

Truncated Love:

A Response to Andrew Marin's *Love Is an Orientation*

Part 1

Robert A. J. Gagnon, Ph.D.
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
gagnon@pts.edu, www.robagnon.net
August 31, 2010

Andrew Marin's book, *Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community* (2009), has been gaining some traction in evangelical circles. Having just finished reading the book I am stunned that an evangelical press like InterVarsity would publish such a fatally flawed work—and that persons such as Scot McKnight (a New Testament professor at an evangelical university, North Park) and a certain Michelle Strombeck of Moody Broadcasting Network (a conservative evangelical organization) would provide endorsements for it. (A foreword by Brian McLaren is not surprising since McLaren had already surrendered to a homosexualist view. The same applies to Tony Campolo, whose enthusiastic video endorsement is posted on Marin's site.)

Although I had read some interviews of Marin and got reports back from acquaintances about Marin's claims, I've ignored his book until now because, frankly, I didn't think his book would have much of an impact on evangelical Christianity. However, a recent puff piece on Marin by Heather Sells for the conservative Christian Broadcast Network has convinced me that it is time to respond ("Christian's Outreach to Gays: I'm Sorry," 8/20/10).¹ Sells applauds Marin for allegedly encouraging Christians to remain true to their theology (he doesn't) while reaching out in friendship to gays. There is not a critically constructive response to Marin presented anywhere in the article.

I. Problems with Marin's Ch. 7: "The Big 5: Principles for a More Constructive Conversation"

I began reading Marin's book with his chapter 7: "The Big 5: Principles for a More Constructive Conversation" (pp. 114-39). I began here because the truth question would decide the shape of love to those engaged in homosexual behavior. How love is to be expressed will be different in significant ways depending on whether homosexual practice is an instance of moral *adiaphora* (a Greek word used by Stoics for "matters of indifference") like food and calendar issues or behavior serious enough to get one excluded from the kingdom of God. If the former, then the policy put forward by Paul in Rom 14:1-15:13 would apply: Mind your own business because it is a matter between the believer and the Lord Jesus Christ who died for him. However, if the latter, then it is the responsibility of the church to correct the offender in the hope of reclaiming this one for God's kingdom, much as Paul did in the case of the incestuous man in 1 Corinthians 5.

¹ <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2010/August/Missionarys-Message-to-Gays-Im-Sorry/>

A. What Marin Ignores: How Homosexual Practice Is a Comparable Wrong to Incest

In 1 Cor 5 Paul is appalled that the Corinthian believers were willing to tolerate an instance of adult-consensual incest between a man and his stepmother (in effect, an affine substitute for his mother). Rather than say that the whole matter is God's business and not that of the church, Paul exhorted the Corinthians to "judge those inside" the church who were engaged in immoral behavior (5:12-13). He insisted that the Corinthians should be in a state of mourning for "the one who calls himself a brother" (5:2). "In the name of our Lord Jesus" they should remove the offender temporarily from their community life ("not even to eat with such a one") as a last-ditch remedial measure (not primarily punitive action) to save "his spirit on the Day of the Lord" and to safeguard the community against laxity in sexual purity (5:4-11).

Marin does not appear to consider whether in Paul's view an adult-committed homosexual union might be comparable in severity to an adult-committed incestuous union. The evidence indicates that the two would have been comparable for him. He connects incestuous offenders in the vice list in 1 Cor 6:9-10 with the sexual offenders "adulterers," "soft men" (i.e. men who feminize themselves to attract male sex partners), and "men who lie with a male" as among those who shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Leviticus 20 lists in the first tier of sexual offenses (vv. 10-16) the prohibition of men lying with a male alongside prohibitions of adultery, the worst forms of incest (intercourse with one's parent, child, or affine substitute), and bestiality.

Incest is rejected in Scripture on grounds that are analogically related to its rejection of homosexual practice: both constitute intercourse with someone who is too much of a same or like in terms of formal structures of embodied existence, one on the level of too much gender identity, the other on the level of too much kinship identity (compare Lev 18:6: "no man shall approach any flesh [*šəēr*] of his flesh [*běšārō*] to uncover nakedness"). Indeed, the principle of complementary *gender* otherness in sexual relationships is grounded in creation in a male-female prerequisite, well before the issue of kinship otherness is addressed. Developing incest law in Deuteronomy and Leviticus outlaw some relations that the patriarchs engaged in: Abraham's marriage to his half sister, Sarah (Gen 20:12), Jacob's marriage to two sisters (Gen 29), and Amram's marriage to his aunt Jochebed (Exod 6:20). By contrast there is never any later retraction in Scripture of earlier permissions with regard to homosexual practice because from the very beginning of creation it is understood that God designed human sexual relations for "male and female" (Gen 1:27).

The principle of otherness-within-sameness is affirmed in Gen 2:18, 20 when the effort begins to find for the *adam* or human a helper "as his counterpart [or: complement]" (*kənegdō*). The preposition *neged* can mean both similarity *corresponding to* (i.e. similarity as humans) and difference *opposite* (i.e. difference as regards a distinct sex extracted from him). This principle of otherness-within-sameness is later applied from gender differentiation to kinship otherness. So not only are the prohibitions of homosexual practice and incest related but also the prohibition of homosexual practice (or, positively stated, a male-female requirement) is more foundational than, and provides the basis for, a prohibition of incest. Adult homosexual practice is thus a *more* severe violation of God's sexual norms than is adult incest, not less so.

B. Two Initial Negatives about Marin's Chapter on the Bible: Poor Research and a Constricted Textual Base

Poor research. The first thing to note about Marin's chapter dealing with Scripture's opposition to homosexual practice is how badly researched his presentation is. This chapter would not pass muster as a paper submitted in a Bible course taken at a reputable seminary, let alone be of a quality that would justify publication by a non-vanity press. He cites only two works specifically dealing with the issue of Scripture and homosexual practice, only one time each; and both works are on the homosexualist side and by now quite dated (Robin Scroggs's *The New Testament and Homosexuality* [1983] and John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* [1980]). That's it. If he read anything else, one sees little evidence of such in what Marin wrote. Marin would undoubtedly counter that his purpose was not to look at the details but the "big picture." The problem with that reasoning is that one can't understand accurately the big picture until one does his or her homework with respect to the details—a point that I aim to demonstrate throughout this review. Marin shows no awareness whatsoever of the mountain of evidence and arguments that I or others have put forward against homosexualist attempts to neutralize these texts. In fact, he gives every indication that he does not want to know.

A constricted textual base: No Genesis and Jesus. The second thing to note is the constricted selection of texts that Marin chooses to discuss. He singles out what he calls "the big 5" Bible passages on homosexual practice: Sodom, the Levitical prohibitions, Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10. Not only does he leave out texts that speak directly to the issue of homosexual practice (the Levite at Gibeah in Judges 19:22-25, the *qedeshim* texts [referring to homosexual cult personnel] in Deuteronomy 23:17-18; and various OT and NT texts that identify the sin of Sodom with sexual immorality: Ezek 16:49-50; 18:12; Jude 7; 2 Pet 2:6-7, 10)² but, more importantly, he leaves out completely texts that speak directly to a male-female prerequisite for sexual relations such as the Genesis creation texts (1:27 and 2:24) and Jesus' use of these texts in Mark 10:2-12 (par. Matt 19:3-9). Indeed, every narrative, law, proverb, exhortation, poetry, and metaphor in the pages of Scripture that has anything to do with sexual relations presupposes a male-female prerequisite for sexual relations and marriage.

