

# Sexual Orientation and the Bible – wk. 4

A Sunday School Class for Dayspring Baptist Church

led by Pastor Chris Fillingham; August 27, 2017

## Lust/Degrading Passion/Consuming Passion – Romans 1:24-27

Are Paul's "unnatural/lustful/passion out of control" condemnations applicable to all same sex relationships? Is it the "same-sex" that is the moral problem, or is there a particular kind of same-sex relationship that Paul is condemning?

### Literary Context – Paul's rhetoric in Romans 1-3

- Letter is written to a mostly Jewish church in Rome.
- Read Romans 1:21-28:
  - Who is the "they" Paul writing about (vs. 21 and following)?
  - What is the underlying problem he is describing?
    - Hint: What are the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> commandments?
- Romans 2:1-3
  - Surprise! Now who is guilty?
  - What is the problem being addressed here?
  - How does this fit into our current conversation?
- Read Romans 3:9-10
  - How does chapter 1 and 2 set up the conclusion in chapter 3?

### Greco-Roman same-sex eroticism: Lust/Impurity/Degrading Passions

- Greco-Roman Sources: Connect same-sex eroticism as manifestation of insatiable lust – an overflow of desire, always wanting more.
  - Dio Chrysostom – *"The Man whose **appetite is insatiate** in such things [i.e. his sex life], when he finds there is no scarcity, no resistance, in **this field** [i.e. sex with his wife], will have contempt for the easy conquest and **scorn for a woman's love, as a thing too readily given**—in fact, too utterly feminine—and will turn his assault against the male quarters, eager to **befoul the youth** who will very soon be magistrates and judges and generals, believing that in them he will find a kind of pleasure difficult and hard to procure. His state is **like that of men who are addicted to drinking** and wine-bibbing, who after long and steady drinking of unmixed wine, often lose their taste for it and **create an artificial thirst** by the stimulus of sweating, salted foods, and condiments."<sup>1</sup>*
  - Notice connection with Paul's words "giving up" or "leaving behind" natural intercourse with women.
- Most common practices of same-sex eroticism in the Greco-Roman World:
  - Pederasty: teacher/pupil
  - Prostitution – especially in temples
  - Masters and Slaves – men has the "usage" of their household "property"

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in James Brownson, 154

- Greco-Roman Assumptions about same-sex eroticism
  - People were thought to be capable of both opposite-sex and same-sex attraction, **and participated in both**.
  - Not an exclusive sexual orientation, but a product of excessive sexual desire. The majority of same-sex behavior fit easily into a paradigm of excess.<sup>2</sup>
    - Notice comparison Dio Chrysostom makes to gluttony.

#### Allusion to Roman Imperial House: Emperor Gaius Caligula

- Connected to Idolatry
  - Tried to erect a statue of himself in the Temple of Jerusalem – The link between Gaius and idolatry was well known in Jewish circles.
- Cultural/Political Symbol of out-of-control lust
  - Suetonius wrote:
    - Gaius, “lived in perpetual incest with all his sisters, and at a large banquet he placed each of them in turn below him, while his wife reclined above.”
    - Reported raping of the wives of his dinner guests in an adjoining room and then returning to the banquet to comment on their performance.
    - Reports various same-sex encounters between Gaius and other men.
  - Philo – Jewish –similarly gives a scathing critique of Gaius Caligula.
- **Assassinated**: Military Officer whom he had sexually humiliated joins a conspiracy to murder him. He was stabbed through the genitals.
- Romans 1:27 – **“Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own person the due penalty for their error.”**
- ***Gaius Caligula: Cultural Example*** – movement from idolatry to insatiable lust, to every form of depravity and the results it creates in your life.

#### Read Romans 1:22-32

- Read with the lens/perspective of Paul and his audience, not you.
- What is one or two things that you hear differently when reading with Paul’s mindset?

#### The questions:

- How does this compare with Christians in loving, committed, covenant relationships who are of the same gender?
- Are Paul’s assumptions when writing Romans 1 a basis for condemning all same-sex relationships?

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 103.

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### 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10<sup>3</sup>

#### 2 Odd Words

malakoi and arsenokoitai

Vice Lists:

- 1 Cor 6:9, the list includes both words: *malakoi arsenokoitai*
- 1 Tim 1:10, includes *arsenokoitai* only.

**malakoi** – What does it mean?

- Literally “soft” – as in fine clothing worn by rich (Matthew 11:8/Luke 7:25)
- How should it be translated in these lists?
  - William Loader: Pejorative attack on a man’s masculinity?
  - Dale Martin: “self-indulgent,” “sexually undisciplined,” “luxurious living”?
  - Robert Gagnon: The passive partner in **all** male same-sex relations (penetrated men) and not just to “male prostitutes” as the NIV and NRSV translates it?

**arsenokoitai** – Paul invents this word

- Composite words. Where do they come from?
- Richard Hayes and others: Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible,
  - Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 - *arsenos + koiten?*
  - Or even a Jewish ethic?
  - But why is Paul the first to put them into one word?
- History of it’s translation into English:
  - Geneva Bible (1587): “buggerers”
  - King James Bible (1607): “abusers of themselves with mankind”
  - Mace New Testament (1729): “the brutal”
  - Wesley’s New Testament (1755): “sodomites”
  - Douay-Rheims (1899): “liars with mankind”
  - RSV (1946): “homosexuals
  - Phillips Bible (1958): “pervert”

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<sup>3</sup> Notes based on David Gushee’s, “Two Odd Little Words” in *Changing Our Mind*, (Canton, Michigan: Read The Spirit Books, 2015) 74-80.

- Today's English Version (1966): "homosexual perverts"
  - NIV (1973): "homosexual offenders"
  - New American Bible (1987): "practicing homosexuals"
- 1 Cor: These people won't "enter the Kingdom of God"?

So the correct translation of this word that Paul coins is **highly contested and debated by classic scholars** and New Testament interpreters. Who exactly is Paul referring to here? Who is excluded from "entering the Kingdom of God"?

- Consensual adult sex?
- Man-boy sex/abuse?
- Prostitution?
- Rape?
- Abuse of slaves?

#### Arsenokoitai outside the New Testament

- Dale Martin: 4 times - economic exploitation and abuses of power, not same sex behavior; or more precisely, perhaps, **economic exploitation and violence in the sex business, as in pimping and forced prostitution.**

#### 1 Timothy 1:10 – Broader Meaning?

- This vice list "includes three interrelated terms in reference to male-male erotic activity." – NT scholar, James Brownson.
- Interconnected meaning?
  - "kidnappers or slave dealers (*andropodistai*) acting as 'pimps' for their captured and castrated boys (the *pornoï*, or male prostitutes) servicing the *arsenokoitai*, the men who make use of these boy prostitutes."<sup>4</sup>
- Is this what we have in mind when we hear the word "homosexual"?

"How might the history of Christian treatment of gays and lesbians have been different if *arsenokoitai* had been translated "sex traffickers" or "sexual exploiters" or "rapists" or "sexual predators" or "pimps"? ... [These] translations are at least as adequate or inadequate, as 'homosexuals' – a term from *our*

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<sup>4</sup> James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), pg 274.

culture with a range of meanings including sexual orientation, identity and activity—not a word from Paul’s world.”<sup>5</sup>

The large amount of scholarly debate about the translation of these words undermines a conclusive resolution of this debate in the Church based on these 2 passages.

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<sup>5</sup> David Gushee, *Changing Our Mind*, (Canton, Michigan: Read The Spirit Books, 2015) pg 79.