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PAUL'S THEOLOGY OF HOMOSEXUALITY

AN ANALYSIS OF ROMANS 1:26-27

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PAUL'S THEOLOGY OF HOMOSEXUALITY AN ANALYSIS OF ROMANS 1:26-27

Since Peter, James, Jude and the Gospel authors are largely silent on the issue of homosexuality, the Church has derived most of its theological views and ethics on the subject from Paul's New Testament epistles and certain Old Testament texts. Although most New Testament authors condemn sexual immorality [πορνεία]¹ and adultery [μοιχεία]², none of them, other than Paul, specifically singles out homosexuality. Paul addresses this controversial subject directly in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Timothy. For example, in 1 Cor 6:9-10 and 1 Tim 1:10, Paul condemns both sexual immorality and male homosexuality [πορνεία and ἀρσενοκοίτης respectively]; whereas, other New Testament authors generally confine their discussions to adultery and sexual immorality, possibly meaning promiscuity, prostitution, and pederasty.

Recently, several newsworthy scholars, including Robin Scroggs, William Countryman, Daniel Helminiak, and John Shelby Spong, have developed revisionist interpretations of Rom 1:26-27, as well as 1 Cor 6:9-10 and 1 Tim 1:10 with the result of advancing the homosexual social agenda. Generally, these scholars embrace the many love-centric passages in the New Testament, but dispute the traditional prohibitions against homosexuality found in Paul's epistles. Using a combination of exegetical arguments and modern schools of thought, they offer several revisionist interpretations to argue for a positive homosexual ethic based on a New Testament love theology.³

¹ Non-Pauline examples include Mat 5:32; 15:19; 19:9; Mark 7:21; John 8:41; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Jude 1:7; Rev 2:14, 2:20, 21; 9:21; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9.

² Non-Pauline examples include: Mat 5:27, 28, 32; 15:19; 19:9,18; Mark 7:21, 10:11, 12, 19; Luke 16:18, 18:20; John 8:3-4; Jam 2:11, 2 Pet 2:14; Rev 2:22.

³ The author has observed that all the pro-homosexual proposals studied appeal to a New Testament love ethic as the basis for homosexual standing within the Church, but the definition of such a supposed love ethic and its theological meaning and significance are not addressed in the materials studied.

At first glance, such revisionist proposals do seem to have merit assuming that “love” is the primary New Testament ethic. Even less liberal scholars such as E.P. Sanders suggest potential inconsistencies within Paul’s epistles and general theology:

There is nothing self-evident, on the basis of the principle “love your neighbor,” about saying that homosexuals would not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-11). Similarly, the principle does not, abstractly considered, ban fornication. Paul apparently felt the standard Jewish repugnance for Gentile sexual practices.⁴

Assuming that Paul is either misunderstood or wrong, could allow for mutual homosexual relationships within the Church, as the aforementioned revisionist scholars advocate.

In any case, the Episcopal, United Church of Christ, and some other liberal Christian denominations have already accepted the revisionist proposals. These churches and others have fully embraced the homosexual social agenda, including officiating gay/lesbian marriages, ordaining practicing homosexuals, promoting gay/lesbian adoptions, lobbying for gay/lesbian workplace rights, advocating alternative lifestyles, and in so doing all these things, marginalizing traditional heterosexual marriage and undermining biblical authority. This paper will investigate whether or not such arguments have exegetical merit.

New Testament Texts and Homosexuality

Historically, the Church has rationalized that non-Pauline texts which condemn sexual immorality [πορνεία] categorically condemn homosexuality [i.e. – ἀρσενοκοίτης] as well. For example, Jude 1:7 explains that God is punishing Sodom and Gomorrah in the eternal fire for their sexual immorality [πορνεία] and pursuit of “strange/other flesh” [σαρκὸς ἑτέρας]. Interpreters usually understand this text as looking retrospectively to Genesis 19:4–5: when the men of Sodom, both young and old, surrounded Lot’s house and demanded that Lot hand over

⁴ E.P. Sanders, *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 95

the two investigating angels so that they could have sexual relations with them. For their crime, commonly understood as homosexuality, God destroys Sodom, Gomorrah and the surrounding cities. This Genesis narrative then echoes throughout the entire Bible: in the Pentateuch [Deut 29:23, 32:32], in the Historical Books with the destruction of the apostate Benjaminites [Jdg 19], throughout the Prophets as a reminder of God's righteous covenant enforcement [Isa 1:9, 10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer 23:14, 49:18; 50:40; Lam 4:6; Eze 16:46-56; Amo 4:11; Zep 2:9], as well as in New Testament eschatology [Mat 10:15, 11:23-24; Luke 10:12, 17:29; Rom 9:29; 2 Pet 2:6; Jud 1:7; Rev 11:8].

