and disabled newborns. Even large Roman families infrequently reared more than one daughter. This led to a disproportionate number of men in the empire.

The following first-century letter fragment written by a man to his wife has been recovered:

Know that I am still in Alexandria. And do not worry if they all come back and I remain in Alexandria. I ask and beg you to take good care of our baby son, and as soon as I receive payment I shall send it up to you. If you are delivered of a child (before I come home), if it is a boy keep it, if a girl discard it.

Proper Elite Female

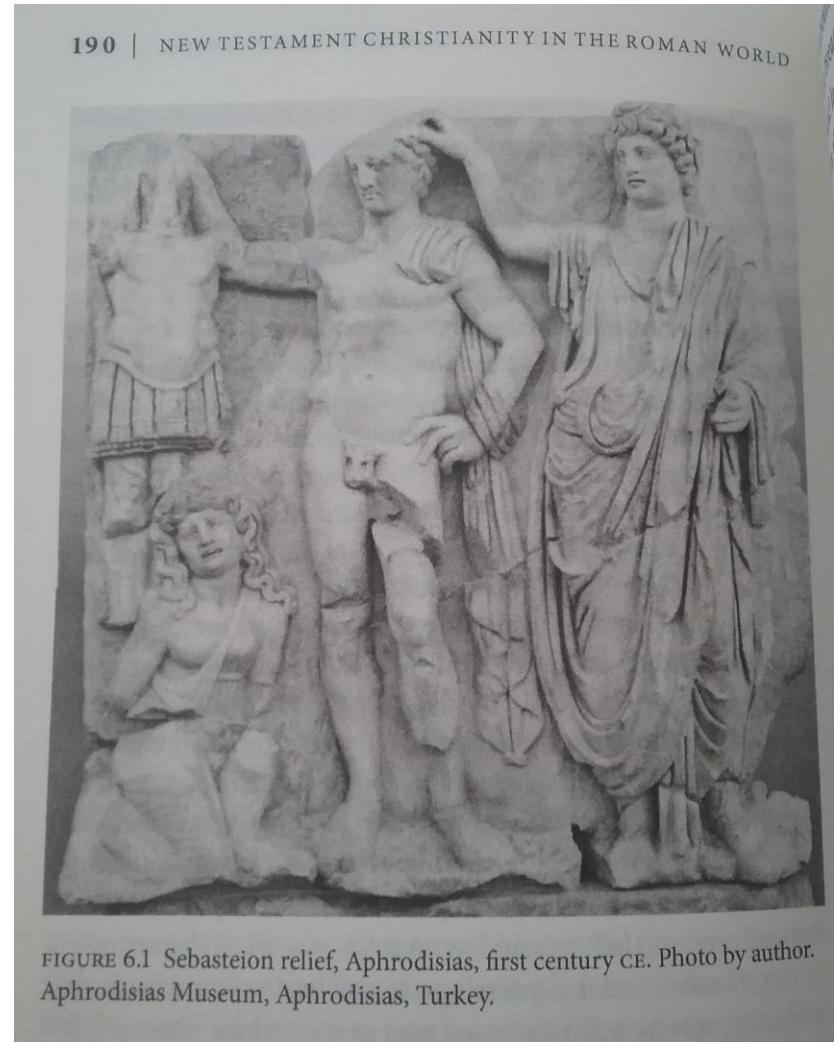
Managed the household, along with slaves and would raise and educate the children. They would dress modestly, elaborately style their hair, eschew ostentatious jewelry and project a disciplined demeanor.

Sometimes a Picture

Notice this first-century relief from Turkey. It signifies the complex gender relationships at the time. You have a virile, heroic, stoic and nude warrior holding the armor of a defeated enemy. Both the nudity and armor speak to the emperor's masculinity and power.

At the foot of the man is a stricken female figure representing the defeated enemy. Her presence and posture depicts her subjugation. Her unbound hair, dress exposing her breast and emotional distress feminizes the defeated enemy and renders it passive, weak, undisciplined and in need of masculine domination.

At the man's left is a properly groomed, dressed, composed, self-controlled and temperate matron - a *proper lady*.



Women as Half-baked Men, Medically Speaking

The ancients believed that the male sperm contained the whole of life. The role of the woman was to accept the seed and grow it in her womb, much as a seed planted in soil. They had no concept of ovulation and the woman's contribution providing the egg to be fertilized. Therefore any release of sperm that could not have the possibility of procreation was an *abomination* among the Jews.

It was believed that cold wet wombs produced female infants and lesser males. Hot dry ones produce robust males. The prevailing understanding was that women were incomplete males, since they did not receive the necessary heat and dryness in the womb to become male – they were obviously missing some masculine equipment. Women were half-baked men.

