

Whose Family? Which Union? Reflections on Scripture, Human Sexuality, and God's Purposes

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Preface

I want to acknowledge Matt Vines' recent presentation and video as an important opportunity to revisit an important subject: gay and lesbian marriages. I am impressed by his courage, personal commitment, vulnerability, and desire to honor the text of Scripture. This paper is intended to be short, focusing mostly on the interpretation of the key passages in Scripture on a high level.

Before that, I would like to address two preliminary issues that seem to be tied in, unavoidably, to discussions about sexuality. First, I wish to comment briefly on the question of sexuality and politics. My theological and political conviction is that the state should issue civil unions for all couples – gay or straight, monogamous and polygamous (since 'fundamentalist' Mormon polygamy is financially supported by our welfare laws which consider a second wife to be a single mother if she has children) – and allow various groups to debate the word 'marriage.' Both Christian biblical theology and the First Amendment (grounded as it is in Roger Williams' theological position respecting freedom of religious conscience) tell us that 'marriage' is defined differently by different religious traditions. Hence, I am a political pluralist on this issue. We do not live in a theocracy like that of Israel in the Old Testament, and the teaching of Jesus forbids Christians from constructing one. Furthermore, since the apostle Paul regarded voluntary sexual sins (i.e. not rape) to be sins against one's own body (1 Cor.6:18), I think civic law is an extraordinarily poor way for Christians to address this question. Civic law protects people from being harmed against their will by another person or entity. It is very limited in preventing a person from harming herself or himself. Seatbelt or helmet laws are important because victims of car or motorcycle accidents need medical care, which is a public resource. But consider making a law against suicide. Of what value or efficacy is such a law? Suicide can be and usually is treated as a health concern. But is it a legal issue punishable by the courts and jail time? No, for it is categorically inappropriate. Similarly, legislating against sexual acts fits into the same category. Legislating against underage sex and pedophilia is appropriate given the concerns adults have about the personal judgment of minors. But civic law is incapable of preventing an adult person from harming herself or himself. I explain my position on this because I wish my readers to know that this is not an issue of political power for me. It is an issue of truth. And for those who do not currently agree with my convictions, I hope my statement about legislative policy makes my paper easier, and also more interesting, to read.

Second, I wish to comment briefly on the question of sexuality and science. Some Christians believe that GLBTQ people are simply misguided or lying when they say that they have always been sexually attracted to people of the same gender. I believe this is naïve and unnecessarily unsympathetic. I accept the biochemical, neurological, and epigenetic findings that would connect a same-sex orientation to their personal physiology. I also accept the personal accounts of GLBTQ people when they tell me that they have always felt this way. However, I do not think science simply supports a same-sex or bisexual orientation. If this were true, then there should be no scientific and health-related difference between various sexual acts from a physical standpoint. But this is untrue. To focus on the area where there is the largest difference, there is a substantial difference between anal sex and vaginal sex. The anatomical and physiological differences between these sexual activities are quite significant. The anus, unlike the vagina, does not produce any natural lubricant. The external tissues around the anus and the internal tissues lining the inner wall of the rectal cavity are thin and can be torn relatively easily, unlike the heavy, thick skin of the vagina. The friction and tension of anal sex can therefore result in tearing of the skin, called anal fissures, and bleeding. Gay men practicing anal sex also regularly struggle with over a dozen bacterial and viral illnesses related to infections by microorganisms not found anywhere else on the body. Those diseases include: amoebiasis; chlamydia; cryptosporidiosis; E. coli infections; giardiasis; gonorrhea; hepatitis A; hepatitis B; hepatitis C; herpes simplex; Kaposi's sarcoma-associated herpesvirus (HHV-8); lymphogranuloma venereum; Mycoplasma hominis; Mycoplasma genitalium; pubic lice; salmonellosis; shigella; syphilis; tuberculosis; and Ureaplasma urealyticum. Fecal bacteria can cause a urinary tract infection in men who do not wear condoms. The sexually transmitted disease human papilloma virus (HPV), in particular, increases risk for anal cancer and typhoid fever. On occasion, anal fissures are so deep they extend into the muscle layers of the sphincter muscle, do not heal on their own, and require surgery. Complicating this is the fact that the sphincter muscle around the anus is also designed to be a one-way valve, relaxing from stimulation internal to the body, and tightening from stimulation external to the body. Anal sex and the use of fingers and other sex objects are known to weaken the sphincter muscle. A weakened

sphincter muscle can also result in rectal prolapse, where the walls of the rectum protrude through the anus. While heterosexuals sometimes engage in anal sex as well, and while the same health risks occur for them too, my point here is that all sexual activities are not equivalent from the standpoint of anatomy and physiology. Our bodies are clearly 'designed' (from both a theistic and scientific standpoint) for sexual activity of a particular kind. From a scientific perspective, it seems most accurate to say that sometimes, biochemical and hormonal activity within a person can cause sexual desires that do not match how that person's body is physically designed.