A recent counter position to this common interpretation of Jude 1:7 argues that Sodom and Gomorrah were not punished on account of their homosexual orientation, but rather their inhospitable behavior towards the two angels. Daniel Helminiak, a proponent of this position writes:

So what was the sin of Sodom? Abuse and offense against strangers. Insult to the traveler. Inhospitability to the needy. That is the point of the story understood in its own historical context. When male – male rape becomes part of the story, the additional offense is sexual abuse – gross insult and humiliation in Lot's time and in our own. The whole story and its culture make clear that the author was not concerned about sex in itself, and it was irrelevant whether the sex was hetero – or homosexual... The point is abuse and assault, in whatever form they take. To use this text to condemn homosexuality is to misuse this text.⁵

There is some material Old Testament support for Helminiak's argument: "This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy"⁶ [Eze 16:49]. Consequently, from this Old Testament witness, it's unreasonable to understand that Sodom's crimes and ensuing punishments were solely the result of their homosexual attractions towards the two visiting angels. Thus,

⁵ Daniel A. Helminiak,, *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*, (Tajique, NM: Alamo Square Press), 46-7.

⁶ ESV

condemning the Sodomites for their sexual orientation alone is at best an exegetical error and at worst, potentially partaking in the same crime as Sodom – perpetuating violence against the poor and helpless – (i.e. – homosexual minorities as Helminiak and others would argue).⁷

Thus, under Helminiak’s view, πορνεία would include rape (hetero or homo) in its range of meaning, as well as cult prostitution, general prostitution, and promiscuity, but exclude monogamous, committed sexual relationships centered on the New Testament “love” ethic. Additionally, as certain liberal scholars like Helminiak are quick to point out, since there is no direct New Testament proof that πορνεία includes consensual, committed homosexual relations, then the Church should neither prohibit nor condemn such relationships either.

Another argument supporting Helminiak’s pro-homosexual view derives from an alternate exegesis of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, specifically the phraseology in 1 Cor 6:9-10: “... οὔτε πόρνοι ... οὔτε μοιχοὶ οὔτε μαλακοὶ οὔτε ἀρσενοκοῖται...” In short, Paul agrees with other New Testament witnesses that neither sexually immoral persons [πόρνοι] nor adulterers [μοιχοὶ] will inherit the Kingdom of God.⁸ However, he goes beyond these two broad categories to also exclude the μαλακοὶ and the ἀρσενοκοί. The literary construction opens up several interpretive possibilities since μαλακοὶ possesses a range of meaning including 1a) “effeminate men” [KJV, NAS], 1b) “passive male homosexuals” [NET], or 1c) “male prostitutes” [NIV, NLT, NRSV]. Similarly, ἀρσενοκοί has a range of meaning including 2a) “homosexuals” [ESV, NAS, NET, NLT], 2b) “male homosexuals” [lit “those that lie with males in bed” – ἄρσην ‘male’ + κοίτη ‘bed’] [KJV, NRSV], or 2c) “male homosexual pedophiles.”

⁷ In the introduction to his book *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*, Helminiak writes “Bible religion plays a major role in allowing violence against lesbian and gay people to occur... Supposedly, the Bible condemns homosexuality, and some people take that to mean that the Bible justifies hatred and cruelty against gays and lesbians.”

⁸ Heb 13:5; Rev 21:8, 22:15; See also Eph 5:5.

Assuming that the sins listed in 1 Cor 6:9–10 are *mutually exclusive*, certain pro-homosexual scholars, such as Robin Scroggs, argue that *μαλακοι* should translate “male cult prostitutes” and *ἀρσενοκοῖται* should translate “pedophiles.”⁹ They reason that if Paul meant all homosexuals are excluded from the Kingdom of God, he would have 1) limited his list to the *ἀρσενοκοῖται*, since this one word could have captured the whole of male homosexual behavior (whether pagan cult worship, pederasty, or even consensual male homosexual practices) and 2) added language to clearly identify lesbianism. But, he did not do either, so, assuming an underlying *principle of mutual exclusion* in 1 Cor 6:9–10, Scroggs and others argue that Paul must have meant to limit the range of sexual offenses to promiscuity, adultery, cult prostitution, and pederasty, “the enslaving of boys as youths for sexual purposes and the use of these boys by adult males.”¹⁰ Applying the same kind of logic to 1 Tim 1:10 yields a similar result:

The fact that *ἀρσενοκοῖται* comes between *πόρνοι* and *ἀνδραποδισταῖς* tells Scroggs the three terms in serial refer to “male prostitutes, males who lie [with them], and slave dealers [who procure to them]”¹¹

Thus, Helminiak, Scroggs and other liberal scholars argue, 1 Cor 6:9–10 does not prohibit consensual homosexual relationships operating within monogamous, committed, and loving unions, but only nonconsensual and promiscuous sexual unions whether hetero or homosexual.

