

Discerning Same-Sex Marriage in the PC(USA)

Session 5

Homosexuality and the Bible:

Two Views

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Gagnon

New Testament

Romans 1:24-27

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. **25** They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. **27** In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Dan O. Via –

Paul notes in Romans 1:18-32 that the state of obdurate hostility to God in which humankind lives is –in accord with the characteristic biblical paradox – a matter of both human choice and divine determination. And that is true of homosexuality in particular.

- Homosexuality is not so much sin itself, rather the consequence of sin in which God gives people over to.
- Homosexuality is a sin because it is a chosen behavior.

Via continued...

- Paul ascribes impurity to same-sex relations (1:24), but its context is not impurity in the O.T. sense, but impurity reinterpreted as sin. He traces homosexual relations to excessive lust – (consumed with passion) and he regards it as chosen – they exchanged natural for unnatural relations (1:26-27). He regards this as contrary to nature and to the created order of the world.

Questions raised by Via:

- Are homosexuals more consumed with lust than heterosexuals?
- Is homosexuality chosen?
- What about “contrary to nature?”

Via continued

- Paul seems to have agreed with the generally held belief of the ancient world that there is only one sexual nature: heterosexual. **Thus, he condemns homosexual acts by people with a heterosexual nature.**
- Therefore, he implies that if people actualize their sexuality, it should be in accord with their nature/orientation. *Thus, if Paul were confronted with the reality of homosexual orientation, consistency would require him to acknowledge the naturalness of homosexual acts for people with a homosexual orientation.*

Via continued

Scientific:

- **Sexual orientation means a predisposition that is given and not deliberately chosen or subject to the will of the individual.** It is believed to be fixed relatively early in life and there is controversy whether that orientation can ever be open to reversal. There is a general agreement that it is extremely resistant to change even among highly motivated people (Gudorf). Thus, the church should recognize homosexual marriage to protect against the temptation of promiscuity (1 Cor. 7:2, 9).
- Via argues that, “If it cannot be demonstrated that homosexual practice is harmful in itself – in mutual, consensual, committed relationships – then it cannot be shown, in Pauline terms, that it is sinful.” P.25
- *“What does the creative and redemptive purpose of God and the ethic of love tell the church its posture should be toward homosexual practice – assuming the relationship is loving, consensual, nonmanipulative, and faithful?”*

Via continued

- *“Since the homosexual is for Christian faith as much a part of God’s creation as the heterosexual, how can the homosexual destiny, which is inalienable as the heterosexual destiny, not be regarded as a part of God’s creative intent, just as the heterosexual identity is so regarded? The orientation in both cases is inalienable. And why should the homosexual in contrast to the heterosexual, be singled out as not having the moral freedom to actualize the only orientation he/she has?” p.33*
- *“I have tried to show that if we look at a number of biblical themes in the light of contemporary knowledge and experience, we can justifiably override the unconditional biblical condemnations of homosexual practice. I can think of two arguments to support my claim of a new “revelation.”P.38*

Via continued

1. *The revelation of Gods' Word occurs when some person or community within Israel or the church reinterprets past tradition in order to give it new meaning in the present. Revelation occurs as the reinterpretation of tradition.*
1. *If claiming a new position that supersedes the few explicit biblical texts that forbid homosexual practice is arrogant, it is no more an effort to appropriate what Scripture promises in the Gospel of John. When the Spirit comes he will lead the disciples into all truth, into implications of Jesus' redemptive mission and message that have not yet come to explicit expression – because they are not yet ready to bear or receive these things. *Again, there is no explicit reference to homosexuality. But “all truth” is as encompassing as “abundant life.”*

Robert Gagnon

Gagnon states that Romans 1:18-3:20 is Paul's broad indictment of humanity, which includes the Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles have the knowledge of God in nature/creation and the Jews also had the knowledge of God through scripture.

Paul lays a trap in chapter 2 for the Jews who were judging and yet doing the "same things" but he didn't do so to trivialize sin or put an end to moral judgment; rather he did so to convict Jew and Gentile of their need for Jesus so that they might receive the Spirit of Christ and be morally transformed. ***God's salvation must be nothing less than liberation from such passions for a Spirit empowered life.***

Gagnon continued...

5 Arguments in Romans 1:24-27 that Paul implicated every form of same-sex intercourse:

1. Intertextual echoes to Genesis 1:26-27

- Idolatry and same-sex intercourse together constitute an assault on the work of their Creator in nature.
- Humans failed to recognize their creation in God's image and worshiped statues in the image of humans and animals.
- They also chose to deny the transparent sexual complementarity of males and females by engaging in sex with the same sex.

Gagnon continued...

2. The argument from nature

- Paul employed an argument from nature to which even pagans could be held accountable. Paul refers to opposite-sex intercourse as natural and same-sex intercourse as “contrary to nature”.
- **In other words, if one did not have access to Genesis or Leviticus one could still recognize in nature that God designed the male-female union alone to be a complementary sexual fit.** The evidence from nature – male-female compatibility in anatomy, physiology, and various interpersonal traits – provides convincing clues regarding God’s will for sexual expression.

Gagnon continued...

3. The mention of lesbian intercourse

- The fact that Romans 1:26 indicts female-female sex undermines the supposition that Paul was concerned only with certain exploitative forms.
- Lesbian intercourse in antiquity normally did not conform to the male pederastic model or entail cultic associations or prostitution.

Gagnon continued...

4. Coercion not an issue

- In 1:27 Paul speaks of the mutual gratification of the participants: *“the males were inflamed with their yearning for one another, males with males...”*
- He also declares that the judgment of God on both partners is deserved: *“males with males committing indecency and in return receiving in themselves the payback which was necessitated n their straying.”*
- Paul was casting a net over every kind of consensual homoerotic activity.

Gagnon continued...

5. The conception of caring homoerotic unions in Paul's cultural environment

- Every kind of homosexual union imaginable existed in Paul's day. We find glowing attributes to male-male love in the Greco-Roman world, with adult male same-sex unions existing alongside man-"boy" unions.
- It was well within the conceptual framework of Paul's time to distinguish between exploitative homosexual relations and caring ones.

Summary

- Via interprets Paul to believe that homosexuality in Romans 1 is sinful in reference to heterosexuals who choose to practice homosexuality.
- Via believes that God gives us our “sexual orientation” and that it is not chosen or subject to the will of an individual.
- **Via believes that Paul was unaware of “orientation”** and if he had been aware of it, it would require him to acknowledge the naturalness of homosexual acts for people with a homosexual orientation. In doing so, marriage would not be an issue, because it would allow homosexual persons to live in faithful union with one another.

Summary

- Gagnon argues that Paul indicts all same-sex intercourse as sinful behavior, male-male and female-female. This is set in the context of the creation accounts and in conjunction with the Levitical proscriptions. Paul even argued that Gentiles who had no access to Scripture had no excuses for engaging in same-sex intercourse, because God had made what was natural known in creation.
- “One-fleshness” is not just about intimacy; it’s also about structural congruity. There is structural incongruity in a sexual relationship involving parents and their adult offspring, two siblings, humans and animals, and adults and children.
- Nothing in Romans 1:24-27 suggests that “homosexuality” is a chosen condition of constitutional heterosexuals. The *exchange and leaving behind* (1:26-27) refer not to a choice of homosexual *desire* over heterosexual desire but to a choice of *behavior* stimulated by disoriented passions over behavior motivated by nature. Nature in this context refers to male-female complementarity clearly revealed in the material creation.
- There is a big difference between God working in unexpected ways and God working in ways diametrically opposed to Scripture’s core values.