

# God and Gay Marriage

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The Bible and Homosexual Practice

# Romans 1

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- Outside of Leviticus 18 and 20, this text is the most pointed and specific in all of Scripture concerning homosexual practice.
- Read Romans 1
- What is the plain meaning of this text?

# “New Information”

- “For the overwhelming majority of human history, homosexuality was not seen as a different sexual *orientation* that distinguished a minority of people from the heterosexual majority. It was considered instead to be a manifestation of normal sexual desire pursued *to excess*- a behavior anyone might engage in if he didn’t keep his passions in check.” Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*



# “New Information”

James Brownson



- “Paul clearly expects his readers to join him in outrage over the sexual behavior he describes in Romans 1:24-27 as an expression of excessive, self-centered desire. He describes this behavior as an expression of ‘lusts’ (1:24), as driven by ‘passions’ (1:26) and as ‘consumed’ or ‘burning,’ with passion (1:27).”
- “This is in keeping with the general perception of same-sex relations in the ancient world: that they were driven by insatiable desire, not content with more normal sexual relationships.”

# “New Information”

Matthew Vines



- “I’m not saying gay people didn’t exist in ancient societies. I’m simply pointing out that ancient societies didn’t think of exclusive sexual orientations.”
- “The new information we have about sexual orientation actually *requires* us to reinterpret Scripture no matter what stance we take on same-sex relationships”

# “New Information”

- “There is nothing new under the sun.” Ecc 1:9.



# “Old Information”

Robert Gagnon



- Plato's *Symposium*: Aristophanes remarks, "...they [two men] continue with one another throughout life...desiring to join together and to be fused into a single entity... and to become one person from two."
- Gagnon cites examples of same-sex marriages in ancient Rome, Egypt and the Middle East- both gay and lesbian. [www.robagnon.net](http://www.robagnon.net) , video, "*Jesus, Scripture, and the Myth of New Knowledge Arguments about Homosexual Unions*"
- These are only a couple of examples Gagnon cites. This idea is NOT NEW. There is no reason to believe that Paul did not include ALL homosexual acts as the text clearly implies.

# Emperors

- Paul's Roman readers would be familiar with the excesses of Caligula and Nero.
- It is often thought that Paul was referring to the excesses of the Roman Imperial court.
- Perhaps, but he makes an all-inclusive statement here, he does not limit it to "authorities" or "powers" of the world (he might have been executed if he did).

# “Impurity”

James Brownson



- Romans 1:24.
- “...for Paul, the core form of moral logic underlying his characterization of sexual misconduct as ‘impurity’ focuses on internal attitudes and dispositions, particularly lust (excessive desire) and licentiousness (lack of restraint).”
- “...it raises the question concerning whether committed gay and lesbian unions, which seek to discipline passion and desire by means of a lifelong commitment, should still be characterized as ‘impurity.’”

# “Impurity”

- Paul does not make any reference or comparison to marriage here.
- Paul could not possibly have condoned or considered such a thing. He was a Pharisee, an avid practitioner of the Law, steeped in its teachings and traditions from birth.
- There is no chance whatsoever that he would have considered any same-sex physical relationship on any level of commitment to be anything less than “degrading... impurity... shameful... unnatural... indecent... depraved.”
- And even though the text cannot be more clear, the arguments keep coming.

# “Exploitation”



- “...widespread and quite vile Greco-Roman cultural practices authorizing the often violent anal rape of powerless young men, especially slaves, but really anybody of lower social status... this is what Paul had in mind when he thought about same-sex interest and activity...”
- Does this square with Paul’s description, “...men... were inflamed with lust for one another”?

# “Exploitation”

Robert Gagnon



- The reference to lesbianism in Romans 1:26 further puts the lie to this idea. Lesbianism in antiquity did not normally emulate male homoerotic exploitation practices, so an indictment of lesbianism is an indictment of all homosexual practice.

# “Natural”

- John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*. Argues that when Paul describes men as acting “against nature” by engaging in sex with other men, Paul is thinking of heterosexual men who act against their own nature and disposition. He concludes that this passage says nothing about homosexual men since their same-sex behavior is in accordance with their own nature or inclination.

