



Bad Reasons for Changing One's Mind

Jack Rogers's Temple Prostitution Argument and Other False Starts

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The Covenant Network has proudly posted on its website a piece by the controversial former moderator Jack Rogers, entitled “How I Changed My Mind on Homosexuality” (an address given to the Covenant Network Northwest Regional Conference on Oct. 11, 2003; go [here](#)). The fact that the Covenant Network is so enamored with it—posting the full 6000-word address, along with a color photo of Rogers and side captions—says something about what passes there for profound reflection on Scripture.

Rogers has been saying for a long time that his intensive study of Scripture led him to embrace committed homosexual unions. He repeats the point in this latest address: “I had often said that I could not change my negative attitude toward homosexuality unless I was convinced by Scripture.” Now at long last Rogers reveals what precisely in Scripture caused him to change his mind. Here it is.

In the summer of 1992 Rogers visited Greece and Turkey. At Corinth he looked upward from the place where Paul was tried. Rogers saw

the AcroCorinth, a mountain on which was a temple to Aphrodite, a bisexual god/goddess. In ancient time, it was staffed by seven thousand prostitutes, male and female. . . . *That experience in Corinth became a significant occasion for reflection on the meaning of the Bible.* I began to study Romans 1 and 2 afresh. . . .

[Paul] wrote Romans from Corinth. I think he was remembering the AcroCorinth and saying: “That is the worst example of idolatry I have ever seen.” I would agree. Paul’s point is not about homosexuality, but idolatry, worshipping false gods.

Paul is talking about idolatrous people engaged in prostitution. It is hardly fair to apply his judgment on them to Christian gay and

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lesbian people who are not idolaters and no more lustful than anyone else. (emphases added)

So Rogers had an epiphany of sorts from his experience at Corinth: In Romans 1:24-27 (and, presumably, 1 Cor 6:9; cf. 1 Tim 1:10) Paul was not condemning homosexual practice per se but merely a type of homosexual practice associated with temple idolatry. Rogers advances no other argument to support this theory. That's all he has.

We will begin with a discussion of why Rogers's temple-prostitution theory is unworkable (part I). After this, we will demonstrate how Rogers misunderstands the broader literary context for Paul's remarks in Romans 1:18-32 (part II). Then we will treat Rogers's continued distortion of the nature argument as a simple failure to understand the principle "both Scripture first and nature" (part III). Finally, we will deal with the rest of Rogers's justifications for endorsing homosexual practice, focusing particularly on his past and present misunderstandings regarding the significance of fidelity and longevity in a minority of homosexual unions. We will show that Rogers still does not grasp Scripture's real reason for proscribing homosexual practice (part IV).

I. Fifteen Reasons Why the Temple Prostitution Theory Is a Bad Idea

I know of no serious biblical scholar, even prohomosex biblical scholar, who argues that Paul had in mind only or primarily temple prostitution—not Nissinen, not Brooten, not Fredrickson, not Schoedel, not Bird, not Martin, etc. There are many reasons why this view has not found a welcome in serious biblical scholarship. I shall limit myself to fifteen such reasons, without making a pretense that the list is exhaustive.

1. ***Rogers's historical anachronism regarding temple prostitution in Corinth.*** Rogers's trip to Corinth convinced him that Paul's views on homosexual behavior were profoundly influenced by the alleged existence of "seven thousand prostitutes, male and female" at the temple of Aphrodite in Corinth in Paul's day. As it happens, the only ancient account that refers to cult prostitutes at the temple of Aphrodite in Corinth is a brief mention by Strabo in *Geography* 8.6.20c:

And the temple of Aphrodite was so rich that it owned more than a thousand temple-slaves, prostitutes, whom both men and women had dedicated to the goddess. And therefore it was on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich. (Text and commentary in: Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* [GNS 6; Wilmington: M. Glazier, 1983], 55-57)

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Any critical New Testament scholar knows that Strabo's comments (1) applied only to Greek Corinth in existence several centuries before the time of Paul, not the Roman Corinth of Paul's day; (2) referred to "more than a thousand prostitutes," not seven thousand; and (3) mentioned only female (heterosexual) prostitutes, not male (homosexual) prostitutes. Scholars agree that there was no massive business of female cult prostitutes—to say nothing of male homosexual cult prostitutes—operating out of the temple of Aphrodite in Paul's day; and that there may not have been such a business even in earlier times (i.e., Strabo was confused). This is not particularly new information, which makes it all the more surprising that Rogers was taken in, apparently, by an ill-informed tour guide. For example, Hans Conzelmann made the following remarks in his major commentary on 1 Corinthians written some thirty years ago:

Incidentally, the often-peddled statement that Corinth was a seat of sacred prostitution (in the service of Aphrodite) is a fable. This realization also disposes of the inference that behind the Aphrodite of Corinth lurks the Phoenician Astarte. [Note 97:] The fable is based on Strabo, *Geog.* 8.378. . . . Strabo, however, is not speaking of the present, but of the city's ancient golden period. . . . Incidentally, Strabo's assertion is not even true of the ancient Corinth. (*1 Corinthians* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1975 [German original, 1969], 12)

This continues to be the view held by scholars. As Bruce Winter notes in a recent significant work on 1 Corinthians,

Strabo's comments about 1,000 religious prostitutes of Aphrodite . . . are unmistakably about Greek and not Roman Corinth. As temple prostitution was not a Greek phenomenon, the veracity of his comments on this point have been rightly questioned. The size of the Roman temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth ruled out such temple prostitution; and by that time she had become Venus—the venerated mother of the imperial family and the highly respected patroness of Corinth—and was no longer a sex symbol (*After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 87-88; similarly, Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 55-56)

The scholarly consensus that there was no homosexual prostitution at the Corinthian temple of Aphrodite in Paul's day is enough, all by itself, to dispense with Rogers's theory and show Rogers's unreliability as an exegete of the biblical text. But we continue anyway.

2. *The plain-sense meaning of Romans 1:24-27.* There is nothing in the language of Romans 1:24-27 that keys into the issue of prostitution or indeed the issue of exploitation generally. What Paul expressed as the problem was not the particularly exploitative way in which *some* homoerotic relationships

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were conducted in the ancient world but rather same-sex intercourse *per se*: females exchanging sexual intercourse with males for sexual intercourse with females, and males likewise having sex with males.

3. ***The mention of lesbian intercourse in Romans 1:26.*** The fact that Paul mentions lesbian intercourse in Romans 1:26—which in the ancient world did not take the form of temple prostitution—proves that Paul did not have in view only forms of same-sex intercourse associated with idol worship or commercial transactions.

4. ***Mutual gratification and mutual condemnation in Romans 1:24-27.*** If Paul were condemning only exploitative forms of male-male intercourse, he would hardly have indicted in Romans 1:24-27 both partners in the sexual relationship. Yet he does condemn both partners—“males engaging in indecency with males, receiving back *in themselves* the recompense which was required of their straying.” This is consistent with the fact that he regards the activity as mutual and consenting: dishonoring “their bodies *among themselves*” and being “inflamed with their yearning for *one another*.” Far from painting a picture where one party is being degraded and exploited by the other, Paul portrays both partners as seeking to gratify their urges with one another and together reaping the divine recompense for their mutually degrading conduct.