Although most Evangelicals disagree with these revisionist arguments, Helminiak, Scroggs, and other liberal scholars raise an important question. In 1 Cor 6:9–10, did Paul detail a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive list of people excluded from the Kingdom of God? To test this, let’s examine Paul’s literary style using the test case of spiritual gifts.

⁹ James DeYoung, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications), 182

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

There are three instances where Paul catalogues spiritual gifts: Rom 12:6-8, 1 Cor 12:4-10, and 1 Cor 12:28-31. These lists are summarized in the below chart:

Spiritual Gifts	Rom 12:6-8	1 Cor 12:4-10	1 Cor 12:28-31
Prophecy	X		X
Service	X		
Teaching	X		X
Exhortation	X		
Generosity	X		
Leadership	X		X
Acts of Mercy	X		
Wisdom		X	
Knowledge		X	
Faith		X	
Healing		X	X
Miracles		X	X
Distinguishing Between Spirits		X	
Tongues		X	X
Interpretation of Tongues		X	

The first list [Rom 12:6-8] demonstrates complete independence from the second list [1 Cor 12:4-10]. However, the third list [1 Cor 12:28-31] derives exclusively from the elements of the first two. By definition, none of the lists demonstrate exhaustion.

Therefore, since we can prove that Paul did not create exhaustive lists in any of these three examples, there is no reason to believe that 1 Cor 6:9-10 presents an exhaustive list either. In all likelihood, there are other offenses beyond the various sins mentioned in 1 Cor 6:9-10 that would exclude one from the Kingdom of Heaven, which Paul did not survey. So, even if Scroggs is correct in her exegesis and translation of 1 Cor 6:9-10, does not mean that Paul implicitly condoned consensual homosexual activities by excluding them from his list of non-consensual homosexual activities, since we can prove that Paul did not create exhaustive lists. The same logic operates similarly concerning 1 Tim 1:10.

Nevertheless, although the aforementioned lists of spiritual gifts did not demonstrate exhaustion, they did demonstrate mutual exclusion amongst the contents of each individual list. Therefore, it is very possible that the sins in 1 Cor 6:9-10 are mutually exclusive and non-

overlapping, as Scroggs and others suggest. However, using a simpler *Qal Vahomer* argument which assumes that Paul had a literary style of creating mutually exclusive lists (as in our test case), the following translation is highly credible:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the promiscuous, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor pseudo-female homosexuals (passive gay/lesbians – i.e. sodomites), nor pseudo-male homosexuals (active gay/lesbians) nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.¹²

In other words, in 1 Cor 6:9-10, Paul condemns all homosexuality, whether consensual or non-consensual. This echoes Rom 1:26-27 where Paul uses the same literary technique to clearly identify and condemn any and all homosexual activity.

Old Testament Texts and Homosexuality

Besides the aforementioned New Testament sources, the mainstream confessing Church also consistently cites Lev 18:22 and 20:13 as proof texts against homosexuality. Unfortunately, for several reasons, the meaning and relevance of these Old Testament ethics to the Church are not as obvious as perhaps we would like them to be. First, most Christians, whether liberal or conservative, are quick to point out that the Church is not under the Law, based on Rom 6:14. Second, using both Old and New Testament texts demonstrates that many Old Testament Laws have minimal relevance and applicability in the Christian life. For example, in good conscience, most Christians will refuse to obey Old Testament statutes concerning sacrifices, diet, clothing, hair styling, and ritual. Third, Catholics and Protestants tend to be weary about works-based righteousness schemes which tend to incorporate amoral Old Testament commandments. Thus, for one or more of these reasons, most Christians tend to have a low view of Old Testament Law.

¹² Author's translation.

