

How Bad Is Homosexual Practice According to Scripture and Does Scripture's Indictment Apply to Committed Homosexual Unions?

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January 2007 (slightly modified December 2007)

This brief essay explores two of the most common questions asked about the Bible's view of homosexual practice. First, how bad is homosexual practice according to Scripture? Second, does Scripture's indictment of homosexual practice apply to committed homosexual unions?

I. How Bad Is Homosexual Practice According to Scripture?

It is my contention that *homosexual practice is a more serious violation of Scripture's sexual norms than even incest, adultery, plural marriage, and divorce*. (The reader will note that I did not mention bestiality because the evidence from ancient Israel and early Judaism suggests that bestiality is a worse offense than same-sex intercourse.)

A. Different Degrees of Severity as regards Sin

At the outset there will be some readers who contend that it is both unscriptural and un-Reformed to argue that any sins are more severe than any other sins. However, no one really believes such a claim. In fact, most people in the mainline churches today who want to see some sort of accommodation made to committed homosexual unions do so because, they rationalize, even if it is not God's ideal it is nevertheless "not that bad of a sin" or at least a lesser evil than, say, promiscuous homosexual behavior. Proponents of homosexual unions often recoil in horror at the thought of any comparison with consensual incest or with adultery (to say nothing of bestiality) precisely because they operate with a notion that some sexual sins are truly more severe than others.

Whatever concessions have been made to fornication and divorce in the church, I still see the mainline churches in the West holding reasonably consistent positions against sexual unions involving more than two partners and certainly incestuous unions of a first-order severity (e.g., incest with one's parent, full sibling, or child), to say nothing of bestiality, sex with prostitutes, and sex with prepubescent children. Are we being unreasonable in giving precedence to some sins over others? Should we concede these other matters as well and be more consistently disobedient to the will of Christ? I don't think so. Failing in some areas does not justify failing in more foundational matters. The church's current practices tacitly acknowledge a different weight given to different sins.

It is true that any sin, including sexual sin, can get one excluded from the kingdom of heaven if merit is the means of entrance. In that specific sense, all sins are equal. And there are certainly other sins, including sexual sins, that the apostle Paul indicates create a risk factor for the exclusion of Christians from the kingdom of God if they persist in such behavior in a serial, unrepentant way. Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 5-6 incest, adultery, and sex with prostitutes alongside same-sex intercourse.

Yet none of this means that the church should regard all sexual sins, let alone all sins of any type, as basically of equal import or even that God views all sins as equally abhorrent. I am confident that few Christians, at least when hooked up to a lie detector or given truth serum, would assert that God views the taking home of a company pen as endangering the eternal destiny of the Christian perpetrator in the same way that, say, raping and eating children (thinking here of the serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer). The image is offensive, I grant. In fact, if you, the reader, feel any offense, this merely confirms my point: you don't really believe that all sins are equally heinous, either to God or to us.

In short, *it is not true that all offenses to God are in all senses equally offensive to God.*

For those from the Reformed tradition it should be noted that such a view is “reformed.” For example, the *Larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) states the obvious: “All transgressions of the law of God are not equally heinous; but some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others” (7.260; elaboration in 7.261; cf. the *Shorter Catechism* 7.083).

The claim that Scripture does not support the notion of different weights of sins is also inaccurate, in my view. To take a few examples:

1. In the Old Testament there is a clear ranking of sins. For instance, when one goes to Leviticus 20, which reorders the sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 according to penalty, the most severe offenses are grouped first, including same-sex intercourse. Of course, variegated penalties for different sins can be found throughout the legal material in the Old Testament.
2. Jesus also prioritized offenses, referring to “weightier matters of the law.” For instance, healing a sick person on the Sabbath takes precedence over resting.
3. Paul's attitude toward the case of incest in 1 Corinthians 5 also makes clear that he differentiated between various sexual offenses, with some being more extreme than others. This is clear both from the horror in his tone at the case of incest but, even more, from the fact that he has to arbitrate between competing values when he condemns the incest. If there were no ranking of priorities, how could Paul reject out of hand a case of incest that was monogamous and committed? If the values of monogamy and commitment to longevity were of equal weight with a requirement of a certain degree of familial otherness, Paul could not have decided what to do. Would commitment to a monogamous, lifelong union cancel out the prohibition of incest? Obviously, this was not a difficult matter for Paul to decide. He knew that the incest prohibition was more foundational.