5. ***The Genesis connection.*** That Paul had the other-sex prerequisite in Genesis in view is obvious from the clear intertextual echoes to Genesis 1:26-27 found in Romans 1:23-27—*eight* terms of agreement between the two sets of texts, in nearly the same order. It is no accident, too, that the other major Pauline text dealing with same-sex intercourse, 1 Corinthians 6:9, is cited in close proximity to Gen 2:24 (1 Cor 6:16). And it is also no accident that these are the two key creation texts lifted up by Jesus in Mark 10:6-8 as prescriptive norms for defining all human sexual behavior: “*male and female he made them*” (Gen 1:27) and “*For this reason a man will . . . be joined to his woman (wife) and the two shall become one flesh*” (Gen 2:24). The story in Genesis 2:18-24 clearly images marriage as the sexually intimate “re-merger” of the constituent parts, man and woman, split from an originally undifferentiated sexual whole. Same-sex erotic unions are structurally precluded from reconstituting a one-flesh merger because the male and female elements cannot be reconstituted from a male-male or female-female union. Since the only differentiation created by the splitting is the differentiation into the two sexes, the presence of the two sexes is indispensable to a valid sexual rejoining. There is no realistic possibility that Jesus, in citing Gen 1:27 and 2:24 as prescriptive norms, missed this other-sex prerequisite—“male and female,” “man and woman”—so clearly embedded in these verses and their surrounding narrative and so staunchly embraced by Jews everywhere in Jesus’ day. (Many other arguments could also be made for adducing Jesus anti-homosex stance; see ch. 3 [pp. 185-228])

of *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* or pp. 68-74 of *Homosexuality and the Bible*). And the fact that Paul had the Genesis creation accounts in view when he indicted homosexual practice proves that he recognized their implication for abrogating all forms of same-sex intercourse (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 289-93).

6. *The parallel between idolatry as an act against creation and same-sex intercourse as an act against nature.* Rogers belittles the notion of a parallel between idolatry and same-sex intercourse. Yet the context makes the parallel obvious (see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 266-69). Paul emphasizes in Romans 1:18-32 that human beings are “without excuse”—even unbelievers who do not know Scripture—because God’s will is evident to them in creation/nature. Exhibit A (on the vertical level) is idolatry and exhibit B (on the horizontal level) is same-sex intercourse. Both alike represent attempts at suppressing the truth about God in creation or nature, transparent to human minds and even visible to human sight. Both acts are spoken of as “exchanges” of clear natural revelation for gratification of distorted desires (1:23, 25 and 1:26 respectively). Both acts are depicted as absurd—foolish or self-dishonoring—denials of natural revelation. The parallel—and not merely consequential—relationship between idolatry and same-sex intercourse is confirmed in *Testament of Naphtali* 3:3-4, where both idolatry and same-sex intercourse are viewed as exchanging the order of nature:

Gentiles . . . altered the order of them [viz., either that of the sun, moon, and stars, cited in v. 2, or their own], and have followed after stones and pieces of wood by following after wandering spirits. But you should not act in that way, my children, recognizing [instead] in the firmament, in the earth and in the sea and in all the products of workmanship, the Lord who made all these things, in order that you may not become like Sodom, which exchanged the order of its nature.

For further discussion of this text, see: *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 88-89n.121, 258n.18; and *Homosexuality and the Bible*, [online note 35](#).

In short, the parallel between idolatry and same-sex intercourse in Rom 1:18-27 is evident: Those who had suppressed the truth about God visible in creation were more apt to suppress the truth about their sexual bodies visible in nature.

7. *The other vices in Romans 1:29-31 not dependent on idolatry.* Yes, Paul sees idolatry as leading to an increase in same-sex intercourse as well as to an increase in the other vices cited in Rom 1:29-31. But to say that Paul was limiting the indictment in Rom 1:24-27 only to homosexual cult prostitution is like saying that the continuation of the vice list in Rom 1:29-31 had only idolatrous contexts in view. Obviously, persons who reject the clear revelation of a transcendent God in creation are going to be more likely to

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engage in forms of sexual behavior that suppress the truth about human sexual complementarity accessible in nature. Equally obvious, however, is the fact that Paul recognized that it was not necessary to worship idols to commit any of the immoral behaviors cited in Rom 1:24-31.

8. *Sexual uncleanness in Romans 6:19.* Later in Romans 6:19 Paul warns believers not to return to the kind of “sexual uncleanness”—*akatharsia*, the same Greek term employed in 1:24 of same-sex intercourse and other sexual offenses—that characterized their lives as unbelievers. He certainly was no more restricting the use of the term to sex in the context of temple prostitutes than he was restricting any of the other instances of “lawlessness” to activity conducted in the context of idolatrous worship.

9. *The distinction between idolatry and male-male intercourse in 1 Corinthians 6:9.* To say that Paul was limiting the indictment of male-male intercourse in 1 Cor 6:9 to homosexual cult prostitution is like saying that Paul was only opposed to incest (the case under discussion in chs. 5-6) in idolatrous and commercial contexts. In fact, “idolaters” are listed as a separate category of offenders, distinct from those who commit incest, prostitution, fornication, adultery, and male-male intercourse. The case of the incestuous man in ch. 5 involves a self-professed Christian with no linkage to idol worshipping or to prostitution. And the discussion of prostitution in 6:12-20 certainly is not tied only to *temple* prostitution. The reasons for the proscription of incest and same-sex intercourse are similar: sex with someone who is too much of a same, whether a familial same (incest: sex with the “flesh of one’s flesh,” Lev 18:6) or a sexual same (homosexual behavior: males who have sex with males).

10. *The expression “contrary to nature” as applied to same-sex intercourse.* In all the critiques of same-sex intercourse as “contrary to nature” that can be found in the ancient world, *not a single one* ever refers to the idolatrous or commercial dimension of same-sex intercourse. For example, the physician Soranus described the desire on the part of “soft men” to be penetrated (cf. 1 Cor 6:9) as “not from nature,” insofar as it “subjugated to obscene uses parts not so intended” and disregarded “the places of our body which divine providence destined for definite functions”(Chronic Diseases 4.9.131). Moreover, numerous cases of same-sex erotic relationships involving neither prostitution nor cultic activity can be documented for the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods.

11. *Early Jewish critiques of same-sex intercourse.* When one reads the critique in early Judaism of homoerotic practice—especially in Philo and Josephus—one notices rather quickly that the remarks focus on the compromise of sexual identity, not issues such as exchange of money or idolatrous connections. The same holds for rabbinic literature. See *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, ch. 2.

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Jewish and even some pagan moralists condemned [the malakoi, “soft men”], not for their role in temple prostitution...but for their attempted erasure of the masculine stamp given them in nature.

12. *The link between “men who lie with males” in 1 Cor 6:9 and the absolute prohibitions in Leviticus.* The term *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor 6:9, a distinctly Jewish and Christian term—literally, “men who lie with males”—is derived from the *absolute* prohibitions of male-male intercourse in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 (Septuagint: *koite* = “lying [with],” *arsen* = “a male”). That these prohibitions have to do, first and foremost, with sexual intercourse and not with idolatry is evident from their sandwiching in the midst of the sex laws in Lev 20:10-21, separate and distinct from the regulation against sacrificing to Molech in 20:2-5. They are no more tied to idolatry or prostitution than are the laws against adultery, incest, and bestiality that surround them. Neither Second Temple Judaism nor rabbinic Judaism (nor Patristic Christianity) restricted the relevance of the Levitical prohibitions to male-male intercourse conducted in the context of idol worship or prostitution.