Genesis 1:27b ("male and female he made them") in its historical and literary context states God's intended design that sexual relations be between the two (and only two) complementary sexes. Genesis 2:21-24 pictures man and woman as the two parts of a sexual whole, each other's missing sexual "counterpart" or "complement" whose union in marriage reconstitutes that wholeness. Jesus cited the self-contained twoness of the complementary sexes, "male and female" (Gen 1:27) or "man" becoming joined to "woman" (Gen 2:24), as the foundation for limiting the number of persons in a sexual union to two. Jesus forbade a revolving door of divorce-and-remarriage and, implicitly, concurrent polygyny (multiple wives) on the basis of a male-female prerequisite for sexual relations and marriage. The Essenes made a similar use of Gen 1:27 to condemn polygyny in Israel (*Damascus Covenant* 4.20-5.1). The twoness of the sexes establishes the twoness of the sexual bond. Jesus thus presumed a male-female requisite as the

² He mentions in passing the Levite at Gibeah and Ezekiel texts but seems not to know their relevance for establishing Scripture's absolute indictment against homosexual practice.

logical foundation upon which other sexual commands are predicated. A homosexual relationship would be for him a violation of a foundational, creation-based command in sexual ethics, more severe than multiple-partner sexual unions since the foundation is always more important than any principle based on the foundation. There are at least nine other arguments that one can make from the literary and historical context that provide additional confirmation for the conclusion that Jesus subscribed to a male-female prerequisite:

- Jesus' retention of the Law of Moses generally, even on relatively minor matters like tithing spices
- Jesus' intensification of the Law's sex ethic regarding not only divorce-and-remarriage (compare Matt 5:31-32) but also "adultery of the heart" (Matt 5:27-28) and the connected warning about cutting off offending members (Matt 5:29-30)
- John the Baptist's willingness to risk his own life by criticizing Herod Antipas for violating Levitical incest law
- Early Judaism's united and vigorous opposition to all homosexual practice, an opposition superseded only by bestiality and matched (if at all) only by the worse forms of incest
- The early church's equally united and vigorous opposition to all homosexual practice, which, in connection with Jesus' Scripture (our OT), the context of early Judaism, and the stance on sexual ethics by the man who baptized him, shows the historical absurdity of any claim that Jesus was somehow open to committed homosexual unions
- Jesus' saying about the holistic, body-defiling effect of desires for *porneiai* ("sexual immoralities," Mark 7:21-23), a word that everywhere in Second Temple Judaism would have included a prohibition of homosexual practice at the top of the list and a remark that underscores how seriously Jesus took sexual sin
- Jesus' embrace of the Decalogue (Mark 10:17-22), a body of law that presumes a male-female prerequisite in its commands to honor father and mother, not commit adultery, and not covet one's neighbor's wife
- Jesus' saying about Sodom (Matt 10:14-15; Luke 10:10-12; we'll come back to this)
- The "born eunuchs" statement in Matt 19:10-12, in which Jesus may have presupposed that men with sexual attractions for other males are not having any sex (like those who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of advancing God's kingdom).

Given the 10 pieces of evidence cited above, the finding that Jesus was opposed to homosexual practice, and strongly so, is an historical no-brainer. To claim otherwise is akin to claiming that your local evangelical pastor must be in favor of adult-committed incest and polyamory or at least think them no big deal, because the pastor has never delivered a sermon or given a teaching against such behavior. Jesus didn't need to speak *directly* against homosexual practice because there was no need to say anything to a Jewish culture in which no one was advocating, let alone engaging in, homosexual practice and in which such behavior was strongly prohibited in Scripture and regarded throughout early Judaism as among the most serious of sexual offenses.

C. Marin's "Eternal Principles" for "Bridging the GLBT and Christian Communities"

Marin largely sidesteps any engagement with the question of whether the authors of Scripture treat homosexual practice as a first-order and intrinsic sexual offense. Instead, he claims to have found "eternal principles" from "the big 5" that "bridge" the "GLBT and Christian communities," "stop the fight," and enable the two sides to "understand [their] differences" (138). Even though the church has never before in its history abandoned the field of biblical exegesis and interpretation when facing heretical challenges, Marin recommends that the church do precisely that over the issue of homosexual practice. He lumps defenders of a male-female requirement for sexual unions (those espousing the correct and moral position) with its attackers (those espousing the incorrect and immoral position) and likens their engagement over the use of Scripture to a back-alley "street brawl" in *West Side Story*. Marin shirks his responsibility for making a careful study of Scripture on the issue, apart from occasionally parroting the homosexualist line. He ignores the fact that the mere existence of more than one interpretation for a given text is not, in itself, proof that all the interpretations are equally valid readings. One *first* has to do one's homework in carefully evaluating the respective arguments—which is something that Marin has clearly not done.

When the Church Fathers were engaged in their centuries-long struggle with Gnosticism (2nd to 5th centuries A.D.)—an earlier "street brawl"—they didn't abandon the scriptural case just because they knew that they would not be able to change the minds of many Gnostics, certainly not the leadership. When Paul encountered the case of the incestuous man at Corinth he did not say, "Let's stop the fighting over what Scripture says about incest and try to find eternal principles that will help us bridge our differences." That may have been the position of the Corinthian "strong" who prided themselves (were "puffed up" or "inflated") in their ability to tolerate such behavior in their midst (1 Cor 5:2); but it was not Paul's position. Essentially Marin adopts the Corinthian position rather than Paul's on how to handle sexual immorality.

Some of Marin's "eternal principles" that he allegedly derives from the broader context of "the big 5" are in direct contradiction to the actual context. And none of the "eternal principles" are utilized by the Scripture author to undermine the teaching of a male-female prerequisite for sexual relations.

D. Marin's Fourth "Eternal Principle," Falsely Derived from the Context of 1 Cor 6:9: "Know when to release control of someone's life" (a.k.a. "the Great Christian Debate Principle")

The most egregious mishandling of Scripture comes in his fourth principle that he allegedly extrapolates from the context of 1 Cor 6:9: "to know when to release control of someone's life" (130-34). This principle is the exact opposite of the one that Paul formulated in context.

Marin seems not to realize that the overarching context for the offender list in 1 Cor 6:9-10 is the case of the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5. The offender list in 6:9-10 is nearly the same as the offender lists formulated by Paul in 5:10-11—the major difference being the addition in 6:9 of three sexual offenders ("adulterers," "soft men," "men who lie with a male") to fill out the meaning of the general term *pornoi*, "sexually immoral persons,"

that Paul has already applied to the incestuous man in 5:9-11 (cf. *porneia*, “sexual immorality,” in 5:1). To these sexual offenses he will add sex with a prostitute (a *pornē*) in 6:15-17 and fornication (sex outside of marriage) in 7:2. The offender lists in 5:10-11 and 6:9-10 are connected in another way as well: Paul’s practical conclusion in 5:9-13 is that believers are “not to get mixed up with [i.e. associate with] sexually immoral persons” (*mē sunanamignusthai pornois*) like the incestuous man at Corinth “who calls himself a brother” (i.e. believer), “not even to eat together with such a person.” Paul derives this practical conclusion from the theological conviction expressed in 6:9-10 that “sexually immoral persons” (including those engaged in incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, sex with a prostitute, and fornication in a serial, unrepentant manner) “will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Precisely because everything is at stake for these sexual offenders—nothing less than the high risk of permanent exclusion from eternal life with God—the church cannot sit idly by and do nothing when self-professed believers are engaged in such conduct. Rather, Paul argued, put the person temporarily outside the sphere of the community’s safety, as a remedial (not punitive) action, (1) for the sake of the offender (who, apart from such a wake-up call, would probably end up not inheriting the kingdom), (2) for the sake of the community as a whole (which, as the leaven analogy in 5:6-7 indicates, would otherwise be infected with indifference and laxness toward gross sexual immorality), and (3) ultimately for the sake of the God and Christ (who redeemed them from the power of sin and whose judgment the community may now incur for tolerating such immorality in their midst; compare 10:5-12).³ In a letter that nearly everywhere else emphasizes unity (chs. 1-4 on divisions, in part chs. 8-10 on idol meat, chs. 12-14 on spiritual gifts), Paul stresses in a case of sexual immorality the necessity of disciplining a self-professed believer who, showing no prospect of repenting on his own, continues to engage in sexual immorality.⁴

In other words, the context of 1 Cor 6:9 is the exact antithesis of Marin’s formulation, “to know when to release control of someone’s life.” Paul asks rhetorically, “Is it *not* those inside (the church) that you yourselves are to judge?” (5:12). The obvious answer in context is “Yes” (note that Paul introduces the question with an interrogative and emphatic *ouchi*, which expects a “yes” answer). But somehow Marin gets a “No” answer. Now it is true that Paul infers that we are not to judge those *outside* the church (5:9-10, 12-13). Yet context indicates that Paul means by this only that believers cannot avoid all association with immoral believers because all unbelievers are at root immoral and strict disassociation from all unbelievers is a metaphysical impossibility this side of the eschaton. He does not mean that believers should not evaluate the behaviors of unbelievers as immoral. Indeed, the whole premise for his observation is that unbelievers are inherently immoral. Nor does he mean that there should be no entry expectations regarding moral conduct for those who want to confess “Christ is Lord.” Indeed, if it were otherwise, a person who professed Christ while continuing in grossly immoral conduct (e.g., engaging in adultery, incest, homosexual practice, sex with prostitutes, murdering, stealing, extortion, kidnapping) and was accepted as a member of a church

³ Paul’s remarks in 10:5-12 cite God’s destruction of the wilderness generation for their idolatry and sexual immorality as a warning to the Corinthian believers.

