

9. Contrast Gagnon, who insists that the real offense here is homosexual sex. The reading of the text simply does not make sense if the central issue is the type of sex, for in reality, the mob was most likely going to rape and kill everyone (Gagnon 2001).

10. Of course, Gagnon will go on to tie it all back to homosexuality by insisting that the sexual immorality was real instead of letting the metaphor carry through. But for a moment, there was an agreement of what the core issue was.

11. See the section on Romans in the next chapter for my discussion on the biblical concept of the “righteousness of God.”

12. Some sought castration intentionally in order to be more feminized.

The New Testament and Same-Sex Behavior

Remember from a Christian perspective, the story set forth in the Hebrew Bible (Christians call it the Old Testament) is extended and brought to its climax in the story told in the New Testament. The New Testament tells how Jesus of Nazareth was the one that the “law and the prophets” looked forward to. This means that there is continuity between them, and therefore we ought to expect that the themes that are laid out in the OT will find their expression in the NT, indeed will find their fullest expression. Loving the stranger, justice, peace, and a world set right—these expectations are what we find in the NT story. But the NT also warns against idolatry and all the havoc it creates for humanity. The center of the story, however, is how the problems defined in the OT—largely idolatry and the behaviors and consequences that grow out of it—find their singular solution in Jesus the Messiah who comes at last as the king who defeats sin and death (Wright 1997; 2012).

First, to understand the texts in the New Testament often associated with same-sex behaviors, we must understand the sexual practices in Greco-Roman society while also maintaining some level of modesty in the writing. Second, since much of the debate has to do with certain words found in the New Testament, we do some lexical work on them before looking at them in their various contexts. With this work completed, we will then do an extended exegesis of the texts in which these words are found. A brief analysis will be given for Mark 10, in which Jesus references marriage. Finally, my summary at the end of this chapter will outline what I believe the Bible does and does not teach about homosexuality.

As noted in the introduction to the OT chapter, a fair amount of detail is provided on the NT texts. As before, the reader may choose to scan the material or simply proceed to the conclusions at the end of this chapter.

Greek and Roman Sexual Practices

Before we look at the specific texts in the New Testament that are assumed to address homosexuality, it is important to provide a brief description of Roman and Greek sexual practices. I believe this excursus will help create context as we read these texts. There is a great deal of similarity (at least for my purposes) between the sexual practices of ancient Greek culture—often referred to as the Classical period—and of the subsequent Greco-Roman culture. Women were viewed similarly, and the sexual practices of men were analogous but with some specific differences. As explained below, sexual practices in these cultures did not divide along the axis that we divide matters in our modern world. Whereas we are inclined to separate people into homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual, they separated people into “dominate/penetrative” or “passive/receptive,” as is evident among the Semitic peoples of the ancient Near East. This distinction in ancient social-sexual practices affects how we read the New Testament texts, which ostensibly address these practices. We must keep in mind as we proceed that the words *homosexuality* and *heterosexuality* were not coined until the nineteenth century. These are our categories but were unknown to the biblical authors. It is our modern world that thinks in a continuum between gay and straight.

Women in Greek and Roman Society

Women were the property of Greco-Roman men (as they were in ancient Israel). Young women belonged to their fathers until they were married off in arranged marriages between the ages of twelve and eighteen—mostly on the younger side. They then came under the authority of their husbands. Some women who were not married were prostitutes or “hetaera,” which in our culture would be higher-class female escorts. Married women in Greek and Roman society were expected to live virtuous lives. They were to have sex only with their husbands. Greek women often had to compete for sex with prostitutes, hetaera, and slaves who were available to their husbands in their homes. The primary role of the wife was to propagate legitimate children for her husband. In Greek and Roman culture, the woman managed the household (called the *oikos* in Greek and the *domus* in Latin). Managing the household included overseeing its daily operations, slaves, and child rearing. In the

Greek *oikos*, women were commonly kept separate from the men. They had their own quarters and consequently were seldom seen by nonfamily members. Many did not venture out from the residence. If a Greek woman did go outside the *oikos*, she had to have a male companion. In the Roman home, a woman could have more independence, but she was still mostly relegated to the household. Although she could not participate in public life, she could and did nonetheless play “political games” to advance her family’s status in the class-stratified Roman social world.¹

Female Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture

Female sexuality was tied to social order in both the Greek and Roman cultures. Women were considered morally weak and thus kept in the controlled environment, where it was possible to monitor their sexuality. Virginity was important, and female sexuality was to be expressed only in marriage. Free women who were sexually active outside marriage lost their protection under the law as well as their social status and respect. There are not many references to sex between women in the Roman Republic, but that changed with the empire. A few documents describe lesbian sexuality usually in the form of poems and love spells.² In part due to the “conservative” nature of Roman culture and the influence of Stoicism, women were expected to keep their sexual desires and expressions moderated.

Greek law strictly forbid adultery by a woman and granted the husband or the family the right to seek revenge against the man while the woman was “put away.” Roman law allowed the husband to put an adulterous wife to death, while it was expected that men would have sexual activities with women other than a wife. Later as the Imperial period evolved, the lax sexual standards meant that both men and women were having affairs (Bromiley 1985, 606).

Men and Sexual Standards

The sexual standards for men were different. (It would appear some things are slow to change.) In Greek society, homoerotic relationships between an adult man and a boy were known as pederasty. We must admit that this practice is offensive to our present moral sensibilities. Even though our twenty-first-century moral and legal definitions prevail, we must look at pederasty and similar practices to understand the New Testament references considered to be about same-sex behavior.

Pederasty already had a long history by the first century of the Common Era when Paul would have been writing. It predates Plato (428–347 BCE) and can be traced to sources even earlier. There were diverse views on the practice in the Greek city-states, some affirming and others not. In Athens and Sparta, the practice was accepted and even endorsed as normative, though for different reasons in each city. In Sparta, the practice was more closely associated with their military training and practice. In Athens, it was practiced among the aristocracy as a process of socialization of the good citizen. Pederasty was seen as a way of supporting and passing on the basic values of the community. Nissinen writes, “Pederastic relationships were at times an essential part in raising young men to be full-fledged members of society” ([1998] 2004, 58). The arts, philosophy, music, and physical exercise were all part of the young boy’s upbringing for the elite of society. The Greeks justified pederasty because their gods practiced it. The story of Zeus and Ganymede is one example. Zeus in the form of an eagle swoops down and catches young Ganymede and carries him off to Mount Olympus to be his lover.

Our modern and Western perspectives about pederasty are informed by our segmentation of people into either heterosexual or homosexual groups. Thus we consciously, or more likely unconsciously, assume that such practices were choices to *be* homosexual, that is, to have a gay identity. Such an assumption is an anachronism. Sexual orientation is a modern construct in the sense of choosing to be one or the other. In reality, most men (*erastēs*) who had a boy (*pais* or *paidika*) were also married and had families. Further, the *paidika* would grow up, get married, have a family, and often become an *erastēs*. One could only become a *paidika* with the agreement of the boy’s father, which occurred in his teens, at about the same age that girls were given in marriage.

Sex and Roles in Ancient Greece

In general, Greek and Roman sexuality did not break along male and female lines as it does in our culture. Sex was erotic, and it was far more about the role one played in the act of sex than the physical gender of the person with whom one had sex. As in the ancient Near East, it was about gender roles.

The role structure between the *erastēs* and the *paidika* is informative of much of the way sexual behavior was understood in the ancient world and, specifically, Greece. A boy, also called an *erōmenos*, (a beloved) was to play the passive (submissive) role. The *erastēs* was to play the active (dominant) role. Again this was not just a sexual arrangement; it was the basic structure of the relationship. Though it may be strange or appalling to us, practically this was a mentor-student relationship with “benefits.” This becomes even more

significant in Roman culture, in which dominance is the most important role for a male to play, which will be discussed in more detail below (Williams [1999] 2010).

The role played in the sexual act, regardless of the relationship, was significant. Whether having same-sex or other-sex, a male adult “citizen” would lose status if he played the passive role. Women, slaves, or young male youths (who were not yet citizens) had no status, so playing the passive role did not matter—and they probably in most cases had no choice in the matter anyway. The passive role was labeled *muliebria pati*, “to submit to what is done to women” and *aselgainein*, “to defile oneself.” The active role in Greek was *hubrizein*, “to exert force upon another” (Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar 1999, 496).

Sex and Roles in Ancient Rome

The active/passive roles in sex were also part of Roman culture, but the Romans carried it further. For the Roman male, dominance was considered a virtue. Strong masculinity was supremely important. This association was supported by the patriarchal social structure and the patron-client system.³ Conquest was valued, and being the active partner in a sexual encounter was a sign of one’s masculinity. Freeborn Roman men could have sex with either men or women, as long as the man played the active, not passive, role in the sex act. A married freeborn Roman was expected to avoid having sex with another freeborn person but was free to have sex with male slaves, prostitutes, or women in the house who served as secondary wives. Unmarried men were free to desire women of any social status or male slaves and prostitutes. Roman men, like their Greek forerunners, had a preference for boys between the ages 12 and 20 (Williams [1999] 2010). But in all of this, it was essential for the Roman freeborn male (citizen) to play the dominant role in any sex act. Williams, in his book *Roman Homosexuality*, described the Roman male’s role in colorful terms:

First and foremost, a self-respecting Roman man must always give the appearance of playing the insertive role in penetrative acts, and not the receptive role: to use popular terminology often unfortunately replicated in the language of scholarship, he must be the “active,” not the “passive,” partner. This can justly be called the prime directive of masculine sexual behavior for Romans, and it has an obvious relationship to hierarchical social structures. For according to this scheme, penetration is subjugation (in the sense that the act is held simultaneously to be a figure for, and to effect, subjugation), and *masculinity is domination*. ([1999] 2010, 18, emphasis added)

To play the receiving role (submissive or passive) was considered weak and effeminate. The dominant role took pleasure. The submissive role gave pleasure. To give pleasure was considered servile and a threat to a man's status as a full Roman citizen.

As Rome transitioned from the republic to the empire, a more licentious culture began to emerge. More freeborn men began to play the passive role in sex, most likely as an expression of the expanding patron-client social structure that had Caesar as the ultimate paterfamilias.⁴ But this role shift was also because the growing licentiousness led to ever more expansive ways to act sexually. It was in part for this reason that the first emperor, Augustus, not known for his sexual restraint, nonetheless attempted to return to more conservative Roman values and morals.

Augustus's goal in restoring public monuments and reviving religion was not simply to renew faith and pride in the Roman Empire. Rather, he hoped that these steps would restore moral standards in Rome—that is, the old ways of clear-cut rules for dominance and receptivity. Augustus also enacted social reforms as a way to improve morality. He felt particularly strong about encouraging families to have children and discouraging adultery. As such, he politically and financially rewarded families with three or more children, especially sons. This incentive stemmed from his belief that there were too few legitimate children born from “proper marriages” (Fife 2012).