B. Why Homosexual Practice Is One of the Most Severe Sexual Sins

Having established the principle that some offenses are more heavily weighted than others, both by Scripture and by the church, the question arises: How big a violation does Scripture view same-sex intercourse? I believe that Scripture indicates that the only sexual offense more severe is bestiality. Here are three main reasons why:

1. ***Homosexual practice, committed or otherwise, is the violation that most clearly and radically offends against God's intentional creation of humans as "male and female" (Gen 1:27) and definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24).*** According to the story in Genesis 2, the differentiation into man and woman is the sole differentiation produced by the removal of a "rib" or (in my view a better rendering) "side" from the originally undifferentiated human. It is precisely because out of one flesh came two sexes (a story line that makes a transcendent point about the exclusivity of male-female complementarity) that the two sexes, and only the two sexes, can (re-)unite into one flesh (2:24). Since Jesus gave priority to these two texts from the creation stories in Genesis when he defined normative and prescriptive sexual ethics for his disciples, they have to be given special attention by us. Paul also clearly has the creation texts in the background of his indictments of homosexual practice in Rom 1:24-27 and 1 Cor 6:9.
2. ***Every text that treats the issue of homosexual practice in Scripture treats it as a high offense abhorrent to God.*** That this is so is evident from (a) the triad of stories about extreme depravity, Ham, Sodom, and Gibeah (which incidentally are no more limited in their implications to coercive acts of same-sex acts than is an indicting story about coercive sex with one's parent limited in its implications only to coercive acts of adult incest), to (b) the Deuteronomic and Deuteronomic legal and narrative materials that rail against the homoerotic associations of the *qedeshim* as an "abomination" or "abhorrent practice" (men who in a cultic context served as the passive receptive sexual partners for other men), to (c) the Levitical prohibitions (where the term "abomination" or "abhorrent practice" is specifically attached to man-male intercourse), to (d) texts in Ezekiel that refer to man-male intercourse by the metonym "abomination" or "abhorrent act," to (e) Paul's singling out of homosexual practice in Romans 1:24-27 (compare 1 Cor 6:9) as a specially reprehensible instance, along with idolatry, of humans suppressing the truth accessible in the material creation set in motion by the Creator, labeling it sexual "uncleanness," "dishonorable" or "degrading," "contrary to nature," and an "indecent" or "shameful" act. These views are also amply confirmed in texts from both early Judaism and early Christianity after the New Testament period, where only bestiality appears to rank as a greater sexual offense, at least among "consensual" acts. There is, to be sure, some disagreement in early Judaism over whether sex with one's parent is worse, comparable, or less severe, though most texts suggest a slightly lesser degree of severity. Yet while Scripture makes some exceptions, particularly in ancient

Israel, for some forms of incest (though never for man-mother, man-child, man-sibling) and for sexual unions involving more than two partners (though a monogamy standard was always imposed on women), it makes absolutely no exceptions for same-sex intercourse. Indeed, every single text in Scripture that discusses sex, whether narrative, law, proverb, poetry, moral exhortation, or metaphor, presupposes a male-female prerequisite. There are no exceptions anywhere in Scripture.

