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HOMOSEXUALITY IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Introduction

The message of Scripture on homosexuality is neither clear nor conclusive. As was true of the Greco-Roman world in general, and the Hebrew world before that, the Bible makes no distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior. Evaluating the biblical implications regarding either, is therefore, complex and limited to tentative conclusions. Moreover, the development of the biblical tradition itself evolved through a number of historical stages. Each stage reflects the perspective of its own cultural-historical moment. Each such moment bears the influence of significant extra-biblical forces and notions.

Sound and comprehensive evaluation of the biblical data on homosexuality, therefore, clearly requires at least three procedures: a general survey of the texts and their contexts with a basic exegetical investigation of each, assessment of the cultural-historical perspective of each, and at least a cursory psycho-theological evaluation of the whole scriptural matter. For clarity and precision, however, it is of primary necessity to define the essential terms to be used for homosexual orientation, on the one hand, and homosexual behavior, on the other.

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Exposition

Definition of Terms

Homosexuality is the condition in which the process of maturation does not result in an adult who is sexually oriented toward the opposite sex but toward the same sex as that of the person concerned (Jennings 1990, p. 529). This orientation is not merely erotic in nature but involves the full range of personality needs for love, understanding, nurture, fellowship, companionship, belonging, and certification as a person. E. Mansel Pattison falls very short of the mark at this point, inadequately and imprecisely defining homosexuality merely as a psychological-emotional *erotic* orientation and attraction (Pattison 1985, p. 319). Moreover, the difference between heterosexual and homosexual orientation is not easily delineated. Individual humans may be found at any point on the continuum between the two extremes of predominant homosexual or heterosexual orientation and need. Bisexual orientation is apparently a manifest need or potential in some humans, as well. There are some reasons to believe the reports that about 7% of American males have clear preferences for homosexual experiences and 2% are exclusively homosexual in orientation throughout life.

It is important to distinguish between homosexuality as the orientation and condition of personal homosexual identity, on the one hand, and overt homosexual behavior, on the other. That distinction is crucial at this juncture since evaluation of the biblical data requires a judgement as to whether the Scripture intends to comment or decree on either condition or on both of them. Since the biblical tradition does not itself clearly distinguish between homosexuality as orientation and homosexuality as overt behavior, it seems necessary to judge from the context which of the two is at issue in any given biblical text or injunction. This issue becomes the more critical in this study when one considers that some persons with homosexual orientation claim to discipline themselves for moral and religious reasons to exclusively heterosexual behavior or to refrain from sexual behavior altogether. Moreover, there seems some considerable indication that confirmed heterosexual persons behave homosexually under certain circumstances as in isolated, single-gender communities such as prisons.

In the light of the psychological and chemical sources of homosexuality and heterosexuality, as well as the recent brain tissue studies which urge the notion that sexual orientation is inborn and pre-set at conception, and in the light of varieties of behavior and social conformity or non-conformity of homosexuals and heterosexuals, it is a crucial matter to determine which of these orientations and/or behaviors is addressed by those scriptures

bearing on this issue. Is the Bible for or against homosexuality as orientation and/or as behavior? Does it express itself regarding homosexual behavior only or also regarding homosexual orientation or identity: either or neither?

A Scriptural Survey

The Bible speaks very infrequently of homosexual orientation or behavior. At most, six references are identifiable and in three of those it is by no means certain that either homosexual orientation or behavior is really the matter of focus. Three Old Testament texts and three from the New Testament deserve our attention. They are Genesis 19: 1–29, Leviticus 18: 22–24, 20: 13, Romans 1: 26–27, I Corinthians 6: 9–10, and I Timothy 1: 10. Of these it is unlikely that homosexual orientation or behavior is the matter at issue in the Genesis and Leviticus passages. Moreover, it is doubtful that homosexual orientation is addressed in any of the scriptural proscriptions, though homosexual behavior seems certain to be.

Old Testament

In Genesis 19: 1–29 the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is recounted. The story unfolds in a series of six related narrative elements. First, Lot encounters the two angelic figures at the city gate and offers them the culturally required *hospitality to strangers* which was so crucial and inviolable in ancient Near Eastern cultures. He provides them food and housing. Second, the citizens of Sodom appear and demand of Lot an introduction to the strangers that they may *know them*. Third, Lot refuses their demands on the ground that the strangers had “come under the shelter of his roof,” a formulaic expression describing the primary condition requiring the *hospitality to strangers*. Fourth, Lot offers the citizens his two virginal daughters to “do with them what they pleased.” Fifth, the citizens feel insulted by Lot for invoking their own cultic hospitality code against them, as though he were their judge, and for offering them his daughters as substitutes, and they attack him. Sixth, the angels defend Lot by striking the citizens blind.

It is noteworthy that there is no direct reference here to either homosexual orientation or behavior. There is some suggestion of sexual misbehavior. There may be some implication of potential bisexual interest. It is much more likely, of course, that Lot is so aware of the homosexual interests of the particular crowd which mobbed his door that he saw them to be of no threat to his daughters and, therefore, intends an ironic insult

against them by offering them his daughters, knowing that his daughters would be of no interest to them and therefore would be perfectly safe and in no sense at risk. One must imagine that his doing so incites a general burst of sarcastic laughter among the company of family and friends inside the house, including merriment on the part of his daughters who understand the ironic nature of the insult perfectly well and may have shared those very sentiments frequently around the family table while discussing the state of cultural values among the citizens of their rather rambunctious adopted city.