⁴ Paul will also indicate in ch. 10 that no accommodation can be made to idolatry; and in ch. 15 that no accommodation can be made to the gospel message about resurrection of the body.

would have to be on church discipline soon, if not immediately. That is why the Apostolic Decree required abstinence from sexual immorality as a prerequisite for membership in the church (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25) and why Paul made instruction on the necessity of sexual purity (no to sexual immorality) second only to the necessity of worship of the one God of Jesus Christ (no to idolatry) in his exhortations to new converts (so 1 Thess 4:1-9; Gal 5:19, 21; 1 Cor 6:18-20; Eph 4:19; 5:3-13). The twin injunctions in 1 Corinthians to “flee sexual immorality” (6:18) and “flee from idolatry” (10:14) are not accidental. These were the two greatest concerns that Paul had for Gentile converts as regards their disassociation from a sinful life.

So how does Marin wring out of a context for 1 Cor 6:9 that emphasizes the necessity of church discipline for unrepentant sexual sinners an “eternal principle” of “know when to release control of someone’s life”? The process is a wonder to behold. Marin deduces from 1 Cor 6:11—“and these things some were but you washed yourselves off, but you were sanctified [i.e. made holy], but were justified [i.e. declared righteous] in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God”—that “potential inheritance of the kingdom of God is birthed out of belief, first and foremost” (132). Well, yes, it does start with God’s grace and our initial faith but the special point of 6:11 is that sexually immoral behavior is *incompatible* with that initial faith and must be repented of, else the offender faces destruction—confession of faith or no confession of faith.

Then Marin adds:

But with all of the Corinthian church’s problems ... Paul knew he couldn’t keep going back to fix everything.... Paul was conscious of the harsh realization in play: at what point do the Corinthians take what he taught and wrote, and stand on their own two feet? ... When it comes to Christians’ relationship with gays and lesbians, the Great Christian Debate encourages us to ... recogni[ze] that at some point GLBT people have to stand on their own in faith, with God.... You can’t make anyone do anything they are not themselves convinced about. When do gays and lesbians have the right to be their own person in Christ, regardless of whether a Christian agrees with their conclusion—whether that conclusion is to be a gay-Christian or nonbeliever? (133-34)

According to Marin, Christians who disagree with homosexual practice should “release responsibility” for a “gay Christian” and trust “in God’s ultimate power to continue to shape their journey of faith—*just as Paul did with the Corinthian church*” (134; emphasis added). However, the problem for Marin is that, in the case of the incestuous man, Paul did not “release responsibility” for the offender’s fate, nor did he encourage the Corinthian believers to do so. His trust in God’s ultimate power did not cause him to let a case of incest at Corinth play itself out without intervention, nor did he encourage the Corinthian believers to take such an approach. On the contrary, Paul insisted “in the name of our Lord Jesus” that the Corinthian believers take action by removing the offender from their midst—a point made no less than six times in thirteen verses:

And have *you* become puffed up [or: inflated with pride, arrogant] and (should you) *not* rather (have) mourned in order that the one who committed this deed might be *removed from your midst?* (5:2)

... *hand over such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh* in order that the spirit may be saved on the Day of the Lord? (5:5)

Clean out [i.e. get rid of] *the old leaven* in order that you may be a new batch (of dough), just as you are unleavened. (5:7)

I wrote to you in (my previous) letter *not to get mixed up together* [i.e. associate] *with sexually immoral persons*. (5:9)

But as it is I wrote to you *not to get mixed up together* [i.e. associate] *if any person who calls himself a brother is a sexually immoral person ... , not even to eat with such a one*. (5:11)

“*Remove the evil one from yourselves*” (5:13, citing Deut 17:7).

To do less would be unloving because it would leave the offender in his sin and thus destined for destruction. The same course of action would have applied to self-professed Christians who were engaged in active and habitual adultery, same-sex intercourse, sex with prostitutes, idolatry, theft, extortion, and drunkenness. Sexual offenses, Paul argued, were particularly pernicious. They affected the body holistically, not superficially, which is problematic for the person whose body is a temple of the Spirit of Christ in them (6:18-19). And they are given to extraordinary amounts of self-justification because of their intensely pleasurable character (6:12-15).

Imagine the Corinthian church writing something like Marin’s position back to Paul:

Paul, what we hear you saying is this: The man having sexual relations with his stepmother has the right to be his own person in Christ, regardless of whether we agree with his conclusion. You want us to release control of the incestuous man’s life and trust in God’s ultimate power to continue to shape his journey of faith. You want us to recognize that we can’t make him do anything that he himself is not convinced about. We agree with you that faith has started him on his journey to inherit God’s kingdom and God alone can change his ways. In accordance with your wishes we will leave the matter in God’s hands and take no action to discipline the man who has perpetrated these actions.

Paul would probably have responded with something like this:

What is wrong with you Corinthians? Why are you deceiving yourselves so? I wrote to you clearly that you should put the sexually immoral man who calls himself a brother outside your assembly and stop associating with him until he repents. Why do you read what I wrote as, “We will take no action against the man who perpetrated these actions”? Are you so inflated with pride in your own tolerance of immorality that you cannot see that I commanded the exact opposite? Do you not care enough for this man to mourn for his fate of exclusion from the kingdom of God that will occur if he does not turn away from his sin? Do you not have any concern for the effect that your inaction will have on communicating to the rest of your assembly that sexual immorality is no great cause for concern in the believer’s life? Do you think you are stronger than the God who redeemed

you from such behaviors? That you can provoke his wrath against you and survive his judgment? Come to your senses: I say this to your shame.

This is exactly what one has to say to Marin with respect to his views on homosexual practice. Someone who really loves those engaged in homosexual practice and trusts in God's power will not allow such gross immoral sexual behavior to continue among brothers and sisters in the faith without ever offering an active rebuke of such behavior. Such sexual offenders cannot be given *carte blanche* to continue in full fellowship while at the same time living in active violation of foundational sexual standards. Of course, unbelievers have to be given some opportunity of being exposed to the proclamation of the word in the church (see 1 Cor 14:23). And believers too, even when engaged in grossly immoral behavior, have to be given adequate opportunity to see the error of their ways and repent. But, no, the church cannot ever in such matters "release responsibility" with respect to its obligation to speak out against immorality and correct in love members who engage impenitently and repetitively in it.

The church can never give up its obligation to rebuke offenders (in an appropriately loving way, of course) and require repentance. Jesus made this clear: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4). Similarly, Matt 18:15-17 lays out a program for communal discipline, as does 2 Thess 3:14-15. But Marin thinks that, as regards serial and unrepentant homosexual practice by self-professed Christians, the church should forego not only temporary removal from the life of the church but any ongoing rebuke whatsoever. To top it all off, Marin uses the context of 1 Cor 6:9, which commands the use of church discipline against sexual offenders, as the scriptural basis for an "eternal principle" of "releasing control" of an offender. Hermeneutically, this is nothing short of stunning. *The misrepresentation of the text of Scripture at this point is so monumental and so key to Marin's whole program as to discredit the whole of it and call shame upon any who help to further it.*

The goal of church discipline is not to punish but to reclaim someone for the kingdom by stimulating repentance. This is clear enough in Paul's discussion of the change of heart of an offender in 2 Cor 2:5-11; 7:8-13. There is at least a 50-50 chance that this offender is none other than the incestuous man of 1 Cor 5, as a number of commentators have noted. Whether it is or isn't, the incestuous man would have been handled in the same way if the discipline that Paul mandated in 1 Cor 5 had its intended effect of prompting repentance. Paul urged the Corinthians to quickly forgive, comfort, and reaffirm their love for the penitent ex-offender, lest Satan take advantage of his "excessive sorrow" for having committed the wrong. The community's initial support for the offender before he repented, apparently manifested in not disciplining the offender and siding with him over against Paul, had led to Paul's tearful letter (which is no longer extant to us). Paul was not happy that the Corinthians were grieved by the letter but he did rejoice that the grieving led to repentance. "Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved but because you were grieved into repentance [i.e. a change of mind].... For grief that accords with God produces repentance that leads to an unrepentant salvation [i.e. a salvation that one will never regret]" (2 Cor 7:9-10). It is precisely this kind of action on Paul's part—rebuke and discipline to stimulate repentance—that Marin rules out of bounds as an unloving and unfaithful church response to homosexual offenders that impedes the offender's salvation.

E. Excursus on the Meaning of *Malakoi* and *Arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor 6:9

As regards dealing with the meanings of *malakoi* (“soft men”) and *arsenokoitai* (“men who lie with a male”) Marin does little, though he appears to lean readers in the direction of homosexualist readings by stating a homosexualist position that pederasty is in view and referring to “the temple prostitution, street prostitution and promiscuous sex” at Corinth (130-31). Also unhelpful is his use of the inaccurate NIV translation “male prostitutes” (the term *malakoi* is not limited to prostitutes) and “homosexual offenders” (which translation does not make clear the specific allusion of *arsenokoitai* back to the Levitical prohibitions).

