

# Does Jack Rogers's Book "Explode the Myths" about the Bible and Homosexuality and "Heal the Church"?

(Installment 3; June 10, 2006)

**Robert A. J. Gagnon, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor of New Testament  
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, PA 15206  
gagnon@pts.edu

[Continued from Installment 2: [html](#) or [pdf](#)]

We saw in installment 2 how (1) Rogers didn't realize that one of his two main arguments for establishing that the Bible doesn't oppose all homosexual practice, **the misogyny argument, actually contradicts his central contention; and (2) the examples that Rogers gives in his book for demonstrating the importance of knowing the historical context for biblical texts actually demonstrate that Rogers himself doesn't know well the historical context.** In some instances this can be attributed to plain ol' poor scholarship and ignorance of the data.

Yet most troubling is that this data was readily available to Rogers in resources that he quotes from. Some of it he had to have read since it appears in very close proximity to pages that he quotes. **This introduces the element of dishonesty into his book: the failure to alert readers to significant material and counterarguments that would have a strong bearing on his own overall argument.** We noted this element of dishonesty already in installment 1 as regards his highly selective use of resources. In particular, we highlighted his aversion to conclusions even in pro-homosex works that Scripture's opposition to homosexual practice is total; that neither committed homosexual unions nor knowledge of homosexual orientation (which, incidentally, is not radically new knowledge to the ancient mind) would have made any difference to Scripture's indictment of homosexual practice.

- **The dishonest character of Rogers's scholarship on the Bible and homosexuality reaches a high (low?) point in his use of my own work. Rogers actually lies (i.e. bears false witness) to his readers about my views.** Now "lies" is a strong term. I choose it because Rogers knows of my responses ([here](#) [Mar. 2004] and [here](#) [Dec. 2001]) to two of his previous attacks on my work and yet has refused to make corrections. Moreover, my views on the matters about which Rogers bears false witness are so prominent and clear within the works of mine cited by Rogers that Rogers could hardly have misunderstood them, much less missed them altogether. **Let me cite two prime instances of these lies: (A) The claim that I provide no supporting evidence for the view that the Bible opposes all homosexual practice. (B) The claim that I believe homosexuality is merely a "willful choice."** In this installment I will treat the first claim.

**(A) The claim that I provide no supporting evidence for the view that the Bible opposes all homosexual practice.** I have had a few scholars distort my work in the past (particularly, David Balch, Walter Wink, and Susan Ackerman). However, perhaps the biggest lie of all is Rogers’s claim that I “simply assert” that the Bible speaks against all forms of homosexual practice but nowhere supply any supporting evidence (boldface added):

[Gagnon] simply asserts, with no supporting evidence, that sexual relations between contemporary Christian people who are homosexual are sinful as such. (p. 84)

Gagnon does not demonstrate that the immoral sexual relations Paul condemns are related to the love of contemporary faithful gay and lesbian Christians. He simply asserts it. (p. 83)

Usually the complaint against my work is that it supplies too much material—what Rev. Jim Berkley of Presbyterian Action (Institute on Religion and Democracy) has aptly called [“pleromaphobia,”](#) a fear of fullness (which we could shorten to “plerophobia”). **Even if I limit myself to the Pauline corpus,** and omit any discussion of the Old Testament and Jesus, **I could point Rogers to the following resources where I supply precisely the supporting evidence that he claims that I nowhere supply:**

- *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (2001), 254-336 (including 289-94, “Did Paul Not Have Creation in Mind When He Spoke of Same-Sex Intercourse?”), 347-61 (“Does the Bible condemn only exploitative, pederastic forms of homosexuality?”)
- *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (2003), 76-81 (“Romans 1:24-27: Does Paul Indict All Same-Sex Intercourse?”), 81-88 (“First Corinthians 6:9: Does It Forbid All Forms of Male-Male Intercourse?”), plus 7 pages of detailed [online notes](#) (pp. 19-25)
- “Does the Bible Regard Same-Sex Intercourse as Intrinsically Sinful?” in *Christian Sexuality: Normative and Pastoral Principles* (Kirk House, 2003), 106-54, esp. 127-40
- “A Comprehensive and Critical Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the ‘Plain Sense’ of Scripture, Part 2,*” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 25 (Dec. 2003)A: 179-275, esp. 206-24 (the critique of David Fredrickson’s article, “Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24-27”; also available online at <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoBalchHBTRReview2.pdf>)
- “Bad Reasons for Changing One’s Mind: Jack Rogers’s Temple Prostitution Argument and Other False Starts,” Mar. 1, 2004 (online at <http://www.robagnon.net/ResponseToRogers2.htm> or, for pdf, <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoRogersResp2.pdf>; 26 pages; 15 reasons why the exploitation argument doesn’t work)
- New: “Why the Disagreement Over the Biblical Witness on Homosexual Practice? A Response to Myers and Scanzoni, *What God*

*Has Joined Together?*, in *Reformed Review* 59.1 (Autumn 2005), esp. 62-88 (online at <http://www.westernsem.edu/wtseminary/assets/Gagnon2%20Aut05.pdf>)