No other explanation seems adequate to account for Lot's otherwise thoughtless and cavalier offer of his daughters. Moreover, this interpretation also accounts adequately for the fact that Lot's offer only incites greater rage and urgency in the crowd outside. They turn violent and attempt to break down the door to get at the strangers housed under Lot's roof. At the same time, they demonstrate no interest whatsoever in Lot's daughters. Moreover, the sexual implications in the narrative do not come under any kind of judgement in the story itself, either positive or negative, regarding either homosexual or heterosexual behavior. Obviously, sexual behavior of whatever kind is not the point of the story nor does it become any kind of issue here.

Quite plainly, the proscription voiced by the passage through the judgement Lot pronounces upon the citizens is viewed by Lot himself as a proscription against a breach of cultic hospitality laws. Though the verb, *know*, clearly implies sexual behavior, and in this case, apparently, homosexual intent on the part of the mob, Lot seems not to care at all, neither does the story express any concern or judgement about whether or what kind of sexual behavior is intended. That seems not to be the issue at stake. What is at stake is the inviolable prescription for hospitality to strangers.

Leviticus 18: 22 declares, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman: it is an abomination." The text clearly forbids some sort of homosexual behavior. However, the scope of that proscription and the motivation behind it is not quite so clear in the text. The entire chapter deals with a long list of commands by God against behavior that leads to ritual uncleanness under the cultic code of Israel. The chapter ends with the rationale that for Israel to breach these cultic laws is to lose her distinctiveness from the Canaanites, her distinctiveness as the people of Yahweh.

Leviticus 18 is a veritable catalogue of Egyptian and Canaanite ritual practices involving behavior which, in terms of God's cultic prescriptions for Israel's distinctive life and worship, were perversions. The chapter opens with a repetitious declaration to Israel that she shall not walk in the statutes of the Canaanites but in those of the Lord. There follows the list

of practices that the Egyptians and Canaanites employed in their daily lives and in their fertility cult liturgies and other related cultic activity: sexually consorting with relatives, sexually consorting with women during their "menstrual uncleanness," adultery, child sacrifice, homosexual behavior, and bestiality.

There are four reasons repeatedly given for the proscription of these practices. Such behavior compromises Israel's cultic and cultural distinctiveness. It is a perversion. It is an abomination. The land will "vomit you out when you defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you." These four are weighted heavily in the passage by being placed against their backdrop and *raison d'être*, namely, "I am the Lord your God!" The entire thrust of Leviticus 18 is the emphasis upon Israel's cultic and cultural distinctiveness.

The Hebrew word for abomination (*to'eba*) is crucially significant here. It is a word derived from the sphere of the cultic rituals of the cultures of the Semitic Near East. Its stem means "to abhor" something for religious reasons. Idolatry is the chief reference to such abomination in the Hebrew Bible. Such scriptures as Deuteronomy 7: 25, 27: 15, II Kings 23: 13, Jeremiah 16: 18, and Ezekiel 14: 6 speak of idols as an abomination. Leviticus 18, Deuteronomy 12: 31, 13: 14, 17: 4, 18: 9, II Kings 16: 3, 21: 2, II Chronicles 33: 2, Ezekiel 5: 9, 11, and Malachi 2: 11 refer to idolatrous behavior as an abomination. "Included as an abomination was not only the explicit practice of idolatry, however, but anything that even remotely pertained to it, like the eating of unclean animals and food (Lev. 11, Deut. 14: 3-21)" (Kosnik 1977, p. 189). The assessment of Leviticus 18 for implications regarding homosexual orientation or behavior, therefore, hinges upon the precise intent of *to'eba*, abomination, in verse 22.

In Leviticus 20 we have, quite curiously, a virtual repetition of Leviticus 18. Only two additions are made. First, all the proscribed cultic behavior is described metaphorically as whoredom with Molech. Second, the death penalty is added to all of the forbidden conduct including homosexual behavior. Leviticus 20, therefore, contributes nothing to the discussion except to reinforce the link between sexual behavior and cultic misbehavior by the use of sexual metaphor to describe "heathen" worship practices.

New Testament

As we turn to the New Testament we must address what has been considered the classic passage on homosexual behavior, Romans 1: 26-27. Paul inveighs against unnatural intercourse by women and homosexual

behavior by men. The entire first chapter of Romans has a special structure which constitutes an illuminating context for this reference to homosexual activity. After the predictable opening greeting, Paul expresses heartfelt concern for the spiritual welfare of Christians in Rome, acknowledging his apostleship to *all kinds* of humans. There follows his section on God's righteousness imputed to persons of faith and faithfulness. The fourth section details God's wrath against wickedness. In this context homosexual behavior comes under judgement rather incidentally as one of the perversions of human relationships which results from the real problem of ungodliness. That real problem is such perversion of our relationship with God as arises out of denial of God's self-revelation in nature, arrogance, and idolatry. Paul argues that the perversion of homosexual behavior is attendant upon that idolatry and is destructive to humans. Here, as in Leviticus, the cultic practices of heathen nations which supplant God with "worship of the creature rather than the creator" are attended by ritual homosexual behavior. That ritual idolatry and its attendant behavior, ritual homosexual activity, is a compromise of the distinctive character of the people called to worship "the creator who is blessed forever."