The broad rationale for such disobedience is that most, if not all Old Testament laws were only relevant for Theocratic Israel. For example, the presentation of the various laws in Leviticus 18 fit an approximate covenant structure, with a title [Lev 18:1], an historical prologue [Lev 18:2-5], stipulations [Lev 18: 6-23], and curses [Lev 18: 24-30]. Thus, to dispel the relevance of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 to the Christian life, certain liberal scholars, such as William Countryman, ironically argue from Paul that Christians are not under law (whatever that may mean) and that Leviticus 18 operated only within Theocratic Israel.¹³ Such an argument works similarly to J.D. Dunn's proposal towards a New Perspective on Paul:

A significant part of Paul's criticism in Romans 2-3 was directed against Israel's continued assumption that it enjoyed a favored nation status before God. The Jewish interlocutor boasted in the law (Rom 2:23) because he saw the law as marking his privileged relation with God (17-20). Israel boasted because the law gave it advantages over other nations... In so doing... Israel was focusing on the outward and visible and defining privilege in terms of the flesh.¹⁴

In essence, Countryman hijacks Dunn's New Perspective on Paul by agreeing with Dunn that the New Testament problem with the Law was fundamentally cultural separation between Jews and Gentiles and that homosexuality is a cultural and non-moral phenomenon. Therefore, Old Testament Laws such as Lev 18:22 and 20:12 which prohibit homosexual practices no longer apply. Such reasoning can be pushed even further... John Shelby Spong writes:

The texts in Leviticus 18 and 20 are simply wrong. They are morally incompetent because they are based on ignorance. They should be viewed, as should so much else in Leviticus and the rest of the Torah, as stages in human development that we have outgrown, that we have been educated beyond and have therefore abandoned. To quote these texts to justify our prejudices and even our violence destroys the very essence of what Christians say they believe about God.¹⁵

¹³ James De Young, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law*, 183.

¹⁴ James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerman's Publishing Company), 145.

¹⁵ John Shelby Spong, *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love*, (San Francisco: Harpers Collins Publishers), 125-126.

Although most Evangelicals would disagree with Countryman and Spong, there are some important issues raised. In the Old Testament, why was homosexuality a capital crime? On what grounds was it similar to murder in severity, where God demanded "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own Image" [Gen 9:6]. Should such punishments still operate as they did in Theocratic Israel? Why or why not? Or, does God punish such infractions differently in the Gospel era? The reason that murder is a capital offense is that it is similar to murdering God Himself. Do consensual gay and lesbian relationships fit the same sort of criteria? Thus, by focusing on the ethics of homosexuality ["how we should live?"], rather than the underlying theology ["what is Godly?"] has left the Church at a disadvantage in articulating a reasonable response to such revised interpretations. A theology of homosexuality is needed which will be developed later in this paper.

Paul's Argument in Romans 1:26-27

Romans 1:26-27: διὰ τοῦτο παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς πάθη ἀτιμίας, αἵ τε γὰρ θήλειαι αὐτῶν μετήλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν, ²⁷ ὁμοίως τε καὶ οἱ ἄρσενες ἀφέντες τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἄρσενες ἐν ἄρσεσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι καὶ τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν ἣν ἔδει τῆς πλάνης αὐτῶν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀπολαμβάνοντες.¹⁶

Romans 1:26-27: Because of this, God gave them over to *passions of dishonor* [πάθη ἀτιμίας], for the female ones of theirs exchanged the *natural function* [φυσικὴν χρῆσιν] for *the other than natural* [τὴν παρὰ φύσιν]. Likewise, also the male ones gave up the *natural function* [φυσικὴν χρῆσιν] of the female being inflamed in their desire for one another, men with men committing disgracefulness and *receiving in their persons* [ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀπολαμβάνοντες] *the penalty* [τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν] which was due for their error [τῆς πλάνης αὐτῶν].¹⁷

¹⁶ NA27.

¹⁷ Author's Translation.

Because of the aforementioned Old and New Testament disputes, Romans 1:26-27 has become the keystone text towards informing the Church's theology and ethics of homosexuality. Paul frames the problem of *male and female homosexuality* within a Creation framework and explains that since the beginning of Creation, God's eternal power and divine nature have been self-evident from the Creation itself [Rom 1:20]. Thus, the natural function [φυσικὴν χρῆσιν] and obligation of Creation, and particularly Humanity, is to worship and serve its Creator [Rom 1:25]. Tragically, Humanity exchanged its natural function to worship God and worshipped the Creation instead [1:23, 25]. Thus, God gave Humanity over to unclean hearts [Rom 1:24] and the dishonoring of their bodies [Rom 1:24, 26, 27]. In other words, since Humanity exchanged its natural function to worship God for its unnatural function to worship "mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things," God gave Humanity over to unnatural passions and subsequently unnatural functions. Thus, homosexuality is the just punishment of a hard heart and idolatrous lifestyle.