We should not assume that his goals for moral revival would look like a Christian hope for moral goodness. For Augustus, it was about consolidating power and stabilizing what he saw as an increasingly unstable empire. Men were still free to act however they wanted sexually within the prescribed Roman norms, and women or men with whom Roman men had sex were still expected to play the passive role. Men however were expected to show restraint, which meant not playing the passive role. They were to restore the proper order of proving their masculinity by reclaiming the dominant role in sexual behaviors.

The other side of the Roman ideal of the dominant male is the weak or effeminate male. To be the passive one in sex meant that the person was the less powerful. Calling someone effeminate was a common way to discredit another politician and to gain political advantage. Many years past, in our own culture, the same sort of denigrating name calling was practiced.

Prostitution in Greek and Roman Culture

In ancient Greece, pederasty was not the only practice in which men had sex with young teens. Male prostitution was a thriving business. Ped-

erasty required a large commitment of time and wealth. Those who didn't have the time or the wealth could satisfy their desires with male prostitutes. Even though prostitution of females and males was legal and even enjoyed some protections as well as taxation, it was still looked upon as socially shameful. As a result, prostitutes were either slaves or noncitizens (Dover [1978] 1989).

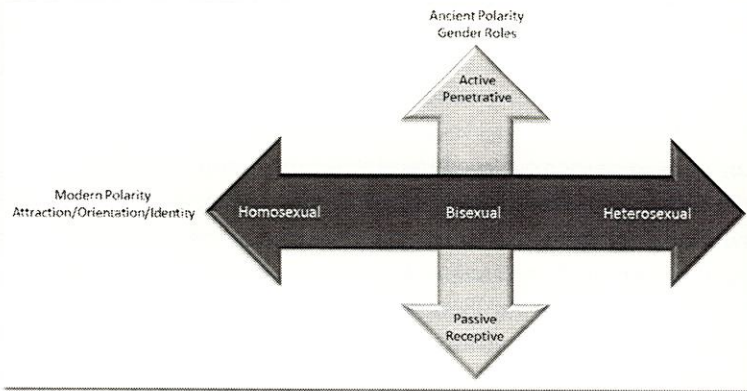
Ancient Greek men believed that the availability of prostitution was necessary to fulfill their needs for pleasure. There were, as stated above, different options available, from prostitutes on the streets, called peripatetic prostitutes, to the more sophisticated and educated hetaira.

Greek prostitutes were bought, stolen, or captured people who were enslaved and then put into prostitution. Many of them were captured in war and forced into prostitution as slaves. This would include both males and females. A famous ancient example of this is Phaedo of Elis. He was a Greek philosopher made famous because he was with Socrates when he died and because Plato named his dialogue “On the Soul” after him. Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* tells the following story of Phaedo, explaining who he was, where he came from, and what he went on to do:

Phaedo was a native of Elis, of noble family, who on the fall of that city was taken captive and forcibly consigned to a house of ill-fame. But he would close the door and so contrive to join Socrates' circle, and in the end Socrates induced Alcibiades or Crito with their friends to ransom him; from that time onwards he studied philosophy as became a free man. (Laertius 1972)

The Sexual Axis of Greek and Roman Practice

A great deal can be read about sexuality in ancient Greece and Rome, but after a while it becomes fairly redundant—and for my twenty-first-century sensibilities, at times disgusting. The striking impression from the literature is how different Greece and Rome were from the world in which we live. What mattered most in the male-dominated patriarchal system was the “penetrative role.” The dominant/passive construct was so pervasive that men assumed female-to-female sexual practices still had to have one play the penetrative role because they could not imagine sexual behavior in any other way. This dominant/passive framework for Greek and Roman sexual practice is the axis upon which ancient sexual practices moved. Current sexual discussions tend to occur in simplistic terms on a heterosexual/homosexual continuum.⁵ The following graphic expresses these different continua.



An Alternative Ethic

Lest we think all the Greeks and Romans were a lascivious lot, there were counter philosophical and religious movements that called for a more modest sexuality and the self-control of one's desires. Most of us have heard of the Epicureans and the Stoics. Both had views on sexual behavior that would moderate sexual behavior or forgo its practice entirely. For Epicureans, sexual intercourse was a natural but unnecessary desire. The Stoics believed "sexual love is a desire which does not afflict virtuous men" (Kreitner 2012).

Some scholars see in the Christian community in Corinth the influence of a religious philosophic group called the Therapeutae, a Jewish sect believed to have originated in Egypt. By the first century CE, they had spread throughout most of the known world.⁶ They were ascetics who emphasized virginity and celibacy even in marriage. They lived chastely with utter simplicity; they "first of all laid down temperance as a sort of foundation for the soul to rest upon, proceed to build up other virtues on this foundation" (Philo 1993). They also eschewed material possessions: "These men abandon their property without being influenced by any predominant attraction, and flee without even turning their heads back again" (para. 18).

It's possible that some Therapeutae, at least in Corinth, had converted to Christianity and were part of the Corinthian church. A number of their teachings and practices appear in the correspondence that reached Paul. Part of 1 Corinthians addresses these. It is in the midst of such a section that one of the so-called vice lists that we are to review in 1 Corinthians 6 is found. The ascetic orientation toward otherworldly spiritual life and especially the denigration of sexuality (as this-worldly) only increases with the centuries. By

the fourth century and Saint Augustine, the ascetic ideas of the Therapeutae (influenced by Platonic dualism that separated the spiritual—good and the physical—evil) had shaped at least the Western church's idea of the devoted life as well as its idea of sexuality. Ideas about sexuality were not positive and, in some Christian contexts, still aren't.

Some New Testament and Other Greek Words

Much of the discussion of the New Testament texts revolves around the meaning and usages of four different Greek words. For the purposes of this overview, I first provide an analysis of each word and its usage within its first-century context. But to do this properly, one must also consider the historical development of a word's usage. Oftentimes when we look up a word in a dictionary, we are looking for a synonym that we do know and use. Then we draw a straight conceptual line from what we know to what we don't know. Words seldom work that way.

This becomes even more of a challenge when the word is in a different language or even an ancient language like Koine Greek, which is the Greek of the New Testament. It is a beginner's error to think an interpreter can come across a Greek word, look it up in a Greek-to-English lexicon in which a translation is given, and assume "we get it." A few moments in a technical lexicon makes this obvious. Rather, the task of the interpreter is to focus on the (in our case, Greek) word in its original language and study its usage in its native context. This is what I attempt to do. But I have only provided my conclusions with necessary supporting information. That said, when we consider these words within the Greco-Roman culture of the first century, a fuller image emerges from the biblical text. Frankly, in some cases, a far more disgusting image emerges than what our English translations would lead us to believe.

Other Greek words that are associated with homoeroticism were also in common usage in the first century CE. Though they are not found in our New Testament, because they were part of the common language of the day and connoted certain types of person, I mention them here. First, one kind of man was called a *kinaidos* (*cenaedus* in Latin). It was a derogatory term referring to a man who was effeminate and only sought erotic contact with men (Nissinen [1998] 2004, 68). The second term was *androgynous*. This term also referred to an effeminate man. It is a compound word meaning "man-woman." A third word, *tribas*, was a description of a woman who preferred sexual eroticism with other women. In the descriptive categories of our modern world, these labels for individuals would likely be closer to a male

or female with a homosexual orientation, though any sense of orientation is our category.

Pornos/Porneia

You probably recognize this word because our word *pornography* is derived from its root. *Pornos* comes from the verb *pernemi*, which means “to sell or to be sold” (Liddell, Scott, and Jones 2014). In Classical Greek, the masculine form represented a man who prostitutes himself for hire—a harlot for hire or a catamite.⁷ It also can mean “idolator” (Liddell, Scott, and Jones 2014). It came to be used universally, meaning a man who indulges in unlawful intercourse (Bauer and Danker 2001, 855). The feminine form, *porneia*, meant illicit sexual practices including prostitution but also metaphorically as idolatry (see discussion on the Septuagint below) (Liddell, Scott, and Jones 2014). The verb and its related words are often translated into English as *fornicate* or *fornication*, words that most people know have something to do with illicit sex. It is believed that our English word *fornication* originated in Latin—not Greek—with the word *fornix* meaning “done under the archway” or “vault” where prostitutes would congregate to practice their trade (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*). The word *pornos* can also mean “idolater” (Liddell, Scott, and Jones 2014, 1450).

The Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, translates the Hebrew *znh*, which means “to be unfaithful,” as the feminine form, *porneia*. To play the harlot is to be unfaithful. As a metaphor, it is used to describe Israel, who is unfaithful to YHWH in chasing after other gods, that is, idolatry. The northern kingdom’s (Israel’s) idolatry and its association with unfaithful practices are clear in this passage from Hosea. The setting is the period between 780 and 725 BCE and before people in the northern kingdom were driven into exile (ca. 734–32 BCE). The reason for the pending exile is apparent:

My people take advice from a piece of wood,
and their divining rod gives them predictions.
*A spirit of prostitution [porneia] has led them astray;
they have left God to follow other gods.*
They offer sacrifices on mountaintops,
and make entirely burned offerings on hills;
they offer sacrifices under various green trees,
because their shade is pleasant.

Therefore, your daughters act like* prostitutes [from *porneia*],
and your daughters-in-law commit adultery.
I will not punish your daughters because they act like prostitutes,
nor your daughters-in-law because they commit adultery;
for the men themselves visit prostitutes [*porneia*],
and offer sacrifices with consecrated workers at temples;
so now the people without sense must come to ruin. (Hos 4:12-14,
emphasis added)

* *Like* is an analogy.

The prophet is not saying the daughters are literally prostituting themselves nor that the daughters-in-law are committing adultery. Nor is he saying the men literally visit prostitutes. Rather, he is saying they are being unfaithful to YHWH. They are committing idolatry against their God by visiting the temples of foreign gods and offering sacrifices with the religious workers of the offending temple.⁸

The southern kingdom (Judah) was not much better. While the word *porneia* is not used, this text states that Judah practiced the same “detestable things” as Israel and other nations. These same idolatrous behaviors ultimately resulted in Judah’s exile as well in 586 BCE:

Judah did evil in the LORD’s eyes. The sins they committed made the LORD angrier than anything their ancestors had done. They also built shrines, standing stones, and sacred poles on top of every high hill and under every green tree. Moreover, the *consecrated workers* in the land did detestable things, just like those nations that the LORD had removed among the Israelites. (1 Kgs 14:22-24, emphasis added)

The period after the Babylonian exile (ca. 538 BCE) is often referred to as Second Temple Judaism, which extended until the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Documents from this period follow this same conceptual association but also broaden the idea of *porneia* to include all forms of illicit sexual practice. One specific document called *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* provides multiple warnings against *porneia*. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* explains “the first of seven evil spirits is *porneia*, to which women are more subject than men and which leads to idolatry” (Bromiley 1985, 919).