In fact, **I specifically gave 15 reasons why the exploitation argument used by Rogers doesn't work in my March 2004 response to Rogers, "Bad Reasons for Changing One's Mind."** Rogers knows of the article. Yet he ignores virtually all of the arguments presented in it. For Rogers to claim to readers now—after all these resources have been produced, including one aimed directly at him—that I don't offer any supporting evidence for debunking the exploitation argument amounts to a level of dishonesty to his readers that perhaps surpasses anything that I have yet encountered. And this dishonesty comes from a former moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA). **It would be one thing if Rogers actually responded to my arguments with strong arguments of his own. But it is quite another when Rogers not only (1) fails to respond to my arguments but even (2) denies the very existence of my arguments.**

**Here are some of the arguments that I put forward as "supporting evidence" for the conclusion that Paul was absolutely opposed to homosexual practice, no exceptions:**

**(1) *Clear echoes to the creation texts in Rom 1:23-27 and 1 Cor 6:9-20.***

According to Rogers, "Paul is not talking in Romans 1:26-27 about a violation of the order of creation" (p. 77). Rogers doesn't bother even mentioning to his readers my argument about intertextual echoes, let alone refute it, despite the fact that it is mentioned in nearly all my work. I can see why Rogers wouldn't want his readers to know about it. It would mean that the standard used by Paul for assessing homosexual behavior was not just how well or badly it was done in his own cultural context but whether it conformed to God's will in creation for male-female pairing.

In Rom 1:23-27 Paul talks about humans exchanging the Creator for worship of idols made "in the *likeness* of the *image* of a perishable *human* and of *birds* and *animals* and *reptiles*" (1:23); then about "*females* [who] exchanged the natural use" and "*males* leaving behind the natural use of the female" to have intercourse with other "males" (1:26-27). This obviously echoes Genesis 1:26-27: "Let us make a *human* according to our *image* and . . . *likeness*; and let them rule over the . . . *birds* . . . *cattle* . . . and . . . *reptiles*. And God created the human in his image, . . . *male* and *female* he created them." There are here not only eight points of correspondence between Gen 1:26-27 and Rom 1:23, 26-27 but also a threefold sequential agreement:

**Gen 1:26-27**

**Rom 1:23, 26-27**

***A. God's likeness and image in humans***

- |     |                               |                               |     |
|-----|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----|
| (1) | human ( <i>anthropos</i> )    | likeness ( <i>homoioima</i> ) | (3) |
| (2) | image ( <i>eikon</i> )        | image ( <i>eikon</i> )        | (2) |
| (3) | likeness ( <i>homoiosis</i> ) | human ( <i>anthropos</i> )    | (1) |

***B. Dominion over the animal kingdom***

- |     |                             |                                 |     |
|-----|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----|
| (4) | birds ( <i>peteina</i> )    | birds ( <i>peteina</i> )        | (4) |
| (5) | cattle ( <i>ktene</i> )     | quadrupeds ( <i>tetrapoda</i> ) | (5) |
| (6) | reptiles ( <i>herpeta</i> ) | reptiles ( <i>herpeta</i> )     | (6) |

***C. Male-female differentiation***

- |     |                          |                             |     |
|-----|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|
| (7) | male ( <i>arsen</i> )    | females ( <i>theleiai</i> ) | (8) |
| (8) | female ( <i>thelus</i> ) | males ( <i>arsenes</i> )    | (7) |

What is the point of the echo in Rom 1:23-27 to Gen 1:26-27? Idolatry and same-sex intercourse constitute a frontal assault on the work of the Creator in nature. Those who suppressed the truth about God transparent in creation were more likely to suppress the truth about the complementarity of the sexes transparent in nature, choosing instead to gratify contrary innate impulses.

Just as Gen 1:26-27 lies in the background of Paul's remarks in Rom 1:23-27, so too Paul cites Gen 2:24 ("... the two shall become one flesh") in close proximity to his indictment of men who lie with males in 1 Cor 6:9 (cf. 6:16). The immediate point of the citation was to show that sexual intercourse per se, not just intercourse in the context of a marital commitment, has a bonding effect on the participants. Thus a Christian man engaged in unholy sexual intercourse with a prostitute (6:15-17), one's stepmother (ch. 5), another man's wife or other males (6:9) brings the indwelling Christ into the act. Given the echo to Gen 1:27 in Rom 1:23-27, Paul could not have missed the relevance of Gen 2:24a ("a man shall . . . become joined to his woman") for his rejection of male homosexual intercourse in 1 Cor 6:9 (he certainly wouldn't have missed its relevance for his reference to "adulterers" in 6:9). Indeed, his use of Gen 1:27 and 2:21-22 later in the same letter on the issue of veils (11:7-12), though it has problems, clearly shows that Paul regarded Gen 1:27 and 2:21-24 as integral for establishing the significance of male-female differentiation in the context of marriage. Moreover, the discussion of hair and headgear has overtones of concern for homosexual practice; namely, that by deliberately obliterating markers of sexual differentiation the community might move down a slippery slope of embracing homoerotic relations.