Paul's attitude to homosexual practice is unambiguous. The third appearance of the word "changed" (cf. vv 23 and 25) seems to imply that the action described ("changing the natural use to that which is contrary to nature") is [the] ... direct result of the basic corruption of the glory and truth of God in idolatry, a similar turning from the role of creature to what is simply a perversion of the creature's share in creating. But more striking still is his use of a sequence of words whose import is unmistakable. Homosexuality is seen as a passion which is "worthy of no respect" ... [and] characterized ... as "unnatural," where Paul uses very Greek and particularly Stoic language ... [appealing] to common sense to recognize that ... [such practices are] a violation of the natural order (as determined by God).¹⁸

This traditional interpretation of Rom 1:26-27 helps inform the Church of Paul's theology of sex and provides the correct lens towards understanding Paul's prohibitions against homosexuality in his other epistles. Re-examining 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, we see Paul condemned not only

¹⁸ James D. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, World Biblical Commentary 38A, (Colombia: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 74.

cult prostitutes and pedophiles, but through his literary technique of mutual exclusion, all genres of homosexual behavior, both gay and lesbian.

A Counter Interpretation: Unnatural in Romans Means “Socially Unacceptable”

Daniel Helminiak, John Boswell, and L. William Countryman, argue that the Creation-centric framework for understanding Paul’s argument in Rom 1:18–32 is wrong. They argue that homosexual acts, like heterosexual acts, are morally neutral, unless grounded in some sort of larger moral context.¹⁹ Thus, in Rom 1:26-27, Paul is not necessarily condemning homosexual acts, but rather those acts that are “out of character or kind.”²⁰ In other words, if homosexuality is natural for someone, it is not immoral. Their conclusions are grounded in their interpretation of *natural* [φυσικός].

For Paul, something is *natural* when it responds according to its own kind, when it is as it is expected to be. For Paul, the word *natural* does not mean “in accord with universal laws.” Rather, *natural* refers to what is characteristic, consistent, ordinary, standard, expected, and regular. When people acted as was expected and showed a certain consistency, they were acting *naturally*... That was the sense of the word *nature* in Paul’s usage.²¹

As proof texts of their concept, Helminiak et. al. offer Rom 2:27, Gal 2:15, and 1 Cor 11:14.²² In Rom 2:27, Helminiak argues Paul writes “uncircumcision by nature” to mean Gentiles, contrary to their ordinary and expected behavior, obey the law.²³ Conversely, in Gal 2:15, Paul writes “we who are Jews by *nature* and not Gentile sinners” should not expect Gentiles to live as Jews, meaning Gentiles should not live uncharacteristically Jewish lifestyles

¹⁹ Daniel Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*, 77.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 78

²¹ *Ibid.*, 79

²² *Ibid.*, 78

²³ *Ibid.*

which would be out of the ordinary for the average Gentile.²⁴ Additionally, these critics cite 1 Cor 11:14, where Paul writes “Does not *nature* [φύσις] itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him?”²⁵ Thus, Helminiak argues: “In all these cases, Paul uses the term ‘nature’ to imply what is characteristic or peculiar in this or that situation.”²⁶

Helminiak et. al. do have a good point, in that φύσις doesn’t have one absolute meaning, but likely some sort of range of meaning. To translate φύσις singularly as “natural” would be a sort of exegetical fallacy, given that BDAG and other credible lexicons suggest φύσις has a range of meaning, including the 1) condition or circumstance as determined by birth, 2) natural character of an entity, 3) regular or established order of things, or 4) an entity as a product of nature.²⁷ Thus, the question arises: which definition did Paul intend in Rom 1:26-26?

The best solution is to examine Paul’s most proximate literary comparables: Josephus and Philo. In *Against Apion*, Josephus writes “... and why don’t the Eleans and Thebans stop the *other than natural* [παρὰ φύσιν] and unrestrained sexual intercourse with males?” [Ἡλεῖοι δὲ καὶ Θηβαῖοι τῆς παρὰ φύσιν καὶ [ἄγαν] ἀνέδην πρὸς τοὺς ἄρρενας μίξεως]²⁸ Likewise, in the same passage *Against Apion*, Josephus writes:

What are our laws about marriage? That law owns no other mixture of sexes but that which nature has appointed, of a man with his wife, and that this be used only for the procreation of children. But it [nature] abhors the mixture of a male with a male; and if anyone does that, death is its punishment.²⁹

Likewise, Philo applies φύσις similarly concerning homosexuality. In *Special Laws 3:37*

VII, Philo writes:

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ ESV

²⁶ Helminiak, 78.