Furthermore, the origin of any given person's sexual orientation is not the decisive issue. Clearly there are biochemical, neurological, and hormonal imbalances that can happen for various reasons. We know that stress, anxiety, emotion, nutrition, environmental toxin levels, and other factors can have an epigenetic effect on human development, even through the parents and especially through the pregnant or nursing mother. Clearly our sexual orientation can be affected by these epigenetic factors. For example, we have only recently begun to study the damaging impact of xenoestrogens in our human environment. Does this chemical have an impact on human sexuality, as it has been shown to have in fish? Probably. Do others? If we can reverse some of this, and if this reduces the number of people who have a same-sex orientation, should we? Or if we isolated genes that affected sexual orientation, if there is such a thing, should we modify them? Provocative questions. We know that neural connections are formed by nurture and even our own choices. A few people even report that their sexual orientation changed gradually in response to their own choices. Moreover, I suspect that we will soon know how to manage serotonin, testosterone, estrogen, and other hormones in our bodies to impact our sexual preferences, orientations, and levels of desire, and that will introduce new questions. This is why the nature versus nurture debate seems to be receding into the background. The boundary between nature and nurture is no longer very clear. Nor is it determinative for the discussion about sexuality. How can it be when the atoms, cells, and organs inside us are clearly affected by the relationships and ecosystem around us?

This is why a biblical and theological appraisal continues to be relevant. In this relatively short paper, I regret that I am also not going to address here the question of how personal desires factor into what to believe. For example, just because a person wants to drink alcohol does not make Islam false. Similarly, just because a person wants to have a same-sex marriage does not make Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism false either. Yet some think that we must never question our own desires in certain areas. I cannot offer here a full blown biblical theology of human desire, which I have attempted elsewhere. Nor can I, in such a short space, explain why Christians try to honor Scripture at all, or why I believe Scripture serves as a compelling foundation from which to form an ethical vision for relationships. Nor is this the place to suggest ways Christians can reduce bullying or assist in meeting the mental health needs of gay youth, much needed as that is. Nor is this the space to comprehensively propose how a gay Christian who is committed to abstinence can develop meaningful friendships and vital faith, supremely important as that is, and possible too.

I am going to focus on interpreting the passages of Scripture which have been important in the debate. Matt focuses on six passages of Scripture. He selects them because he believes that the traditional, orthodox interpretation hangs on these six passages. He acknowledges that the traditional interpretation of marriage – in its ideal form, before the fall – begins with the book of Genesis. Adam and Eve are the model couple, and it is significant that they are male and female. Gay people, however, want to marry someone of the same sex. So is the traditional interpretation of Scripture correct? Or have Christians been wrong for many centuries? I am going to separate my explanation of the traditional interpretation into two parts. In the first part, I focus on Genesis, Leviticus, and Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. This takes about ten pages. While I am interested in the debates about Paul's writings, unlike many others, I find that the case can rest entirely on Genesis and Jesus. This will reduce the amount of reading that people will have to do. In the second part, I focus on Paul's writings, chiefly Romans and 1 Corinthians. Those who are interested enough and have the stamina are certainly welcome to read the second part as well. In fact, my half of the email correspondence that Matt and I have had to discuss and debate Scripture together is located with some other reflections on my website: nagasawafamily.org/archives_question_sex.

PART ONE: GENESIS, LEVITICUS, AND JESUS

The Creation Order of Genesis: A Life-Creating God and His Life-Creating People

From the opening pages of Genesis, we find a God who wants a human family with many children. But He didn't start off with lots of human beings. Instead, He made Adam first. He then said, 'It is not good for the man to be

alone' (Gen.2:18). Then God made Eve from Adam's side. And at some point soon after that, God said to both of them, 'Be fruitful and multiply' (Gen.1:28). And this is where the controversy starts. Matt says that the paradigm for biblical, Christian marriage should involve any two people in a relationship of consensual love. Their genders, according to him, didn't actually matter to the biblical author, the community of faith, or to God. Matt speaks sincerely and touchingly of his desires to have a family, and to experience union with another who loves him. So same-sex marriages are good, by his definition, because it is not good for anyone to be alone.

But if God, at the beginning of the creation of humanity, had made two gay men, or two lesbian women, then what would have happened? Humanity would not have been able to 'be fruitful and multiply.' God's purposes for humanity and creation would have come to a rather abrupt end. So if we take this story of Adam and Eve seriously, or even only half seriously, it seems like their genders as male and female matters a lot to the story. A same-sex couple could not have substituted for Adam and Eve. That is why I've titled this paper *Whose Family? Which Union?* For we also have to consider God's affectionate desire for a family with many children, and His longing for the ultimate union He made us for – namely, union with Himself and similarity with Himself.