Gender existed on a spectrum determined by the heat and moisture of the womb. Men who developed in a cool moist womb emerge as *soft* or effeminate. In the ancient world homosexuality was not linked to effeminacy. The main concern was not same-sex relations, but rather with manliness and power over others.

These ideas were developed in societies governed by male elites and organized for their benefit. This understanding of sex and gender expresses a hierarchy of power wherein the masculine/strong/active/dominant rules the effeminate /weak/passive/subservient.

Women experienced:

- High death rates when bearing children
- Being ordered by their husband to abort a fetus leading to infertility or worse to death
- Being exposed at birth where they would perish or be sold into slavery

Birth Control?

- Ingesting plants such as Queen Anne's lace.
- Various vaginal insertions believed to kill sperm
- Anal Intercourse
- Avoiding sex with wife

And Slaves?

Slavery was understood as part of the *natural* order

- Male and female slaves were often mistreated and used as sex objects
- Slave dealers castrated boys for sale as sex objects,
- Exposed girls were often bought from slave traders to generate income through prostitution,
- Children were purchased as slaves solely for the sake of sexual exploitation.

Sex in the City?

- Neither Roman religion or law recognized homosexual eroticism as distinct from or inferior to heterosexual eroticism
- Roman society assumed adult males would be interested in sexual relations with both sexes
- There was a strong bias against passive sexual behavior on the part of adult men. The emperor Caligula once sexually humiliated a military officer. The officer later joined a conspiracy to murder him, resulting in a successful assassination crowned by repeatedly stabbing him in the genitals. *Ouch.*
- Slaves could be coerced into homosexual or heterosexual behavior, but it was illegal to do so with free or freed persons
- It was acceptable for consenting young men to be passive sex objects for older men, it sometimes improved one's social status later in life (e.g. Augustus)
- Elites could participate in same sex marriages (e.g. Nero married 2 male companions)



Phallic Street Sign Pointing Way to Brothel, Ancient Pompey



Nero's Bathtub, Vatican Museum

New Testament Scriptures

Pertinent Passages appear in three places in the New Testament. We will hold off on Romans 1: 26-27 for a moment and take up 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10. They read thusly:

- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 “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.”
- 1 Timothy 1:8-11 “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, 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 that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”

Definitions

- Fornicator – a person who has sex with someone who is not their husband or wife.
- Prostitute - a male or female, who engages in sexual activity ritually (e.g. temple prostitute) or for payment or other personal gain.
- Sodomite – In Corinthians and Timothy, the Greek words translated as sodomites are arsenokoitai and malakoi. Arsenokoitai appears to be a word coined by Paul. It is not found elsewhere in the Bible or elsewhere in ancient literature. It is made up of the following two Greek words: arsenos (man) and koiten (bed). The literal translation for malakoi, used only in Corinthians, is “soft.” Most suggest that “soft” is a disparaging slang term for effeminate males. We entailed “soft” earlier as a trait believed to be caused by a womb that was too cool and moist. The word has changed over the centuries to include any male or female engaging in sexual gratification via other than penile vaginal penetration. In even more recent history it has been used, whether originally so meant or not, as describing a homosexual.

Traditionalist Argue:

- First, Paul's meaning of arsenokoitai is closely linked to the Levitical prohibitions of same-sex relations. Paul has created the new word arsenokoitai by combining these two terms from the Greek translation of Leviticus.
- Second, Paul places malakoi alongside arsenokoitai in 1 Corinthians 6 listing these words as a pair. Paul is denouncing the homosexual behavior of both partners in gay sex.

Progressives Argue:

- The indefinite term arsenokoitai more likely references exploitive same-sex practices as practiced by much of the Roman Aristocracy with their slaves, consensual sex with younger men or paid services to a male prostitute. After the fourth century the word was interpreted as any disapproved sexual activity including homosexuality.
- It is not certain that Paul intends "soft" or Malakoi to be interpreted sexually. Malakoi may refer to one's demeanor, or it may suggest a character flaw such as weakness or cowardice.
- To correctly understand Paul's theological denouncement of homosexual behavior in Romans 1, it is essential to thoroughly grasp the cultural context in which Paul was writing.
- In Leviticus the word translated "abomination" is *toevah* which is not used for something intrinsically evil, but rather places it in the category of ritual purity laws designed to distinguish the Jews from their pagan contemporaries.

What are your thoughts???



The third and last New Testament passage dealing with same-sex relations is from Paul's letter to the Romans. It is as follows:

- Romans 1:26-27 “For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. **Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural**, and in the same way also **the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another**. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.”
- Note:
 - This is the only place in the Bible that addresses homosexuality with more than a single sentence
 - It is the only verse in the Bible that explicitly addresses same-sex female behavior.
 - It frames the issue in a broader theological context.

So, What are we talking about here?

Religion in the City

The Roman Empire numbered between 50 to 60 million, 90% were pagans.