3. ***The male-female prerequisite is the foundation or prior analogue for defining other critical sexual norms.*** Jesus himself clearly predicated his view of marital monogamy and indissolubility on the foundation of Gen 1:27 and 2:24, texts that have only one thing in common: the fact that an acceptable sexual bond before God entails as its first prerequisite (after the assumption of an intra-human bond) a man and a woman (Mark 10:6-9; Matt 19:4-6). Jesus argued that the “twoness” of the sexes ordained by God at creation was the foundation for limiting the number of persons in a sexual bond to two, whether concurrently (as in polygamy) or serially (as in repetitive divorce and remarriage). The foundation can hardly be less significant than the regulation predicated on it; indeed, it must be the reverse. Moreover, the dissolution of an otherwise natural union is not more severe than the active entrance into an inherently unnatural union (active entrance into an incestuous bond would be a parallel case in point). The principle by which same-sex intercourse is rejected is also the principle by which incest, even of an adult and consensual sort, is rejected. Incest is wrong because, as Lev 18:6 states, it involves sexual intercourse with “the flesh of one’s own flesh.” In other words, it involves the attempted merger with someone who is already too much of a formal or structural same on a familial level. The degree of formal or structural sameness is felt even more keenly in the case of homosexual practice, only now on the level of sex or gender, because sex or gender is a more integral component of sexual relations, and more foundationally defines it, than is and does the degree of blood relatedness. So the prohibition of incest can be, and probably was, analogically derived from the more foundational prohibition of same-sex intercourse. Certainly, as noted above, there was more accommodation to some forms of incest in the Old Testament than ever there was to homosexual practice. Adultery becomes an applicable offense only when the sexual bond that the offender is cheating on is a valid sexual bond. Needless to say, it would be absurd to charge a man in an incestuous union or in a pedophilic union with adultery for having sexual relations with a person outside that pair-bond. One can’t cheat against a union that was immoral from the beginning.

My purpose in evaluating, from Scripture’s perspective, the severity of engaging in same-sex intercourse is not to exhort believers to hate those who engage in homosexual behavior but rather to inform love with knowledge of the truth. Many Christians have attempted to respond in love towards persons who act on homosexual urges, including ordained officers, by either “tolerating” the behavior or, worse, affirming it. If, however, same-sex intercourse is a high offense in the sexual realm toward God, then there can be no question of ordaining persons participating in such acts in a serial, unrepentant

manner. To do such would only confirm the sin, leave the individual exposed to the wrath of God, and risk that one's exclusion from an eternal relationship with God—not to mention produce deleterious effects on the community of believers (see 1 Cor 5:6-7: a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough).

It is also important to determine the relative severity of an offense because of polity decisions. Churches do not treat all sexual offenses as equal when it comes to decisions of ordination (and sometimes even membership) but rather make distinctions on the basis of the severity of the offense, its repetitive character, and whether the offender has expressed repentance. Churches will ordain persons who have and occasionally entertain lustful thoughts, though I'm not sure one will find many churches ordaining persons who affirm and promote such thoughts. They will ordain persons who have been divorced and remarried, though I know of none who will ordain persons who have had five or more divorces and remarriages and plan to continue the cycle. Some churches may even ordain heterosexual persons in a committed sexual bond outside of marriage. However, few if any churches will ordain—at least not as of today—persons who are in committed sexual bonds involving close blood relations, more than two persons concurrently, or an adult and an adolescent or child. Few if any will ordain persons who are actively engaged in adulterous behavior. So knowing the severity of the sexual offense is an important factor in deciding what ordination decisions should be taken when violations are committed—and not only committed but committed repeatedly and, worse of all, unrepentantly.

In fact, the more severe the sexual offense, the more acute becomes the question of whether churches and individuals should stay in a denomination that tolerates or perhaps even promotes such offenses among its ordained officers. For I know of few, if any, reasonable persons who would stay in a church that tolerated or promoted repetitive and unrepentant incest, adultery, or polyamory among its ordained officers. If same-sex intercourse is treated by Scripture as equally severe or worse than these sexual offenses, then serious issues about denominational unity are posed by a denomination's toleration or affirmation of homosexual practice among its ordained officers.