Hence in his two primary critiques of homosexual practice Paul took the same two creation texts that Jesus lifted up as decisive for defining sexual ethics, Gen 1:27 and 2:24, and applied them to various sexual issues, including an absolute rejection of homosexual practice. If the two-sex requirement of the creation texts

is the standard against which Paul is rejecting homosexual practice, then a distinction between exploitative and non-exploitative homosexual practice would be beside the point. Rogers completely ignores the phenomenon of intertextuality.

(2) ***The nature argument in Romans 1:26-27.*** Paul's nature argument in Romans 1:26-27 is also not the kind of argument that lends itself to a distinction in Paul's mind between good and bad forms of homosexual practice: "their females exchanged the *natural* use for that which is *contrary to nature*; and likewise also the males, having left behind the *natural* use of the female. . . ." **Nature for Paul here refers to the material structures of creation, still intact despite the fall of Adam and still giving evidence for God's will even to those without access to the revelation of Scripture.** This is precisely the point made in the parallel discussion about idolatry in 1:19-24; namely, that humans (here primarily Gentiles) are culpable not merely for sinning but, even more, for suppressing the knowledge of the truth accessible to them in creation structures. Thus Rom 1:19-20 emphasizes:

The knowable aspect of God is visible (or: transparent, apparent, evident) to them because God has made it visible to them. For since the creation of the world his invisible qualities are clearly seen, being mentally apprehended by means of the things made.

For Paul the sin of same-sex intercourse provides the perfect complement on the horizontal level to the sin of idolatry on the vertical level. For, like the sin of idolatry, it involves the suppression of truth that should be obvious to all by means of the "things made," here the complementarity of our gendered bodies in terms of genital fit, physiology (incl. procreative capacity) and various interpersonal features distinctive to men and women. Female-female intercourse and male-male intercourse are "beyond nature" (*para phusin*), contextually in the negative sense of being "contrary to" or "against nature," because they "dishonor" this self-evident complementarity of male and female "bodies" through a bodily incongruous union with a structural same. The issue of exploitation by having sex with a minor, slave, or prostitute is simply irrelevant to a global indictment based on gender incompatibility.

Rogers depends entirely on Nissinen in contending that

*physis* (nature) is not a synonym for *ktisis* (creation). In speaking about what is "natural," Paul is merely accepting the conventional view of people and how they ought to behave in first-century Hellenistic-Jewish culture. (pp. 77-78)

Rogers, however, doesn't even acknowledge Nissinen's concession that "'natural intercourse' implies *not only gender difference and the complementarity of sexes but also gender roles*" (p. 107; my emphasis). Rogers simply states that it has nothing to do with the complementarity of the sexes. At any rate, so far as Paul's understanding in Rom 1:18-27 is concerned, an assertion that *physis* refers only to the merely conventional over against *ktisis* (creation) is absolutely false. Already in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (2001) I had responded to Nissinen's claim:

To be sure, Paul in 1 Cor 11:2-16 does put forward a proof pertaining to the creation of Adam and Eve (11:7-12; the verb *ktizo* appears in 11:9) separately from a proof pertaining to nature (11:13-14). In this sense, creation refers to an event at the beginning of time while nature refers to the ongoing semi-timeless state or result issuing from that event. Depending on the information needed, discerning creation may require some knowledge of divine revelation (viz., God's specific actions in Genesis 1-3, such as woman's derivation from man), whereas discerning nature presupposes only human observation of created things. **In the case of Rom 1:18-27, the distinction between creation and nature collapses because Paul there means by "creation" the way things turned out after the initial act of creating.** True, *ktisis* in 1:20 ("from the creation of the world") refers to the primal event, but it does so in a context that emphasizes the aftermath of that event: "the things made" which are now subject to human observation. **The use of *ktisis* in Rom 1:25 (worshipping the creature rather than the Creator), like its use in Rom 8:19-22 (the creation groans in expectation of redemption), refers to created things or things reproduced after the pattern of the initial creation, which are still accessible to sense perception.** One could easily substitute nature for creation in Rom 8:19-22 and not materially affect Paul's meaning. The only difference would be that the term creation necessarily requires the notion of a Creator, whereas the term nature does not. Yet in Paul's thinking, as for first-century Jews generally, nature is by definition the Creator's handiwork. Consequently, when Nissinen (citing Wischmeyer) states that "creation and nature are not interchangeable concepts in Paul's theology," he is mistaken, at least insofar as the uses in Romans are concerned (*Homosexualism*, 107). **What is "contrary to nature" is at one and the same time contrary to divinely created structures.** (p. 259 n. 18; boldface added)

**In short, there is no substantive difference in Rom 1:18-27 between "creation," understood as "the things made," and "nature."** Rogers does not mention, much less respond, to my argument here. He simply acts as if no counterargument has been made.