²⁷ BDAG

²⁸ Josephus Flavius, *Against Apion* 2:273, Bibleworks v7.0.

²⁹ Ibid., 2:199.

Moreover, another evil, much greater than that which we have already mentioned, has made its way among and been let loose upon cities, namely, the love of boys, which formerly was accounted great infamy even to be spoken of, but which sin is a subject of boasting not only to those who practice it, but even to those who suffer it, and who being accustomed to bearing the affliction of being treated like women, waste away as to their souls and bodies... changing their manly character [φύσιν] into and effeminate one.³⁰

Therefore, although φύσις does indeed have a range of meanings in common vernacular usage, when applied to sexual relations, φύσις definitively means traditional, heterosexual relations, and within Jewish circles, heterosexual marriage. Furthermore, amongst Paul's Hellenistic Jewish contemporaries, when applied to sexuality, the natural [φύσις] abhors unnatural, homosexual relations [παρὰ φύσιν]. Paul's meaning could not be more lucid.

We may now quickly observe Helminiak's exegetical fallacy. It is true φύσις has a range of meaning, but when applied to sexual relations it clearly means heterosexual relations. In sexual contexts, "other than natural" [παρὰ φύσιν] relations refers to homosexual intercourse. Thus, the interpretive options for φύσις in Rom 1:26-27 are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. Therefore, according to Paul and his most relevant contemporaries, homosexual relations, whether attributed to sexual orientation or otherwise, are fundamentally unnatural.

A Counter Interpretation: An Ad Hominem Argument Against Paul

[Rom 1:26-27] ... is the most overt and, I might add, the strangest condemnation of homosexual acts in the New Testament. It is the only place in the Bible where there is a specific allusion to female homosexuality... Its obvious meaning is simply ignored or dodged. Let me state that meaning boldly. Paul is asserting that homosexuality is the punishment given by God to those who fail to worship God properly! Homosexuality for Paul is not a sickness or the result of a choice which one has freely made; it is a punishment for the sin of not attending to the details and practices of proper worship. In other words, Paul is saying that God infects people with homosexual desire if they engage in improper worship or use improper images of God.³¹

³⁰ Philo Judaeus, translated from the Greek by C.D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judaeus, the Contemporary of Josephus*, (London: Henry G. Bonn), 1855.

³¹ John Shelby Spong, 136.

John Shelby Spong is quite right. Given the exegetical evidence, Paul's meaning is absolutely clear, as it has been under most traditional, orthodox interpretations. Although Spong concurs with the orthodox interpretation of Paul's argument, he absolutely disagrees with the argument itself, which he considers completely hypocritical and homophobic.

In response to Paul's strong statements in Rom 1:26-27, Spong presents an *ad hominem* argument to discredit Paul by claiming that "Paul of Tarsus was a gay man, deeply repressed, self-loathing, rigid in denial... [regarding] this fact about himself."³² By asserting that Paul was a closet homosexuality, Spong essentially seeks to discredit Paul and caricaturize him as a hypocrite, who repressed his own homosexual impulses to live a life of false purity and holiness. If what Spong asserts about Paul is true, then perhaps one should discount what Paul writes in Rom 1:26-27. However, there is no evidence that ever suggests that Paul was homosexual or had homosexual tendencies. Spong's extreme and absolutely unwarranted view of Paul has neither Biblical nor historical support. The entire basis of this view is speculative at best and given the hard evidence, slanderous.

If one understands Spong's assertion as an *ad hominem* argument, then it is logically flawed, highly inflammatory, and perverse. However, despite the despicability of such an argument, Spong does raise an important issue which deserves some attention:

Imagine what it must be like to live in fear that God will turn your sexual desire "from the natural use of a woman," making the recipient burn with lust toward one of his own gender! Would God not be an ogre, a demon, or something worse?³³

Spong's point which questions Paul's argument, tests the nature of God's character and His sense of justice.

³² Ibid., 140.

³³ Ibid., 136

If a person worships false gods or the true God falsely, does such a person deserve to be afflicted with such unnatural passions? Does such a punishment fit the crime? And, if someone is so afflicted with homosexuality, isn't that person just receiving his due? Using some of the rationale from Romans 13, when a government uses its power of the sword to imprison, fine, or even execute criminals, does such punishment increase the condemnation of the criminal? No, it doesn't. The offender merely receives his just reward.