The question then is whether homosexual behavior in its own right, apart from cultic expressions which compromise our distinctiveness as the people of Yahweh and are thus the varied forms of idolatry, is to be judged negatively. It seems clear that whatever is abhorred in Romans 1: 26-27 is homosexual behavior rather than homosexual orientation. Neither the Greco-Roman world nor the biblical documents distinguish between the two, nor was there a consciousness in that world of the psychological or genetic condition of heterosexuality or homosexuality as a psychological or systemic orientation. This accounts for the fact that the Bible addresses itself consistently to the behavior only, particularly in those expressions of it which identified persons with the non-Judaic and non-Christian cultic or cultural values and functions.

The second Pauline reference with which we must concern ourselves is I Corinthians 6: 9-10. Here Paul publishes a catalogue of sinners in which he lists homosexuals along with those who are greedy, immoral, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, revilers, and robbers. He declares that these people will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul's address to the Corinthian Church on these matters makes two points regarding homosexual behavior. First, he points to some of the church members as previous practitioners of the pagan activity and, second, he declares them saved, forgiven, and sanctified by God's grace. The Pauline assessment places homosexual behavior on a par with other common sins. His point concerns the difference between the customary behavior of the old pagan way and that of the new

Christian status of the believers. In this passage there seems to be some indication that homosexual behavior is sinful in its own right, rather than simply constituting a compromise of cultic prescriptions by reverting to proscribed pagan cultic or cultural behavior.

Finally, I Timothy 1: 10 offers us a Pauline reference to Sodomites. Though it is impossible, as noted above, to identify the sin of Sodom as homosexual behavior since it is so clearly a matter of the breach of the code of hospitality to strangers, it is generally assumed that when Paul refers to Sodomites he has followed Philo Judaeus and the Apocrypha in meaning homosexual behavior. *The Book of Jubilees*, *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *The Testament of Naphtali*, *The Testament of Benjamin*, *The Second Book of Enoch*, and Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* are all non-canonical books which suggest that the sin of Sodom was homosexual behavior.

Philo Judaeus (30 B.C.E.–50 C.E.) was the first writer to connect Sodom explicitly with homosexual practices (Kosnik 1977, p. 192). Jude 6–7 and II Peter 2: 4, 6–10 suggest that the sin of Sodom was fornication and “going after strange flesh.” In Jude 7, as in *The Book of Jubilees*, the matter is related to the sin of the angels and men described in Genesis 6: 1–4, in which the sons of God make love with the daughters of men. Because this reference in Jude depends upon mythic apocryphal evidence from which it is borrowed, and makes reference to a completely obscure text in Genesis, it is neither relevant to our study nor a trustworthy definition of the sin of Sodom.

The question remaining regarding the New Testament literature on homosexual orientation and behavior, therefore, is that concerning the extent to which the behavior is proscribed on the basis of its being inherently immoral or unchristian. To what extent is it forbidden because of its pagan cultic connection, or because of an unfortunate link made between homosexual behavior and the sin and fate of Sodom? To what extent, in the last case, is the link dependent upon an erroneous dependency of Paul, similar to that of Peter and Jude, upon apocryphal sources from the Septuagint, or upon Josephus and Philo Judaeus? In the following section the questions raised in this scriptural survey will be addressed. Such passages as Deuteronomy 22: 5 on transvestism, and 23: 17 as well as I Kings 14: 24 and 15: 12 on male cult prostitution in Israel might have been treated in detail, as well. They illustrate further the proscriptions of cultic sexual behavior addressed in Leviticus and echoed in Romans and Corinthians. However they add nothing new or significant in information, perspective, or emphasis to what has been stated regarding homosexuality in biblical perspective.

The Cultural-Historical Perspective

A determination of the precise meaning of the six scriptures studied depends upon the connotation as well as the denotation of the two terms referred to above: *yd^e* (to know) and *to^eeba* (abomination). In addition, accurate interpretation of those scriptures requires a determination of the extent to which some or all of them depend upon mythic apocryphal sources and other influences from the cultural-historical matrix shaping them.

● Old Testament

Genesis 4: 1 declares that after the expulsion from the garden "Adam knew his wife, Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain..." This use of *yd^e* is a euphemism and circumlocution for the act of intercourse. The terminology was used for marital and non-marital sexual relations, as is evident in Genesis 38. Such usage is not confined to Hebrew but appears in Akkadian with reference to the coitus of both humans and animals (Speiser 1964, p. 31).

When in Genesis 19, therefore, one encounters the term *yd^e*, there seems no justification for any alternative interpretation than that of intended sexual intercourse, or sexual relations of some sort. The interpretation is confirmed by Lot's ironic suggestion regarding his daughters. Genesis 19: 5-8 is a reference to homosexual promiscuity in Sodom. That such homosexuality is not, however, the abomination for which Sodom was destroyed is indicated by two facts. First, neither the angels nor Lot make a negative judgement regarding the sexual intent or actions of the mob, that is, the narrative does not address their homosexuality as a moral issue. Second, the moral claims made in the pericope have exclusively to do with the prescriptions of the hospitality code, grounded in Lot's argument that the strangers, the angels, had come under his roof and thus he was responsible for their health and welfare. The mob's wish is to exploit the strangers against their will. This the narrative harshly judges. Such behavior breaches the prescriptions for proper hospitality current in the culture and essential to its stability. From Lot's perspective, heterosexual and homosexual promiscuity were accepted cultural features in Sodom, but inhospitality to strangers, male or female, by exploiting them without their consent, was severely censurable.