Marin’s claim that the word *arsenokoitēs* appears “only in the Bible” and “nowhere else in ancient literature” is wrong (131). True, it appears first in extant literature in 1 Cor 6:9; but it and related words appear subsequently in Christian literature from the second century on; by the sixth century we see it cropping up in non-Christian Greek literature. The Talmudic rabbis used a related Hebrew expression *mishkav zakar*, “lying with a male,” drawn from the Hebrew text of the Levitical prohibitions. Although the textual evidence is much later than the use in 1 Cor 6:9, it is unlikely that the rabbis developed the Hebrew expression from the Christian Greek term; more likely it was a case of the former and it is simply an accident of history that the Hebrew expression does not appear in earlier extant texts. The point to be made is that the Greek term is a distinctly Jewish and Christian term formulated from the Levitical prohibitions of man-male intercourse (18:20; 20:13 LXX), extrapolated from the words *koitē* “lying” and *arsēn* “male” where the first element of the compound *arsen-* represents the object of the verbal idea implicit in the stem *koit-*. The subject “men” is derived from the masculine suffix *-tēs*. Hence, “men who lie with a male” is by far the best translation, calling to mind (as it would have for Paul and his readers) the Levitical prohibitions of man-male intercourse. The use of the term in 1 Tim 1:10 alongside *pornoi* confirms the derivation of the term from the Levitical prohibitions since the author speaks of the vices in the list being derived from “the law” and formulates the list to correspond to the subject headings of the Decalogue (where under the seventh commandment against adultery the Levitical prohibitions of man-male intercourse are sometimes subsumed in early Jewish and Christian discussions).

Although Marin doesn’t tell readers the following, the evidence is quite strong that Paul intended by these two terms, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, an intrinsic indictment of all man-male intercourse. There are uses of *malakoi* or related words in Greek and Latin (*molles*) for males who actively feminize their appearance in order to attract male sex partners and without limitation to acts of prostitution. Indeed, the Roman satirist Juvenal (*Satire 2*) refers to an aristocrat named Gracchus who willingly became the “bride” to a common cornet-player and signed semi-official marriage documents. Orientation theories crystallize around “soft men,” where it is not uncommon to claim that this behavior arises from biological disposition and/or early childhood socialization. The fact that *arsenokoitēs* and related words were formed deliberately from the Levitical prohibitions suggests an inclusive sense since Jews in the ancient world consistently interpreted these prohibitions as inclusive of all same-sex male sexual relationships (see, for example,

Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.199; Philo, *Contemplative Life* 59; and *b. Sanhedrin* 54a).⁵ The use of *arsenokoitēs* and related words after Paul is—consistent with *malakoi*—not limited to pederasty or prostitution. And the inclusive sense of “men who lie with a male” is confirmed by the inclusive sense given in Rom 1:27 (“males with males ...”).

The broader context of 1 Cor 5-7 provides additional proof that the terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in combination apply to all forms of man-male intercourse. The case of the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5 involves a comparable instance of sexual intercourse between two persons who are too much of a structural “like” or “same” in embodied existence, here as regards kinship. There is obviously no limitation of an indictment of incest only to circumstances where a child or exchange of funds is involved. Its description of man who “has the wife of his father” likewise echoes the absolute prohibitions in Leviticus and Deuteronomy (which confirms that Paul would have had the absolute prohibitions in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 in view when referring to “men who lie with a male”).

As regards the other vices in 1 Cor 6:9-10, the offender list distinguishes sex offenders from idolaters (so there is no limitation to cultic acts) and consent is presumed among all the offenders (so coerced acts are not under consideration). The partial citation of Gen 2:24 (“...the two shall become one flesh”) in 1 Cor 6:16 indicates that Paul thought of the sex offenses in 6:9 as, in one way or another, a violation of the Genesis norm. Moreover, Paul’s allusions to Gen 1:27 and 2:21-24 in his discussion of veils (1 Cor 11:7-9, 12a), where he expresses concern over the blurring of sexual differentiation in headwear (to say nothing of same-sex sexual intercourse!) confirms that he would have regarded “men who lie with a male” as violating Gen 2:24 (“a man shall ... become joined to his woman”; compare also the echo to Gen 1:26-27 in Rom 1:23-27). Paul’s discussion of marriage in 1 Cor 7 (and everywhere else in Paul) also repeatedly presumes that marriage, and thus sexual relations, is confined to a male-female union.

In short, all the historical and literary context evidence indicates that with the terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* Paul was not limiting his indictment only to particularly exploitative or promiscuous forms of man-male intercourse. Does Marin cite any of this evidence? Not only doesn’t he cite it; he gives no indication in his footnotes that he is even aware that such information exists (since he cites no sources that make the case) or even wants to know that it exists. Even NT scholar Dan O. Via conceded in our *Two Views* book on *Homosexuality and the Bible* (Fortress Press, 2003)—Via providing the homosexualist view—that the term *arsenokoitai* was not limited to contexts of pederasty or prostitution.

F. Marin’s Fifth “Eternal Principle,” Falsely Derived from the Context of 1 Tim 1:10: “Keep open a path for God to accomplish his will for a person’s life, even until their last breath” (a.k.a. “the Big-Picture Principle”)

Marin’s fifth “eternal principle” is allegedly drawn from the context of 1 Tim 1:9-10, another offender list like 1 Cor 6:9-10 that contains the word *arsenokoitai* (“men who lie with a male”). Marin assures readers that “the responsible approach to this controversial passage is not starting with the word [*arsenokoitēs* in 1:10] but the big picture” (134). Marin characterizes the “big picture” of 1 Timothy as, well, “the big picture”: Paul

⁵ The last-mentioned text, incidentally, says that the male with whom the active partner lays may be “an adult or minor” so the indictment of man-male intercourse is certainly not limited to pederasty.

looking back over his life and giving Timothy the benefit of his experience. Without any specific appeal to texts in 1 Timothy Marin simply asserts that Paul was conveying the importance of building “bridges for people to encounter [God’s] love.” For Marin this message translates today into churches today building bridges to the homosexual community “by moving past their prejudices”—prejudices that Marin once shared when he was a “Bible-banging homophobe” (137).

The idea of “building bridges for people to encounter God’s love” is a platitude that could apply to just about any New Testament text (and therefore not very descriptive of the broad context of 1 Timothy). “Building bridges” is never understood in the New Testament the way Marin wants readers to understand it: namely, as refraining from calling people to repentance who are actively participating in serious sexual immorality, as a way of building bridges for the gospel to be proclaimed. The message of 1 Timothy is no exception. The point of the offender list in 1 Tim 1:9-10 is again precisely the opposite of what Marin promotes, for it stresses that teaching of the law is vital in circumstances when people are living lives “contrary to healthy teaching [or: sound instruction],” including the *pornoī* (sexually immoral persons) generally and the *arsenokoitai* (men who lie with a male) specifically. Later in the same chapter, reference is made to “Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have turned over to Satan [i.e. had expelled from the Christian community], so that they may learn not to blaspheme”—obviously not an example of Marin’s “building bridges.” Likewise, in 5:20 we encounter the command to “rebuke [or: reprove, reprimand, correct, from verb *elenchō*] in the presence of all [i.e. the whole church]” elders “who are sinning.”

In all the Pastoral Epistles (1-2 Tim, Tit) an essential element in the job description of the elder (*presbyter*) or overseer (*episkopos*)⁶ is to safeguard the faith, teach the truth, and correct those who err. For example, in the letter to Titus we read that the elder/overseer fulfills his ministry by “holding firmly to [or: having a firm grasp of] the trustworthy word, in accordance with (my) teaching, in order that he may also be able to exhort with healthy teaching [or: sound instruction] and *refute* [or: reprove, correct, convict, from verb *elenchō*] those who speak against it” (1:9). Later in 1:13 Titus is commanded with regard to false teachers: “*rebuke* [*elenche*] them sharply [or: rigorously, severely; *apotomōs*]”; later still in 3:10-11: “after a first and a second *admonition* (*nouthesia*) *avoid* [or: reject, have nothing to do with; Gk. *paraitou*] a factious person.” By “factious person” (Gk. *hairetikon* [heretical] *anthrōpon*)” is meant a person who does not accept the church’s teaching on doctrine or ethics, including sexual ethics—not a person who reproves others for grossly immoral conduct.