If God punishes people with homosexuality, why does their condemnation increase? What is the rationale or legal basis for such a punishment? Is the Judge of the whole universe just? To some degree, these questions are already answered by the traditional orthodox interpretation of Rom 1:26-27: For their crime of unnatural passions towards idols, God punishes people with unnatural passions. This somewhat explains the physical crime and punishment, but there are also spiritual forces operating within the context of Rom 1:26-27 which we will now explore as we flush out Paul's theology of homosexuality. To understand some of the core spiritual issues, we now return to 1 Cor 6 to understand how Paul's theology of the body relates to sexual immorality and particularly homosexuality.

Paul's Theology of the Body

1 Cor 6:13-20: ¹³ ... The body [σῶμα] is not for sexual immorality [πορνεία], but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body [ὁ κύριος τῷ σώματι]. ¹⁴ And the God who raised the Lord and will also us through His power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies [τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν] are members of Christ [μέλη Χριστοῦ ἐστίν]? Shall I then take the members of Christ [our bodies] and make them members of a prostitute [πόρνης μέλη]? May it never be! ¹⁶ Do you not know that the one joining with a prostitute [ὁ κολλώμενος τῇ πόρνη] is one body [ἓν σῶμά ἐστιν] with her? For, it is written, "The two are one flesh." [quoted from Gen 2:24] ¹⁷ But the one joining to the Lord [ὁ δὲ κολλώμενος τῷ κυρίῳ] is one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every sin a person commits is outside the body [ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματός], but the one committing sexual immorality sins against his own body [ὁ δὲ πορνεύων εἰς τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα ἀμαρτάνει]. ¹⁹ Do you not know that the body (singular) of yours (plural) is a temple of the Holy Spirit

within you [τὸ σῶμα ὑμῶν ναὸς τοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐστίν], whom you have from God? You (plural) are not your (plural) own,²⁰ for you (plural) were bought with a price. So glorify God in the body (singular) of yours (plural) [δοξάσατε δὴ τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν]³⁴

Paul's theology of the body, which he outlines in 1 Cor 6, is foundational to his theology of sex and therefore homosexuality. For Paul, the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor 6:19], which God had purposed for Himself to indwell from the beginning. In other words, God created Humanity in His Image [Gen 1:27] and as part of His Image, he gave them bodies for His Spirit to indwell.

The Christian should understand that his or her body is God's Holy Temple and a member of Christ's body, which ought not to be profaned through sexual immorality [1 Cor 6:15] and particularly homosexuality. Sexual immorality, in all its forms, profanes God's Holy Temple [1 Cor 6:18]. This explains why sexual sins are capital offenses.

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. [1 Cor 3:16-17]³⁵

Those profaning their bodies and therefore God's Holy Temple, sin against their very persons [1 Cor 6:18], since they do violence to the Image of God (meaning their bodies), leaving themselves desolate and devoid of God's Holy Spirit.³⁶ This is particularly true regarding homosexuality: the Temple of the Holy Spirit becomes profaned, suggesting that the Spirit Himself is grieved or even worse, possibly blasphemed.³⁷ This background will now help direct our remaining exegetical task.

³⁴ Author's translation. Greek quoted from NA27.

³⁵ ESV

³⁶ This explains why many sexual offenses are capital. Such offenses attack and kill the Image of God.

³⁷ This concept potentially relates to Mark 3:28-30, but will be discussed later in this paper.

What Do They Receive In Themselves?

Rom 1:26-27 addresses the issue of homosexuality and condemns it as unnatural and contrary to God's Creation, for the various reasons already discussed. For their offense, homosexuals receive within their persons the due penalty [τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν] of their error [Rom 1:27]. Traditional scholars understand that the penalty received is sin, meaning that sin is the punishment for sin:

The implication is that unnatural sexual practice is its own penalty, the inevitable outcome of wandering from God. That the divinely ordered punishment for sin is to be handed over to the power of that sin, to be left to its consequences...³⁸

Unfortunately, this traditional interpretation is vague and somewhat circular in its approach, making it incongruent with the linear argument Paul develops throughout Rom 1:18 – 32 and beyond. It also begs the sensitive question: what is the punishment for homosexuality?