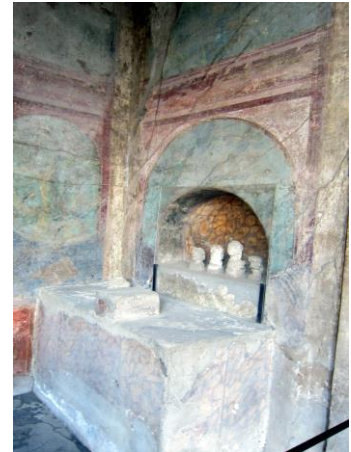
The Empire was awash with regional and ethnic gods and temples in all the major cities.

Highly ritualistic procedures were a symbol of orthopraxy which if ignored would lead to chaos in the Empire.

Divination rites generally involve the layout of some materials on which a range of patterns could result. The substance could be the shape of an animal's liver, an arrangement of birds in flight or the casting of objects.

Experts – priests, freelance specialists, simply the owner of a divination manual – interpret the resulting patterns as the encoded communications of gods, spirits, or some greater supernatural order.

Rituals were designed to address crises points in life to provide a sense of safety and certainty such as for love, healing, cursing another, etc. Some rituals involved temple prostitutes.



Idols at a family altar,
Pompey

The Guilt of Humankind: Romans 1: 18-32

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters,^[1] insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

Traditionalist Argue

It is difficult to imagine how Paul can be any clearer. Paul's use the word "natural" is theologically crucial for the traditionalist. God created an inherent order in the universe, and within God's created order humans were endowed with an essential nature. An intrinsic part of that nature is the sexual union between a man and a woman. God intentionally created humans both male and female to be complementary partners. Human bodies are designed for heterosexual relationships and therefore since we were created that way it must be God's intention that sexual relationships be fulfilled as such. This has been called *natural law* theory.

Progressives Argue

Genesis addresses major categories of creatures, sea creatures, birds of the air and land creatures. But amphibians or other animals that were winged land animals, feathered land animals and non-feathered flying animals were not mentioned, but we know they existed. Since only major classifications were addressed, perhaps the dichotomous class of male and female simply make up the majority of humans, but not the totality of humans.

Natural law theory was not developed in this way until a thousand years after Paul's death. It is unfair to place Paul's writings in this context. He simply would not think in that way.

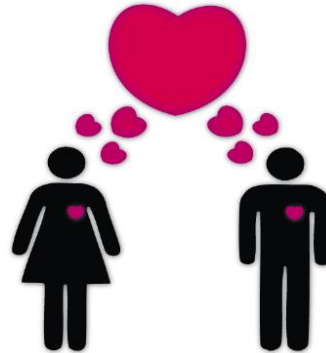
So what would Paul mean by *natural* when he wrote "Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another." We will address this shortly.

Traditionalists Also Argue

The gift of sex is for procreation. Homosexual unions cannot procreate, so they are unnatural sexual encounters and therefore against God's intentions.

Progressives Argue

If sex is only for procreation, what about infertile people who cannot have children? Are they to not fulfill their sexual attraction for one another? Further, once a woman reaches menopause should fulfillment of sexual desire be abandoned?



Also, while human bodies are designed for procreation is that the only or even primary purpose for the gift of sex? Or is it to fulfill the deepest yearnings of two loving couples? If that is the case then sexual gratification achieved between two committed loving adults, regardless of its form or the gender combination would be appropriate and not counter to the will of God or the design of nature.

Romans 1:26-27 “For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. **Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another.** Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.”

Is Paul merely talking about temple prostitution here?

Paul may have been familiar with temple prostitution, both homosexual and heterosexual, and it is reasonable to think that he is warning the Romans against the immorality of the temple prostitutes.

But Paul is not describing dispassionate acts performed in the interest of ritual or ceremony: he states very clearly that the parties involved “burned in their lust one toward another.” It is unreasonable to infer from the passage that there was any motive for the behavior other than ardent sexual desire.

So, what was Paul getting at here? What does he mean by exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural?

When we look at the context of these passages within the paragraph with which it is embedded, we see the point of the passage is not to stigmatize sexual behavior of any sort but to condemn the Gentiles for their general infidelity to God. There was a time, Paul implies, when monotheism was offered to or known by the Romans, but they rejected it.

The reference to homosexual behavior is simply a mundane analogy to this theological sin; it is patently not the crux of this argument. Once the point has been made, the subject of homosexuality is quickly dropped, and the major argument resumed.

What is even more important, the persons Paul condemns are manifestly not homosexual, but homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons.

The whole point of Romans 1 is to stigmatize persons who have gotten off the true path they were once on. It would completely undermine the thrust of the argument if the persons in question were not “naturally” inclined to the opposite sex in the same way they were “naturally” inclined to monotheism.