In the New Testament there is also an association of sexual immorality and idolatry. The Jerusalem Council in considering whether the Gentiles must keep the practices of Torah say no, but ask that they abstain from certain

things: “Therefore, I conclude that we shouldn’t create problems for Gentiles who turn to God. Instead, we should write a letter, telling them to avoid the pollution associated with idols, sexual immorality, eating meat from strangled animals, and consuming blood” (Acts 15:19-20).

The first and last items—idols and blood sacrifices—are clearly related to Greco-Roman religious/social practices. Given that *porneia* is illicit sexual behavior—and that it is sandwiched between two obvious idolatrous practices—it is likely that it too is a reference to idolatrous religious practices. But is the sexual immorality literal or again figurative of unfaithfulness to God? It is not clear, and perhaps it is both. Religious/social/political life in the Roman world was what we might call today a “mash-up.”⁹ As I have said previously, although we separate these, they were not separated in the ancient world. To not participate would effectively marginalize one (Bauckham 1993; Wright 2013b). Remember that the central issue between YHWH and Israel and between YHWH and all nations is idolatry. So the Jerusalem Council admonished the new Gentile Christians to avoid such practices. We will see this when we look at Romans 1. I address how the word *porneia* is used in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 below.

Arsenokoitēs

This is the word translated variously as “sodomites,” “homosexual offenders,” “homosexuals,” or “practicing homosexuals.”¹⁰ *Arsenokoitēs* is found only in two places in the New Testament and does not appear to have been used before these instances. It is a compound of two Greek words. The first is the word for “man”: *arsen*. The second, *koiteis*, is Greek for “bed” (and from which we derive our English word *coitus*). In an awkward sense, it means “man bed” or “man bedder,” or, in other words, a man who goes to bed with men.¹¹ The Bauer and Danker lexicon (BDAG) illuminates the uncertain definition, taking issue with the English translations “homosexuals” or “sodomites” (Bauer and Danker 2001, 135).

The precise meaning of this word is difficult to obtain. It is used too rarely, so the best we can hope for is an approximation of its meaning within a field of possibilities. Some scholars believe the Apostle Paul coined *arsenokoitēs* since it is only found in 1 Corinthians 6 and was picked up by the author of 1 Timothy 1 (if not written by Paul). Paul, who was knowledgeable of the Septuagint (LXX), may have formed the word by putting together two words from Leviticus 18:22: *meta arsenos ouw koimēthēsē koitēn gunaikos bdelugma gar estin*. The words in bold are *arsen* and *koitē*, which, compounded, become *arsenokoitēs*. If this is true, then Paul would have in mind the proscription

against having a male playing the female role, which Leviticus prohibited. If it is not the case that Paul coined the word from Leviticus, the meaning remains the same: “Don’t bed a male as you bed a female.” Robin Scroggs thinks that Paul likely has in mind a Hebrew phrase known among the Hellenistic Jewish rabbis of his day as a description of male homosexuality. The phrase *mischkav zakur* would be translated as “lying with a male” (Scroggs 1983, 108–10).¹² Nissinen believes it should be translated as “one who lies with males.” This is where BDAG’s definition lands as well (Bauer and Danker 2001, 135). Now this certainly sounds like male-to-male sex. Our brief review of sexual practices in the Greco-Roman world informs us that there was a great deal of diversity in how penetrative sex was performed.¹³ The man was not to play the passive role—regardless of the specific form—because it was an affront to his masculinity. Although it is the case that it is difficult to pin down just what this word precisely meant, we can say it most likely referred to a practice that would have been part of the Roman culture, and it would have been tied to gender role confusion (strong/weak, penetrative/passive, insertive/receptive, i.e., male/female) (Williams [1999] 2010). Additionally, it would be fair to hypothesize that the Roman concern for “too much desire” played a part in its field of meaning. Given that it is found twice in so-called vice lists, that is something seriously to consider. The meaning in the New Testament ultimately has to be defined by its use in a specific context. That will be considered when we look at 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1.

Malakos

Malakos occurs in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and is paired with *arsenokoitēs*. The word group from which *malakos* is derived means “softness” or “weakness.” It could range from being physically sickly to moral weakness (in the Greek and Roman sense of moral weakness, which meant lacking in self-control). *Malakos* could also mean “soft” or “effeminate” (Liddell, Scott, and Jones 2014). Moral weakness meant effeminacy and the “traditional signs of effeminacy—lack of self-control and yielding to pleasures” (Nissinen [1998] 2004, 118). Understandably then, it was also used as a label for effeminate men. It was the opposite of the ideal, dominating male of Greco-Roman culture, who had control of his desires. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines the word as “effeminate, esp. of catamites” (Bauer and Danker 2001, 613). The Latin spelling is *catamitus*, a young intimate partner of a Roman man. It may be similar to the Greek practice of pederasty but with less emphasis on the formation of character and future citizenship and frankly more emphasis on the satisfaction of desire for the dominant partner.¹⁴ The greater emphasis on

sex was associated with the Greek story of Zeus and Ganymede, the beautiful Trojan youth that was abducted by Zeus and made his official cupbearer. (Nisinen [1998] 2004). Ganymede in Latin is Catamitus (Williams [1999] 2010, 59–70).¹⁵ In summary then, *malakos* is a description of an effeminate man, which may only be a description of his behavior apart from sex. But within the field of sexual behavior, its meaning could include (1) a companion of a dominant man, (2) the practice of pederasty, or (3) prostitution. Whatever the case, when it is about sexual behavior, it is the male who plays the passive role.

Andrapodistēs

In the New Testament, the word only occurs in 1 Timothy 1. *Andrapodistēs* is another compound word. The first word is again *aner*, or “man,” and the second is from *podos*, which in its many forms means “foot.” It is often associated with another word, *tetrapoda*, which means “four footed,” as in animals (Moulton and Milligan 1995, 40). So man footed and animal footed. The meaning is not immediately obvious of course.

Andrapodistēs is translated “man stealer” or “slave trader.” These are, in effect, the same thing. First there is the theft and then the sale. There is a form of the word that refers to the person stolen as a slave; the word is *andropodon*. This word is to be distinguished from the more typical word for slave, which is *doulos* (slave or servant) and which we find often in the New Testament in phrases such as “servants/slaves of Christ.” *Andropodon* connoted a much more horrific form of slavery. It could refer to captured men, women, and children who were then sold into slavery (Liddell, Scott, and Jones 2014).

We know of course that slavery was legal in ancient Rome and Greece. Yet the *andrapodistēs* was considered to be a low-life scoundrel and would be included in vice lists of those persons who were morally degenerate—along with murderers. But why, if slavery was legal, were they disparaged? Somebody had to do it. *Andrapodistēs* is the word used to connote those who captured men, women, and children and sold them into slavery. Sometimes these unsavory characters would simply steal people and sell them into prostitution, which today we would call “human trafficking.” Their crime was stealing “free citizens.” Greco-Roman sexual practices provided a ready market for either girls or boys. When the normal acquisition process of obtaining slaves through war captives would not meet market demand, they would kidnap free citizens. This practice is likely what the author of 1 Timothy had in mind. So when we read translations of the word as “kidnapper,” we must read it with all of the horrific reality of the practices associated with it (Harrell 1999).

Now we turn to the texts in which these words are found.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10—Against a Culture of Death

The first text to examine is 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Embedded in the middle of a discussion about fellow Christians dragging each other into court to resolve differences is a list of “vices.” A list like this is placed in a text for a reason, and if one is to properly interpret it, it is necessary to discover why Paul placed it here.¹⁶

The letter was written by the Apostle Paul most likely when he was in Ephesus in 54–55 CE (1 Cor 16:8). Paul had founded the church in Corinth after leaving Athens but had moved on to Asia Minor. The letter was written in response to a report delivered to him regarding some behaviors in the Corinthian Church: “My brothers and sisters, Chloe’s people gave me some information about you, that you’re fighting with each other” (1 Cor 1:11).

Some Background on Corinth

Corinth was a crossroads between the east and Rome. It was located on a small isthmus of land between the Greek mainland and the Peloponnesian peninsula. Ships from throughout Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia Minor made port in Corinth, and small boats were dragged the 3.5 miles across the isthmus from the Aegean Sea, through the Gulf of Corinth, and out into the Ionian Sea. From there, they could travel on to Rome. Because of its location, Corinth was a magnet for every philosophy and religion of the world. (Some have compared it to New York City in our time.) The people of Corinth included Greeks, Roman freedmen from Italy, and sizable Jewish communities, as well as many others. Corinth was also the home to the Temple of Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love, beauty, and fertility. Athens and Corinth celebrated the festival of Aphrodite called the *Aphrodisia*. The city was known as a center of sexual license and luxury. The cosmopolitan atmosphere of Corinth meant that it offered a smorgasbord of lifestyle choices, religious practices, and philosophies.

Setting 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 in Context

This brief background is important for understanding the multiple issues Paul addresses in his letters to the Corinthians, and especially 1 Corinthians. Starting a church in Corinth would be akin to starting one in modern-day New York City. Paul, as was his practice, began in the Jewish synagogue, but when they objected to his teaching that Jesus was the expected Jewish Messiah, he left and moved next door to the house of Titius Justus, a Gentile God worshipper, and continued his preaching ministry (Acts 18:4-8).

Building a church from scratch in Corinth was bound to be a challenge. Not long after Paul left, factions began to form in the Corinthian house churches. Some, influenced by what many scholars consider to be incipient gnosticism, were overly impressed with their special knowledge and wisdom. There was an ascetic party that considered themselves spiritually superior and above things of this earthly existence, like even having sex as married couples. These are the people some scholars believe may have been the Therapeutae mentioned earlier. Conversely, although we do not know the extent, it seems that some in the congregations were practicing immorality with impunity. The most blatant example was an instance of incest. There actually was a man in the church living with his father's wife.

Paul is horrified by this. How could anyone think this was OK? Even the pagans of Corinth, a city not known for its prudish sexual morality, would be shocked by what was occurring. But this is just the beginning of his disgust. It is also reported that people in the church are dragging each other into court: "When someone in your assembly has a legal case against another member, do they dare to take it to court to be judged by people who aren't just, instead of by God's people?" (1 Cor 6:1). This is the subject matter immediately prior to the so-called vice list that begins in verse 9. Paul asks some pointed questions:

I'm saying this because you should be ashamed of yourselves! Isn't there one person among you who is wise enough to pass judgment between believers? But instead does a brother or sister have a lawsuit against another brother or sister, and do they do this in front of unbelievers? The fact that you have lawsuits against each other means that you've already lost your case. Why not be wronged instead? Why not be cheated? But instead you are doing wrong and cheating—and you're doing it to your own brothers and sisters. (1 Cor 6:5-8)

This simply should not happen in the new covenant community. Paul's alarm is that instead of convening a group within the church to adjudicate a dispute between two members of the church, they went to a court outside the community. It was very common for different religious cults and even the Jews to have internal processes and procedures for dealing with conflicts between people within their communities. This is what Paul has in mind. If they are the new covenant community, if they are the people who are finally to fulfill the original calling of humans to be God's vice regents of creation, then certainly they ought to be able to resolve this matter.