# “Nature”

James Brownson



- Nature as communal well-being:
- “Modern people generally conceive of the natural world as what exists prior to and apart from human influence, either individual or social.”
- In the ancient world, “Living in accordance with biological nature and living in accordance with other humans in an ordered society were conceived of as two sides of the same coin.”
- Quoting Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “It is a crucial idea in Stoicism that these two specifications [i.e. ‘life in accordance with nature’ and ‘moral virtue and virtuous acts’] amount to the same thing.”

# “Nature”

James Brownson



- “A number of revisionist interpreters suggest that when Paul says that same-sex eroticism is unnatural, what he means is that it violates normal societal conventions.”
- “To put it simply, men having sex with other men was considered unnatural, at least in part, because it violated established gender roles, forcing men to play the role of women, upsetting the normal hierarchy of the genders that went unquestioned in the ancient world.”
- Patriarchy again.

# “Nature”

James Brownson



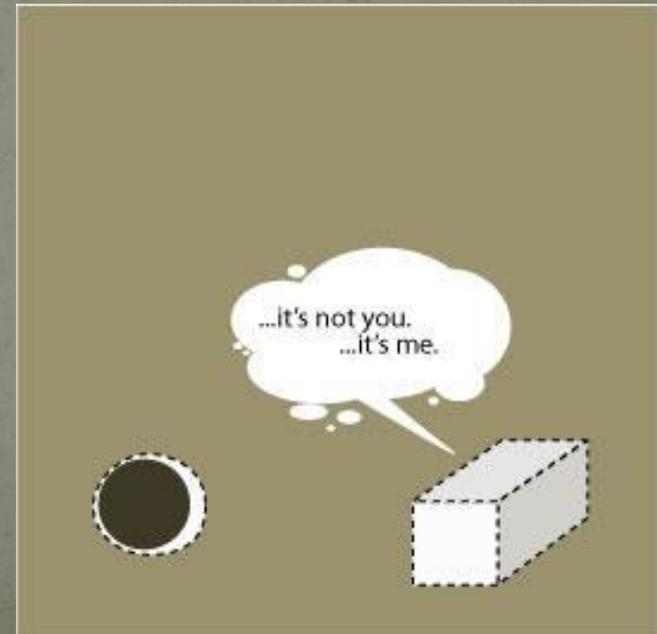
- “Many ancient writers- Jewish, Christian and pagan- spoke of procreation as the ‘natural’ purpose of sexual relations.”
- “Sexual behavior was bad when it was not directed to these goals, but was driven only by passion (the desire for self-gratification).”
- Compare this to the Song of Songs. Did either person talk about the desire to procreate? Was the sexual desire for one another condemned because procreation was not their immediate aim?

# “Nature”

Robert Gagnon



- “Minimally, Paul is referring to the anatomical and procreative complementarity of male and female... Paul in effect argues that even pagans who have no access to... Leviticus should know that same-sex eroticism is ‘contrary to nature’ because the primary sex organs fit male to female.”



# “Nature”

Robert Gagnon



- “...by fittedness I mean not only the glove-like physical fit of the penis and the vagina but also clues to complementarity provided by procreative capacity and the capacity for mutual and pleasurable stimulation.”
- “First and foremost, along with idolatry, same-sex intercourse represents one of the clearest instances of conscious suppression of revelation in nature by gentiles, inasmuch as it involves denying clear anatomical gender differences and functions (leaving them without excuse).”
- “The key parallel is the *absurd denial of natural revelation* in one’s worship of God and intercourse with other humans.”

# And Furthermore

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- Where is Paul going with this?
- He concludes chapter 1 with a vice list.



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- In 2:1, he snares the devout Jew who might be inclined to pass self-righteous judgment.

# And Furthermore

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- Where is Paul going with this?
- He concludes chapter 1 with a vice list, widening the net.
- In 2:1, he snares the devout Jew who might be inclined to pass self-righteous judgment.
- “Paul’s point is not merely to condemn homosexual activity but to begin with a very clear example of unethical conduct and then to continue widening the net until it captures all of humanity.”
- Romans 3:23- you have this memorized!