There is no surprise in the fact, therefore, that no tradition prior to the first century C.E. identifies the sin or abomination of Sodom as homosexual behavior. Isaiah (1: 10, 3: 9) emphasizes that it was a lack of justice. Jeremiah (23: 4) refers to it as adultery, lying, and an unrepentent attitude.

Ezekiel speaks of it as pride, surfeit of food, prosperous ease, and a failure in the care of the needy (Speiser 1964, p. 142; Kosnik 1977, p. 191–192). D. S. Bailey provides a detailed evaluation of the homosexual interpretation of Sodom's sin in the non-canonical scriptures (Bailey 1955, p. 11–25). The apocryphal sources in Wisdom 10: 8 and Sirach 16: 8 describe Sodom as guilty of folly, insolence, and inhospitality. When Jesus refers to Sodom's sin no connection with sexuality is suggested, let alone any connection of homosexuality. "There is not the least reason to believe, as a matter either of historical fact or of revealed truth, that the city of Sodom and its neighbors were destroyed because of their homosexual practices. This theory of their fate seems undoubtedly to have originated in a Palestinian Jewish reinterpretation of Genesis 19, and its exponents, and by contempt for the basest features of Greek sexual immorality" (Bailey 1955, p. 27; See also McNeill 1976, p. 42–50). Of course, there is, nonetheless, the implication of intended sexual abuse in the Sodom story. However, sexual assault and violence, as physical and psychospiritual violation is always wrong, whether it is heterosexual or homosexual. Therefore, even if homosexual assault were condemned in the Sodom story it would not, therefore, follow that homosexual behavior in other circumstances is wrong.

There is a passage in Judges 19 which recounts an incident that is in some ways reminiscent of the narrative elements of Genesis 19. It concerns the Levite whose concubine was sexually violated by the citizens of Gibeah so that she died. The story has in common with the Sodom account the following: a stranger housed by a citizen of Gibeah, the desire of the townsmen to (*ya'*) know the stranger sexually, and the offer of the female concubine instead, in breach of the hospitality codes. The essential behavior intended in Genesis 19 and Judges 19 is sexual assault. The moral infraction is breach of the hospitality code. The condemned behavior in Genesis 19 is breach of the code and in Judges 19 breach of the code and murder. In Judges 19 ff. the penalty for the breach of the hospitality code by the men of Gibeah is their being put to death.

Both the stories of Sodom and Gibeah deal with sexual violations. But the fact that the sex victim is interchangeable without lessening the repulsion of the biblical authors shows clearly that it is not homosexuality or heterosexuality that is the primary consideration here, but the violence and violation of the "stranger who has come under our roof." If sexuality is involved in the condemnation it is subordinate to the issues of hospitality and justice. For Sodom as for Gibeah, the emphasis falls not on the proposed sexual act *per se*, but on the terrible violation of the customary law of hospitality (Kosnik 1977, p. 191; Bailey 1955, p. 23).

Neither Genesis nor Judges 19 tolerate violence, abuse, or murder but neither do they condemn homosexual orientation or homosexual behavior.

They do not deal with the former at all and deal with the latter only incidently. However, the link that Philo makes between Sodom and homosexual behavior, reinforced by *II Enoch* 10: 4, *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *The Testament of Naphtali* 3: 4-5, *The Testament of Benjamin* 9: 1, and Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* 1: 11, 3, apparently resulted in the fact that "by the end of the first century A.D.[sic], the sin of Sodom had become widely identified amongst the Jews with homosexual practices" (Bailey 1955, p. 23). This apocryphal and cultural-historical influence shaped the perspective on homosexual behavior taken by Paul, Peter, and Jude.

So by Pauline and Petrine times Sodom had become a symbol of the depravity Christians found to be an abomination in Hellenistic culture. Kosnik (1977) and others point out that it is precisely that symbolic role for Sodom, reinterpreted as homosexual misbehavior particularly, that influenced New Testament writers, in their rare references to homosexual behavior, as one among a number of sins. They proscribe it as inherently wrong since it represented the typical depravity of the Hellenistic culture from which Christians were called out to be distinctive as *ekklesia*, those called out and set apart for God. In that regard the ritual and cultic distinctiveness of God's people addressed in Leviticus 18 and 20 is of great interest. Both Leviticus 18: 22 and 20: 13 inveigh against sexual intercourse between males. In both instances such homosexual behavior is called *to'eba* (abomination). In both passages homosexual behavior is equated in seriousness with adultery, incest, and bestiality; yet there is one distinction in the condemnation of homosexual activity. It is condemned with the formula that always refers to participation in heathen worship ritual, "It is an abomination!" All the others are condemned as depravity, perversions, defilement, and the like. The emphasis is, therefore, not just upon those behaviors which do not conform to the majority of sexual activities. In the case of homosexual behavior the emphasis is consistently upon its being forbidden because it is an activity of heathen worship practices and thus erases the distinctiveness of the worshipping character of the people of Yahweh.