But whatever the issue was, far from being able to convene to establish justice, they were perpetrating injustice—on each other: "But you yourselves

wrong and defraud—and believers at that" (1 Cor 6:8 NRSV). Paul is concerned that the Corinthians simply—as we would say today—"don't get it." This is shameful behavior, especially given who they were supposed to be. To make his point, Paul establishes a baseline principle: "Don't you know that people who are unjust won't inherit God's kingdom?" (1 Cor 6:9a).

The word translated "unjust" is *adikos*, the same word as in 6:1, in which Paul asks why they are taking grievances before the "people who aren't just" instead of the saints. For Paul, it is the unbelieving community, those without faith, who have not embraced Jesus as Lord and whose "justice" reflects the oppressive patronage system that shaped Roman culture. What Paul calls "unjust" (in some translations, "wrongdoers") are people living lives contrary to the promise and hope of the gospel and the people to whom the Corinthians were to preach and demonstrate the gospel, certainly not the people to whom they should turn to settle their disputes. The list (vice list) that follows describes what the unbelieving world looks like or perhaps more precisely, how unbelievers live and behave. I am providing two translations of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 for comparison, the NRSV and the CEB:

Do you not know that *wrongdoers* will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, *male prostitutes, sodomites*, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. (NRSV, emphasis added)

Don't you know that *people who are unjust* won't inherit God's kingdom? Don't be deceived. Those who are sexually immoral, those who worship false gods, adulterers, *both participants in same-sex intercourse*, thieves, the greedy, drunks, abusive people, and swindlers won't inherit God's kingdom.¹⁷ (emphasis added)

In Paul's mind none of these behaviors correspond to the gospel he had shared with them—namely, why Jesus came and what he has done and is doing for them.

The unjust (the wrongdoers) are persons still lost in idolatry. Remember, idolatry is not just about worship. It is a life orientation defined by who or where a person places his or her trust, namely, the immorality that attends idolatry. (For more on idolatry, see the section on Romans 1 below.) The same point was made earlier about Sodom. Abraham was called righteous precisely because he trusted God. Sodom was unrighteous, meaning it was going after other gods and all of the behaviors that followed such idolatry such as all forms of immorality. This immorality was the expression of an oppressive and exploitive society that used and abused the stranger and the weak. This was

the cry that went up to YHWH's ears and called for judgment. In the same way here in Corinth, what Paul is writing about in general terms is a culture of idolatry that translates into multiple forms of human degradation and depravity. Some of these behaviors would have actually been part of cultic rituals. Some would have just reflected the culture's values—though the line between these is thin. But all were antithetical to what righteousness should look like. God was calling his people out of that to just and holy lives—lives humans were intended to live.

Paul then says in verse 11:

That is what some of you used to be! But you were washed clean, you were made holy to God, and you were made right with God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor 6:11)

Vice lists were a common literary motif used by writers in this period as a way of describing moral flaws in society. Paul employs a known vice list to make a specific point. The Corinthians used to be these kinds of people, living these kinds of vices. But having heard the gospel of Jesus the Christ, they no longer had to be. Now their lives were to reflect the character of their Lord. This was not the kind of life Jesus had called them to. His death was the defeat of evil; his resurrection, his vindication as the true Lord of heaven and earth. To strengthen and help them resist temptation, Jesus gave them the gift of the Spirit to convict and empower them to be God's new creation. But here they were behaving worse than the unbelieving community. And it appears that some were even proud of it. It was an expression of their new "freedom" in Christ. But they had been set apart (sanctified) for God, vindicated before God (justified) in the name of Jesus, and they had the Spirit of God with them now. Paul closes this section with these powerful words: "Or don't you [all] know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you? Don't you [all] know that you have the Holy Spirit from God, and you don't belong to yourselves? You [all] have been bought and paid for, so honor God with your body"¹⁸ (1 Cor 6:19-20).

Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that they were now on the road to what humans were intended to be. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, would have said that they were "on the road to perfection." The presence of God was with them. They together as a community were the place where heaven and earth meet. That possibility had been costly. Therefore, they were no longer their own. Rather now they were intended to reflect God's glory in their life—to be a living temple of God, not walking in the ways of their former lives.

The Vice List

By placing the vice list in context, we see that Paul's concern is about the holiness of the Corinthian Christian community. The gospel called people out of a culture of death into a culture of life made possible by the love of God, most fully expressed in Jesus. The logic is simple. Live a new life because you *can* live a new life.

Look at the list again in 1 Corinthians 6:9b-10

Don't be deceived. Those who are sexually immoral, those who worship false gods, adulterers, *both participants in same-sex intercourse*,* thieves, the greedy, drunks, abusive people, and swindlers won't inherit God's kingdom. (emphasis added)

*The CEB translates the two Greek words *malakos* and *arsenokoitēs* as "both participants in same-sex intercourse."

In the following table each of the vice words are provided along with a list of optional translations and what I believe is the preferred translation. These options reflect the alternative ways a word was used historically.

Word	Translation/Usage Options	Preferred Translation
<i>pornoi</i>	A male prostitute Illicit sex practices (fornicator) Any sexual immorality Metaphor for idolatry	Illicit sex practices (fornicator)
<i>eidōlōlatrai</i>	An idolater	An idolater
<i>moichoi</i>	An adulterer Figurative for unfaithfulness to God	An adulterer
<i>malakoi</i>	A male prostitute who plays the passive role A male slave who plays the passive role A boy in a pederastic relationship	A male prostitute who plays the passive role A male slave who plays the passive role A boy in a pederastic relationship

<i>arsenokoitēs</i>	A man bedder	The adult/active side of pederasty
	The adult/active side of pederasty	A man who takes the active role having sex with a male prostitute
	A man who takes the active role having sex with a male prostitute	
<i>kleptai</i>	A person who steals from another	A person who steals from another
<i>pleonektai</i>	A person who is greedy for gain	A person who is greedy for gain
	A covetous person	A covetous person
<i>oumethusoi</i>	A drunkard	A drunkard
<i>ouloidoroi</i>	An abusive person (verbally)	An abusive person (verbally)
<i>ousarpages</i>	One who takes by force	One who takes by force
	A rapacious person	A rapacious person
	A swindler	A swindler

From this brief analysis we can say with certainty that these are pretty nasty people doing pretty nasty things. Each term, and the terms in the aggregate, presents the antithesis of God and what God wants for or expects from humanity. If we compare this list to several items on the earlier list of practices considered abominations in the Old Testament, we will see a definite correlation. Paul was a rabbinic Jew, and he knew the Hebrew scriptures. He knew what was an abomination to God. Remember, an abomination is something deeply outrageous. In rabbinic Judaism, it meant that the Lord must separate from them and that they would lose their place in the land as God's covenant people. Idolatry, illicit sex, male (and female) prostitution, exploitation of the weak, cheaters, thieves, and those who oppress the poor and needy—the consequences of these would be on Paul's mind. All of these things are antithetical to God and the people God is calling into being. They are forms of injustice—things not as they ought to be—the very things from which God is redeeming his creation.

Three specific examples from the Old Testament will make the point. The first text is from the prophet Jeremiah. Notice the themes of injustice and idolatry or justice and faithfulness to YHWH that are clear in each:

If you truly reform your ways and your actions; if you treat each other justly; if you stop taking advantage of the immigrant, orphan, or widow; if you don't shed the blood of the innocent in this place, or go after other gods to your own ruin, only then will I dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave long ago to your ancestors for all time. And yet you trust in lies that will only hurt you. Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, sacrifice to Baal and go after other gods that you don't know, and then come and stand before me in this temple that bears my name, and say, "We are safe," only to keep on doing all these detestable things? (Jer 7:5-10)

Jeremiah's concern was for justice in the land of Israel. God will dwell with God's people wherever they deal justly with one another. But if they begin to chase after other gods and morally devolve into stealing, murder, adultery, making false statements, and making offerings to Baal, still assuming all is good, they are mistaken. They need to know that such things are an abomination to the Lord, and God will separate from them, leaving them to their own devices. They will create a culture of death instead of life. From the prophet's perspective, indeed from the perspective of the Old Testament, such courses ultimately result in the destruction of the community and its culture.

The association of all of these behaviors with idolatry is clear. A second text adds to the understanding and again is reflected in the vice list:

Judah did evil in the LORD's eyes. The sins they committed made the LORD angrier than anything their ancestors had done. They also built shrines, standing stones, and sacred poles* on top of every high hill and under every green tree. Moreover, the consecrated workers** in the land did detestable things, just like those nations that the LORD had removed among the Israelites. (1 Kgs 14:22-24)

* In Hebrew, *asherim* are perhaps objects devoted to the goddess Asherah (CEB).

** Traditionally, these are cultic prostitutes (CEB).

Once again it is the unfaithfulness to YHWH by chasing after other gods and the behaviors that typically attend the shift in worship/cultic practice that are an abomination.

The third text is from the prophet Ezekiel. This is an extended text that is informative because it sets the benefit to faithfulness to YHWH against unfaithfulness. Faithfulness propagates justice in the land, and unfaithfulness, injustice:

People are declared innocent when they act justly and responsibly. They don't eat on the hills or give their attention to the idols of the house of Israel. They don't defile the wives of their neighbors or approach menstruating women. They don't cheat anyone, but fulfill their obligations. They don't rob others, but give food to the hungry and clothes to the naked. They don't impose interest or take profit. They refrain from evil and settle cases between people fairly. They follow my regulations, keep my case laws, and act faithfully. Such people are innocent, and they will live, proclaims the LORD God. But suppose one of them has a violent child who sheds blood or does any one of these things, even though his parents didn't do any of them. He eats on the mountains, defiles his neighbor's wife, oppresses the poor and needy, robs others and doesn't fulfill his obligations, pays attention to the idols and does detestable things, and takes interest and profit. Should he live? He should not. He engaged in all these detestable practices. He will surely die, and his blood will be on him. (Ezek 18:5-13)

Two different lives, and two different lives lived. One promotes a culture of life; the other, death. From the Old Testament perspective, it is not possible to separate faith in YHWH and life in the land lived as it should be. Conversely, neither can one separate living in the land unjustly—life as it ought not to be—from idolatry. Each goes hand in hand with the other. We have seen this time and again in our study.

Now we will get back to Paul and 1 Corinthians and the vice list. This is not just a list, but it is also behaviors that are indicative of a culture that does not know God. But it is not an irreligious culture. No culture is, even those that deny God in our day. But specifically in the Corinthian context, Paul saw a culture chasing after all kinds of gods, sometimes in cultic practices, sometimes not. What he sees is a culture that is giving itself to all sorts of things that ultimately result in death not life. All would be idolatry. In our modern analysis, we would look at these as manifestations of systemic evil.

The kind of people represented in a vice list lived humanly debasing lives; they not only degraded themselves but also degraded everyone who came in contact with them. It is these types of people practicing these types of behaviors that create a culture of death. This is why these shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Their choices move them in the opposite direction. But we must also remember that it is these very people Paul expected the Corinthians to reach *and* that such were they when he found them: "And this is what some of you used to be" (1 Cor 6:11 NRSV).