Rogers's only other argument against Paul understanding "nature" as the material structures put in place by God's act of creation is the following:

The most significant evidence that "natural" meant "conventional" is that God acted "contrary to nature" (Rom. 11:13-24). That is, God did something very unusual by pruning the Gentiles from a wild olive tree, where they grew in their natural state, and grafting them into the cultivated olive tree of God's people (Rom. 11:24). Since it cannot be that God sinned, to say that God did what is "contrary to nature" or "against nature" (v. 24) means that God did something surprising and out of the ordinary. (p. 77)

Once again, Rogers simply ignores my response to this type of argument. In *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* I comment on Rom 11:21, 24 in the course of a discussion of the meaning of *physis* in Paul outside of Rom 1:26-27:

**Here [in Rom 11:21, 24] "nature" clearly has to do not with innate desires or social convention but with the "organic" unity of branches and the tree from which they originally sprouted.** What is "beyond" or "contrary to" nature is the circumvention of natural processes of growth with artificial, human intervention.

In this particular case, however, such a circumvention of nature is not treated as a negative act because olive trees do grow branches; while supplementing or aiding nature, one is not trying to fit together two discordant entities. The same could not be said for sexual intercourse between two males, in the view of Paul, Philo, Josephus, and many Greco-Roman moral philosophers, since males do not possess complementary sex organs. To attempt to join two members of the same sex is to act contrary to nature's bodily and physiological provision for human sexuality.

**In all of [Paul's uses of the word *physis*], "nature" corresponds to the essential material, inherent, biological, or organic constitution of things as created and set in motion by God.** Neither in Paul's thinking *nor in our own* do any of these uses pertain merely to personal preferences or prejudices, custom, a culturally conditioned sense of what is normal, or social convention. "Nature" in these verses goes beyond what one feels and thinks to what simply "is" by divine design. (pp. 372-73; boldface added)

This includes the meaning of *physis* in 1 Cor 11:14-15 where the hair argument is similar to the Stoic argument for beards for men, based on natural endowment (ibid., 365-67, 373-78). **In Rom 11:21 (similarly 11:24b), the prepositional phrase *kata physin* (lit., according to, or in conformity with, nature) sandwiched in between the definite article and the word "branches" does not mean "the conventional branches."** It means branches that are organic, growing without human interference, *natural*. The same is true of *kata physin* in Rom 11:24a, sandwiched between the definite article and the term "wild olive tree."

Where Rogers gets confused—no doubt because he is not a Greek scholar—is over the preposition *para* + accusative object. The most basic meaning is the neutral "beyond" and here the morally neutral "beyond nature" (*para physin*) makes perfect sense for a horticultural metaphor. But *para* + acc. obj. often (incl. with *physin* as object) stretches in meaning to the morally negative sense "in transgression/violation of" or "contrary to, against" (cf. Liddell-Scott-Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. *para* C.III.4; and BDAG, s.v. *para* B.6, citing, for example, Rom 1:26; 16:17; Gal 1:8-9). **There can be no doubt that *para physin* in Rom 1:26 is in this morally negative sense since the context refers to same-sex intercourse as "sexual impurity," "dishonoring their bodies," "dishonorable passions," and "indecent" or "shamelessness" (1:24, 26-27)—all in a broader context referring to "impiety," "unrighteousness," "sin," and practices "deserving death" (1:18-32; 3:9-20, 23).**

This sense of *para physin* as "in transgression or violation of, contrary to, or against the embodied complementarity of the sexes" is also confirmed by usage in Philo and Josephus (two prominent first-century Jews) and in Greco-Roman authors. We have already noted in installment 2 that

**Basic to the heterosexual position [against homosexual practice] 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*, 444; boldface added)

The physician Soranus characterized desires of "soft men" to be penetrated by other men as "not from nature" insofar as they "subjugated to obscene uses parts not so intended" and disregarded "the places of our body which divine providence

destined for definite functions” (*On Chronic Disorders* 4.9.131). Rogers simply gives no credible argument for understanding Paul’s nature argument in Rom 1:26-27 as anything other than an attack on homosexual practice as a structurally incongruous violation of God’s will for human sexual pairing, a sinful pairing of sexual sames rather than sexual counterparts.

**(3) Exchange, mutuality, lesbianism, and echoes to the Levitical prohibitions in Romans 1:26-27.** Other features of Romans 1:26-27 rule out a focus on particularly exploitative behavior.

(a) The wording of 1:26-27 regarding **“exchanging” and “leaving behind” the other sex for the same sex** is absolute and clearly inclusive of all same-sex sexual relations: “their females exchanged the natural use . . . and likewise also the males, having left behind the natural use of the female, were inflamed with their yearning for one another, males with males . . . .” What is the point of Paul charging males with “leaving behind” sexual intercourse with “the female” and females with “exchanging” natural intercourse (with the male) if his indictment is aimed solely at an exploitative subset of same-sex unions? Would he not rather have to say that they exchanged or left behind loving consensual relationships with a person of either sex? This is precisely what he does not say.

(b) In fact, the wording in **1:27 stresses the mutuality of affections**: “. . . were inflamed with their yearning for one another” (similarly, 1:24: “their bodies being dishonored among themselves”).