13. *The main objection to the homosexual cult prostitutes in the Old Testament.* The Old Testament—particularly Deuteronomy and the “Deuteronomistic History” (Joshua through 2 Kings)—does condemn “homosexual cult prostitutes” (the so-called *qedeshim*, “consecrated ones”). But even here, parallel figures in the ancient Near East—the *assinnu*, *kurgarru*, and *kulu’u*—were held in low regard not so much for their prostitution as for their compromise of masculine gender in allowing themselves to be penetrated as though women (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 48-49). Even Phyllis Bird, a prohomosex Old Testament scholar who has done as much work as anyone on the *qedeshim*, acknowledges that the writers of Scripture emphasized not the cultic prostitution of these figures but rather their “repugnant associations with male homosexual activity.” On the *qedeshim*, see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 100-110.

14. *The meaning of “soft men” in its historical context.* The term *malakoi* in 1 Cor 6:9—literally, “soft men”—was often used in the Greco-Roman world as a description of adult males who feminized their appearances in the hopes of attracting a male partner. Jewish and even some pagan moralists condemned them, not for their role in temple prostitution—most were not temple prostitutes—but for their attempted erasure of the masculine stamp given them in nature. See further *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 306-12; and *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 82-83 with [online notes 96-98](#).

15. *A Corinthian critique of male-male love.* The pseudo-Lucianic text *Affairs of the Heart* records a debate between Charicles, a Corinthian, who defends the superiority of male love for women, and Callicratidas, who defends the superiority of male love for males. Interestingly, the Corinthian never focuses on the association of male-male love with temple prostitution. Instead, he notes that men who engage in sex with other males “transgress the

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laws of nature” by looking “with the eyes at the male as (though) at a female,” “one nature [coming] together in one bed.” “*Seeing themselves in one another* they were ashamed neither of what they were doing nor of what they were having done to them” (cited in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 165-66 n. 10). What does this critique have to do with temple prostitution? Absolutely nothing. Yet Rogers would have us believe that Paul’s view of same-sex intercourse, and that of Scripture generally—which every historical piece of evidence indicates was more absolutely, consistently, and strongly opposed to same-sex intercourse than anything found in the Greco-Roman world—was actually *more* accepting of homosexual behavior than the cultural milieu out of which emerged.

Rogers claims that when he learned to read the anti-homosex texts in Scripture in their historical and literary context he discovered that they didn’t condemn homoerotic activity per se. But the truth is that Rogers doesn’t know the historical and literary context well. What he thinks he knows—his allegation about rampant temple prostitution at Corinth in Paul’s day—he in fact does not know. Since Rogers bases the major part of his argument on the premise that the biblical texts had only homosexual cult prostitution in view, the end result of our analysis above is that Rogers has *no* scriptural case for affirming committed homosexual unions.

The worst part of all is that Rogers could have deduced all these reasons for why the temple prostitution argument is untenable from a careful reading of *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. The idolatry, cult prostitution, and exploitation arguments are treated at several points in the book (e.g., pp. 100-110, 129-32, 284-89, 347-61). Unless Rogers can refute all fifteen arguments given above—an obvious impossibility—he should admit to readers that either he has not read my book for comprehension or he has chosen to ignore the insurmountable problems with his position. The matter is deeply troubling, whether the problem lies with gross incomprehension of clear and repeated discussion in my book or a deliberate cover-up of the aforementioned material for a credulous audience.

II. On Rogers’s Misunderstanding of Romans 1-3

This epiphany that Rogers experienced regarding temple prostitution at Corinth made him “realize” that Paul was opposed to anyone, anytime, passing judgment on the behavior recorded in Rom 1:18-32 (idolatry, same-sex intercourse, murder, deceit, covetousness, etc.). At least this is how Rogers interprets Rom 2:1: “Therefore, you are without excuse, O human, everyone who judges, for in what you judge another you are condemning yourself, for you who judges does the same things.” He “buttresses” this conclusion with an appeal to Rom 3:23-24: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift, by his grace, through the

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redemption in Christ Jesus.” According to Rogers, to use Rom 1:24-27 as a basis for condemning homosexual practice is “to turn Romans 1 into a law” and “to misrepresent Paul’s point. It turns the Protestant Reformation upside down.”

1. *Reading beyond Romans 1-3 to Romans 6:1-8:17.* Needless to say, Rogers’s conclusion would have been news to Paul, as well as to the great Reformers. Like many who share his view of homosexual behavior, Rogers fails to do the simple task of reading beyond Romans 3 to Romans 6:1-8:17. When Paul asks in ch. 6 the rhetorical question, “Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?” he answers by insisting that genuine adherence to the lordship of Jesus Christ leads us *out of* a life under the control of the sinful impulse (6:15-23; 7:5-6; 8:1-17; cf. 6:1-14). Thus Paul can assert:

Just as you [formerly, as unbelievers] presented your bodily members as slaves to *sexual uncleanness (akatharsia)* and to [other acts of] lawlessness with a view to lawlessness, so now [as believers] present your bodily members as slaves to righteousness with a view to holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free with respect to [not doing] righteousness. What fruit, therefore, were you having at that time? Things of which you are now ashamed, for the end (outcome) of those things is death. (Romans 6:19-21)

Interestingly, same-sex intercourse in Rom 1:24-27 is cited as the prime example of “sexual uncleanness” (*akatharsia*)—the very word used in Rom 6:19 to denote the behavior that Christians must now leave behind (note that the term appears nowhere else in Romans). The mention of shameful practices that lead to death in Rom 6:19-21 also clearly echoes the themes of Rom 1:24-27, 32. Obviously, then, the point of the Christian life is to discontinue the shameful practices of 1:19-31, including females having intercourse with females and males having intercourse with males. If *the wrath of God* manifested in this age involves, in part, God permitting people to engage in such self-dishonoring, shameful behavior, with death resulting, then *the saving righteousness of God* must mean not merely forgiveness of sins but empowerment, through the Spirit, to be delivered from the primary control of such shameful impulses.

Accordingly, “sin shall not be lord over you, for you are not under the law but under grace” (6:14). To be “under the law” is to be dominated by sinful passions that “bear fruit for death” (7:5). To be “under grace” is to be Spirit-controlled and thus bearing fruit for life (7:6). It is life *lived* in “the law of the Spirit of life”—that is, life lived under the primary regulating power of indwelling Spirit—that effects liberation from “the law of sin and death.” Paul means by “the law of sin and death” the internal regulating power of sin operating in human flesh, which brings death to those who obey it (8:1-2).

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Life lived in conformity to the Spirit “fulfills the righteous requirement of the law” (8:4) rather than violates or ignores the law.

For Paul, the transformed life, while not meriting salvation, is the indispensable middle term between Christ's justifying death and the gift of eternal life. Self-professed Christians who continue to live life under sin's primary sway will perish. Thus the conclusion to the question, “Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?”—that is, should we sin because there are, allegedly, no apocalyptic repercussions for sinning—is as follows:

So, then, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, that is, to live in conformity with the flesh. For if you live in conformity to the flesh, you are going to die. But if, by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live. For as many as are being *led* by the Spirit of God—these are the children of God. (8:12-14)

In other words, a profession of faith void of a transformed life is worthless and will not save a person from divine wrath. Calvin put it well when, in commenting on Rom 8:9, he wrote:

Those in whom the Spirit does not reign do not belong to Christ; therefore those who serve the flesh are not Christians, for those who separate Christ from His Spirit make Him like a dead image or a corpse. . . . Free remission of sins cannot be separated from the Spirit of regeneration. This would be, as it were, to rend Christ asunder. (*The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* [trans. R. MacKenzie; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961], 164)

Similarly, commenting on Rom 6:19, Calvin contends that Christians should be “no less eager and ready in performing *the commandments of God*” than they were eager, as unbelievers, to engage in sinful conduct (ibid., 134; emphasis mine, noting the importance of obedience to God's commandments for a faithful Christian life).