The difficulty that confronts us with these texts is the question in which distinguishable respects they are normative for us. It is the difficulty we encounter with much of the Old Testament legislation. For there are three aspects to Mosaic regulations: the ceremonial or cultic, the civic, and the ethical. Some maintain that the prohibition of homosexualism (behavior) was instituted because of the cultic practices of Israel's pagan neighbors and was intended to forbid Israel's participation in such heathen worship practices. That male prostitution was practiced among the neighbors of Israel is seen in Deuteronomy 33: 17. If this was indeed the intent of the legislation then it is addressed against a specific (cultic) type of homosexualism (behavior), and it may be questioned whether homosexualism in non-cultic (e.g., moral) contexts is condemned by these passages. (*Acts of Synod*, 1973, p. 617-618)

The use of the term *to'eba* throughout the Leviticus passages is the clue to the essentially cultic nature of their proscriptions of homosexual behavior. Keil and Delitzsch (1951) relate the passages to the Egyptian goat cult. Canaanite literature has a Baal priest enacting Baal's ritual of intercourse with a heifer. Primitive temple prostitution of both sexes was common in the ancient Near East. Leviticus 18 and 20 are against every form of loss of cultic identity in Israel resulting from emulating pagan cult behavior. Koznik, quoting from Noth (1965, p. 16; 1967, p. 49), Snaith (1967, p. 126), Schoeps (1962, p. 371), and Cole (1959, p. 350-351) respectively, makes the telling point that

The fundamental theme of the Levitical Holiness Code is, "Do not defile yourselves," do not make yourselves unclean. Its concern is not ethical, but cultic. Even adultery is forbidden because of ritual impurity (Lev. 18: 20). "Leviticus deals almost exclusively with cultic and ritual matters." For Israel of the Old Testament, the worship of Jahweh was unconditionally exclusive. Anything pertaining to the idolatrous cult of Israel's neighbors was an "abomination" that "defiled" an Israelite and rendered him unclean for the cult of Jahweh. The Old Testament law codes, however, "took their origin in a milieu where no sharp distinction was drawn between the cultic and the non-cultic sphere of activity, but where every side of life had its links with cultic celebration." Homosexual activity between men is proscribed in Leviticus for the same reason that it is condemned in Deuteronomy and the Book of Kings. It is an "abomination" because of its connection with the fertility rites of the Canaanites. The condemnation of homosexual activity in Leviticus is not an ethical judgement. "Homosexuality [sic] here is condemned on account of its association with idolatry." (Kosnik 1977, p. 189-190)

The Old Testament, then, not only fails to forbid homosexual orientation or identity, by virtue of never defining or considering the orientation or tendency, but proscribes homosexual behavior only in terms of its negative cultural, cultic, and ritual role in Israel and her neighbors. Moreover, the proscription falls within a context which (a) equates it with intercourse with a woman during menstruation "a regulation not generally considered to be morally binding today," (b) identifies it with compromise of cultic distinctiveness over against the Canaanites, an issue no longer relevant in the twentieth century, and (c) forbids it as a form of violation of cultural hospitality prescriptions, a problem hardly relevant to the contemporary question. In addition, the Old Testament stands against any form of behavior which violates another human, a behavior soundly condemned today in Western culture regardless of whether it is sexual and regardless of the gender or orientation of any of the persons involved.

● New Testament

The New Testament passages which address our subject are clearly dependent upon the Old Testament tradition, but add a dimension to the matter, largely drawn from extra-canonical sources. It is clear that a basic

line of argument in Romans 1: 26–27, taken in the light of the entire chapter, is essentially the same as the argument in Leviticus. Various sins and distortions of appropriate human behavior are indicated, including homosexual behavior, and are judged negatively precisely because they represent a way of life incongruent with being the people of God. The general thrust of the chapter uses such terms as wickedness, ungodliness, suppression of the truth, futile thinking, impure hearts, debased minds, degraded bodies, and idolatry. Homo-sexual behavior is referred to as a degrading passion which exchanges the natural for the unnatural.

It seems clear that Paul means to describe here a general category of ungodliness, the term that introduces this section of his essay (1: 18–25). The essay describes this ungodliness as human misconceptions of God's truth, the truth revealed plainly in creation for all to see. The result is worship of the creature rather than the creator. The consequence of this mistake regarding truth, which Paul claims in the next pericope (1: 26–32), is that humans have succumbed to two problems: degrading passions and debased minds. Degrading passions are sexual disfunctions in which humans "go against their own natures," and debased minds include covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, gossip, slander, insolence, haughtiness, boastfulness, disrespect of parents and God, foolishness, faithlessness, heartlessness, and ruthlessness.

There is clearly a distinction which Paul intends between the sexual disfunctions, on the one hand, which produce "degrading passions having the consequence that those persons receive in their own selves the penalty of their error," and the debased minds, which produce the list of seventeen specific sins, on the other. In the former case the language is very much like that which would describe psychopathology: unnatural behavior which has the weight, character, and valence of an *error* and produces a penalty in the perpetrator's inner person. In the latter case the list of *sins* is specifically referred to as *wickedness* and "those that practice such things deserve to die." This contrast seems more than just incidental or accidental. Paul does not say what exactly the penalty is for the error of sexual abnormality, nor does he indicate how it falls upon those with sexual disfunction, but it is clear that it impacts equally both "women who resort to unnatural intercourse and men who burn with passion for one another and commit shameless acts."

One might conjecture that the behaviors which are common to such women and such men might be oral sex and anal sex. These Paul might have considered unnatural, though they were not so considered in his day nor are they in our day. Indeed, they seem to have been considered two of the natural forms of sexual play throughout the Hellenistic Culture, and seem to be considered normal range behaviors in ours.

It is possible, of course, that Paul had some kind of anal fixation and therefore refers only to anal sex in both cases and judges it as a degrading passion. My imagination is probably somewhat limited in these matters, but I cannot think of other options which Paul might be denegrating except bestiality, and if that is what he meant one would think he would have spelled it out, as does the Levitical Code which can be seen shining through from behind Paul's thought and language. What we do know is that Paul speaks against these "unnatural" behaviors because he sees them as consequences of failing to be distinctive worshippers of Yahweh. Pagan people do such things. The People of Yahweh do not.