(c) Further, as noted in installment 1, **the mention of lesbian intercourse in 1:26** does not fit with a focus on intercourse with prostitutes, slaves, and adolescents, since in the ancient world lesbianism is neither known nor critiqued primarily for such practices.

*Note:* Although Rogers (citing Myers/Scanzoni who, in turn, were citing John Boswell) raises a question about whether Rom 1:26 refers to female-female intercourse (p. 78), **the vast majority of commentators rightly recognize that female-female intercourse is being indicted in Rom 1:26**, including Bernadette Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 248-52. The parallel phrasing of Romans 1:26 and 1:27 leaves little doubt: “even *their females exchanged the natural use* [i.e. of the male] for one contrary to nature, and *likewise also the males, having left the natural use of the female*, were inflamed in their yearning for one another, males with males.” For the “likewise also” of 1:27 to be appropriate, both the thing exchanged and the thing exchanged *for* must be comparable—here sex with members of the same sex, not non-coital sex. Male and female homoeroticism are paired often enough in ancient sources—for example, in Charicles’s argument against same-sex intercourse in (pseudo-)Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart* 28—so that there to be nothing surprising about such a pairing in Rom 1:26-27. In addition, while it was commonplace in the Greco-Roman world to refer to female homoeroticism as “unnatural,” there are no explicit references to anal or oral *heterosexual* intercourse as unnatural. Finally, in the context of the Greco-Roman world, it is not possible that Paul could have been strongly opposed to male homosexual practice while being favorably disposed to female homoeroticism. For although some Greco-Roman moralists were open to specific forms of male homoerotic practice, attitudes toward female homosexual practice were uniformly negative. Paul’s statement that “even their women” engage in such practices underscores the point. That Paul and other biblical authors were opposed to lesbian intercourse can be taken as an



historical given. Cf. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 297-99. Not surprisingly, Rogers addresses not a one of these arguments.

(d) That **Paul had the absolute Levitical prohibitions of male-male intercourse partly in view** is evident from the intertextual echoes to Lev 18 and 20 in Rom 1:24-32. Paul's word for "nakedness, indecent exposure, indecency" (*aschēmosynē*) in Rom 1:27 is used 24 times in the Septuagint translation of Lev 18:6-19; 20:11, 17-21. Paul's word for "uncleanness, impurity" (*akatharsia*) in Rom 1:24 appears in the Septuagint rendering of Lev 18:19; 20:21, 25. "Worthy of death" in Rom 1:32 may also have called to mind the capital sentence pronounced on man-male intercourse in Lev 20:13. Even Bernadette Brooten acknowledges that Rom 1:26-32 "directly recalls" Lev 18:22 and 20:13.

(4) "**Soft men**" and "**men who lie with a male**" (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10) in **context**. Rogers's treatment of 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10 is a classic instance of how one-sided and selective Rogers's "exegesis" is. There is no original thought here. He simply leans exclusively on a few quotes from the work of Martti Nissinen (an Old Testament scholar), Dale Martin (a New Testament scholar who is a self-identified homosexual man with an enormous axe to grind), and Victor Furnish (a New Testament scholar who offers only a short one-page treatment that provides little new information). He concludes that the terms *malakoi* (soft men) and *arsenokoitai* (men who lie with a male), whatever they might mean, cannot be used to "condemn all homosexual relations" (citing Nissinen). He then closes with a quote from Marion Soards back in 1995 that "only indirectly may we derive information regarding homosexuality from this material" (pp. 73-75). This appeal to Soards is now irrelevant. See the postscript at the beginning of Installment 2 where Soards now states, in an email to me:

Rogers does not seem to read my intentions with clarity. . . but if anything I am more than ever persuaded of the relevance of the range of OT/NT texts for the current discussion of homosexual behavior. Actually to put it succinctly, I find your own analysis/exegesis persuasive.

**At no time—not even once—does Rogers address a single one of the arguments that I have raised against the positions of Nissinen, Martin, Furnish, and others.** In fact, I'm not even mentioned in his discussion of 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10. And this is despite the fact that I devote to the question of whether the terms in 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10 forbid all forms of male-male intercourse 34 pages in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (pp. 303-36), 7 pages in *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (pp. 81-88, plus 3 pages of small-print online notes, containing some new material), and 14 pages in my critique of David Fredrickson's views on these texts (views similar to those of Nissinen and Martin) in Part 2 of my review of D. Balch's *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture* (review in [Horizons in Biblical Theology 25.2](#) [2003]: 226-39; this also contains some new material). What kind of credibility is there to an analysis of 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10 that completely ignores the work of a scholar who, holding a different view, has done the most extensive investigation

of these texts in their literary and historical context? This is supposed to be good and responsible scholarship? At least when I write on the subject I address *all* the arguments that are put forward for dismissing the relevance of these texts for contemporary discussions of homosexual practice. Rogers and, apparently, his editors at Westminster John Knox (Stephanie Egnotovich and Donald McKim) think that the opposite approach, addressing *none* of the arguments for their relevance, represents the best way at getting at the meaning of biblical texts. I offer here a summary of my arguments but urge readers to see the fuller analyses in my works cited above.