2. ***The gospel mandate to abstain from various sexual practices.*** Thus it is ludicrous to contend, as Rogers does, that it would “misrepresent Paul” and “turn the Protestant Reformation upside down” if the church condemned “the sexual expression of one group of people.” (Imagine the consequences of following the same line of reasoning for persons who experience exclusive sexual attraction for children!) Even in Paul's day, (1) not everyone engaged in same-sex intercourse, much less homosexual cult prostitution; and (2) there were widespread theories that attributed one or more forms of homosexual practice to some degree of congenital influence for some people (see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 380-94 *passim*; and now “Does the Bible Regard Same-Sex Intercourse as Intrinsically Sinful?” in *Christian Sexuality* [ed. R. Saltzman; Kirk House, 2003], 106-55, particularly pp. 141-

By Rogers's reckoning, the Corinthian believers should have responded [to Paul's question in 1 Cor 5:12 with]: "No. You are turning grace into law!" But that is the wrong answer.

The fact that all persons have sinned is no license to continue in sin.

46). Neither of these points dissuaded Paul from singling out same-sex intercourse as a prime example, among inter-human sins, of human suppression of the truth about God's creation evident in nature. Nor did these points prevent Paul from exhorting believers not to return to the unclean sexual practices of their former life, whether same-sex intercourse or some other "lawless" act influenced by biological predispositions.

Indeed, the same point is made in 1 Cor 6:9-20, where Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers not to return to the sexual immorality of their former life, which could include adult consensual incest, male-male intercourse, adultery, fornication, and sex with prostitutes. "These things some of you *were*; but you washed yourselves off, you were made holy, you were made righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (6:11). The basis for his appeal is that sex, *unlike dietary concerns*, is not a matter of soteriological indifference (6:12-20; contra Rogers and others who have appealed to the inclusion of Gentile believers in Acts 15 as a parallel). What one does sexually can get one thrown into hell (compare Jesus' saying about cutting off body parts in Matt 5:29-30). Precisely because Christ has purchased us out of slavery to sin, we belong to God, not ourselves, and so should "glorify God in [our] bodies" (6:19-20). In the immediate context it is obvious that Paul was not against the church passing judgment on believers who engage in sinful sexual behavior, even behavior of an adult, consensual, and committed sort. In the case of the incestuous believer in 1 Corinthians 5, a somewhat exasperated Paul asked the Corinthians: "*Is it not those inside [the church] that you are to judge?*" (5:12). By Rogers's reckoning, the Corinthian believers should have responded: "No. You are turning grace into law!" But that is the wrong answer to this obviously rhetorical question.

Paul does indeed set up a sting operation in Romans 2 against moral persons—in context, primarily unbelieving Jews—who condemn those who engage in the sinful activities of Rom 1:18-32 while committing sins of their own. But Paul does so not to trivialize the moral life but rather to underscore the universal human need for putting one's trust in Jesus' atoning death and empowering presence. (Note that the Covenant Network wrongly treats the atoning, or amends-making, function of Jesus' death as a non-essential doctrine of Christian faith.) God's wrath is *still* coming on those who live under sin's primary rule, which for Paul meant all unbelievers and some self-professed believers in Christ. Jesus' amends-making death makes possible the indwelling of Christ's Spirit for those who believe, which in turn makes possible a Spirit-led life, with an outcome of eternal life. A return to the sinned life of old puts at risk one's inheritance in the kingdom of God, whether one claims to be a believer or not. This includes a return to the practice of same-sex intercourse.

In short, *the fact that all persons have sinned is no license to continue in sin*. The point of our "baptism into Christ's death" is that we should now, "as

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Rogers willfully distorts my “both-and” argument regarding Scripture and nature into an “either-or.”

if alive from the dead,” put our bodily members at God’s, not sin’s, disposal (Rom 6:3-14). The difference between our lives before faith and our lives in faith is *not* that we now get to live sinful lives without fear of apocalyptic repercussions, but rather that we are now empowered by the indwelling Spirit of Christ to live lives that do not lead to death.

I had already treated the relationship of the argument in Romans 1:18-32 to the rest of Romans in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 277-84. That I have to restate it here for Rogers is just one more example that Rogers has not read my book for comprehension. Worse still, it is regrettable that this basic point of Christian teaching regarding the new creation in Christ and the necessity of a transformed life has to be made clear to a former moderator of the PCUSA and professor emeritus of theology. As I have said many times, the global theological arguments used to support or minimize homosexual behavior are just as harmful, and perhaps more so, than the support of homosexual behavior.

III. Rogers’s Distortion of the Nature Argument—Once Again

In his address Rogers goes on to attack my work by repeating a blatant misrepresentation that he had made two years earlier in a national Covenant Network address (2001). “The irony is that for Gagnon, you really don’t need the Bible, because everything it says about homosexuality comes, not from revelation, but from his understanding of natural law.” I have already clearly shown this to be a gross distortion of what I wrote in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. See “Robert Gagnon on Jack Rogers’s Comments: Misrepresenting the Nature Argument,” [pdf](#) and [html](#).

Rogers willfully distorts my “both-and” argument regarding Scripture and nature into an “either-or.” He alleges that my argument actually ignores the special revelation of Scripture or regards it as irrelevant. Given that my 500-page book is mostly about *Scripture’s* case against same-sex intercourse, such an allegation is absurd.

1. ***Taking my remarks out of context.*** Rogers takes a few statements in my book out of context and mischaracterizes their contextual sense—evidently the same procedure that he employs when he reads the biblical witness against homosexual practice (see I. above).

For example, he quotes the following line from my conclusion:

Acceptance of biblical revelation is thus not a prerequisite for rejecting the legitimacy of same-sex intercourse. (p. 488)

What he conveniently neglects to cite is the very next line:

For those who either do not know, or (like Rogers) refuse to accept, special biblical revelation, there is adequate reason in the natural realm for not approving of same-sex intercourse.

If Scripture itself makes an appeal to creation/nature, it can hardly be contrary to a revelation-based approach to make a similar appeal.

However, for those who do attribute special inspired status to Scripture at any level, there is even less warrant to affirm same-sex intercourse.

In other words, *for those who either do not know, or (like Rogers) refuse to accept, special biblical revelation, there is adequate reason in the natural realm for not approving of same-sex intercourse.* And both the sentence that Rogers cites and the one he does not are part of the second of four reasons why I contend that same-sex intercourse is contrary to God's intention for human sexual relations. The first and primary reason that I cite is:

Same-sex intercourse is strongly and unequivocally rejected by the revelation of Scripture. (p. 487)

I make a similar point at the conclusion to ch. 4, "The Witness of Paul":

To be sure, *Paul and other Jews derived their own opposition to same-sex intercourse, first and foremost, from the creation stories in Genesis 1-2 and the Levitical prohibitions*, both which have intertextual echoes in Rom 1:18-32. Yet, Paul contended, even gentiles without access to the direct revelation of Scripture have enough evidence in the natural realm to discern God's aversion to homosexual behavior. (p. 337; emphasis added)

How could this point be any clearer? The direct revelation of Scripture is primary, but even the indirect revelation of nature provides sufficient grounds for holding accountable those who engage in same-sex intercourse, whether out of ignorance of Scripture or out of defiance of it.