In 2 Timothy, which is even more of a “last testament” and farewell letter than 1 Timothy (and thus should, in Marin’s view, be a better candidate for “the big picture”), we read that “the Lord’s slave [or: servant; *doulos*]” is responsible for “*correcting* [or: disciplining, instructing, educating; from the verb *paideuō*] opponents with gentleness” in the hope that “God may give to them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth and they may come to their senses again [and so escape] from the devil’s trap, having been captured alive by him for [the doing of] that one’s will” (2:25-26). Later in the same letter Timothy himself is solemnly charged “in the presence of God and Christ Jesus who is going to judge the living and the dead” to “proclaim the word ... *reprove* [or: correct,

⁶ The term *episkopos* is often rendered “bishop” in standard English translations but in the Pastoral Epistles the word appears to be essentially the same office as the elder.

convict, convince, from verb *elenchō*], **rebuke** [or: *reprimand, warn*; from the verb *epitimaō*], **exhort** [or: *appeal to, urge, encourage*, from the verb *parakaleō*], with all patience and teaching [or: instruction; *didachē*]” (2 Tim 4:1-2). It is important to bear in mind that this is the *concluding* exhortation of the letter so it can hardly be ancillary to the “big picture.” The charge is then followed—ironically for Marin—by the prediction that “there will be a time when (people) will not put up with healthy teaching [or: sound instruction] but in accordance with [i.e. in order to gratify] their own desires will accumulate for themselves teachers, having an itching in their hearing, and will turn away their hearing from the truth” (4:3-4).

Marin’s “big picture” message is vastly different than that of the Paul of the Pastoral Epistles, at least if the offender is engaged in homosexual relations. Marin’s approach is: Say nothing to such a person about the sinfulness of homosexual activity and instead repent of “homophobia.” As long as you do this, Marin assures readers, you will “keep open a path for God to accomplish his will” in that person’s life. More likely, the church, if it adopted Marin’s approach, would keep the homosexual offender trapped in, and enslaved to, sin—sin that could lead to the offender’s destruction. Once more it is clear that Marin has *not* understood the “big picture” of the text in question (here 1 Tim 1:10). To read the “big picture” of the Pastoral Epistles as opposed to correction, rebuke, and reproof of erring souls is to arrive at an anti-“big picture” of these epistles. Marin could hardly have picked a set of texts *more* affirming of the need *for* active rebuke and correction than the Pastoral Epistles and yet he implies that their “big picture” speaks *against* such a practice. In the Pastoral Epistles (as everywhere else in the New Testament) building bridges never comes at the cost of the church relinquishing its obligation to reprove persons engaged in sinful practices of an egregious sort. Reproof is itself a loving act when done with a ‘gentle firmness’ and with the intent to reclaim someone for God’s kingdom and to save that one from a path of destruction. Marin’s love is a truncated love at best; functional hate at worst, if it encourages the offender to view his sinful actions as no big deal.

G. Marin’s Third “Eternal Principle,” Misleadingly Appropriated from the Context of Rom 1:26-27: “Recognize from [the] choice [to live for God or not] what positively or negatively affects an individual’s oneness with the Lord” (a.k.a. “the oneness principle”)

When discussing Romans 1:26-27 Marin devotes 16 lines to the position of two homosexualist scholars, Robin Scroggs and John Boswell, to the effect that Paul is implicating only pederasty and prostitution. He devotes a fourth of that attention, 4 lines, to state simply that the “conservative Christian” position is that “Paul is speaking not just to pederasty but also to consensual same-sex adult sexual relationships.” There are at least five strong arguments supporting an intrinsic indictment and shattering the homosexualist case (see below)—any one of which (let alone the five in combination) demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that Paul would not have made any exceptions for committed homosexual unions. Yet Marin mentions none of them. Instead, he simply throws up his hands and says: “Unfortunately for the current debate, no one is able to go back and ask Paul exactly what he was speaking about” (127)!

No problem, says Marin. The important thing is to “move beyond the particulars by looking at the broader passage of verses 18-32” (127). Marin is correct when he states that people are handed over to the controlling power of sin when, despite God’s self-revelation, they choose “not God.” He is also correct that God’s “giving over” in 1:26-27 is not “because they had same-sex attraction” but rather because of the decision to reject God (128). And he is correct in exhorting those who come to the crossroads of choosing for or against God to “chose to believe in God and live out his revolutionary ways” (129). Where Marin gets into trouble is in his application to “GLBT-Christian relations.” He argues that the first priority should be to get them to “choose for God.” Then God can tell each of them “personally and individually ... what he feels is best for their life.” This “best for their life” Marin then categorizes as “optimal ideals.” These “optimal ideals,” he argues, can only be accomplished after homosexually active persons decide for God. “Therefore the Christian community is responsible to do everything they possibly can to allow for a clear path to be made to God” so that God can bring about these “optimal ideals” (129). It is evident what Marin means by doing everything possible to “allow for a clear path to be made to God”: not stating that Scripture regards homosexual practice as sin, let alone sin of an egregious sort.

The Christian faith cannot be held hostage in its full proclamation of the gospel because some interest group finds offensive part of that message. If persons in polyamorous, adulterous, incestuous, or homosexual relationships find the church’s insistence, respectively, on monogamy, marital fidelity, exogamy, and heterosexuality offensive, so be it. The demands of the gospel as regards certain minimal expectations of conduct are not just “optimal ideals.” For example, the prohibition against sexual intercourse with one’s mother or stepmother (Deut 22:30; 27:20; Lev 18:7-8; 20:11), even in the context of consent and commitment, is not an “optimal ideal,” as Paul made clear in the case of the incestuous man (1 Cor 5). To engage in such behavior or other grave sexual offenses as a believer is to put at great risk one’s inheritance of the kingdom of God and eternal life (1 Cor 6:9-10, 15-20; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19-21; 1 Thess 4:2-8; Col 3:5-10; Eph 4:17-19; 5:3-6; 1 Tim 1:9-11).

Because of his ideological bent Marin is partially deaf to the broad message behind Rom 1:18-32. Idolatry (1:20-23, 25) and sexually impurity (with homosexual practice as a flagship example, 1:24, 26-27) are presented as obvious examples of deliberate suppression of the truth about God and God’s will for our life accessible in the material structures of creation/nature. Yes, Paul does expand the net in 1:29-31 to include a broad range of vices: from murder to seemingly more pedestrian offenses such as greediness, envy, gossipers, arrogance persons, and persons disobedient to their parents. But this does not mean that the wrath of God is not still coming on those who are controlled by sin—on unbelievers whose salvation depends on unattainable perfection but also on professed believers who are not in the main led by the Spirit of God and exhibit extreme manifestations of the more run-of-the-mill offenses. God’s kindness in not immediately zapping offenders is supposed to “lead” offenders “to repentance,” not convey a license to continue to sin; otherwise offenders are storing up for themselves “wrath on the day of wrath and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (2:3-6, 8-9). If personal merit is the basis for salvation then any sin would get one excluded from the kingdom (so the unbeliever). Yet that does not mean that in the view of the authors of Scripture all sin is equal in all respects and that all offenses are equally severe in God’s sight. It does not

mean, for example, that a believer who regularly engages in incest (even of an adult-consensual sort) is no more in danger of being excluded from God's future kingdom than someone who takes home a company pen.

The believer who engages in extreme sexual offenses *remains* subject to God's wrath—and the homosexual practice that Paul singles out and calls a “dishonoring” of one's gendered self, an “indecent” or “shameful act,” and an “uncleanness” “contrary to nature” is certainly treated by Paul as an extreme sexual offense. That is Paul's point when he echoes Rom 1:24-27 later in ch. 6. Formerly, Paul says, the recipients of his letter had been “slaves of sin,” that is, “to uncleanness [or: impurity] and to (other forms of) lawlessness for (the sake of doing) lawless acts” (6:17, 19). The reference to “uncleanness” or “impurity” (Gk. *akatharsia*) is important. Paul uses the term elsewhere in Romans only in 1:24 where he uses it of sexual offenses generally but with homosexual practice particularly in view. The normative sexual reference of the term is clear from its close association in the Pauline corpus with *porneia* (sexual immorality) and/or *aselgeia* (sexual licentiousness or unrestraint).⁷ A further intratextual echo to 1:24-27 appears in the reference in 6:21 to “things of which you are now ashamed, for the end of these things is death,” for the shame motif is prominent in 1:24-27.