When Paul speaks of homosexual behavior he says that because the Hellenistic people worship the creature instead of the Creator, God gave them up to degrading passions, unnatural relations, and shameless acts, and some internal personal penalty for their error. The problem addressed is the experience of disorder in human behavior and the related disorder within the person. The undefined penalty may be confusion of sexual identity, lack of full-fledged psychological health, certainly some spiritual disfunction since it compromises one's distinctiveness as an adherent of the cult of Yahweh, or sexual addiction of some sort. There is nothing here of the language of wickedness, divine punishment, or sinful behavior that is blatant in the next section regarding debased minds and their seventeen sins, and for which the punishment is the death penalty of Leviticus 20: 2-21, 27.

So Paul does not address the issue of homosexual orientation in Romans 1 and he does not list homosexual behavior with the fatal sins of the godless life. Rather, he describes abnormal sexual behaviors in both men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, as human sickness and distortion which results from subverting the truth of God evident in the creation. Since in the Hellenistic culture the notion of interior sexual orientation was not known or considered, much less the question of whether it was inborn, developmental, or environmentally induced, homosexual behavior was considered to be a practice of heterosexual persons engaged in for the sake of cult ritual or for diversion. Women were seen as filling the role of home manager and bearer of children, not as sexual playmates. Thus pubescent girlish boys were often taken as sexual playmates by older men. This seems to have been a common practice in addition to cultic homosexual behavior associated with fertility rites and the like.

It cannot be determined on the basis of Romans 1 that Paul considered all homosexual relationships to be inherently sinful. It must be concluded, however, that this passage argues that homosexual behavior is at least a pathology, distortion, or dysfunction: an abnormality which is against

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nature. This seems to be associated with a specific unconventionality, namely, an unnatural burning passion for non-vaginal intercourse, whether heterosexual or homosexual, whether by women or men.

In I Corinthians 6: 9–10 the situation is quite different than Romans 1 and I Timothy 1: 10 is similar to it. In the Corinthian passage homosexual behavior is listed in the middle of the catalogue of sins, for which the twice-repeated penalty is failure to inherit the Kingdom of God, namely to lose out on the flourishing reign of God's agape and grace in one's life. The total list of sins includes fornication, idolatry, adultery, male prostitution, sodomy, theft, greed, drunkenness, and reviling. The element in common in all of these sins, of course, is promiscuity. The Bible is generally and consistently against promiscuity (*porneia*) usually rendered as fornication. However, promiscuity is possible in many ways, all having the same destructive effect of eroding human personality and personhood. For example, one can be promiscuous sexually, intellectually, spiritually, psychologically, and socially. All loosen the hinges of one's psychospiritual identity and erode one's sense of self. All shear off one's authentic inner emotional or psychospiritual self from the gymnastics of one's behavior, whether that is sexual behavior, intellectual behavior, social behavior, or spiritual behavior.

Psychospiritually, it is the same function to engage another person in sexual behavior without an authentic inner emotional connectedness, as to engage another person in profound intellectual sharing without having an authentic inner sense of trust and investment in that person based upon some deep shared goals or ideals, or to engage another person in sharing your deepest spiritual experience without having established an authentic personal relationship. When a person sits down beside you on a bus and immediately proceeds to "share Jesus" in intensive and extensive detail, that is personality-eroding promiscuity and is situation-inappropriate. It reflects psychopathology in that person. The hinges are too loose. The same must be said for the person who immediately feels it appropriate to expound Kant's philosophy under that same circumstance, or explain his or her own intimate personal odyssey in exhausting detail. These are promiscuous behaviors and the Bible is everywhere against them because they are destructive of human personality or manifest considerable inner pathology and distortion, namely, a gross lack of healthy boundaries, impulse control, cognitive reflection, and orientation to the situation.

In I Corinthians 6: 9–10 it is clear that Paul is against this kind of promiscuity. This is particularly evident in his references to fornication, idolatry, adultery, male prostitution, sodomy, and theft. These are persons whom we identify psychologically as suffering from a failure to set and maintain appropriate inner boundaries, either because they are suffering

from developmental disorders or from inherited Borderline Personality Syndrome. Male prostitutes obviously are promiscuous in the sense that they solicit promiscuously. They have no identified committed allegiance or covenanted relationship. Sodomites seek out male or female prostitutes for anal intercourse. They are promiscuous in the same manner as their prostitute counterparts. There is reason to believe that what Paul is decrying here is promiscuity, which the Bible is everywhere against and which is so obviously destructive of human personhood. That would suggest that perhaps this perspective has something to do with what Paul means in his reference in Romans 1 to an internal penalty which is paid within one's person as a consequence of abnormal sexual practices of any kind.