2. ***A simple principle: Both Scripture first and nature.*** It is a simple "both-and": both Scripture first and nature—and, I might add, the disproportionately high negative effects attending homosexual behavior *and* the increase in homosexuality that would arise from cultural endorsement and incentives.

The coherence of Scripture and nature is not surprising in view of the fact that the Revealer who communicates in Scripture an other-sex prerequisite is also the Creator who designs males and females for complementary sexual pairing. The alternative is the kind of Gnostic dualism that the church resisted in the second to fifth centuries. If Scripture itself makes an appeal to creation/nature, it can hardly be contrary to a revelation-based approach to make a similar appeal (within limits; see point 3 below). That Paul *does* make such an appeal to the created order in Romans 1:24-27 is easily demonstrated (see my eight-point section, "An Imposed Natural Law Theory?" [pp. 6-9] in my online response to L. William Countryman's review, [pdf version](#) and [html version](#)). But the witness of Scripture is, of course, primary. It is, if anything, even more unequivocal and binding than the testimony of nature. Let it also

be said that Paul was not the first writer of Scripture to appeal to creation's or nature's testimony to God (see James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1993]).

3. *An anti-Scriptural, anti-Reformed view of nature?* Rogers tells his audience that to suggest that creation or nature gives people any indication about God or God's will for human behavior is an anti-Reformed and anti-Scriptural view. He says:

Paul, according to Gagnon, proclaims that both God and ethical human behavior can be known through observing nature. To most American Christians that just sounds like common sense. However, in the Reformed tradition, we know God in Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture. Augustine, Calvin, and most of the Reformed tradition, would have had real theological differences with Gagnon's methodology.

Rogers is wrong as regards both Paul and the Reformed tradition. He sets up a false dichotomy between (1) knowing *anything* about God and ethical behavior "through observing nature" and (2) knowing God *definitively* "through Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture." Clearly, Paul (and Scripture generally) did believe that *some* rudimentary things could be known through creation/nature, without detracting from the definitive character of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

I made clear in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* that I am not arguing that people can attain saving knowledge of Jesus Christ simply through observation of creation or nature. In failing to note this, Rogers once again shows either deliberate deception of his audience or lack of basic reading comprehension. At the same time, I state what Paul obviously stated in Romans 1:18-32: people know enough through creation and nature to leave them "without excuse"—that is, justly under God's sentence of judgment and in need of special revelation about Jesus Christ. In some areas nature provides enough knowledge for humans to be held culpable for violations, but never enough knowledge or power to bestow justification. Hence:

It is certainly true that, for Paul, at least since the coming of Christ definitively redemptive knowledge of God was possible only through . . . the communication of the gospel . . . [and] God's "sealing" of the believer with the Spirit of Christ. Nevertheless, Rom 1:18-32 makes quite clear that Paul allowed for sufficient knowledge of God accessible through observation of the material creation to enable gentiles to deduce that idolatry was wrong and to justify God's expression of wrath against those who commit it. He also apparently regarded some knowledge of moral absolutes among gentiles as possible through the "natural" faculties of reason and conscience (Rom 2:14-16). However, he did not regard such knowledge as any more fruitful for redemption than the access that

I state what Paul obviously stated in Romans 1:18-32: people know enough through creation and nature to leave them "without excuse."

For Rogers to argue that...Paul did not see any revelatory character to nature is a blatant misrepresentation of the text of Scripture.

Jews had to the direct revelation of Mosaic law. . . . For Paul, then, nature provided the unbeliever (and believer) with access to some information about God and God's will that enabled compliance with the truth at some level. It also justified God's condemnation of those who violated certain basic principles concerning idolatry and immorality. Yet the knowledge that nature/creation communicated about God was insufficient for salvation—only the word of the gospel and the gift of the Spirit could convey that. (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 257 n. 17)

For Rogers to argue that it was otherwise for Paul, that Paul did not see *any* revelatory character to nature, is a blatant misrepresentation of the text of Scripture. On what basis does Paul contend in Romans 1:19-23 that those who worship statues in the images of humans and, worse, animals are “without excuse”? Apparently for Rogers there is no basis for such a verdict. But Paul says otherwise. For pagans without Scripture, the grandeur and order of creation itself testifies to a God who is above and beyond creation:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against every impiety and unrighteousness of humans who suppress the truth about God in their unrighteousness, because *the knowable aspect of God is visible/evident to them, for God has made it visible/evident to them. For from the creation of the world on, his invisible qualities are clearly seen, being mentally apprehended by means of the things made—both his eternal power and divinity—so that they are without excuse.* (Romans 1:18-20)

A limited appeal to natural revelation here is unmistakable. Only a prior commitment not to acknowledge any degree of natural revelation could cause one to miss it. A similar point is made in the first-century A.D. (?) Jewish work *Wisdom of Solomon*:

All people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know the one who exists, nor did they recognize the artisan while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars . . . were the gods that rule the world. . . . Let them perceive from them how much more powerful is the one who formed them. *For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.* Yet . . . perhaps they go astray while seeking God and . . . trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful. Yet again, *not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?* (13:1-9)

A similar point is made in *Testament of Naphtali* 3:4 (cited in point I.6 above). These texts are additional examples of the fact that Rogers does not read New Testament passages properly in their historical context. To my

[According to Calvin] “we are not so blind that we can plead ignorance without being convicted of perversity.”

knowledge, there is not a single major commentary on Romans written in the past quarter century that would dispute the reading of Romans 1:19-23 that I am giving here.

Not only does Rogers’s claim distort Scripture, it also distorts the Reformed tradition. Readers can get a concise overview of the matter in the entry “Natural Theology” in the *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith* (ed. Donald McKim; Westminster / John Knox, 1992), 250-53. Calvin held the view that I am espousing (this is evident both in his *Institutes* and in his commentary on Romans). For example:

By saying God *manifested it* he means that man was formed to be a spectator of the created world, and that he was endowed with eyes for the purpose of his being led to God Himself, the Author of the world, by contemplating so magnificent an image. . . . God is invisible in Himself, but since His majesty shines forth in all His works and in all His creatures, men ought to have acknowledged Him in these, for they clearly demonstrate their Creator. . . .

This [statement, “that they may be without excuse” (Rom 1:20)] clearly proves how much men gain from this demonstration of the existence of God, viz. an utter incapacity to bring any defense to prevent them from being justly accused before the judgment-seat of God. We must, therefore, make this distinction, that the manifestation of God by which He makes His glory known among His creatures is sufficiently clear as far as its own light is concerned. It is, however, inadequate on account of our blindness. But we are not so blind that we can plead ignorance without being convicted of perversity. We form a conception of divinity, and then we conclude that we are under the necessity of worshipping such a Being, whatever His character may be. Our judgment, however, fails here before it discovers the nature or character of God. . . . And yet we see just enough to keep us from making excuse. (*The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, 31-32; commenting on Rom 1:19-20)

Of one piece with this argument is Calvin’s comment on Rom 1:26, where he speaks of same-sex intercourse as “the fearful crime of unnatural lust,” in which humans become “worse than beasts, since they have reversed the whole order of nature.”

Nothing stated in the opening lines of the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1643 is at odds with my own view:

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation.