II. Does Scripture's Indictment of Homosexual Practice Apply to Committed Homosexual Unions?

Many claim that the Bible is opposed only to particularly exploitative forms of homosexual practice; specifically, those involving an adult and adolescent (pederasty), coercive sex with a slave, or solicitation of prostitutes. However, this claim is generally made in ignorance of the arguments that suggest Scripture's absolute (i.e. exception-less) opposition to homosexual practice. Because the arguments for this latter position are so numerous and involve many texts, I here restrict my remarks to the witness of Paul. This witness is not unique among the authors of Scripture; indeed, it is representative of the whole, including the figure of Jesus. Yet Paul makes a good test case because he says the

most about the issue and provides us, among New Testament-era figures, with the broadest array of contextual information for assessing his views.

The discussion below has two parts: six synthesized arguments for why Paul's rejection of homosexual practice was total, followed by a citation of some scholars who, though supportive of homosexual unions, acknowledge that Paul's indictment is not limited to particularly exploitative instances of same-sex intercourse.

A. *Why Paul's Indictment of Same-Sex Intercourse Included "Committed" Unions*

Below I offer six arguments for concluding that Paul's opposition to same-sex intercourse was absolute and not limited only to particularly exploitative forms of homosexual practice. Readers can consult my two books as well as online material for further documentation. Naturally, if I had opened the scope of the investigation below to the whole range of scriptures that address the issue of homosexual practice, the length of my presentation would have increased significantly.

- (1) *Paul clearly had in view the creation texts in Gen 1:27 and 2:24 behind his two main indictments of homosexual practice, Romans 1:24-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9 (cf. 1 Timothy 1:10). There are eight points of correspondence, in a similar relative order, between Romans 1:23, 26-27 and Genesis 1:26-27: human, image, likeness; birds, cattle, reptiles; male, female. This intertextual echo back to Genesis 1:26-27 occurs within a context in Romans that emphasizes God's role as Creator and the knowledge about God and about ourselves that can be culled from observation of the material structures of creation/nature. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 6:9, in a context in chs. 5-7 that deals with sexual vices, is in close proximity to Paul's citation of Gen 2:24. These allusions to Gen 1:27 and 2:24 indicate that Paul's first problem with homosexual practice was that it was a violation of God's will for male-female pairing established in creation, not that it was typically exploitative. Incidentally, Paul uses the same two texts that Jesus himself defined as normative and prescriptive (with proscriptive implications) for all matters of human sexual ethics (cf. Mark 10:6-9; Matt 19:4-6). So the two most important texts in Scripture for defining sexual ethics, at least in the view of Jesus—Genesis 1:27 and 2:24—were at the heart of Paul's rejection of *all* forms of male-male and female-female intercourse.*
- (2) *Paul's nature argument against homosexual practice in Romans 1:24-27 does not lend itself to distinctions between exploitative and non-exploitative manifestations of homosexual behavior but rather to an absolute rejection of all homosexual bonds. By "against nature" Paul meant that the evidence from the material structures of creation—here the complementary embodied character of maleness and femaleness—gives clear evidence of God's will for human sexual pairing. Some have argued that this could not have been what Paul intended by his nature argument, despite Paul's clear statement in Rom 1:19-20 that such matters are "transparent" and have been so "ever since the creation of the world . . . being*

mentally apprehended by means of the things made.” Yet the historical context also confirms this way of reading Paul, whose views on the matter were no different from Jesus’. “Basic to the heterosexual position [against homosexual practice in the ancient world] is the characteristic Stoic appeal to the providence of Nature, which has matched and fitted the sexes to each other” (Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* [University of California Press, 2003], 444). “Some kind of argument from ‘design’ seems to lurk in the background of Cicero’s, Seneca’s, and Musonius’ claims [against homosexual practice]” (Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* [Oxford University Press, 1999], 242). Ancient writers “who appeal to nature against same-sex *eros* find it convenient to concentrate on the more or less obvious uses of the orifices of the body to suggest the proper channel for the more diffused sexual impulses of the body” (William R. Schoedel, “Same-Sex Eros,” *Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture* [ed. D. Balch; Eerdmans, 2000], 46). Part of Charicles’ attack on all homosexual practice in pseudo-Lucianic text *Affairs of the Heart*, a work which contains a debate about the respective merits of heterosexual love and male homosexual love, is the assertion that male-male love is an erotic attraction for what one already is as a sexual being:

She (viz., Aphrodite) cleverly devised a twofold nature in each (species). . . . having written down a divinely sanctioned rule of necessity, that each of the two (genders) remain in their own nature. . . . Then wantonness, daring all, transgressed the laws of nature. . . . And who then first looked with the eyes at the male as at a female . . . ? One nature came together in one bed. But *seeing themselves in one another* they were ashamed neither of what they were doing nor of what they were having done to them. (19-20; my emphasis)

- (3) *In Rom 1:24-27 Paul emphasizes the mutuality of the homoerotic desires* (“inflamed with their yearning for one another,” “their bodies being dishonored among themselves”) so he is clearly not restricting his remarks to coercive, exploitative acts. Moreover, *the wording of “exchanging” and “leaving behind” the other sex for the same sex is absolute* and clearly inclusive of all same-sex sexual relations.
- (4) *The indictment of lesbian intercourse in Rom 1:26 does not support the view that Scripture’s indictment is limited to exploitative homosexual acts, since lesbianism in antiquity was not generally characterized by pederasty, prostitution, or abuse of slaves.* Indeed, Greco-Roman moralists in antiquity who argued against homosexual practice sometimes cited intercourse between women as a trump card against arguments for men-male sexual bonds (see, for example, pseudo-Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart*, 28). For consistency’s sake, advocacy of male homosexual bonds necessarily entails acceptance of female homosexual bonds, something few if any men in antiquity were willing to accept. It is a way of making an absolute argument against *all* homosexual bonds, not merely against particularly exploitative ones.

- (5) *The terms malakoi (lit., “soft men,” but taken in the sense of men who feminize themselves to attract male sex partners) and arsenokoitai (literally, “men who lie with [koite] a male [arsen]”) in 1 Cor 6:9 are clearly inclusive of all homosexual bonds, as is evident from the following. With regard to malakoi note: (a) its place in a vice list amidst other participants in illicit sexual intercourse, (b) its pairing with the immediately following arsenokoitai, (c) Philo of Alexandria’s (a first-century Jew’s) use of cognate words to refer to the effeminate male partner in a homosexual bond, and (d) occasional Greco-Roman usage of malakoi (and the comparable Latin molles) to denote effeminate adult males who are biologically and/or psychologically disposed to desire penetration by men. With regard to arsenokoitai note: (a) clear connections of this word to the absolute Levitical prohibitions of man-male intercourse (18:22; 20:13), evident from the fact that the word, exclusively used in Jewish and Christian contexts until late in antiquity, was formulated directly from the Levitical prohibitions, that ancient rabbis used a parallel Hebrew term, mishkav zakur (“lying with a male”), to apply to all men-male sexual bonds, and that 1 Tim 1:10 explicitly connects opposition to this vice (among other vices) to the law of Moses; (b) early Judaism’s univocal interpretation of the Levitical prohibitions against men-male intercourse as allowing only sexual relations between a man and a woman (e.g., Josephus, Philo, the rabbis); (c) the singular use of arsenokoites and related words subsequent to Paul in connection with male-male intercourse per se, without limitation to pederasts or clients of cult prostitutes; (d) the implications of the context of 1 Corinthians 5-7, given the parallel case of adult, consensual incest in ch. 5, the assumption of consent in the vice list in 6:9-10, the citation of Gen 2:24 in 1 Cor 6:16 (see also 11:7-9, 12), and the presumption everywhere in ch. 7 that sex is confined to male-female marriage; and (e) the fact that the Greco-Roman milieu considered it worse for a man to have sex with another adult male than with a boy because the former had left behind his “softness.”*
- (6) *A conception of caring homoerotic unions already existed in Paul’s cultural environment and yet even these unions were rejected by some Greco-Roman moralists. For example, in a late first-century / early second-century (A.D.) debate over heterosexual and homosexual bonds, Plutarch’s friend Daphnaeus admits that homosexual relationships are not necessarily exploitative, for “union contrary to nature does not destroy or curtail a lover’s tenderness.” Yet, he declares, even when a “union with males” is conducted “willingly” it remains “shameful” since males “with softness (malakia) and effeminacy (thelutes) [are] surrendering themselves, as Plato says, ‘to be mounted in the custom of four-footed animals’ and to be sowed with seed contrary to nature” (Dialogue on Love 751). Even in the non-Jewish milieu of the Mediterranean basin, “literature of the first century C.E. bears witness to an increasing polarization of attitudes toward homosexual activity, ranging from frank acknowledgment and public display of sexual indulgence on the part of leading Roman citizens to severe moral condemnation of all homosexual acts” (Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, 383, emphasis added). If even some sectors of the “pagan” world were beginning to*