Paul is clear in 6:15-23. You Romans used to be slaves of sin, including gross sexual impurity. “But now, having been freed from sin and having been enslaved to God, the fruit (of righteous conduct) you have leads to holiness and the end [or: outcome] is eternal life” (6:22; cf. 6:18-19). Otherwise, if one continues in egregious conduct, sin is really one's lord and sin will recompense the offender with eternal death (6:16, 21). Christ became a sin offering on our behalf in order that “the (essential) requirement of the law might be fulfilled in *us* who are walking not in conformity to the (sinful impulse of) the flesh but in conformity to (the leading of) the Spirit” (8:4). Only those who are “led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (8:14). “If you continue to live in conformity to the (sinful impulse of) the flesh, you are going to die [i.e., be eternally separated from God]” (8:13). That is Paul's ultimate answer to the question in 6:15: “Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?” The answer: No, because if you behave in such a way that sin is your lord, you will perish, regardless of whether you mouth the confession that “Jesus is Lord.” Your life indicates otherwise. Paul regarded serial/unrepentant homosexual practice, among other grave offenses, as *prima facie* evidence that an individual is a slave to sin who, apart from repentance, will be excluded from God's kingdom.

Marin sadly detaches completely the issue of ongoing homosexual behavior from the issue of conversion, whereas for Paul, Luke, and all other New Testament authors repentance is part of the conversion process. Not perfection, to be sure, but nonetheless a watershed moment of turning away from sin to God. As a sign of repentance, the murderer gives up murdering. The thief and extortionist give up stealing and oppressing. The adulterer gives up committing adultery. And the participant in same-sex intercourse or in incest obviously gives up these immoral activities. Giving up such extreme offenses—acknowledging that intermittent ‘backsliding’ followed by more repentance may yet occur—is hardly a call for perfection. The early church understood it as a sign of minimal repentance. The person that says “I believe” and yet continues to engage impenitently in the self-affirming adultery, incest, homosexual practice, pedophilia, rape,

⁷ 1 Thess 4:7; Gal 5:19; 2 Cor 12:21; cf. Col 3:5; Eph 4:19; 5:3, 6.

robbery, extortion, or murder that characterized his (or her) pre-Christian life has not crossed the threshold from unbelief to faith in any saving sense. *That* is the broader context for Rom 1:26-27.

To be sure, Marin does intimate that, once homosexually active persons become believers, God will tell them “personally and individually ... what he feels is best for their life” (129). Whether that includes ceasing from homosexual practice Marin does not make clear. But even if he had that in mind, it was not Paul’s position or that of any other author of Scripture that correction of a self-professed believer engaged actively in bestiality, homosexual practice, incest, adultery, or the like should be a matter left solely between the offender and God. It is an essential part of the teaching of the church that such behavior should stop yesterday. God has given the church a vital role in communicating that message to potential converts and new converts up front, not just waiting for offenders to figure things out alone in their relationship to God. “Gay Christians” and their homosexualist supporters actively communicate that homosexual behavior is not intrinsically sinful. The church has a moral obligation to these offenders to make clear that the united witness of Scripture, including Jesus, says otherwise. That is why Paul told converts to “stop deceiving themselves” about being exempted from God’s judgment when they continue in immoral behavior (1 Cor 6:9; 15:33; Gal 6:7). The church must continue to act out of the same love for offenders.

It is a truism in Christian circles that truth uninformed by love can turn people away from the gospel, major in minors, and lead to hypocrisy. However, love uninformed by truth can lead persons down the path of destruction by failing to warn people of the consequences of their action. Paul’s famous line about “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6) appears in the harshest letter in the Pauline corpus in Scripture. Indeed, the phrase immediately follows a warning to the Galatian Gentile believers that if they take on circumcision they would be “discharged from Christ” and would “have fallen from grace” (5:4). Paul warns the Galatian Gentile believers not to engage in “the works of the flesh,” the first three of which are sexual offenses: “sexual immorality (*porneia*), sexual impurity (*akatharsia*), sexual unrestraint [or: licentiousness] (*aselgeia*)” (5:19). Paul makes clear: “I am telling you in advance [i.e. of God’s judgment], just as I told (you) [i.e. when I was with you] in advance [i.e. of God’s judgment], that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (5:21). These are the very things that Marin tells readers *not* to talk about when conversing with persons who engage in homosexual practice. And yet they comprise for Paul what it means to have “faith working through love.”

The same sort of context can be met for the even more famous Pauline phrase “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15, which continues “... let us grow in all things into him who is the head, Christ”). Immediately Paul launches into a fervent exhortation that highlights the necessity of avoiding sexual immorality:

No longer walk as the Gentiles walk, ... [who] have given themselves up to *sexual unrestraint* [or: *licentiousness*] (*aselgeia*) for the greedy doing of every *sexual impurity* (*akatharsia*). But you did not so learn Christ, if in fact you listened to him and were taught in him, in accordance with the fact that there is truth in Jesus. [You were taught] to put off yourselves as regards the former conduct the old human that is being corrupted by desires that deceive, and to renew yourselves by the spirit of your mind and to clothe yourselves with the new human that was created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.... *Sexual immorality* (*porneia*) and *sexual impurity*

(*akatharsia*) of any kind ... must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.... Know this indeed, that every *sexually immoral person (pornos)* or *sexually impure person (akathartos)* ... has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God is coming on the children of disobedience. So do not become associates of theirs. For you were once darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.... And do not be partnering with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather even be exposing/refuting them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that are done in secret by them. (Eph 4:17, 19-24; 5:3, 5-8, 10-12)

According to this text “speaking the truth in love” does not exclude, but rather requires:

- Exhortations to believers to “put off” sexually immoral behavior as incompatible with “truth in Jesus” and the renewal of the mind “in true righteousness and holiness” after the likeness of God stamped in creation
- Injunctions not to even speak in approving terms of sexually immoral practices, let alone to accommodate to such practices in the church
- Warnings that sexually immoral persons will not inherit the kingdom of God and will be recipients of God’s wrath on the day of judgment
- Commands not to associate with persons engaged in sexually immoral behavior but rather to expose and refute their error

Note that these approaches to sexual immorality cannot be taken if one claims, as Marin does, that it is God’s business, not ours, to assess whether any given behavior is immoral. It is no wonder that Paul in his praise of love in 1 Cor 13 states that love “does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices along with the truth” (13:6).

All this is consistent with what is probably our earliest extant letter from Paul: First Thessalonians. Immediately after the extended thanksgiving for his Thessalonian converts Paul launches into moral exhortation. And what is first up on the list? Sexual purity concerns:

For the rest, then, brothers (and sisters), we ask you and urge (you) in the Lord Jesus that, just as you received from us the (instruction about) how you ought to walk and please God, just as you do indeed walk, that you abound [or: excel, progress] (even) more. For you know what instructions [or: commands] we gave to you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God: your holiness [or: sanctification], that you abstain from sexual immorality (*porneia*) ... because the Lord is an avenger concerning all these things, just as also we told you before and were charging (you before God). For God did not call us to (sexual) uncleanness [or: impurity] (*akatharsia*) but in holiness [or: sanctification]. For that very reason the one who rejects (this instruction) rejects not a human being but God who gives the Holy Spirit to [or: into] you. (4:1-8)

Does this sound like Paul leaving it up to his converts to decide for themselves alone, in their personal and individual relationships with God, what is acceptable sexual behavior and what isn’t? No, Paul repeatedly made it a point to tell his converts that a top priority of his teaching was clarifying the critical importance of what constituted a sexually pure life. We should note here the use of the term *akatharsia*, “(sexual) uncleanness” or “impurity,” in parallelism with *porneia*, “sexual immorality.” Here Paul makes a special point of tagging adultery with the term while in Rom 1:24, 26-27 he

identifies homosexual practice specifically. Does this passage suggest that giving up sexually immoral intercourse is merely an “optimal ideal” and that continuing in such intercourse does not endanger one’s eternal relationship with God? No, rather: “The Lord is an avenger concerning all these things” and “the one who rejects (this instruction about the necessity of abstaining from sexual immorality and impurity) rejects ... God who gives the Holy Spirit to you.” Thus, clearly, self-professed believers who continue to engage in homosexual practice in a self-affirming manner reject the very God who gave them his Holy Spirit. That doesn’t sound good, does it? And the solution to that is ... don’t tell them that this is what they are doing? I don’t think so.

H. Excursus on Five Irrefutable Arguments for Concluding That Paul’s Indictment of Homosexual Practice in Romans 1:24-27 Was Absolute

Contrary to Marin’s remark, it is not necessary to travel back in time in a literal sense to know that Paul was making an absolute indictment of homosexual practice, inclusive of adult-committed unions. The literary and historical context makes this point clear.

(1) ***Paul clearly had in view the creation text in Gen 1:27*** in his critique of homosexual practice in Rom 1:26-27, There are eight points of correspondence, in a similar relative order, between Rom 1:23, 26-27 and Gen 1:26-27: *human, image, likeness; birds, cattle, reptiles; male, female.*

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) |

This intertextual echo back to Gen 1:26-27 is further reinforced by the fact that the context for Rom 1:24, 26-27 emphasizes God’s role as “Creator” (1:25) and the knowledge about God and ourselves that can be culled from observation of “nature,” that is, the material structures of creation still intact despite the fall (1:19-20, 26-27). Those who suppress the truth about God transparent “since the creation of the world” are more likely to suppress the truth about the complementarity of the sexes, male and female,

transparent in “nature.” We already seen that Gen 2:24 is the background text for the indictment of man-male intercourse in 1 Cor 6:9.