The irony of ironies is that Rogers, while criticizing me for accepting the limited natural theology put forward by Scripture, peddles an unacknowledged natural theology of his own, and an anti-scriptural one at that.

Modern scientific study recognizes that all behavior, good and bad, is the product, at some level, of biological causation factors.

Of course, Rogers, in supporting homosexual behavior, accepts *neither* the direct revelation of Scripture *nor* the indirect revelation of nature. Here is my wish: Would that Rogers upheld the definitive, countercultural revelation of Scripture as regards same-sex intercourse!

4. ***The irony of Rogers's own unacknowledged natural theology.*** Of course, the irony of ironies is that Rogers, while criticizing me for accepting the limited natural theology put forward by Scripture, peddles an unacknowledged natural theology of his own, and an anti-scriptural one at that.

Rogers appeals to an immutable homosexual destiny for some as a basis for claiming that God “created” them that way and that the church should learn to accept homosexual practice. “I didn’t choose my heterosexual orientation. That is just the way that God created me. I see no reason to doubt the stories of [homosexuals] . . . that they are simply created differently in this aspect of their being.”

This is a version of natural law argument that contravenes both the witness of Scripture and the witness of the Reformers to Scripture. It is no more credible than contending that, because men on average are significantly more visually stimulated and genitally focused than women, society should be more permissive of short-term sexual unions or plural marriages for males—and all the more so in cases of homoerotic male relationships. Or that because some persons do not choose a pedophilic or ephebophilic orientation society should find ways to accommodate such desires while averting measurable harm to minors.

Modern scientific study recognizes that all behavior, good and bad, is the product, at some level, of biological causation factors. Even non-theologians know that there is no intrinsic link between biological causation and morality. A recently published article on the genetics of sexual orientation, written by two “essentialist,” prohomosex scientists, Brian Mustanski and J. Michael Bailey, concedes:

Despite common assertions to the contrary, evidence for biological causation does not have clear moral, legal, or policy consequences. . . . No clear conclusions about the morality of a behaviour can be made from the mere fact of biological causation, because all behaviour is biologically caused. (“A therapist’s guide to the genetics of human sexual orientation,” *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 18:4 [Nov. 2003], 432)

The fact that there may be some indirect genetic or biological influence on homosexuality does not reduce us to moral robots. We may not have asked to feel a given way, but we are responsible for what we do with such feelings.

Christian faith does not operate on a model of biological determinism. It operates on the model of a new creation in Christ.

Would Rogers change his mind about polygamy if a polygamist said to him: “I can tell you a sin that many monogamists have committed that I never have”?

Christian faith does not operate on a model of biological determinism. It operates on the model of a new creation in Christ, in which sinful, biologically related urges are, and are to be, put to death.

Paul himself viewed sin as an innate impulse running through the members of the human body, communicated by an ancestor, and never fully within human control. Paul distinguished between innate impulses, which were frequently products of a sinful condition and thus unreliable indicators of God’s will, and the holistic structural complementarity of male-female sexuality, still intact from creation and thus a more reliable indicator of God’s will for sexual pairing. Unfortunately, Rogers refuses to accept such a distinction.

In short, Rogers, not I, promotes a kind of natural theology that the Reformers would have rejected. It is Rogers, not I, who ironically dispenses with the special revelation of Scripture in favor of his own flawed brand of natural theology.

IV. The Rest of Rogers’s Case for Supporting Homosexual Practice

1. ***The freedom-from-heterosexual-sin argument.*** Rogers states that a particular remark by a homosexual man “got me thinking” that homosexual intercourse might not be sinful after all: “I can tell you a sin that you have committed that I never have. I have never looked on a woman to lust after her.” Now why this remark should have had *any* role in changing Rogers’s mind about homosexual behavior is a mystery to me. So the man in question substituted one sin (lusting after a sexual “other” who is not one’s spouse) for what Scripture regards as a worse sin (lusting after sexual sames). So what? This is not an improvement. Indeed, there are now two sins, not one: erotic desire to merge with what one already is as a sexual being *and* an erotic desire for more than one such person.

Analogies are helpful here. Would Rogers change his mind about incest if a person with incestuous desires were to say to him: “I can tell you a sin that you have committed that I never have; I have never looked with lust at a person outside my family unit”? Would Rogers change his mind about polygamy if a polygamist said to him: “I can tell you a sin that many monogamists have committed that I never have; I have never divorced any of my wives”? Or, worse, would Rogers change his mind about pedophilia if a pedophile said to him: “I can tell you a sin that you have committed that I never have; I have never looked at an adult woman to lust after her”?

2. ***Rogers’s misunderstandings about promiscuity and homosexuality.*** Rogers was deeply surprised by the fact that not all homosexuals are promiscuous or nasty people. Judging from his narrative, this consideration

In a same-sex erotic pairing, the sexual gaps of a given sex are not filled and extremes are not moderated.

seems to have played the dominant role in his change of mind, along with his unacknowledged nature argument regarding sexual orientation (see III. above). But this just underscores Rogers's naïveté about homosexuality and his misunderstanding of Scripture's proscription. Rogers operated with two false assumptions: (1) Homosexual relationships can *never* be committed and faithful; and (2) Scripture opposes homosexual practice *only* because of an absence of commitment and fidelity. Persons who start with an uninformed view of homosexuality and what Scripture says about homosexual practice are prone to endorsing homosexual practice when they encounter evidence at odds with their uninformed view. Rogers was, and remains, one such person.

Regarding the first assumption, *of course* a tiny percentage of homosexual relationships can be long-term (say, of twenty-five years duration or more) *and* monogamous *and* free of sexually transmitted disease and mental illness problems. No form of consensual sexual behavior of any sort—including incest, polyamory, and even pedophilia—leads irresistibly to infidelity, disease, and personal distress for all participants, in all circumstances, and in scientifically measurable ways. I suppose that we should be grateful that Rogers has not encountered committed incestuous, polyamorous, or adult-child unions. For, if he had, he might—if he reasoned consistently—start approving of some of these types of relationships.

But homosexuals experience a disproportionately high rate of such problems in each of these areas, even in homosex-affirming areas such as San Francisco or the Netherlands. The main problem is not homophobia but the way men and women are constructed as sexual beings. In a same-sex erotic pairing, the sexual gaps of a given sex are not filled and extremes are not moderated. For example, J. Michael Bailey—chair of the department of psychology at Northwestern, perhaps the most prominent researcher of homosexuality, and a strong advocate for “gay rights”—has written:

Because of fundamental differences between men and women. . . . [and] regardless of marital laws and policies. . . . gay men will always have many more sex partners than straight people do. . . . Both heterosexual and homosexual people will need to be open minded about social practices common to people of other orientations. (*The Man Who Would Be Queen* [Joseph Henry Press, 2003], 100-102)

Even more importantly, rejecting homosexual practice on the assumption that it lacks commitment is like rejecting incestuous behavior on the assumption that it lacks longevity or inherently involves children. It does not get at the ultimate reason for the rejection, which has little to do with the absence of commitment, longevity, and adult partners. We will come back to this in point 7 below.

Not a single New Testament moral imperative is predicated on the assumption that believers first lose all desires to violate the imperative in question.