“On the other hand [τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν]... could be a vivid way of saying that those who engage in such activities will suffer eternal punishment... in their own persons.”³⁹ The primary argument for this view notes that ἀντιμισθία “often denotes sins of unbelievers in the New Testament.”⁴⁰ Examples include Eph 4:14; 1 Thess 2:3; 2 Thess 2:11; 2 Pet 2:18, 3:17; and, 1 John 4:6. Perhaps, this is where the term “fagot” derived, implying that homosexuals will be burned up like a fagot in the fire. In general, this is bad theology, since it overemphasizes homosexual sin creating the delusion that homosexuality is somehow unforgivable and worse than other sins which exclude a person from the Kingdom of God, contrary 1 Cor 6:8-11.

³⁸ Dunn, James D., *Romans 1-8*, 65.

³⁹ Moo, Douglas, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company), 116.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

A better interpretation incorporates Paul's theology of the body found in 1 Corinthians and outlined in the previous section. Although Paul doesn't mention body [σῶμα] in Rom 1:26-27, the concept is obviously on his mind.⁴¹ For their crime of unnatural passions towards idols, God gives Humanity over to unnatural passions towards one another [Rom 1:26-27]. These unnatural passions cause people to defile their bodies, leaving their persons desolate and devoid of God's Holy Spirit [1 Cor 6]. Thus, God leaves them altogether – this is the penalty of their error [idolatry] and the undisputed condition of the unbeliever, hence Paul's choice of words [τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν]. Homosexuals, and other sexual offenders, are devoid of God's Holy Spirit.

Using an historical approach, the proposed interpretation is analogous to God's measured departure from Jerusalem for her unrepentant idolatry and prostitution to foreign gods:

In Ezekiel 8 - 11 the LORD showed Ezekiel in a vision God's glory as it was manifested in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple. Ezekiel saw that because of compromise, sin, idolatry and immorality God was grieved and His holiness offended to the point that His glory began reluctantly and gradually leaving the house of God. First, the glory of God left the Holy of Holies and moved to the threshold of the Temple (10:4). Then the glory of God departed entirely from the Temple and moved to the east gate of the Temple (10:19). Then the glory of God departed from the Temple area altogether. And when God's glory left the House of God, His glory also left the city (11:23).⁴²

After God punishes their bodies, He then punishes their minds giving them over to a debased thinking [Rom 1:28]. Such miserable souls become filled with the demonic wisdom of the world [Jam 3:15]. After their minds and bodies have become laid to waste, their souls are too, leaving them filled with all wickedness and evil:

²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. [Rom 1:29-32]

⁴¹ Jewett, Robert, *Romans*, Hermeneia, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 172-181.

⁴² <http://www.prayerbydesign.com/revival.php>, Nov 13, 2007.

Thus, for refusing to thank God and worship Him as Creator [Rom 1:21-23], God destroys their bodies [Rom 1:26-27], minds [Rom 1:28], and souls [Rom 1:29-31]. Death is total [Rom 1:32]. This is the wrath of God being revealed [Rom 1:18] and Paul's argument in Rom 1:18-32.

Is Homosexuality Unforgivable?

Is homosexuality unforgivable? No, it isn't as Paul himself articulates immediately in 1 Cor 6:11 – "... And such were some of you [homosexuals]. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." The root cause of homosexuality, murder, and other capital offenses is idolatry. However, God forgives both those that sin against Him and those who sin against His Image. As God has forgiven Moses, Judah, David, and Paul for their capital crimes against Him and those in His Image, in His great and infinite mercy he is also quick to forgive the homosexual person for his offense through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Through the Gospel, the Church has the responsibility to help homosexuals confess and repent of their sins through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusions

Fundamentally, the homosexual agenda attacks God's holiness, within His Church and within His people. The proponents of homosexuality do not want to consider God's holiness. Instead, they want to imagine a benevolent deity, who will encourage, support, and approve of their sinful lifestyles that blaspheme Him. Unfortunately, the god they are imagining is a myth and an idol, since they completely neglect the holy nature of the true, living God.

Homosexuality, as well as other forms of sexually immorality, is sin and profanes God's Holy Temple, meaning our very persons. The root cause is idolatry. To justify homosexuality on the basis of love is a lie, since it's an offense motivated by hatred towards God, one's neighbor, and one's self. It's an offense that destroys the body and if continued destroys the mind and soul too.

By perpetuating false truths about God, those liberal scholars attempting to advance the homosexual social agenda are creating false teachings and idols which will lead people astray. Unfortunately, unthankful and hard-hearted people will desire to follow such false teachers and their teachings, so we should not be surprised if these heresies accumulate followers... for a time. However, the Church should remain steadfast to Paul's teachings and reject these heretical proposals based on the historical and literary evidence discussed.

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