In a day when same-sex attraction was not understood, by natural, Paul means that heterosexual people went against their own nature for cheap sexual thrills as we saw earlier was common “back in the day.”

In Summary

It is not clear that Paul distinguished in his thoughts or writings between gay persons (in the sense of permanent sexual preference) and heterosexuals who simply engaged in periodic homosexual behavior. Paul did not discuss gay persons, but only homosexual acts committed by heterosexual persons.

There is no clear condemnation of homosexual acts between same-sex attracted individuals *per se*, in the verses in question. The expression “against nature” has been almost wholly obscured over 2,000 years of misinterpretation. It has been associated with *natural law* philosophy which interjects the will of God into what seems logical and reasonable through observation. However, the concept of “natural law” was not fully developed until more than a millennium after Paul's death, and it is incorrect to read it into his words.

For Paul, “nature” was not a question of universal law or truth but, rather, a matter of the character of some person or group of persons. “Nature” is not a moral force for Paul.

Assuming that Paul’s original intent was in reference to the creation stories of Genesis is simply incorrect. A possessive is always understood with “nature” in Pauline writings: it is not “nature” in the abstract but someone's “nature.” “Nature” in Romans 1:26, then, should be understood as the personal nature of the pagans in question.

Paul condemns homosexual acts by heterosexual individuals which is against their natural sexual inclinations. They are promiscuous pleasure seekers, not homosexuals whose nature is same sex attraction.

What are we to take away from all of this?

When we consider homosexuals in committed monogamous relationships would we characterize them as: filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless and ruthless, as Paul indicates?

Q & A:

What do you think?



What did Jesus have to say about same sex relationships?

- Jesus is silent on this issue – what does this mean?

Traditionalists Argue

- Say there are countless issues that Jesus didn't overtly address but that we nevertheless consider crucial to Christian morality.
- Jesus is silent on other sexual topics like rape, incest, pedophilia, and bestiality.
- Argue that Jesus's teachings uphold the established Old Testament ethics for sexuality, including the prohibitions of same - sex relations as commanded in Leviticus.

Progressives Argue

- Focus on the broad, foundational teachings of Jesus such as “love your God with all your being and love your neighbor as yourself.”
- LGBTQ individuals are systematically treated like “the least of these” in today's world. They have been marginalized, ostracized, and traumatized.
- Because LGBTQ people have been subjected to callous and homophobic prejudice and discrimination, followers of Jesus are commanded to reach out in radical love.
- Progressive Christians highlight the revolutionary way Jesus interacted with the outcasts of his culture.
- Jesus focused on the most important issues of his day, apparently homosexuality was not one of them.

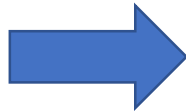
Is it time to stop interpreting the Bible as a static rather than a developing understanding of God's revelation?

You don't have to be afraid of truth – whenever and however you find it – because God is the source of all truth.

Continuing Biblical Revelation:

OT Purity Laws (Leviticus 11: 4-7)

But among those that chew the cud or have divided hoofs, you shall not eat the following: the camel, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you. The rock badger, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you. The hare, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you. The pig, for even though it has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed, it does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you.



Peter's Vision (Acts 10:9-15)

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."

Continuing Biblical Revelation:

OT Purity Law Leviticus 12:3

On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.



The Jerusalem Council Acts 15:1-35

Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. ... Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled^[e] and from blood. Acts:15

This illustrates a developing understanding of God's revelation within the Bible?

Is there also evidence of a developing understanding of God's revelation within and beyond the Bible?

We noted last week that at the Wesley Covenant Association's Global Legislative Assembly on Nov. 2 an emphasis on the need to be faithful to Scripture and to transform the culture rather than to accommodate it. Others called for an end to *casual Christianity*.

Titus 2: 9-10

Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to talk back, not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior.



United States Constitution, 13th Amendment, Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

1 Timothy 2: 11-12

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.



UMC Clergy

Methodists ordained women in the late 19th century. In 1956 women were granted full clergy rights and now make up 25% of all UMC clergy.

***Casual Christianity* of fulfillment of the overarching message of Scripture?**

Concluding Thought:

What have been the five most important teachings in Scripture for you?

How might these teachings impact your beliefs with respect to people with same-sex attraction?

Bibliography

Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*. University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Gould, Sam. *Being Christian in the Twenty-First Century*. Wipf & Stock, 2017.

Hansen, Adolf. *Is It Time: Helping Laity and Clergy Discuss Homosexuality One Question at a Time*. Abingdon Press, 2017.

Johnson, Jill, M, et. al. *Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and the United Methodist Church*. Abingdon Press, 2017.

Maier, Harry, O. *New Testament Christianity in the Roman World*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

McConkey, Dale. *United Methodists Divided: Understanding Our Differences Over Homosexuality*. Global Parish Press. Kindle Edition, 2018.

Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. Princeton University Press, 1996.