3. *Rogers's misunderstanding of the meaning of change.* Rogers was surprised to find out that most homosexuals could not change from a "category 6" homosexual (exclusively homosexual) to a "category 0" heterosexual (exclusively heterosexual). We have already discussed above why resistance to "change" is no argument for the morality of a given behavior (see III. above). To this may be added the following point: Rogers, like many, has an overly restrictive understanding of change. In the Christian worldview change is a multifaceted phenomenon. Legitimate change can include any, some, or all of the following:

- A reduction or elimination of homosexual behavior
- A reduction in the intensity and frequency of homosexual impulses
- An experience of some heterosexual arousal
- Reorientation to predominant heterosexuality

Not a single New Testament moral imperative is predicated on the assumption that believers first lose all innate desires to violate the imperative in question. Indeed, the greatest Christian triumph comes not when all contrary desires are removed but rather when obedience persists in the face of strong desires to the contrary. That, in a nutshell, is cruciform existence: losing one's life, taking up one's cross, denying oneself, and following Christ.

Management of homoerotic impulses, normally coincident with a reduction in intensity, is possible for all homosexual Christians. Indeed, most homosexuals experience at least one shift along the Kinsey spectrum during the course of life, even apart from any therapeutic intervention. Does Rogers want to contend that Alcoholics Anonymous is a disaster because most participants in its programs do not undergo a complete or near-total eradication of desires for alcohol? Homoerotic orientation, like alcoholism (or pedophilic orientation, an intense desire for multiple sexual partners, or addiction to pornography), cannot be equated with ethnicity, sex, and eye color as a non-malleable, completely congenital condition.

Ironically, those like Rogers who argue that homosexual behavior should not be disavowed precisely because it is resistant to change would—to be consistent—have to contend that non-monogamous relationships be accepted for male homosexual relationships. This is because empirical evidence to date strongly suggests that male homosexuals have extraordinary difficulty, relative even to lesbians, in forming lifelong monogamous unions.

Rogers also does nothing with the evidence that I amass that microcultural and macrocultural factors can increase the incidence of homosexuality in the population (see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 395-429; also my response to Countryman's review of my book, sec. VI: "The Effect of Societal Approval" [go [here](#) for pdf and [here](#) for html]). In fact, Rogers never refers to any concrete studies of any sort.

The notion that ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity only marginally held an other-sex prerequisite for valid sexual unions is absurd.

Only a liberal “fundamentalist” or “literalist” can possibly ignore the obvious point that every confession of the church that says anything about marriage operates on the premise of an other-sex prerequisite.

4. *The few-texts-against-homosexual-behavior argument.* Rogers says: “I have become convinced that to pull the few statements about homosexuality out of Romans 1 and make them a universal law exactly denies the point that Paul is making.” The notion that ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity only marginally held an other-sex prerequisite for valid sexual unions is absurd. Biblical texts that explicitly reject same-sex intercourse are more numerous than Rogers is apparently aware of. They extend beyond Paul and Leviticus to the “Yahwist” (much of the Tetrateuch), Deuteronomy, the “Deuteronomistic History” (Joshua through 2 Kings), Job, Ezekiel, Jude, and 2 Peter. Texts that *implicitly* reject homosexual unions run the gamut of the entire Bible, including *not only* the creation stories in Genesis 1-3, Jesus’ appeal to Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 as prescriptive norms (as well as a half dozen other indications of Jesus’ view), the Apostolic Decree in Acts and other *porneia* (“sexual immorality”) texts, and texts that reject overt attempts at blurring sexual differentiation (e.g., Deut 22:5; 1 Cor 11:2-16), *but also* the whole range of narratives, laws, proverbs, exhortations, metaphors, and poetry that presume the sole legitimacy of heterosexual unions. Nowhere is there the slightest indication of openness anywhere in the Bible to homoerotic attachments, including the narrative about David and Jonathan. The truth is that, so far as extant evidence indicates, every biblical author, as well as Jesus, would have been appalled by any same-sex intercourse occurring among the people of God. The other-sex prerequisite for marriage is not a marginal view in Scripture. It is the only view and one that is held strongly, absolutely, and counterculturally. There is as much, or greater, basis in Scripture for rejecting same-sex intercourse than there is for rejecting man-mother or brother-sister incest.

5. *The it’s-not-in-the-Confessions argument.* Rogers says that Scripture ultimately convinced him that loving homosexual unions are acceptable—a case that we have shown to be specious. It is interesting that Rogers spends more time in his talk trying to show that the Reformed Confessions do not deem homosexual practice as sin than he does trying to make the case from Scripture. This underscores how little Scripture matters for Rogers on this issue. G-6.0106b makes clear that “Those who are called to office in the church are to *lead a life in obedience to Scripture* and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church.” The basis in Scripture for opposition to homosexual practice is clear; and Scripture in Reformed churches is the basis for the confessions. To what extent the Confessions *explicitly* specify the prohibition of homosexual practice I leave to others to discern—though I am largely unimpressed by Rogers’ arguments.

This much is clear: Only a liberal “fundamentalist” or “literalist” can possibly ignore the obvious point that every confession of the church that says anything about marriage operates on the premise of an other-sex prerequisite. Marriage was always regarded in the Reformed churches as the

How many explicit references in the Confessions are there to prohibiting man-mother incest? Yet who would argue that the Confessions are somehow “open” to such sexual unions?

I don't “consult the motivation” of those in incestuous or polyamorous relationships either, and frankly I would be shocked if Rogers did.

reconstitution of male and female into a sexual whole. Furthermore, references in the Confessions to New Testament texts alluding to *porneia*, “sexual immorality”—“fornication” is too restrictive a translation—include implicitly a reference to same-sex intercourse, as also incest. How many explicit references in the Confessions are there to prohibiting man-mother incest? Yet who would argue that the Confessions are somehow “open” to such sexual unions?

6. *The argument from the analogies of slavery/racism and women.* I have shown in my works why these are bad analogies and why the analogy regarding incest is far superior. Rogers shows no awareness of my arguments. See: *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 441-52; *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 43-50. There was a recent attempt by a certain Rev. Krehbiel on www.Presbyweb.com to lift up antebellum American views on slavery as an analogue to contemporary views on homosexual behavior (go [here](#) and [here](#)). But I have shown in two responses that there is no merit to such an argument (go [here](#) and [here](#)). In the absence of effective rebuttals, there is no point here in restating my position.

7. *Why same-sex intercourse cannot be judged solely on the basis of loving disposition.* As with nearly everything else, Rogers mischaracterizes the argument of my book to say that same-sex intercourse is only wrong because the body parts don't fit. (Indeed, he says that I speak of anatomical complementarity “so often it gets embarrassing.”) He blames me for not “consulting either the motivation or manner of expression of real gay and lesbian people.” Actually, I don't ignore the “manner of expression of real gay and lesbian people.” I provide much more documentary evidence of what homosexuals typically do than Rogers does (see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 452-60, 471-85). Indeed, Rogers provides nothing but small-scale, personal anecdotal evidence. But that aside, I should also say that I don't “consult the motivation” of those in incestuous or polyamorous relationships either, and frankly I would be shocked if Rogers did. Rogers grossly misunderstands why same-sex intercourse is wrong and tragically invalidates any notion of structural prerequisites for sexual activity that transcend personal motivation.

Anatomical complementarity serves as an important heuristic springboard for grasping the broad complementarity of maleness and femaleness. The complementarity of the sex organs is a very important dimension of the whole, as is evident from the health hazards and repulsive quality of men who eroticize the anal cavity for penetration and even oral activity. Anatomy is also a clue not easily falsified, unlike the malleable character of many human desires. Christians are not anti-body gnostic dualists. At the same time, the matter is about more than sex organs. It is about essential maleness and femaleness. In effect, Paul is saying in Rom 1:24-27: Start with the obvious “fittedness” of human anatomy. When done with that, consider

procreative design as a clue. Then move on to a broad range of interpersonal differences that define maleness and femaleness. The image behind this is the splitting and remerging of the two sexual halves in Gen 1:27 and Gen 2:21-24.