Two consequences follow from these intertextual echoes. First, Paul shows himself to be a good disciple of Jesus in taking the same two texts that Jesus declared to be essential for sexual ethics and emphasizing, as Jesus apparently did, their message about the complementary duality of the sexes. Second, these echoes establish that Paul’s main problem with homosexual practice was that it was a violation of God’s will for male-female pairing established in creation, not that it was typically exploitative.

(2) *Paul’s nature argument in Romans 1:24-27* does not lend itself to distinctions between exploitative and non-exploitative manifestations of homosexual behavior but rather to an absolute rejection of all homosexual bonds. By *para phusin* (“beyond nature” in the sense of “contrary to, against nature”) Paul meant that the evidence from the material structures of creation—here the complementary embodied character of maleness and femaleness—gives clear evidence of God’s will for human sexual pairing.

Some have argued that this could not have been what Paul intended by his nature argument, despite Paul’s clear statement in Rom 1:19-20 that such matters are “transparent” and have been so “from the creation of the world . . . being mentally apprehended by means of the things made.” As it is, the historical context also confirms this way of reading Paul. According to Thomas Hubbard, a classicist at the University of Texas (Austin) who has written the premiere sourcebook of texts on homosexuality in ancient Greece and Rome: “Basic to the heterosexual position [against homosexual practice in the Greco-Roman world of the first few centuries C.E.] is the characteristic Stoic appeal to the providence of Nature, which has matched and fitted the sexes to each other.”⁸ Similarly, classicist Craig Williams, who has written what many regard as the premiere book on Roman homosexuality, concedes: “Some kind of argument from ‘design’ seems to lurk in the background of Cicero’s, Seneca’s, and Musonius’ claims [against homosexual practice].”⁹ Also classicist William Schoedel, emeritus of the University of Illinois, acknowledges that ancient writers “who appeal to nature against same-sex *eros* find it convenient to concentrate on the more or less obvious uses of the orifices of the body to suggest the proper channel for the more diffused sexual impulses of the body.”¹⁰ The second-century physician Soranus (or his later “translator” Caelius Aurelianus) referred to *molles*, “soft men” eager for penetration (i.e. the Latin equivalent for the term *malakoi* in 1 Cor 6:9), as those who “subjugated to obscene uses parts not so intended” and disregarded “the places of our body which divine providence destined for definite functions” (*On Chronic Diseases* 4.9.131). Part of Charicles’ attack on all homosexual practice in the pseudo-Lucianic text *Affairs of the Heart*, a work that contains a debate about the respective merits of heterosexual love and homosexual love, is the assertion that male-male love is an erotic attraction for what one already is as a sexual being:

⁸ Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 444.

⁹ Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 242.

¹⁰ William R. Schoedel, “Same-Sex Eros: Paul and the Greco-Roman Tradition,” in *Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture* (ed. D. Balch; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 43-72, here p. 46.

Then wantonness, daring all, transgressed the laws of nature. . . . And who then first looked with the eyes at the male as at a female . . . ? One nature came together in one bed. But *seeing themselves in one another* they were ashamed neither of what they were doing nor of what they were having done to them. (19-20; my emphasis)

(3) In Rom 1:24-27 Paul emphasizes *the mutuality of the homoerotic desires*, referring to the participants in same-sex intercourse being “inflamed with their yearning for *one another*” and to “their bodies being dishonored *among themselves*.” This proves that Paul was not restricting his remarks to coercive, exploitative acts. Moreover, *the wording of “exchanging” and “leaving behind” the other sex for the same sex is absolute* and clearly inclusive of all same-sex sexual relations: “their females exchanged the natural use (of the male) for that which is contrary to nature; 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.” The text does not say that men and women exchanged or left behind committed relationships with either sex for exploitative relationships with either sex. It states clearly that the problem was solely the exchange or leaving behind of other-sex sexual unions to pursue same-sex sexual unions.

(4) *The indictment of lesbian intercourse in Rom 1:26* does not support the view that Scripture’s indictment is limited to exploitative homosexual acts, since lesbianism in antiquity was not typically characterized by pederasty, prostitution, or abuse of slaves. Indeed, Greco-Roman moralists in antiquity who wanted to argue against man-male intercourse in its entirety sometimes cited intercourse between women as the ultimate trump card inasmuch as lesbian intercourse was universally abhorred by men, including men who advocated for man-male intercourse. For example, Charicles (above) culminates his argument against homosexual bonds by saying: “If males find intercourse with males acceptable, henceforth let women too love each other!” (*Affairs of the Heart*, 28).¹¹

¹¹ A few scholars claim that Rom 1:26 refers to heterosexual anal intercourse, not female-female intercourse. This claim is ruled out by at least four considerations. (1) The parallel phrasing of Rom 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 with their yearning for one another, males with males.” For the “likewise also” of 1:27 to be appropriate, both the thing exchanged (i.e., a person of the other sex) and the thing exchanged *for* (i.e., a person of the same sex) must be comparable—here sex with members of the same sex, not non-coital sex. (2) Lesbian intercourse is the form of female intercourse most commonly labeled “contrary to nature” and most commonly paired with male homosexual practice in Greco-Roman sources. (3) In the Greco-Roman milieu male attitudes toward female homoeroticism were uniformly negative, even among moralists who favored male homosexual practice. As the text from *Affairs of the Heart* cited above shows, a reference to the wrongness of lesbianism could be used as a clinching argument against supporters of male homosexual unions. Paul’s statement that “*even* their women” engaged in such practices functions in a similar manner. He opens with an argument against homosexual practice that will most easily win common assent. That Paul and other biblical authors were opposed to lesbian intercourse can be taken as an historical given. (4) The dominant history of interpretation of Rom 1:26 supports the assumption that lesbianism is in view. Augustine (ca. 410) is a notable exception when he interprets the reference as heterosexual anal intercourse, but his interpretation was influenced by his debates with the Pelagians, who in Augustine’s view had an overly positive view of sex in marriage apart from its procreative function. All the other Church Fathers from Augustine’s time or earlier who commented on what Paul meant by unnatural female intercourse in Rom 1.26 understood it as lesbian intercourse: probably Clement of Alexandria (ca. 200) and the Apocalypse of Peter (second century), certainly “Ambrosiaster” (ca. 370) and John Chrysostom (ca. 390).

Even Bernadette Brooten, who (as a self-avowed lesbian) has written the most important book on lesbianism in antiquity from a homosexualist perspective, admits:

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

If . . . the dehumanizing aspects of pederasty motivated Paul to condemn sexual relations between males, then why did he condemn relations between females in the same sentence? . . . Rom 1:27, like Lev 18:22 and 20:13, condemns all males in male-male relationships regardless of age, making it unlikely that lack of mutuality or concern for the passive boy were Paul’s central concerns. . . . The ancient sources, which rarely speak of sexual relations between women and girls, undermine Robin Scroggs’s theory that Paul opposed homosexuality as pederasty.¹²

(5) A conception of caring homoerotic unions already existed in Paul’s cultural environment and yet even these were rejected by some Greco-Roman moralists. Already in Plato’s *Symposium* (ca. 380 B.C.) Aristophanes remarked as regards male-male relationships: “they [i.e. the two men] continue with one another throughout life . . . desiring to join together and to be fused into a single entity . . . and to become one person from two” (192E). Although Aristophanes is a comic he charges that what he has said not be construed “after the manner of comedies” (193D). His remarks reflect or play off of the positive view of same-sex eroticism expressed by Phaedrus and Pausanias and current among some in antiquity. Neither Phaedrus (the ‘beloved’ of Eryximachus, also at the banquet) nor Pausanias, who was a lover of the tragic poet and host Agathon (a relationship that began when Agathon, now 31, was 18 years old), advocate for same-sex hedonism. On the contrary, they carefully distinguish their view of same-sex love from a common hedonistic view, stressing an attraction for the soul or mind more than the body and the relationship’s inducement to moral excellence. Pausanias, in particular, emphasizes that “love is neither right nor wrong in itself” but only right when it is “done rightly” and “for the right reasons”; that lovers who love rightly “are prepared to love in the expectation that they will be with them all their life and will share their lives in common,” “as if having been fused into a single entity with” the soul of the beloved (181D, 183E). It is thus evident that Aristophanes reflects Pausanias’s view of himself when the former states that men who love males “are not inclined by nature (*phusei*) toward marriage and the procreation of children, yet are compelled to do so by the law or custom (*nomos*)” with the result that two joined males “live their lives out with one another unmarried” (192A-B).¹³

In Plutarch’s *Dialogue on Love* (late 1st- early 2nd century A.D.) Protogenes argues that man-male love is superior, not because it is more hedonistic but because, instead of having “as a net result the reaping of the fruits of pleasure (*hēdonēn*),” it “comes through friendship to the end and goal of virtue” (750D; 4). Pisis infers that while “it is doubtless fitting (for women acting) with discretion and moderation neither to love passionately nor to be loved passionately,” it is a different matter with a male beloved (752C; 6). Daphnaeus, defending the superiority of male-female love, concedes that homosexual

¹² Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 11, 253 n. 106, 257, 361.