Malakos and Arsenokoitēs

The focus now turns to the two words that are traditionally associated with homosexuality. Based upon the lexical study of the words above and the context in which they are found in 1 Corinthians 6, I believe these refer to truly loathsome practices.

Paul pairs *malakos* with *arsenokoitēs* in this vice list. It seems clear that the two reflect the two roles played in any sexual act in Roman culture, as discussed above; and in this sense, the Common English Bible translation gets it right in the note on the text where it says, "submissive and dominant male sexual partners." *Malakos* means "soft" or "effeminate." The effeminate in Roman culture was not necessarily a person with a homosexual orientation as we would describe it today. Remember, sexual orientation is a modern construct. Rather, a *malakos* would have been the person who played the receptive or passive role in intercourse. A *malakos* could be a male or a female though in this context it is likely a male. The *arsenokoitēs* is a man who takes the dominant/active or penetrative role in intercourse. Many biblical translations are not far from this. However, understanding requires more specificity as to what Paul was talking about. I believe there are three possible readings and one unlikely one. The focus in each one is what is meant by *malakos*. Once this word is understood, the meaning of *arsenokoitēs* becomes pretty clear.

Three Possible Readings and One Unlikely

Practice of Pederasty: Pederasty is the practice wherein an older man would have his "call boy" with whom he maintained a relationship. This would not be the kind of idealized pederasty of Classical Greece, but rather a more sexually focused relationship as a sexual outlet for an older man (Scroggs 1983, 62–65).

Boy Slaves: We have seen earlier that it was an accepted practice to require slaves to have sex with their masters. This sex could be with a male or female. But it had two important characteristics. First, the slave was forced to have sex with his or her master—though again in this case, the master was male. Second, the slave was to play the passive/receptive role in all sexual behaviors. There was no choice here.

Male Prostitute: We have also seen that there were male prostitutes that would sell their services to a whoremonger—a man who frequents prostitutes for sex. These prostitutes could have chosen to be a prostitute, or they could have been boys captured and sold as slaves to whoremasters. In the latter case, the boy had no choice.¹⁹

Unlikely Reading: Based upon this analysis, it seems pretty unlikely that Paul had in mind general same-sex relations. I do not mean that he thought some same-sex relations were valid. Rather, I am saying that when he talks about the despicable, he has specific practices in mind. I am suspect of the idea that Paul thought about what we know today as committed same-sex relationships and lumped them all in together. What Paul objects to and considers despicable, we do as well. In our day such practices would be called human trafficking, child abuse, molestation, and pedophilia. We, too, will not stand for such behaviors. Our culture today would be on the side of Paul, with some modifications based upon our greater biological and psychological knowledge.

Summary

Paul is concerned that the Corinthian Christians understand how they have been called out of the world of idolatry and loose living in which they had been living. This means that they should not be hauling one another into court. And even more, they should not defraud or treat one another unjustly. This was how they were; it is not how they should be.

1 Timothy 1:10—A Horrid Practice

A Brief Introduction to 1 Timothy

This letter to Timothy is one of three traditionally called the Pastoral Epistles. This is because they are written to either Timothy or Titus with the intent of providing them wisdom for dealing with some problems in the churches they were serving. Topics range from living as faithful Christians to church leadership and the way to guide teachers who were off the mark theologically. In fact, 1 Timothy admonishes Timothy to deal with people teaching a doctrine different than the one he had received:

When I left for Macedonia, I asked you to stay behind in Ephesus so that you could instruct certain individuals not to spread wrong teaching. They shouldn't pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. Their teaching only causes useless guessing games instead of faithfulness to God's way of doing things. The goal of instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. (1:3-5)

The author²⁰ explains that the aim of instruction (by teachers of the faith) is loving—lives flowing out of hearts that have been captured by authentic faith. But there were some teachers within the church that Timothy was sent

to serve who were teaching something else. At least part of what they were teaching had to do with Torah. In effect, the author is saying that they don't know what they are talking about. So he sets the record straight, explaining what and who Torah is for:²¹

Because they missed this goal, some people have been distracted by talk that doesn't mean anything. They want to be teachers of Law without understanding either what they are saying or what they are talking about with such confidence. Now we know that the Law is good if used appropriately. We understand this: the Law isn't established for a righteous person but for people who live without laws and without obeying any authority. They are the ungodly and the sinners. They are people who are not spiritual, and nothing is sacred to them. They kill their fathers and mothers, and murder others. *They are people who are sexually unfaithful, and people who have intercourse with the same sex. They are kidnappers, liars, individuals who give false testimonies in court, and those who do anything else that is opposed to sound teaching.* Sound teaching agrees with the glorious gospel of the blessed God that has been trusted to me. (1 Tim 1:6-11, emphasis added)

The Vice List

First Timothy 1:9-10 again has a vice list. As mentioned previously, vice lists were a common literary motif, and the author, as in 1 Corinthians, has used one to associate what is contrary to God. It is clear from the text that it is for these kinds of people that law is meant, not for the "righteous." In the context of this letter, the "righteous" would mean the faithful Christians. It is not clear exactly what doctrine the false teachers were expounding. Some suggest they were trying to teach the Jewish Torah but did not really understand it. Others suggest it is a reference to an incipient gnosticism (the meaningless talk). It may have been some mixture of both. The author does make it clear that their understanding of the purpose of law was not correct.

Many commentators see in this list direct allusions to the Ten Commandments (Mounce 2000, 30; Oden 1989, 39). The CEB is a dynamic translation so it is difficult to point to a Greek word and know the English equivalent. To make this possible structure easier to see, the NRSV has been provided so that the corresponding Greek and English words can be laid out in the table below. Verses 9-10 have been segmented and labeled in the table somewhat to reflect such allusions. Notice that items in rows A through C each have to do with a relationship to God. Rows D through F have to do with relationships with others. This follows somewhat the structure of the commandments as is illustrated:

Some people have deviated from these and turned to meaningless talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions. Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, *fornicators, sodomites, slave traders*, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. (1 Tim 1:6-11 NRSV, emphasis added)

Just how precise the author was trying to be in his list is open to interpretation. But that he had the commandments in mind is compelling because of the statement that the false teachers do not have a proper understanding of Torah and the commandments represent a summation of Torah. This is not the place for an extended discussion of the proper understanding of Torah. But the author's point is that Torah is not for the innocent but for people who practice these behaviors, presumably because it points out the behaviors as being unjust.

Row	Greek Text	Behaviors (NRSV Translation)	Offense Committed
A	<i>anomois de kai anypotaktois</i>	lawless and disobedient,	Against God
B	<i>asebesin kai hamartōlois</i>	the godless and sinful,	Against God
C	<i>anosiois kai bebēlois</i>	the unholy and profane,	Against God
D1	<i>patralōais kai mētralōais</i>	those who kill their father or mother,	Dishonor of mother and father
D2	<i>androphonois</i>	murderers,	Murder
E1	<i>pornois arsenokoitais</i>	fornicators, sodomites	Adultery
E2	<i>Andrapodistais</i>	slave traders (kidnappers),	Stealing
F	<i>pseustais epiorkois</i>	liars, perjurers,	Bearing false witness

G	<i>kai ei ti heteron tē hygiainousēa didaskalia antikeitai</i>	and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching	Against anything else contrary to faith
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Close examination reveals that they are not just a string of fourteen words (and a phrase to catch anything else he had not covered). Some are paired intentionally by the addition of the Greek word *kai* (English, “and”). Others appear to be thematically related, such as liars and perjurers. This leaves the three words in rows E1 and E2 (shaded in gray). There are two possible interpretations. The first is that the two words of E1 are related and must be seen as a unit. E2 then stands alone as a specific example of stealing. However, as explained above, slave traders were known not only to trade slaves but also to capture people and make them slaves or to steal slaves from one owner and sell them to a different owner. So, a second interpretive possibility is that E1 and E2 form a single piece together, the three representing a social practice that the author finds to be a violation of two commandments: committing adultery and stealing. This latter interpretation, I believe, makes the best reading of the text.

The Three Words

We are now ready to apply the results of the prior word studies. The three words are *pornois*, *arsenokoitais*, and *andrapodistais*. The following table, like before, provides possible translation options for each of the three words in 1 Timothy and then what I believe to be the preferred interpretation of each.

Word	Translation/Usage Options	Preferred Translation
<i>pornois</i>	A male prostitute A catamite Any sexual immorality Metaphor for idolatry	A male prostitute or catamite

<i>arsenokoitais</i>	A man bedder The adult side of pederasty A man who takes the active role while having sex with a male prostitute	A man who takes the active role while having sex with a male slave or prostitute
<i>andrapodistais</i>	A slave dealer or kidnapper A man who steals humans and sells them into slavery, often prostitution	A man who steals humans and sells them into slavery, often prostitution

Putting it all together then, *pornos* probably meant a male prostitute or at least a male who performed the passive role in same-sex behavior, often under compulsion. The *arsenokoitēs* was a man who used a male prostitute (catamite) as a passive partner or a man who used his slave boys under compulsion. This is suggested due to the proximity of the word *andrapodistēs* to the other two words. Therefore, it is likely that it reflects the practice of using boy slaves as sex objects. These boy slaves could have been captured and sold into prostitution by the *andrapodistēs* (the slave trader), or they could be the personal slaves of the *arsenokoitēs* who perhaps obtained the slave boy via the *andrapodistēs*. Either way it is an ugly practice. Today we would call it human trafficking, the sex trade, and pedophilia. Recall that Greek and Roman sexual practices expected the man to play the dominant or active role. But the practice is obviously more horrific than the role played. Most of these men (*arsenokoitēs*) would be considered heterosexuals (or at least bisexual) by our modern definition. The three words together list the typical Greco-Roman practice of a dominant male expressing his sexual desire with another male; in all probability it was a young male slave or a prostitute who was probably a slave or possibly a freedman who had been stolen and sold into slavery. The author of 1 Timothy had in mind practices that today would get a person locked up for life. These were terribly abusive acts of self-indulged men.

Romans 1:18-32—Idolatry and Its Outcomes

Although many who are opposed to same-sex marriage and LGBT ordination may agree that the Sodom story and the abomination of Leviticus

are not really germane to the current discussion, they give heavy significance to Paul in his letter to the Romans. This text, above all others, they believe, makes it clear that Paul was opposed to same-sex behavior of any kind.

What Is Paul Talking About?

Is Paul talking about the modern same-sex couple who lives in a long-term committed relationship and behave, in all other ways, like a loving, committed married opposite-gender couple? Is this Paul's concern? Does he have in mind the middle-aged lesbian couple who has quietly lived their lives together for 25 years? Is he thinking about the seventy-year-old man who sits beside the bed of his aging male partner of 40 years who is dying of cancer? Are these the people Paul has in mind? The disparity between these two instances and Paul's description in Romans 1 is enormous. So what does Paul mean when he speaks of exchanging one kind of sexual behavior for another? We must answer these questions in our study of this primary New Testament text that clearly is talking about some form of same-sex behaviors.