In my book the theme of anatomical complementarity is joined to a broader pattern of male-female complementarity: physiological, psychological, interpersonal, distinctive arousal, etc. (pp. 40, 60-62, 337, passim). For example, I state in the conclusion to *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*:

Scripture rejects homosexual behavior because it is a violation of the gendered existence of male and female ordained by God at creation. Homosexual intercourse puts males in the category of females and females in the category of males, insofar as they relate to others as sexual beings. . . . God intended the very act of sexual intercourse to be an act of pluralism, embracing a sexual “other” rather than a sexual “same.” . . . Same-sex intercourse represents a suppression of the visible evidence in nature regarding male-female anatomical and procreative complementarity. Complementarity extends also to a range of personality traits and predispositions that contribute to making heterosexual unions enormously more successful in terms of fidelity, endurance, and health than same-sex ones. (pp. 487-88)

Simply put, the obvious compatibility of male and female genitals is both *part of and emblematic of* the broad complementarity of essential maleness and essential femaleness that is so well illustrated by both the copulative act and by the story of the splitting off of woman from a sexually binary, primal human in Genesis 2:21-24. Scripture teaches that woman is man’s sexual “other half” and counterpart, not another man. Scripture rejects same-sex intercourse because it represents a false attempt to complete one’s sexual self with a sexual same. A sexual counterpart is required for reconstituting the sexual whole of an original, sexually undifferentiated human.

In the end, erotic desire for the same sex is *sexual narcissism* or *sexual self-deception*: an erotic attraction either for what one knowingly is as a sexual being or for what one wishes to be but in fact already is: male for male, female for female. As with consensual adult incest, issues of commitment and monogamy are simply beside the point and come into play only *after* the prerequisites for a valid sexual union are met.

No one can reasonably deny that a homoerotic desire is an erotic attraction to what that person already is or has as a sexual being. What else are homoerotically inclined persons attracted to? Why else would a person who experiences homoerotic desire, especially exclusively so, desire specifically a person of the *same* sex rather than a person of the other sex? And we are not talking here simply about a friendship or admiration. We are

Erotic desire for the same sex is sexual narcissism or sexual self-deception: an erotic attraction either for what one knowingly is as a sexual being or for what one wishes to be but in fact already is.

talking about erotic attraction, a desire to sexually *merge* and become one with a person who is not a complementary sexual counterpart but a person of the same sex. That's why we call it "*homosexual*" intercourse (homo- for *homoios*, "like" or "same") and distinguish it from "*heterosexual*" intercourse (hetero- for *heteros*, "other, different"). It is patently a desire for the essential sexual self that one shares in common with one's partner. *By definition* it is sexual narcissism or sexual self-deception. There is either a conscious recognition that one desires in another what one already possesses as a sexual being (anatomy, physiology, sex-based traits) or a self-delusion of sorts in which the sexual same is perceived as some kind of sexual other. There are no other alternatives.

Notice here that I am not asserting, as Rogers would probably suppose, that two or more persons in a homoerotic relationship are inherently incapable of exhibiting mutual care and compassion. As noted above, such a claim would be absurd for virtually any proscribed form of human sexuality. Rather, *so far as the erotic dimension is concerned*, homoerotic desire is sexual narcissism or sexual self-deception. The church has no objection to intimate, non-erotic same-sex relationships. We call them friendships. It is only when an erotic dimension is introduced to a same-sex relationship that problems develop. If one protests that there is only a fine line between *intimate* and *erotic*, another may respond: parents who do not maintain a clear distinction between intimate and erotic in dealings with their own children are candidates for criminal prosecution.

Again, I'm not talking merely about what some prohomosex advocates derisively refer to as an "obsession with plumbing." Quite clearly, though, most homosexuals, especially male homosexuals, exhibit an obsession with the "plumbing" or anatomy of persons of the same sex. The tremendous emphasis on "gay" pornography in the male homosexual community, their significantly higher average rates of sex partners, and the existence of "gay bathhouses" are all striking testimony to this. To say that distinctive, same-sex anatomical features are not critically important to homosexual men would be like saying that most heterosexual men experience only minor attraction to beautiful female anatomical distinctives. At the same time, I am talking about something more than "plumbing" or anatomy: recognition of something holistic, an essential maleness or essential femaleness. We have to ask: Why do about 99% of all persons in the United States limit their selection of mates to persons of a particular sex? The only reasonable answer is that sexual differentiation is the primary consideration for mate selection. Either people want a mate of the other sex (97% of us) or they want a mate of the same sex (2%). No other criterion for mate selection comes even close to this one consideration. Clearly, there is a basic human acknowledgement that a person's sex matters; that there is something essentially male and essentially female that causes persons to rule out of consideration an entire sex when they choose a sex partner. And it is precisely the erotic attraction to the same

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essential sex that one already is, to the distinctive sexual features that one already has, that can be labeled sexual narcissism.

In this connection, too, it is interesting that homosexual men, even those who bear effeminate traits, usually desire very “masculine” men as their sex partners. Why? Undoubtedly many desire what they see as lacking in themselves: a strong masculine quality. Such a desire is really a form of self-delusion. In the perspective of Scripture and indeed of science, they are already men, already masculine. They are masculine by virtue of their sex, not by virtue of possessing a social construct of masculinity that may or may not reflect true masculinity. They need not seek completion in a sexual same. Rather, they must come to terms with their essential masculinity.

There is a world of difference between being attracted to complementary otherness and non-complementary sameness. A same-sex erotic merger is structurally discordant because the sexual counterpart or complement to one’s own sex is missing.

Concluding Word

Despite what Rogers would like readers to believe, his narrative underscores that the real catalyst for his change of mind was not Scripture but experiences that called into question his initial naïveté about homosexuality. He then attempted, rather unconvincingly, to contort Scripture in ways that would buttress his newfound beliefs, advancing a temple prostitution argument that is without merit. Ultimately, he effectively eliminates all structural prerequisites to sexual unions and considers only whether “love,” narrowly defined as a subjective disposition of concern for another, is manifested between the participants. Rogers gives no thought for the differences between intimacy and eroticism in the application of this principle of “love.” He tries to hold on to the sanctity of two partners at any one time but he fails to explain to readers why we should maintain this prerequisite when (1) Scripture regards the other-sex dimension as even more significant than the number of partners; (2) fidelity and commitment can be manifested in “threesomes” or other polygamous unions; (3) male homosexual relationships show themselves to be, on the whole, deeply resistant to monogamy; and (4) the limitation of sex partners to two persons at any one time is itself predicated on the idea, rejected by Rogers, that two sexes are needed to create a sufficient sexual whole.

All in all, Rogers’s address raises troubling questions about his competence in handling the biblical text, his integrity in restating accurately and fairly the positions of those with whom he disagrees, the real priority of Scripture in his life, and the consistency and logic of his hermeneutical moves. Then, too, his address raises the same troubling questions for the

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Covenant Network that sponsors and esteems Rogers's work. Perhaps the best thing that can be said is that we continue to hope for a properly directed change of mind for Jack Rogers, and the membership of the Covenant Network generally—reforming in the direction of Scripture rather than “deforming” away from it.

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