**The meaning of *malakoi* (lit., “soft men”) in context** is not the broad sense of merely effeminate men, as Rogers (parroting Nissinen and Martin) contends, but rather has the more restrictive sense of “**men who feminize themselves to attract male sex partners**” (incidentally, this is similar to the meaning given to the term by both Furnish and Brooten, though Rogers conveniently does not tell readers this). **What is the evidence** for the more restrictive sense?

- ***Its place in the vice list amidst other participants in illicit sexual intercourse.*** Since it is sandwiched in between the terms *pornoi* (a generic term for sexually immoral persons but, in the immediate context of 1 Cor 5, applied specifically to the incestuous man in nearly identical vice lists; cf. 5:9-11) and *moichoi* (adulterers) on the one side and *arsenokoitai* (men who lie with a male) on the other side, it is probable that *malakoi* too has to do with immoral sexual relations.
- ***Its pairing with the immediately following word arsenokoitai.*** Since *arsenokoitai* means “men who lie with a male” as a reference to the active, insertive partners in male-male intercourse, it is likely that *malakoi* refers to the passive, receptive partner in such intercourse. Indeed, the two preceding terms *eidololatrai* (idolaters) and *moichoi* (adulterers) form a natural pair in the Old Testament, making more probable the pairing of the next two terms, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*.
- ***Philo of Alexandria’s use of cognate words.*** Philo (a first-century Jewish philosophy) uses cognate terms to *malakos* to refer to men who actively feminize themselves for the purpose of attracting other men: *malakia* and *malakotēs*, “softness”; also: *anandria*, “unmanliness,” *hoi paschontes*, “those who are ‘done’” [as opposed to the “doers,” *hoi drōntes*], and *androgynoi*, “men-women” (cf. *Special Laws* 3.37-42; *On Abraham* 135-36; *Contemplative Life* 59-61; translated in Gagnon 2001a, 172-75).
- ***Greco-Roman usage of *malakoi* and the parallel Latin word molles (soft men).*** The terms *malakoi* and *molles* could be used broadly to refer to effeminate or unmanly men. But in specific contexts it could be used in ways similar to the more specific terms *cinaedi* (lit., “butt-shakers”) and *pathici* (“those who undergo [penetration]”) to denote effeminate *adult* males who are biologically and/or psychologically disposed to desire penetration by men. For example, in Soranus’s work *On Chronic Diseases* (early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.) the section on men who

desire to be penetrated (4.9.131-37) is entitled “On the *molles* or *subacti* (subjugated or penetrated partners, pathics) whom the Greeks call *malthakoi*.” An Aristotelian text similarly refers to those who are anatomically inclined toward the receptive role as *malakoi* (Pseudo-Aristotle, *Problems* 4.26). Astrological texts that speak of males desirous of playing the penetrated female role also use the term *malakoi* (Ptolemy, *Four Books* 3.14 §172; Vettius Valens, *Anthologies* 2.37.54; 2.38.82; cf. Brooten, 126 n. 41, 260 n. 132). The complaint about such figures in the ancient world generally, and certainly by Philo, centers around their attempted erasure of the masculine stamp given them by God/nature, not their exploitation of others, age difference, or acts of prostitution.

Rogers addresses not one of the above points.

**The word *arsenokoitai* should be translated literally as “men who lie with a male.” Here are some reasons why:**

- ***Clear connections to the Levitical prohibitions of male-male intercourse.*** The word is formed from the Greek words for “lying” (*koite*) and “male” (*arsen*) that appear in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Levitical prohibitions of men “lying with a male” (18:22; 20:13). The intentionality of the connection with the absolute Levitical prohibitions against male-male intercourse is self-evident from the following points: (a) The rabbis used the corresponding Hebrew abstract expression *mishkav zakur*, “lying of/with a male,” drawn from the Hebrew texts of Lev 18:22 and 20:13, to denote male-male intercourse in the broadest sense. (b) The term or its cognates does not appear in any non-Jewish, non-Christian text prior to the sixth century A.D. This way of talking about male homosexuality is a distinctly Jewish and Christian formulation. It was undoubtedly used as a way of distinguishing their absolute opposition to homosexual practice, rooted in the Torah of Moses, from more accepting views in the Greco-Roman milieu. (c) The appearance of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Tim 1:10 makes the link to the Mosaic law explicit, since the list of vices of which *arsenokoitai* is a part are said to be derived from “the law” (1:9). All of the above considerations show Dale Martin’s argument (adopted by Rogers) to be silly; namely, that the meaning of a compound word does not necessarily add up to the sum of its parts. In this instance, it clearly does.
- ***The implications of the context in early Judaism.*** That Jews of the period construed the Levitical prohibitions of male-male intercourse absolutely and against a backdrop of a male-female requirement is beyond dispute. For example, Josephus explained to Gentile readers that “the law [of Moses] recognizes only sexual intercourse that is according to nature, that which is with a woman. . . . But it abhors the intercourse of males with males” (*Against Apion* 2.199). There are no

limitations placed on the prohibition as regards age, slave status, idolatrous context, or exchange of money. The only limitation is the sex of the participants. According to *b. Sanh.* 54a, the male with whom a man lays in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 may be “an adult or minor,” meaning that the prohibition of male-male unions is not limited to pederasty. Indeed, there is no evidence in ancient Israel, Second Temple Judaism, or rabbinic Judaism that any limitation was placed on the prohibition of male-male intercourse.