Paul is clear about his main concern. As he looks out at Greco-Roman culture and its sexual practices (along with many other practices and behaviors), he sees a world drowning in destructive idolatry and, again, the degrading practices that attend idolatry. We must be clear about what is meant by idolatry, however.

The Righteousness of God Reprised

Any exposition of Romans 1:18 and following must begin with Romans 1:16-17. This is because it is the initial statement of Paul's entire argument that extends to the end of chapter 11. Chapter 12 then develops the practical implications of the theology that has preceded it.²² Here Paul is telling the story of God's faithfulness to God's covenant promise to heal, restore, and complete creation. Paul calls this the gospel—the good news story—and it is for everyone who has faith, who trusts in the one true God and nothing else. We can only assume that Paul is aware that this “good news” was different than the “good news” about the salvation offered through Caesar.²³ Rather, this gospel gives the “righteousness of God” full expression: “I'm not ashamed of the gospel: it is God's own power for salvation to all who have faith in God, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. *God's righteousness* is being revealed in the gospel, from faithfulness for faith, as it is written, *The righteous person will live by faith*” (Rom 1:16-17, emphasis added).²⁴

N. T. Wright has dramatically opened up this key phrase “the righteousness of God” for many of us who have struggled to understand the argument of Romans by reanchoring this phrase in the covenant history of Israel. Wright summarizes his exposition of Romans as follows:

Romans is the letter in which he (Paul) plants this goal of the mission and unity of the church in the firmest possible theological soil, i.e., the exposition of the righteousness of God—which I take to mean essentially the covenant faithfulness, the covenant justice, of the God who made promises to Abraham, promises of a worldwide family characterized by faith, in and through whom the evil of the world would be undone. (1993, 234)

We discussed this in the earlier chapter on creation theology. As a Christian and someone from a Reformed theological background, I was taught that this phrase referred to something I was given as a believer—namely, God’s righteousness. This of course would be consistent with an interpretation that Romans 1–8 is about how I am saved, justified, sanctified, glorified, and so on. Now all of that is certainly addressed in Romans 1–8, but that is not the primary thrust. The primary thrust, as Wright has insisted, is about God’s covenant faithfulness. It is God’s own righteousness that has been revealed. God faithfully keeps the covenant promise to creation, and God is calling out a new Israel, a new covenant community comprised of all kinds of people—Jew and Gentile. (Galatians takes this further.²⁵) That covenant faithfulness is captured better in the phrase “God’s righteousness” as translated in the CEB. So it’s not about me or something I get for having faith; it is about God and who God is and how God has fulfilled that covenant promise. This emphasis comes to a focal point at Romans 3:21–23: “But now God’s righteousness has been revealed apart from the Law, which is confirmed by the Law and the Prophets. God’s righteousness comes *through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ* for all who have faith in him. There’s no distinction. All have sinned and fall short of God’s glory” (emphasis added). The covenant faithfulness of God has been fully expressed through the faithfulness of Jesus to be faithful to his calling, even to the point of death.²⁶

If we go back to the beginning and look again at Romans 1:16–17, Paul’s overarching concern is with how God has acted to fulfill God’s covenant promise. The story of Jesus is how God has acted, and it is about this that Paul is not ashamed.

With this auspicious beginning, Paul launches into his argument. Romans can be a complicated book, so before we zoom in on the relevant text in chapter 1, we need an overview through 3:24. Romans was written to inform

the Roman church—which Paul had not started and had never visited—that he intended to stop there on his way to Spain (15:21). *But in addition and perhaps more to the point, he is writing to the Roman church that is comprised of Jews and Gentiles, who are not getting along.* Paul intends to show how all of the threads of humanity end up in one large family of God that is both Jew and Greek (i.e., Jew plus everybody else). Evidently some Jewish Christians were acting a bit superior to their Gentile converts. Conversely, as demonstrated later in chapters 9 through 11, some Gentiles did not fully appreciate the role the Jews had played in working out God’s new creation project.²⁷ So amazingly, Paul writes the most mind-blowing letter in history to emphasize God’s covenant promise to heal creation.

The first part of the argument from 1:18 to 3:24 levels the playing field. Is there a place for the Jews to feel superior to the Gentiles? At first it would appear so, for Paul, in 1:18–32, brings forth unflattering images of what Jews thought about Gentiles. Every good Hellenistic Jew²⁸ would have recognized his language and the centrality of the Gentile problem of idolatry, as we will see momentarily. The language Paul uses in 1:18–32 is reminiscent of language in the Wisdom of Solomon, which he would most certainly have in his literary repertoire along with the Hebrew scriptures.²⁹ The echoes of Wisdom 14 are obvious to anyone who has read 1:18–32. It would have certainly been clear to Paul’s Jewish readers. But as Nissinen says, it’s a “rhetorical trap” for his imaginary Jewish conversation partner (scholars refer to this as an interlocutor): “The description of the corruption of humankind in Romans 1 is an introduction to chapters 2 and 3, where Paul proceeds to assert that the Jews are really no better off than the gentiles if they imagine they can be saved because of the Law and circumcision” ([1998] 2004, 111). “So what are we saying? Are we better off? Not at all. We have already stated the charge: both Jews and Greeks are all under the power of sin. As it is written, *There is no righteous person, not even one.*” (Rom 3:9–10).

With this larger backdrop in mind, we zoom in on chapter 1.

Without Excuse

In Romans 1:18, Paul begins to lay out the problem. In other words, why is it that God has had to act in such a manner to begin with (i.e., to reveal God’s righteousness)? He begins with the worst Gentile behavior and specifically idolatry. It is a fairly typical Jewish critique of Gentile culture. Humans have turned from a living relationship with their creator and replaced that relationship with the worship of gods they have made out of things that are merely part of the creation:

God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodly behavior and the injustice of human beings who silence the truth with injustice. This is because what is known about God should be plain to them because God made it plain to them. Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—God's eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they are understood through the things God has made. (Rom 1:18-20a)

In response to this faithlessness, God's wrath has been revealed as well. Wrath sounds scary, but it is not for the reasons people often assume. Too often God is portrayed as a large, powerful, usually male being enraged by unfaithful humanity and ready to strike down people for their sinfulness. But this is not what the "wrath of God" means. The wrath of God is a way of saying, "You want to worship something or someone other than me; then have it your way." And further, to put it in a phrase that seems to be popular today, "How is that working out for you?" More seriously, God lets us have our own way, and God lets us suppress the truth about God, even though everywhere we look, we see God's creation. This is consistent with the overview of creation and the kind of universe God created with its freedom. Here we see that very thing worked out from Paul's theological perspective; that is, he expresses how human choice to reject God had worked out among the Gentiles. So Paul continues:

So humans are without excuse. Although they knew God, they didn't honor God as God or thank him. Instead, their reasoning became pointless, and their foolish hearts were darkened. While they were claiming to be wise, they made fools of themselves. *They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images that look like mortal humans: birds, animals, and reptiles.* (Rom 1:20b-23, emphasis added)

Humans cannot claim that God is not made known. The evidence for a creator is all around. The Gentiles simply choose to reject what is obvious and go their own way, doing their own thing. It is pitiable if nothing else! Let's again step back and generalize from the text to include our modern society. The creator of the universe creates humans in the divine image to be vice regents or stewards over the rest of God's creation. Yet instead of embracing that, we turn our backs, and our thinking becomes foolish. How so? Look at what we exchanged for a relationship with God! We even turned animals into little gods; and though they are precious to God's creation, they are not God. In fact, they are not on the same level as humans, who alone were created in

the image of God. Yet that is what we did/do. If that is not foolish, I don't know what is! Idolatry among many other things is foolish.

Paul is setting the trap. Look at what these foolish Gentiles have done. They make little images, set up little alters in their houses, and worship what they made with their own hands. Keeping with the typical Jewish critique of Gentile idolatry, the Wisdom of Solomon, which is a book of the Apocrypha, tells a story to show how pathetic it is:

Imagine this. A woodcutter with some skill cuts down a pliable shrub. He carefully strips the outside covering of the plant and then, because he has some skill, shapes it into a tool for daily use. Afterward he picks up the leftover bark that he had stripped away and uses it to cook a meal for himself. He eats his fill and then picks up one of the leftover pieces of wood, one that wasn't good for anything, a crooked hard piece with broken ends where the branches had been. Having nothing else to do, he takes this piece of wood and starts carving. By a process of trial and error, he's finally able to give it a human shape, or he fashions it into something that vaguely resembles some miserable creature. He covers it with red paint, giving it a rosy hue where the creature's flesh is supposed to be. He covers over every flaw in the wood. Finally, he makes a perfect little shrine for it and fastens the shrine securely to the wall with a nail so that it doesn't fall down. He knows full well that it can't do anything for itself. After all, it's only an image, and it requires help. (13:11-16)

We saw the emphasis on idolatry earlier in the Old Testament texts, and it is at the forefront here as well. For the Jews, all evil has its origin in idolatry. The Wisdom of Solomon makes this precise point:

The very notion of idols was the beginning of immoral sexual activity. The invention of idols ruined human life. (14:12)

The worship of nameless idols is the origin of all evil—its cause as well as its result. (14:27)

N. T. Wright, commenting on the Wisdom of Solomon, says that the author "did not believe that the created order was itself evil, but that human beings, by committing idolatry, distorted their own humanity into sinful behavior and courted corruption and ultimately death" (2003, 727).

Degrading Passions and Idolatry

Where do things go from here? Once a person starts down the road to foolishness (i.e., idolatry) and away from the God who alone can show us

where life is to be found, things go badly. When Paul says, “so God abandoned them to their hearts’ desires,” he is saying again, God let us—humanity—have what we wanted and what our hearts would produce if left to our own devices (Rom 1:24). C. S. Lewis says in *The Great Divorce*: “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done’” (2009, 75). Exchange the truth for a lie, exchange the glory for the worship of anything else, and one will quickly devolve into all manner of debauchery and promiscuity. This is consistent with the analysis of Genesis 19:1-11, Leviticus 18:22-24 and 20:3, and 1 Corinthians 6. All point to what happens to human society when we turn our back on God. We humans have to worship something, even if we make it up. Even one of Bob Dylan’s songs from the 1970s, when for a brief moment he embraced the Christian faith, says:

You’re gonna have to serve somebody.
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord,
but you’re gonna serve somebody. (Dylan 1979)

Paul continues in Romans:

So God abandoned them to their hearts’ desires, which led to the moral corruption of degrading their own bodies with each other. They traded God’s truth for a lie, and they worshipped and served the creation instead of the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. That’s why God abandoned them to degrading lust. Their females traded natural sexual relations for unnatural sexual relations. Also, in the same way, the males traded natural sexual relations with females, and burned with lust for each other. Males performed shameful actions with males, and they were paid back with the penalty they deserved for their mistake in their own bodies. (1:24-27)

This is the text where interpreters see Paul declaring that same-sex behavior is a degrading passion. In fact, it very much looks like he is saying just that; and in fact, within Paul’s frame of reference as a first-century Christian Jew, he is. But remember that the larger theme is about idolatry and idol worship, so we must consider again what idolatry means and then apply it to this text.