In all of these Pauline passages a number of things may be discerned. First, Paul does not condemn homosexual orientation but neither does he approve it. As the rest of Scripture, his passages offer no treatment of it since it is never identified in the Bible as a human condition. Second, Paul addresses only homosexual behavior, as do the surprisingly few other relevant scriptural passages. Third, in Romans Paul treats at least some kinds of homosexual practice, if not all homosexual behavior, as a serious human disorder like that of women who practice unnatural intercourse, presumably of a heterosexual nature. Incidentally, there is no indication here that Paul thinks of the possibility of lesbianism. Fourth, in this Romans passage Paul does not list homosexual behavior as wickedness nor assign it the death penalty of Leviticus. In I Corinthians and I Timothy Paul describes as sinful male prostitution and sodomy, the only forms of homosexual behavior he knows in these passages, and both of which are forms of promiscuity, to which he assigns the death penalty. Fifth, in all of these passages Paul speaks of homosexuality in contexts which sound like promiscuous and obsessive behavior and in none does Paul clearly address the possibility of a homosexual relationship within a troth of committed love and "marriage" (Olthuis 1975). The idea does not seem to arise in his mind. Besides the apparent implications of promiscuity in some or all of these Pauline passages, the Corinthian and Timothy references list the homosexual behavior in conjunction with adultery, underlining the illicit and promiscuous character of the aberration. Therefore, it cannot be determined that Paul intended to condemn homosexual behavior within troth. Sixth, there is a general structural correspondence of ideas between Old Testament condemnation of homosexual behavior as a compromise of Israel's cultic distinctiveness as the people of Yahweh and the New Testament condemnation of homosexual behavior as a compromise of the distinctiveness of the body of Christ. These two stood in contrast with the degenerate aspects of the Canaanite and Hellenistic cultures, respectively.

It must be remembered that the New Testament originated in the era of Caligula and Nero. St. Paul was a contemporary of Petronius, whose *Satyricon*, along with the writings of Juvenal and Martial, presents a lurid description of pagan life in the first Century. Prostitution, male as well as female, was rampant. Slaves, men and women, were sold for sex. Pederasty, child molestation, and seduction were commonplace. Dissolute heterosexuals engaged freely in homosexual liaisons for diversion. Violence was coupled with every sort of perversion and possibility of dehumanization. Confronted by such degeneracy, a Hellenistic Jew like Paul could not but be repulsed. (Kosnik 1977, p. 194)

Psycho-Theological Evaluation

Having attempted to read the relevant biblical passages in their scriptural and cultural-historical context, what can we say from a biblical perspective to the twenty first century about homosexual orientation and behavior? Are the prohibitions or constraints in the biblical passages universalizable to all forms of homosexual behavior, for all times and situations? What about generic psychological conditions, genetic factors, congenital differences in brain tissue structure in the sex-determining centers in the brain, and which produce or shape homosexuality? What about any early childhood environmental factors which might fix sexual orientation pre-cognitively and sub-volitionally? Does the Bible provide room for exceptions depending upon the situation? The creation order seems to have been male and female in union, an arrangement in which native and primal human needs are fulfilled in companionship – in experience with an “appropriate helper.” What about committed companionship for the homosexual person who cannot change?

Obviously, homosexual orientation cannot be condemned or proscribed on biblical grounds. The Bible does not deal with it, as indicated above. The most one can say in terms of the specific references to homosexual behavior in Scripture is that the Bible is against promiscuous and corrupting homosexual activities which have a destructive impact upon others or upon one's inner self. The psychological sciences have long since taught us how erosive of healthy and integrated personhood is any promiscuous practice in whatever sphere of human self-expression. Recent research published in such estimable journals as *Science*, *Science News*, and *The New England Journal of Medicine* have demonstrated the congenital nature of at least some forms of homosexuality as evidenced by tissue studies of the sex orientation-determining facet of the brain. In this regard it is highly informative to take note of the research reports on brain features and genetic factors which are linked to sexual orientation presented in *Science News* in the last six years (Aug. 31, 1991, vol. 140, p. 134; Jan. 4, 1992, vol. 141, p. 6; Jul. 17, 1993, vol. 144, p. 37; Jan. 21, 1995, vol. 147, p. 42; and Nov. 4, 1995, vol. 148, p. 295).

There is an increasingly burgeoning and converging body of empirical evidence that homosexual orientation is as natural for the homosexual person, and as congenitally predetermined, as heterosexual orientation is for the rest of us. As that picture becomes clearer, as I am sure it will in the next decade, surely the next century, it will become apparent that if Paul's argument in Romans 1 hangs on the notion that it is wrong to go against one's own nature, that cuts both ways and is as solid a warrant for healthy homosexual behavior as for healthy heterosexual behavior. A person of the opposite gender is an unnatural partner for a homosexual person. Paul's condemnation of exchanging the natural for the unnatural raises the issue of authentic personhood as certainly for the homosexual person as for the heterosexual person and inveighs against willful promiscuity and compromise of a person's authentic self, whether homosexual or heterosexual.

Obviously, St. Paul knew nothing of inversion either as an inherited trait or a condition fixed in childhood. [...] Inversion as a constitutional condition is a phenomenon which lies totally outside the biblical perspective and consideration. [...] Until recent findings of medical science and research came to light, inversion lay outside Christian tradition and theological considerations altogether. (Kosnik 1977, p. 195-196; See also Schoeps 1962, p. 373)