- ***The choice of word.*** Had a more limited meaning been intended—for example, pederasts—the terms *paiderastai* (“lover of boys”), *paidomanai* (“men mad for boys”), or *paidophthoroi* (“corrupters of boys”) could have been chosen.
- ***The meaning of arsenokoitai and cognates in extant usage.*** The term *arsenokoites* and cognates after Paul (the term appears first in Paul) are applied solely to male-male intercourse but, consistent with the meaning of the partner term *malakoi*, not limited to pederasts or clients of cult prostitutes (see specifics in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 317-23). This includes the translations of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10 in Latin, Syriac, and Coptic.
- ***Implications of the parallel in Rom 1:24-27.*** It is absurd to interpret the meaning of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor 6:9 without consideration of the broad indictment of male-male intercourse expounded in Rom 1:27 (“males with males”).
- ***Implications from the context of 1 Cor 5-7.*** This absolute and inclusive sense is further confirmed by the broader context of 1 Cor 5-7: the parallel case of incest in ch. 5 (which gives no exceptions for committed, loving unions and echoes both Levitical and Deuteronomic law); the vice list in 6:9-11 (where sexual offenders are distinguished from idolaters, consent is presumed, and a warning is given to believers not to engage in such behavior any longer); the analogy to sex with a prostitute in 6:12-20 (where Gen 2:24 is cited as the absolute norm and the Christian identity of the offender is presumed); and the issue of marriage in ch. 7 (which presumes throughout that sex is confined to male-female marriage).
- ***The relevance of 1 Cor 11:2-16.*** If inappropriate hairstyles or head coverings were a source of shame because they compromised the sexual differences of men and women, how much more would a man taking another man to bed be a shameful act, lying with another male “as though lying with a woman”? Paul did not make head coverings an issue vital for inclusion in God’s kingdom, but he did put same-sex intercourse on that level.
- ***Implications of 1 Tim 1:9-10 corresponding to the Decalogue.*** At least the last half of the vice list in 1 Tim 1:8-10 (and possibly the whole of it) corresponds to the Decalogue. Why is that important? In early Judaism and Christianity the Ten Commandments often served as summary headings for the full range of laws in the Old Testament.

The seventh commandment against adultery, which was aimed at guarding the institution of marriage, served as a summary of all biblical sex laws, including the prohibition of male-male intercourse. The vice of kidnapping, which follows *arsenokoitai* in 1 Tim 1:10, is typically classified under the eighth commandment against stealing (so Philo, *Pseudo-Phocylides*, the rabbis, and the *Didache*; see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 335-36). This makes highly improbable the attempt by some to pair *arsenokoitai* with the following term *andrapodistai* (kidnappers, men-stealers), as a way of limiting its reference to exploitative acts of male-male intercourse (so Rogers, parroting others), rather than with the inclusive sexual term *pornoi* (the sexually immoral) that precedes it.

- ***The implication of the meaning of malakoi.*** If the term *malakoi* is not limited in its usage to boys or to men who are exploited by other men, then *arsenokoitai* certainly cannot be limited to men who have sex with boys or slaves.
- ***Sex with adult males as worse than sex with adolescent boys.*** In the Greco-Roman world homosexual intercourse between an adult male and a male youth was regarded as a *less* exploitative form of same-sex *eros* than intercourse between two adult males. The key problem with homosexual intercourse—behaving toward the passive male partner as if the latter were female—was exacerbated when the intercourse was aimed at adult males who had outgrown the “softness” of immature adolescence. Consequently, even if *arsenokoitai* primarily had in mind man-boy love (and from all that we have said above, there is no evidence that it does), then, *a fortiori*, it would surely also take in man-man love.
- ***On commitment and orientation.*** Finally, there is little basis for concluding that *arsenokoitai* does not take in committed homoerotic relationships between homosexually oriented persons. The term’s emphasis on the act—similar to proscriptions of various incestuous unions—makes the term more encompassing of all male-male sexual activity, not less so. A loving disposition on the part of the participants is as irrelevant a consideration for homoerotic behavior as it is for an adult man-mother or brother-sister union. Moreover, as we shall see below, ancient authors were able to conceive of caring, committed homosexual unions. Knowledge of a “sexual orientation” also is irrelevant, both because (as noted in installment 1) the ancients could conceive of something akin to a sexual orientation while rejecting the behaviors that arise from them and because Paul conceived of sin itself as an innate impulse, passed on by an ancestor, running through the members of the human body, and never entirely within human control.