Recall that idolatry is choosing to worship something other than the creator God. But what does that mean? To worship something is to ascribe value to it and then *desire* that thing, to give yourself to it. Again, Dylan’s song: “You’re gonna have to serve somebody.” Wright comments, “Humans are worshipping creatures, and even when they don’t consciously or even unconsciously worship any kind of god, they are all involved in the adoring

pursuit of something greater than themselves” (2013b, 36). To worship anything, we must draw the conclusion that if I give myself to this god, this god will do something for me. There is a transaction at work. We give ourselves to those things (gods) that we believe will provide us the “life” we long for and the prestige we so desire. If you believe a necklace with a jeweled reptile will protect you, you will also be inclined to give yourself to that reptile and do what you have been told it expects of you. If you believe that always being seen with so-and-so will bring you the prestige you so long for, you will do what you have to in order to be seen with them—perhaps at any cost. If you believe that sexual orgasm easily and often is the road to making you feel powerful and virile, you will look for it wherever, whenever, and however you can. In every one of these scenarios, it is behavior based upon the believed promise that promotes choices. In every case, from the simple idol worship of a reptile to the insatiable pursuit of sex, a person gives a piece of herself or himself away in exchange for the promise made by the object of pursuit—the idol. When Paul says they “burned with lust for each other” (Rom 1:27), he is providing an apt description of persons who have given themselves fully with the expectation that there is a payoff for doing so.

Given the sexual morality of ancient Rome and especially in Corinth where Paul probably was when he wrote Romans, it is not difficult to see how his description of human idolatry would look. Corinth was a notoriously corrupt and promiscuous city. If there was a place where human sexual passions had run amok, it was Corinth. Paul’s description is not an abstract expression of how we humans turn creation into gods to which we give ourselves. In such settings as Corinth, sexual desires were unleashed—men with women, men with men, women with women. One can barely imagine how perverse, exploitive, and abusive such practices were. Idolatry destroys humanity. Desires run amok. This is what I believe Paul means when he says, “they were paid back with the penalty they deserved for their mistake in their own bodies” (Rom 1:27; Nissinen [1998] 2004, 108–9).

From a theological standpoint, I do not believe Paul’s concern is that “you are deserving of judgment because of all of your horrible, bad behavior” (my paraphrase). Rather, I think Paul’s concern is for how destructive idolatry is to human beings who were created to bear God’s image. So, far from expressing that image in their relationships with one another and even themselves, they were using one another for their own consumptive purposes. If idolatry is the transaction that says to the object of worship, “You be to me all that I need for life. In exchange I will give myself to you and your demands even if they are exploitive, abusive, tyrannical, rapacious, overbearing, dominating, and

deceitful.” These actions are simply the way people give themselves in order to receive what the god promises. Paul saw human life being sucked out of people at every level of society. When he uses the phrase, “received in their own persons the due penalty of their error,” he is not happy that they got their just deserts. He is appalled and weeps, for this was not why God created us. God gave them over to what they desired, but false gods cannot deliver; and in the end, all they got was death. This is the tragedy of the human story—or, more precisely, human sin.

Dehumanized Humanity

The result is dehumanized humanity. Far from reflecting the glory of the living God, humans begin to shrink and shrivel, and given enough time, they cease to be human. N. T. Wright says:

When people continually and consistently refuse to worship this God, they progressively reflect this image less and less. Instead, they reflect the images of what they are worshipping. Since all else other than the true creator God is heading for death, this means that they buy into a system of death. Thus, failure to worship the God revealed in Jesus leads, by one’s own choice, to an eventual erasing of that which makes us truly human. I think this is the way a doctrine of hell might be restated today. (2014)

In *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis observes this specific dynamic. Humans who are continually given the opportunity to enter heaven reject it and in the process become less and less human, more and more separated from others into the gray world of their own imaginings. In his book *Mere Christianity*, he follows this same theme: “The most dangerous thing you can do is to take any one impulse of your own nature and set it up as the thing you ought to follow at all costs. There’s not one of them which won’t make us into devils if we set it up as an absolute guide” ([1952] 2009, 11).

When we read in Paul’s letter the language about giving up natural intercourse for unnatural, don’t read it as heterosexual versus homosexual sex. It should be read as life versus death.

About That “Natural” Word

What about the language that would appear to specifically address some kind of same-sex behavior? Is that what Paul means or isn’t it? I think it would be hard to argue that he has something other than same-sex behavior in mind. We must remember he was a good Jew. And it is clear that he is well versed

in Second Temple literature such as the Wisdom of Solomon. For post-exilic Jews, same-sex eroticism was repugnant. It was not considered natural for a woman to play the role of a man—that is, the active or penetrative partner. Such behavior masculinized the active partner. It was not natural for a man to play the female role and allow himself to be penetrated. Such behavior feminized the passive partner. Paul meant this more in the sense of the normal order of things and that to depart from this was to turn social order upside down (Nissinen [1998] 2004, 106–8). Men are the active partner; women are the passive partner. Exchanging these roles disrupts life. It is “unnatural.”³⁰

Those who want to absolutize the idea of *natural* miss the central point, not just of what Paul is saying, but of what God has said and Jesus clearly said. Humans were created to love God and love one another. Idolatry turns one away from love, and healthy desire morphs into lust. Lust is not love, and it is lust that Paul is pointing to. But let us not forget how Paul completes Romans 1:

Since they didn’t think it was worthwhile to acknowledge God, God abandoned them to a defective mind to do inappropriate things. So they were filled with all injustice, wicked behavior, greed, and evil behavior. They are full of jealousy, murder, fighting, deception, and malice. They are gossips, they slander people, and they hate God. They are rude and proud, and they brag. They invent ways to be evil, and they are disobedient to their parents. They are without understanding, disloyal, without affection, and without mercy. Though they know God’s decision that those who persist in such practices deserve death, they not only keep doing these things but also approve others who practice them. (vv. 28-32)

In summary, whatever Paul means in Romans 1, it is not to be compared to all same-sex relationships. If there is a comparison to make, it is with behaviors that originate in desires not directed toward the love of God and the other. That is what the rest of chapter 1 points to.

- We do not know much of anything about same-sex relationships in Paul’s era that approximate modern same-sex partners in a long-term committed relationship based upon love.
- We do know many of the sexual practices of Greeks and Romans. We know those practices would be more comparable to the kinds of promiscuous lifestyles we see practiced today by both same-sex and opposite-sex persons.

- The most we can say then, relative to Paul and current same-sex committed relationships, is that Paul is silent on the issue, though as a Hellenistic Jew whose understanding of social structures was fairly consistent with the rest of the Jewish people, he would have found same-sex behavior an affront to the natural order—meaning male as dominant, female as passive.
- We can (and must) conclude that his concern is what happens to human beings, created in the image of God and who are meant to live that way. When they turn from God and make gods out of anything else, they debase their own humanity as well as that of others. That was Paul's concern, and that ought to be ours.

Jude 5-7—A Strange Text

Some who oppose same-sex marriage and homosexuality in general refer to Jude 7. This short letter is a truly odd one. The issue is common enough: concern that Christians are allowing pagan influences to infiltrate their community. To counter that, the author wants to remind them of a couple of stories and what happened in them. The first is easy enough for us to understand, for it is the story of Israel: “I want to remind you of something you already know very well. The Lord, who once saved a people out of Egypt, later destroyed those who didn't maintain their faith” (Jude 5).

But starting with verse 6, things turn fantastically strange:

I remind you too of the angels who didn't keep their position of authority but deserted their own home. The Lord has kept them in eternal chains in the underworld until the judgment of the great day. In the same way, Sodom and Gomorrah and neighboring towns practiced immoral sexual relations and pursued other sexual urges. By undergoing the punishment of eternal fire, they serve as a warning. (vv. 6-7)

Two additional reminders are given, but only the first is of concern to us. It is a reference to an equally odd text (odd to us, anyway) in Genesis 6:

When the number of people started to increase throughout the fertile land, daughters were born to them. The divine beings saw how beautiful these human women were, so they married the ones they chose. In those days, giants lived on the earth and also afterward, when divine beings and human daughters had sexual relations and gave birth to children. These were the ancient heroes, famous men. (vv. 1-2, 4)

Our only concern with these texts is the intermarriage between human women and divine beings. What follows this story is the great flood. The author of Jude in the tradition of other Second Temple writings concluded that at least part of the reason for the flood was the intermixing of divine and human beings, thus blurring the line between the heavenly and earthly. Consequently, these divine beings await their final judgment. (Second Peter 2:4-6 also relates to this story.) Next the author references Sodom and Gomorrah. Second Temple Judaism's interpretation of that event was not about potential homosexual behavior but about crossing the line between divine beings (Lot's guests) and humans. The rape would have been against divine beings (Nissinen [1998] 2004, 90-93)

The author of Jude is trying to warn his Christian friends about the danger of following “in the footsteps of Cain” (Jude 11). The text has nothing to do with homosexuality—or perhaps more precisely homoeroticism. Furthermore, we have already seen that the “sin of Sodom” was not homosexuality. The sin of Sodom was idolatry that manifested itself in wanton disregard for basic moral decency and social justice even for the Middle Eastern nations of the time.

Mark 10:2-12—Jesus and Marriage

This text, perhaps more than any other, has caused me to pause over the years. Here we are, dealing with the reported words of Jesus. You don't get any closer to the mind of God than this: “Jesus said to them, ‘He wrote this commandment for you because of your unyielding hearts. At the beginning of creation, *God made them male and female. Because of this, a man should leave his father and mother and be joined together with his wife, and the two will be one flesh.* So they are no longer two but one flesh” (Mark 10:5-8).

If we were to isolate all of scripture to this text, it would be difficult to avoid the conclusion that Jesus does not support same-sex marriage. But before rushing to judgment we must, as I have said previously, take these words in their context. What is the issue? It is clear from verse 5 that Jesus is responding to something, and his answer is intended to address whatever was inquired of him. So who was he responding to, and what was the issue? Let's look first at the larger context. Here is a full reading of the text.