develop absolute opposition to all forms of homosexual practice, what is the likelihood that Paul would have made exceptions for committed homosexual unions, given that he operated out of Jewish Scriptures and a Jewish milieu that were unequivocally opposed to homosexual practice, and given too that he was a disciple of a figure (Jesus) who predicated his views about human sexuality on the exclusive male-female model in the creation texts?

Historically speaking, then, the evidence is overwhelming that Paul, like all other Jews and Christians of the period, opposed homosexual practice categorically and absolutely.

B. Scholars Supporting Homosexual Unions Admit Paul's Absolute Rejection

The best of the scholarly proponents of homosexual practice recognize the point made above. Note that I do not cite such support for my own sake. I have researched the matter of Scripture and homosexual practice in its historical and hermeneutical context as much or more than the scholars below have. Rather I cite these scholars for the sake of those who can't hear truth from the writings of someone who does not endorse homosexual practice but may hear it from those who do endorse such behavior.

For example, **Louis Crompton** in the massive *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Harvard University Press, 2003) has written:

According to [one] interpretation, Paul's words were not directed at "bona fide" homosexuals in committed relationships. But such a reading, however well-intentioned, seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstance. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian. (p. 114)

Similarly, **Bernadette Brooten**, who has written the most important book on lesbianism in antiquity and its relation to early Christianity (especially Rom 1:26), at least from a pro-homosex perspective, criticized both John Boswell and Robin Scroggs for their use of an exploitation argument:

Boswell . . . argued that . . . "The early Christian church does not appear to have opposed homosexual behavior per se." The sources on female homoeroticism that I present in this book run absolutely counter to [this conclusion]. (p. 11)

If . . . the dehumanizing aspects of pederasty motivated Paul to condemn sexual relations between males, then why did he condemn relations between females in the same sentence? . . . Rom 1:27, like Lev 18:22 and 20:13, condemns all males in male-male relationships regardless of age, making it unlikely that lack of mutuality or concern for the passive boy were Paul's central concerns. . . . The ancient sources, which rarely speak of sexual relations between women and girls, undermine Robin Scroggs's theory that Paul opposed homosexuality as pederasty. (*Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female*

Homoeroticism [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], 253 n. 106, 257, 361)

She also criticized the use of an orientation argument:

Paul could have believed that *tribades* [the active female partners in a female homosexual bond], the ancient *kinaidoi* [the passive male partners in a male homosexual bond], and other sexually unorthodox persons were born that way and yet still condemn them as unnatural and shameful. . . . I believe that Paul used the word “exchanged” to indicate that people knew the natural sexual order of the universe and left it behind. . . . I see Paul as condemning all forms of homoeroticism as the unnatural acts of people who had turned away from God. (p. 244)

On the issue of homosexual orientation, incidentally, which many today still falsely claim to be radically new knowledge, note the following quotation from **Thomas K. Hubbard**:

Homosexuality in this era [viz., of the early imperial age of Rome] may have ceased to be merely another practice of personal pleasure and began to be viewed as an essential and central category of personal identity, exclusive of and antithetical to heterosexual orientation. (*Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook*, 386)

William Schoedel in a significant article on “Same-Sex Eros: Paul and the Greco-Roman Tradition” states that “some support” exists in Philo, *Abraham* 135 for thinking that Paul might be speaking in Rom 1:26-27 “only of same-sex acts performed by those who are by nature heterosexual.” But he then dismisses the suggestion:

But such a phenomenon does not excuse some other form of same-sex eros in the mind of a person like Philo. Moreover, we would expect Paul to make that form of the argument more explicit if he intended it. . . . Paul’s wholesale attack on Greco-Roman culture makes better sense if, like Josephus and Philo, he lumps all forms of same-sex eros together as a mark of Gentile decadence. (*Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture*, pp. 67-68)

Schoedel also acknowledges that a “conception of a psychological disorder socially engendered or reinforced *and genetically transmitted* may be presupposed” for Philo (p. 56 [emphasis added]; see also my short review and critique of Schoedel in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 392-94).

Martti Nissinen, who has written the best book on the Bible and homosexuality from a pro-homosex perspective and whose work I heavily critique in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (precisely because it is the best on the other side), acknowledges in one of his more candid moments:

Paul does not mention *tribades* or *kinaidoi*, that is, female and male persons who were habitually involved in homoerotic relationships, but if he knew about them (and there is every reason to believe that he did), it is difficult to think that, because of their apparent ‘orientation,’ he would *not* have included them in

Romans 1:24-27. . . . For him, there is no individual inversion or inclination that would make this conduct less culpable. . . . Presumably nothing would have made Paul approve homoerotic behavior. (*Homoeroticism in the Biblical World* [Fortress, 1998], 109-12)

Dan O. Via also acknowledges in his response to my essay in *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Fortress, 2003) that the Bible's rule against homosexual practice is "an absolute prohibition" that condemns homosexual practice "unconditionally" and "absolute[ly]" (pp. 93-95). In his essay in *Two Views* he rightly notes:

The Pauline texts . . . do not support this limitation of male homosexuality to pederasty. Moreover, some Greek sources suggest that—at least in principle—a relationship should not be begun until the boy is almost grown and should be lifelong. . . . I believe that Hays is correct in holding that *arsenokoites* [in 1 Cor 6:9] refers to a man who engages in same-sex intercourse. . . . True the meaning of a compound word does not necessarily add up to the sum of its parts (Martin 119). But in this case I believe the evidence suggests that it does. . . . First Cor[inthians] 6:9-10 simply classifies homosexuality as a moral sin that finally keeps one out of the kingdom of God. (pp. 11, 13)

Even **Walter Wink**, in his generally mean-spirited review of my book *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, had to admit:

Gagnon exegetes every biblical text even remotely relevant to the theme [of homosexual practice]. This section is filled with exegetical insights. I have long insisted that the issue is one of hermeneutics, and that efforts to twist the text to mean what it clearly does not say are deplorable. Simply put, the Bible is negative toward same-sex behavior, and there is no getting around it. . . . Gagnon imagines a request from the Corinthians to Paul for advice, based on 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 [on how to respond to a man in a loving and committed union with another man]. ". . . . When you mentioned that *arsenokoitai* would be excluded from the coming kingdom of God, you were not including somebody like this man, were you?" . . . No, Paul wouldn't accept that relationship for a minute. ("To Hell with Gays?" *Christian Century* 119:13 [June 5-12, 2002]: 32-33; at <http://www.robagnon.net/Reviews/homoWinkExchanges.pdf>, fuller responses at <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/gagnon3.pdf>, <http://www.robagnon.net/Reviews/homoWinkRejoinder.pdf>)

In short, the notion that Paul—or, for that matter, any other author of Scripture or Jesus himself—would have been favorably disposed to same-sex intercourse in the context of a committed union shows a great misunderstanding of the texts of Scripture in their historical context.