¹³ Cf. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, 5: “Greek homosexual activity, despite popular misconceptions, was not restricted to man-boy pairs.”

relationships are not necessarily exploitative, for “sexual intercourse that is contrary to nature with males does not do away with, nor damage, a lover’s kindness [or: amorous goodwill]” (751C; 5). Yet, he declares, even when “the (intercourse) that comes about from (the joining of) males” is done “willingly,” it remains “shameful” (*aschēmōn*) since males are, “with softness (*malakia*) and effeminacy (*thēlutēs*), surrendering themselves, according to Plato, ‘to be mounted in the custom of four-footed animals’ and to be sowed as if to produce children (*paidosporeisthai*), contrary to nature” (*para phusin*; 751D-E; 5).

Two second-century C.E. romances—Xenophon of Ephesus’ *An Ephesian Tale* (3.2) and Achilles Tatius’s *Leucippe and Clitophon* (1.7-8, 12-14, 33-34)—both include tragic love stories about similar-aged, male lovers. Relationships of a different sort but still attesting to commitment are reported in Rome by the epigrammatist Martial (ca. 40-104 A.D.; 1.24; 12.42) and by the satirist Juvenal (early second century A.D.; *Satire* 2): effeminate men who willingly commit themselves as “brides” to another man. For example, Gracchus, “a man renowned for his family background and his wealth,” became the “bride” to a common cornet-player and signed semi-official documents (*Satire* 2.119, 125, 129). Lucian of Samosata (mid-second century A.D.) tells of two rich women who regard themselves as married, the masculine Megilla of Lesbos and her “wife” Demonassa the Corinthian (*Dialogues of the Courtesans* 5). The astrologer Ptolemy of Alexandria (second century A.D.) refers to manly women born under a certain constellation who are “lustful for sexual relations contrary to nature” and take the active sexual role with women whom they sometimes call their “lawful wives” (*Tetrabiblos* 3.14; §171-72). Several rabbinic texts forbid marriage of a man to a man; one referring to Egyptian practices even forbids marriage of a woman to a woman (*Sifra* on Lev 18:3).¹⁴ Clement of Alexandria likewise referred to “women ... contrary to nature ... marrying women” (*Paidagōgos* 3.3.21.3). These marriage texts presume that some in the ancient world are seeking a committed same-sex relationship.

Some Greek and Roman moralists condemned *all* homosexual acts on the grounds of a nature argument. “Literature of the first century C.E. bears witness to an increasing polarization of attitudes toward homosexual activity, ranging from frank acknowledgment and public display of sexual indulgence on the part of leading Roman citizens to severe moral condemnation of *all* homosexual acts.”¹⁵ “Basic to the heterosexual position is the characteristic Stoic appeal to the providence of Nature, which has matched and fitted the sexes to each other.”¹⁶ If even some sectors of the “pagan” world were beginning to develop absolute opposition to all forms of homosexual practice, what is the likelihood that Paul would have made exceptions for committed homosexual unions? We can add to this the fact that Paul operated out of Jewish Scriptures and a Jewish milieu that were unequivocally opposed to homosexual practice even of a committed sort. We can also add that he was a disciple of a figure (Jesus) who predicated his views about human sexuality on the exclusive male-female model in the creation texts.

¹⁴ *Sifra* on Lev 18:3, *Genesis Rabbah* 26.6; *Leviticus Rabbah* 23.9; *b. Hullin* 92b. Cf. Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 65.

¹⁵ Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, 383 (emphasis added).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 444.

Historically speaking, then, the evidence is overwhelming that Paul, like all other Jews and Christians of the period, opposed homosexual practice categorically and absolutely. Historian Louis Crompton, a self-identified “gay” man, was correct in his massive *Homosexuality and Civilization* when he stated:

According to [one] interpretation, Paul’s words were not directed at “bona fide” homosexuals in committed relationships. But such a reading, however well-intentioned, seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstance. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian.¹⁷

The question is: Why does Marin refuse to deal with this evidence? I suspect that to do so would force him to acknowledge something that he believes would complicate his outreach to the homosexual community. But throwing up one’s hands and saying that we can’t know whether Paul was indicting all or only some homosexual acts is disingenuous in the face of the mountain of evidence. It’s a cover-up that the early church would not have participated in. In the end, it winds up being unfair even to the homosexual community that Marin wants to reach for the gospel. It is like sharing the gospel to someone currently in an adult-committed incestuous relationship and saying, “Unfortunately no one is able to go back and ask Paul exactly what he was speaking about when he reacted so negatively to the man sleeping with his stepmother in 1 Corinthians 5. We can’t know whether he was including consensual and committed incestuous unions in his indictment.” It is like a parent telling a child: “The burner is on but I don’t really know whether touching it will harm you.” Such statements are neither truthful nor loving. If Scripture indicates that ongoing homosexual behavior jeopardizes inheritance of eternal life even for professed believers (and it does indicate precisely that), then withholding that information from a prospective convert from the homosexual community is not a kindness or favor. Homosexual persons do not get some kind of special pass disallowed to other perpetrators of serious offenses.

Marin’s cozying up to the “GLBT” community comes at too great a cost: shutting up as regards what Scripture has to say about homosexual practice (and, worse, misrepresenting it), while “gay Christians” and their homosexualist supporters continue to press their case for accepting homosexual relationships (to say nothing about the full-court press of the broader secular society). Marin’s approach differs not only from that of Paul but also from that of Jesus. Jesus reached out to “sinners and tax collectors” but did not shut his mouth to economic exploitation and sexual impurity. He called people to repentance for these and other sins. Yes, he also criticized hypocrisy by the Pharisees who often majored in minors while ignoring more significant offenses (sometimes in their own lives) and callously consigned to hell egregious sinners with little thought for recovery. Even so, Jesus did not give up proclaiming and even ratcheting up God’s rigorous demand. He rather reached out to the biggest violators of that demand by loving them, eating with them, and calling them to “no longer be sinning lest something worse happen to you” (compare John 5:14 with 8:11). Unlike most of the Pharisees, Jesus combined an intensified ethic with an intensified outreach to offenders, always doing both, and not (as with the Pharisees, ancient and modern) one or the other.

¹⁷ Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 114.

The Pharisees could not get their theological imagination around the notion that God's people must both proclaim God's rigorous ethical demand and at the same time reach out in love to the violators of that demand. They thought that loving outreach to the latter would necessarily entail a reduction in the demand. So they concluded that if Jesus was having success among sinners and tax collectors he must be compromising God's rigorous demand. They were wrong. Marin is closer to a Pharisee than to Jesus in his book because he aligns himself with the Pharisaic view that one cannot both proclaim that homosexual practice is wrong and at the same time reach out in love to those engaging in homosexual practice. Where he differs from the Pharisees is only over the question of which of the two supposed alternatives the church should pick. Whereas the Pharisees gave up the loving outreach and kept the demand, Marin proposes that the church give up the proclamation of the demand and keep the outreach. Jesus called his followers to wed the two: love and demand, demand and love. That's why he could define discipleship as taking up one's cross, denying oneself, and losing one's life for his sake and for the sake of the kingdom of God that he proclaimed and enacted.

Marin for his part operates with a worldly definition of love that differs little from the notion of tolerance—which, when practiced toward immoral conduct, the authors of Scripture regard as a vice rather than a virtue (Rev 2:2, 20; cf. Ps 101:5; Mic 6:11). The Judeo-Christian understanding of love is much more robust in terms of correcting wrong. For this reason it would appear that Marin's book ultimately does not promote love in the Christian sense to homosexually active persons, at least not a full-orbed love. At best his book promotes an immature, truncated love. At worst it functionally promotes hate. That is because it fails to get the truth question right on Scripture's view of homosexual practice or at least attempts to hide it from those most in need of hearing it. And in doing so it puts many at risk for the judgment of God that is still to come.

Part 2 to follow