Some Pharisees came and, trying to test him, they asked, “Does the Law allow a man to divorce his wife?” Jesus answered, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a divorce certificate and to divorce his wife.” Jesus said to them, “He wrote this commandment

for you because of your unyielding hearts. At the beginning of creation, *God made them male and female. Because of this, a man should leave his father and mother and be joined together with his wife, and the two will be one flesh.* So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, humans must not pull apart what God has put together.” Inside the house, the disciples asked him again about this. He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if a wife divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” (Mark 10:2-12)

The inquirers are the Pharisees, and the issue is divorce. We know that the Pharisees sometimes asked Jesus questions in order to trap him. They wanted to see if he would say something that they could use against him. It is no different here. They wanted to know if he would support their reading of Torah. As they read it, Moses allowed men easily to dismiss their wives. In their culture, that meant a woman was cast out of her home and hopefully back to her original family. But to be sent back was a disgrace on the family and possibly a hardship. This does not even begin to describe what it meant for the woman. So, far from supporting this callous practice, Jesus points out that the only reason Moses allowed the practice of divorce was because of their stubborn hearts. The certificate of dismissal was meant to protect the dispossessed wife. The husband could not merely kick her out. When breaking a covenant, he did have obligations. But this was not how God intended human relationships to unfold. A marriage partnership—a covenant—was intended to be permanent. By appealing to Genesis 2, Jesus makes this point.

Does this insight about divorce preclude same-sex marriage? It really doesn't. Same-sex marriage was unheard of in first-century Judaism. It was barely heard of in Rome. Jesus was talking about how relationships between men and women should be committed and permanent in that culture, in which women had few rights.

Jesus's response to the Pharisees is germane to any type of marriage, however. It speaks to a culture that sees relationships as transient. When we consider the affirmation of same-sex marriage, the expectation of a lasting commitment must be part of that discussion. This is difficult for many couples, whether gay or straight. Yet it is ironic that in most church traditions today, divorce is common, and people who have been through a divorce are not precluded from full participation in the life of the church, including ordained leadership and remarriage.

Summary of the Biblical Texts

What can we say then about these texts that are the traditional sources of the whole range of beliefs about homosexuality?

- The “sin of Sodom” pertains to a society whose idolatry had devolved into a culture of degradation and injustice and whose victims cried out for justice.
- The offense of the Sodomites was a radical failure of hospitality that, consistent with the evil that had engulfed the culture, included a crowd intent on violent gang rape. It was not an issue of heterosexual versus homosexual behavior. Their determination to do violence to the stranger—and in the perception of Jude, a divine stranger—was the offense.
- The ancient Near Eastern cultures, the Classic Greek culture, and the Greco-Roman culture all subscribed to a natural order in which the male was to play the insertive or active role and the female the receptive or passive role. Sex was conditioned by gender roles, which is what Paul means in Romans by “according to nature.” To act “against nature” was to have men playing the role of a woman, which meant the passive, receptive role.
- The idea of *nature* in biblical times does not have the same meaning as *nature* over the past thousand years, when philosophers or scientists describe the “laws of nature,” which reflect alleged rules that cause the universe to unfold as it does. To read the modern scientific use of the term back into Paul's use of the concept of nature is to misinterpret Paul.
- The abominations to which the Leviticus passages refer are practices that exploit and abuse the other. Within the cultural context of post-exilic Israel, they referred to practices that threatened the clan by compromising the “natural” order of male dominance. These were the practices of Israel's neighbors that Israel was to avoid.
- Prostitution practices exploited and abused the stranger: the immigrant slave, the poor, and the powerless, who were also made in the image of God; therefore these acts were an abomination.
- Paul rejected the practice of whoremongers (*arsenikoitēs*) who (a) used and abused their own boy slaves or those boys sold into prostitution for

sexual gratification, (b) used male prostitutes (*malakos*) who may have offered sexual services for a fee, or (c) practiced pederasty. He may have meant all of them. In all cases, the *arsenokoitēs* used sex for self-serving pleasure at the expense of the *malakos*.

- The issue in Romans is human idolatry, the rejection of the creator God whose presence is obvious all around them and the choice to worship other things; and with that worship comes practices that are comparable to what today most people would consider promiscuous lifestyles.
- Theologically, these kinds of behaviors are consistent with idolatry—turning sexual pleasure into a god and giving oneself to it and taking what one can to satisfy selfish desires.

To the extent this analysis is faithful to the biblical stories, one can conclude that the Bible is silent on the forms of committed same-sex relationships that are the center of the modern discussion. At the same time, the Bible is exceedingly clear about the dehumanizing effects of turning sexual pleasures and their pursuits into gods, regardless of the kinds of sexual expression—gay or straight.

Notes

1. For more reading on the life and roles of Roman women, see *Roman Women* by Eve D'Ambra (2006) or *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life* by Lynn H. Cohick (2009).
2. Most of the literature we have from the ancient world was written by upper-class men. This means their perspectives and values were reflected in what they wrote. There was a female writer named Sappho (ca. 630 BC) who lived on the Island of Lesbos. It is from this island and Sappho that we get our word *lesbian*. (Nissinen 1998 [2004], 74–76).
3. The relationship was hierarchical, but obligations were mutual. The *patronus* was the protector, sponsor, and benefactor of the client; the technical term for this protection was *patrocinium* (Quinn 1982, 117).
4. In a patron-client social structure, there is always someone to whom you owe allegiance as well as someone who owes it to you. Within such a structure, a man may have someone with whom he plays the active role. But likewise, there may be someone to whom he is subservient, and thus he plays the passive role.
5. We have already explored the current viewpoint that human sexuality falls along a continuum between heterosexuality and homosexuality, with most humans falling somewhere between. But the point is that it was binary in the ancient world.

6. They were a Jewish ascetic sect. In some ways they were like the Essenes, yet they were different in that they were also influenced by Hellenism and therefore Platonism. For more information, visit the website for the Jewish Encyclopedia, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14366-therapeutae>.
7. A catamite was a boy or man who was the receiving partner in sex. It comes from the Latin word *catamitus*.
8. This text and many others like it have been traditionally understood as referring to sacred prostitution. Recent scholarship has cast a pretty dark shadow over the whole constructed world of sacred prostitution. It is not in the purview of this book to go into this, for it does not support my argument. See *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* by Stephanie Lynn Budin (2008).
9. A mash-up is a product that brings together several different content pieces and puts them together—or mashes them together.
10. All of these words we read through our twenty-first-century lenses, importing what we know into how we understand them.
11. Gagnon subscribes to the reading of the compound word *man bedder*, meaning a man who goes to bed with males: “It is a neologism, occurring for the first time in extant literature here in 1 Cor 6:9 and later in 1 Tim 1:10” (2001).
12. Scroggs goes on to limit the meaning to Greek pederasty, but subsequent scholars have mostly set this view aside.
13. Penetrative practices included vaginal (in women), intercrural, anal, and oral.
14. The Greek words usually associated with formal pederasty were *erastes* for the dominant partner and *eromenos* for the passive.
15. See also Nissinen [1998] 2004.
16. It has become customary within scholarly circles to look at these vice lists used by New Testament authors as relatively standard lists that would have been commonplace in the first century. Paul, for example, pulls from these lists multiple times and in different configurations to meet his purposes. These lists would have been known to his readers. See Harrell 1999.
17. The CEB conflates the two Greek words *malakos* and *arsenokoitēs* into the phrase “both participants in same-sex intercourse.”
18. The Greek is the plural second person pronoun. It is important in this text to understand that Paul is speaking to them collectively. Thus I have inserted the word *all* in brackets to emphasize this point.
19. There are some who would suggest that a fourth alternative would be male sacred prostitutes. But as mentioned before, current scholarship has brought the entire sacred prostitute theory into question. Further research would be required for this to be added to the list here.
20. The letters say they are from Paul, but many scholars do not think Paul the apostle is in fact the author. But for the purposes of this discussion, it really does not

matter. The Pastoral Letters are part of the “received text” and as such are part of our rule of faith.

21. There is a secondary discussion that is beyond the scope of this study that considers the question: Who really was under Torah? In reading Paul in Romans, it is clear that the Jews alone were under Torah. Gentiles were still accountable to God for their idolatry but not because of a failure to live according to Torah, which was part of the covenant God made with Israel.

22. I do not mean to suggest there were not Christian life implications prior to chapter 12. Rather, my point is that it is at Romans 12:1 that Paul himself gives a large *therefore* that points forward. Given all that has proceeded, these are some real implications for life together in the Roman church that is comprised of Jews and Gentiles alike.

23. The most divine Caesar...we should consider equal to the Beginning of all things...; for when everything was falling [into disorder] and tending toward dissolution, he restored it once more and gave to the whole world a new aura; Caesar...the common good Fortune of all...the beginning of life and vitality...All the cities unanimously adopt the birthday of the divine Caesar as the new beginning of the year...Whereas Providence, which has regulated our whole existence...has brought our life to the climax of perfection in giving to us [the emperor] Augustus, whom it [Providence] filled with strength for the welfare of men, and who being sent to us and our descendants as Savior, has put an end to war and has set all things in order; and [whereas,] having become [god] manifest (*phaneis*), Caesar has fulfilled all the hopes of earlier times...in surpassing all the benefactors who preceded him..., and whereas, finally, the birthday of the god [Augustus] has been for the whole world the beginning of good news (*euangelion*) concerning him [therefore let a new era begin from his birth]. (Dittenberger 1905 in Horsley 2003, 27–28)

24. In the CEB, the phrase *dikaiousunē theou* is translated “God’s righteousness.”

25. Gal 3:28-29: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (NRSV).

26. See Phil 2:8.

27. This phrase comes from the tagline of a new church in Irvine, California, that my wife Debbie and I often participate in. It is called Canvas Church: Inviting everyone to join in God’s project of new creation (see CanvasOC.org).

28. Hellenistic Jews were those who did not live in Palestine and who were more likely to be influenced by Greek and Roman culture.

29. Paul may have used the Septuagint (LXX), which was a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. The Wisdom of Solomon would have been part of that collection.

30. This is consistently Gagnon’s view, but as I have said, I believe this reflects his own presuppositions. There are good arguments regarding “what is natural” referring to what are the normal—for them—practices. We see this in the situation in 1 Corinthians when Paul states that it is not natural for a man to have long hair.

Constructing a Theology of Inclusion

A Fixed Point in an Evolving World

I was having coffee one day with a friend and pastor colleague, the Reverend Kirk Winslow. I don’t even remember the content of our discussion other than it was theology. Kirk and I are inclined to talk theology when together. He was referring to something Miroslav Volf told him when he was a graduate student at Fuller Seminary. Volf said, “You are going to have to put one anchor pole in the ground, and everything else must be understood in light of that.” I continue to think about that comment because of its simplicity. For all of the profound and challenging and exciting ideas that make up the biblical story in all of its diversity and complexity (and sometimes contradictions), is there one single and simple idea that makes sense out of it all? Is there a single anchoring idea that gives meaning and definition and by which everything else must be evaluated or judged? With the question put that way, I think most of us who have been Christians for a while would answer, “Yes, it is love.”

I would agree. But having made this claim, do we really let it play that defining role or do we fudge on it? Do other ideas sometimes take precedence over love? Does love consistently guide and shape our behavior as individuals and as the church? This chapter addresses these issues, but it will also provide a framework for a theology of inclusion. Obviously the primary focus of this book is inclusion for LGBT people, so we will look back to strides we have made to be inclusive of the “other” as well as look forward toward groups who remain in the “other” category. My approach will use the stories and teachings of Jesus because they are real, accessible, and concrete.