If this suggests to some that the biblical perspective looks a lot like situational ethics, it should be noted that Jesus made a very large point of situational ethics being the heart of the Christian Way. The Sabbath was made for people and not people for the Sabbath, hence the laws regarding it were to be interpreted in ways that would accommodate the reality of human need. Jesus was a situational ethicist, but a special kind of one. He was a situational ethicist with a very special bias. His bias was that whatever was legitimated behavior had to be healing behavior which enhanced human growth and wellbeing. Jesus constantly set aside principle, precedent, and tradition to act in terms of what was healing for a specific person, in a specific situation, at a specific time. That was his principle! His forgiveness of the adulterous woman in John 7-8, instead of following the law that required stoning her, is a dramatic case in point. Moreover, the Bible presents numerous exceptions to the most rigid rules. Killing is forbidden in Scripture but exceptions are made for war, self-defense, and capital punishment. Marriage is a permanent commitment in Scripture but divorce is provided for, as an exception. Lying and deceit are forbidden, but Rahab and the Hebrew midwives are approved for it. Some forms of homosexual behavior, at least, are condemned. Are there exceptions? If so, what are they? A heterosexual is advised by Paul that it is better to marry than to lose self control and be aflame with passion. Surely the homosexual person

who is in the comparable circumstance should be encouraged to find the requisite nurture and fulfillment, as well, in a permanent, committed, faithful troth relationship of love and marriage with a homosexual partner, in keeping with his own nature, as Paul prescribes.

Conclusion

It seems quite evident that in Scripture homosexual behavior is not the natural order of creation. However, that is not the issue. The issue is rather the problem of whether the homosexual person who finds himself or herself in that state must be deprived of the full-orbed personhood that is afforded and enhanced by sexual communion and the attendant emotional and spritual nurture, affection, and appreciation. In their pastoral advice Kosnik *et alii* assert that homosexual persons have the same rights to love, intimacy, and relationships, in terms of their native needs, as do heterosexuals. Under the more general rubrics of Christian love, grace, and growth, that would surely seem to be the requirement of God's word.

In so far as this may be agreed upon, it follows, of course, that homosexual persons are also required to pursue the same relationship ideals as heterosexual persons are ideally committed to observe. The norms for their sexual activity are the same as those for all human ethical life, the Christian bias for what heals and incites growth in themselves and others, before the face of God and in his way of righteousness and truth. Minimally this means faithful, exclusive, permanent love relationships, requiring the judgment by and with the homosexual person as to what is self-liberating, other-enriching, honest, faithful, life-serving, and joyous; as well as what prevents depersonalization, selfishness, dishonesty, promiscuity, harm to society, and demoralization. These differ not at all from the constraints upon heterosexual persons in relationship. These are the universal scriptural *dicta* for wholesome life in and with Christ and his body, the Church, under God's constitution of Shalom.

A consequent imperative of this biblical perspective is that the ecclesiastical and secular communities provide for homosexual persons the same rites of passage, rituals of affirmation, and opportunities for status that heterosexual persons enjoy. This would seem to include at least the liturgies for marriage into wholesome, exclusive, committed love relationships, regular opportunities for professional roles, and ordination into religious ministry.

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Homoseksualizm w perspektywie biblijnej

Streszczenie

Przekazy biblijne na temat homoseksualizmu nie są jednoznaczne. Problem poruszony w pracy dotyczy z jednej strony zdefiniowania samego pojęcia homoseksualizmu, z drugiej – dyskusji jego aspektów uwidoczniionych w społeczeństwie okresu biblijnego.

Biblia nie odróżnia orientacji homoseksualnej od zachowania homoseksualnego – podobnie jak i inne przekazy literackie świata grecko-rzymskiego.

Autor, dyskutując terminologię z punktu widzenia teologa i psychologa, podkreśla, że w rozważaniach należy wziąć pod uwagę również faktory chronologiczne. Aby w pełni zrozumieć oba aspekty homoseksualizmu w ujęciu biblijnym, odwołuje się on do rozważań kontekstualnych.

Biblia rzadko wzmiankuje homoseksualizm. Autor szczegółowo omawia trzy przykłady z zakresu Starego Testamentu i trzy z zakresu Nowego Testamentu (Genesis 19: 1–29; Leviticus

18: 22–24, 20: 13; Listy św. Pawła: do Rzymian 1: 26–27, Koryncjan 6: 9–10, Tymoteusza 1: 10). Wzmianki te odnoszą się do zachowań homoseksualnych.

Autor zwraca uwagę, że homoseksualizm jest oceniany jako zły, grzeszny i przestępczy w związku z kultem, lecz nie jest jasne, czy też poza nim. Biblia zajmuje się głównie kontekstem religijnym, a tylko pośrednio – etycznym.

Omawiając kontekstualne aspekty przekazów nowotestamentowych, autor przywołuje fakt, że św. Paweł jest zdania, iż kult zwierząt powszechny w okresie hellenistycznym być może wpłynął na deprawujące zachowania seksualne i widzi w odmiennym zachowaniu seksualnym ludzką słabość i zwyrodnienie, więcej – patologię. W liście do Koryncjan homoseksualizm jest zaklasyfikowany do grzechów.

Biblia z zasady jest zorientowana przeciw nierządowi (*porneia*). Fakt, że księgi Nowego Testamentu powstały w czasach panowania Kaliguli i Nerona, współcześnie z *Satyrykonem* Petroniusza, dziełami Juwenala i Marcjalisa, kiedy rozluźnienie obyczajów było powszechne, a seks był rozrywką, bez wątpienia wpłynął na sformułowania biblijne (etyka sytuacyjna).

Autor jest zdania, że reakcjom opisanym w Biblii nie możemy nadać uniwersalnego charakteru. Wskazuje na osiągnięcia nauk medycznych i psychologii, które pozwoliły nam poznać głębiej naturę jednostki. W efekcie, jeśli argumenty św. Pawła w liście do Rzymian opierają się na odrzuceniu tego, co sprzeczne naturze, problem homoseksualizmu w stosunku do przekazów biblijnych wymaga nowych rozważań.