Does Rogers mention a single of the above arguments, let alone bother to refute any of the above arguments? No, not a one. Keep in mind that Rogers has charged me with supplying “no supporting evidence” for my assertion that Scripture’s

prohibition of homosexual practice is absolute. Not only have I supplied supporting evidence for this reading of 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10, but also the supporting evidence that I do give for this assertion is far greater than anything that Rogers supplies. It is not even close.

**(5) *Caring homosexuality and universal critiques in Greece and Rome.*** Rogers's argument presupposes that (a) no one in the ancient world had any knowledge of caring and committed homosexual unions; or (b), if anyone did, such persons could not have opposed homosexual unions of this type. So, the argument goes, Paul's remarks could not have had in view such homosexual unions, but only exploitative kinds. The evidence does not bear out such presuppositions. Rogers has no excuse for not knowing this, for a good part of the argument that follows was already present in my book *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (pp. 350-60). Rogers simply turned a blind eye to the evidence that was before him. He covered it up for his readers.

**(a) *The conception of caring homoerotic unions in Paul's cultural environment.*** The idea of caring homosexual unions existed long before Paul's day. For example, in Plato's *Symposium* Aristophanes refers to males who are "not inclined by nature toward marriage and the procreation of children, yet are compelled to do so by the law or custom" and must "live their lives out with one another unmarried." When those who are "fondly welcoming that which is of the same kind"

happen upon that very person who is his half . . . they are wonderfully struck with affectionate regard and a sense of kinship and love, almost not wanting to be divided even for a short time. And these are they who continue with one another throughout life. . . . [the lover] desiring to join together and to be fused into a single entity with his beloved and to become one person from two." (192)

Similarly in the much later work, the Pseudo-Lucianic *Affairs of the Heart* (ca. A.D. 300) Callicratidas defends love for males by arguing, in part, that "reciprocal expressions of love" between a man and his young male beloved reach a point where "it is difficult to perceive which of the two is a lover of which, as though in a mirror. . . . Why then do you reproach it . . . when it was ordained by divine laws . . . ?" (48). There are numerous examples of committed homosexual love in antiquity (see texts in *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, edited by Thomas K. Hubbard). Had Paul and other Jews of the period opposed only unloving kinds of homosexual unions, they could easily have made the distinction in their writings.

**(b) *Absolute rejections of homosexual practice in the Greco-Roman world.*** Even some emerging Greco-Roman thought rejected homosexual practice completely. We have already noted this through quotes from Hubbard regarding (i) the emergence in the first few centuries of the common era of "severe moral condemnation of all homosexual acts" alongside strong endorsement of homosexual unions and (ii) the development of critiques of homosexual practice based on nature arguments regarding the holistic fittedness of the sexes—arguments that transcend the issue of individual exploitative acts and reject homosexual acts categorically. For example, 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). If some non-Jewish/non-Christian moralists and philosophers in the Greco-Roman world, coming out of cultures that had considerable tolerance for various forms of homosexual behavior, could indict even loving homosexual unions as against nature and morally wrong, is it not all the more likely that Paul, coming out of a culture that had a long history of intense rejection of homosexual activity, could do the same?

Does Rogers show any awareness of this broader cultural environment? Although he stresses in his guidelines for interpreting Scripture the importance of knowing the historical-cultural context, he shows no such awareness here.

**I have given 12 pages here to showing that I do supply in my work an abundance of evidence that demonstrates that Scripture’s opposition to homosexual practice is absolute and total.** Part of me feels apologetic about giving readers so much to digest but part of me wishes that I could present here an even fuller case (but space concerns do not permit me to do so). Remember, too, that the evidence that I have just supplied is limited to the Pauline witness. I haven’t yet discussed the Old Testament evidence or the evidence from the Jesus tradition. Yet I think that I have said enough to pose again the allegations that Rogers makes about my work:

[Gagnon] simply asserts, with no supporting evidence, that sexual relations between contemporary Christian people who are homosexual are sinful as such. (p. 84)

Gagnon does not demonstrate that the immoral sexual relations Paul condemns are related to the love of contemporary faithful gay and lesbian Christians. He simply asserts it. (p. 83)

**How else can these statements by Rogers be reasonably classified as anything but an extreme instance of bearing false witness in scholarship? And how can the official publishing house of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., Westminster John Knox—a Christian publishing house—give credence to such a lie by publishing such a book?** Readers who do not know my work and who are inclined to believe Rogers will be deceived because Rogers has failed to mention any of the supporting evidence that I give for my position. **Surely, many will conclude, a former moderator of the PCUSA is not going to lie so brazenly about a fellow Christian and Presbyterian? Alas, that is precisely what Rogers and, by inference, Stephanie Egotovich and Donald McKim of Westminster John Knox have done. In so doing, Rogers and WJK have attempted to cover up the deficiencies in Rogers’s argument. How can such conduct possibly “heal the church,” as the subtitle of his book advertises? And when Rogers and WJK talk about “exploding myths” have we not**

**shown that the myth is Rogers's own position that Scripture does not disapprove of all homosexual practice?**

*To be continued in Installment 4*