In the repeated, almost musical, rhythm of creation in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3, we are told about a God who empowers life to make more life through itself. In other words, God doesn't just create one generation of living beings. This God empowers life to reproduce more life, and commands that they do so. He made 'fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them' (Gen.1:11 – 12). He told the sea animals and birds, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth' (Gen.1:22). He made the land animals to reproduce 'after their kind' (Gen.1:25). God gave everything alive the power to produce more life – other things or beings like themselves – through their own physical bodies. Finally, He made human beings, and that pattern holds:

Gen.1:26 Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...' ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it...'

While everything God creates bears some resemblance to Him (e.g. everything living bears more life), human beings are uniquely made in the image of God. What does this mean? Aside from a whole bunch of other characteristics of human beings, it means that we bear more human beings. Because God loves making human beings, He wanted Adam and Eve to partner with Him in the creation of all the other human beings. In the intimacy of their marital love (monogamous marriage was God's idea) and through the bonding power of sex (marital sex was God's idea, too), they would bring forth children (definitely God's idea). He wanted a world teeming with life of all kinds. And He wanted human beings caring for all the plants and animals and ecology of the created world, bringing everything else into its fulfillment. God wanted a big human family. And He wanted humans to share in the profound joy He had in the conception and birth and development of every other human being. That's one of the central facets of bearing God's image.

A marriage of male and female, then, is essential to the fulfilling God's command to reproduce and bearing God's image. That's biologically true. It's also there in the grammar of Genesis 1:27. There is something about the marital union of male and female in lifelong, loving oneness that reflects the image of God. Of course every individual person bears the image of God in an individual way. But, at least at this point in the biblical story, that image is not completed or fulfilled except in a union with someone of the opposite gender. For Adam to have been 'alone' was 'not good' because he couldn't fulfill his destiny without a wife who would be his 'strong ally' (that's what the biblical word 'helper' means) in bringing new human beings into this world, and then spreading the garden further over the wild creation. So before Eve came along, Adam didn't just *feel lonely*. He might have felt that. But, interestingly enough, the text of Genesis does not tell us that. If that were the main point, then marriage would be the explicit solution for the feeling of loneliness, but that's just not true. On the one hand, friendship is a way to address loneliness; and on the other hand, unfortunately many married people still have to struggle with feeling profoundly lonely even within a marriage, and Christian ethics do not permit them to simply divorce and remarry someone they think will make them feel less lonely. The reason why God had Adam name the animals right after the declaration of 'not good' and right before the creation of Eve, was so Adam could see that each animal came marching by in male and female forms. He had to recognize his need for a *female* companion, not just for a generic companion regardless of gender. God is a life-creating God. So He created and empowered a life-creating humanity, thereby bearing His image, until His purposes in creation would be fulfilled through their voluntary

partnership with Him. We were meant to become more and more like God, albeit in our own finite, human way. This pattern of human relationships, of which marriage is an important part, is called ‘the creation order.’

Implication of the Creation Order #1: Human Relationships Are Not Merely Social Constructs

Or are relationships merely social constructs? Perhaps the biggest emotional and intellectual challenge to the general American reader is the idea that human relationships are not merely social constructs, but designed and envisioned by God. Since the Enlightenment, and especially since Rousseau, we have tended to believe in a fundamental form of individualism: We are born as free ‘noble savages’ who lived in a ‘state of nature’ until we entered into the ‘state of civilization.’ If this is true, then all relationships are constructed by us, and there is no normative type of relationship. Except maybe the type of minimal relationship that allows us to retain as much freedom as possible. But when was this individualistic picture of humanity ever true? Exactly when was a human being born into this kind of individualistic freedom? Biologically, historically, and anthropologically, this individualistic picture is completely *untrue*. Every human being is born into some kind of family, with nurture and care given to her, as well as obligations and responsibilities that are called forth from her. Our very existence is dependent on, derived from, and physically taken from others.

Nevertheless, Enlightenment individualism has become so much a part of Western cultural and political rhetoric that it is hard to suggest anything else. Socially and politically, we assert a supposed ‘right’ to not be interfered with so we can maximize our individualistic freedom. That is telling: We frame our ‘rights’ negatively. But that is exactly why it is almost impossible to assert positive and tangible ‘responsibilities’ we have towards one another, beyond non-interference. American conversations about social justice and responsibility, therefore, are exceedingly shallow. What responsibilities and obligations do the descendants of slaveholders and Jim Crow segregationists have towards the descendants of slaves? In an individualistic framework, it is difficult to impossible to answer that question. And because of this Western cultural inheritance, we implicitly and explicitly have a very difficult time with the idea that God has a pattern for human relationships into which He calls us and invites us to take our place. But just because we have a more difficult emotional time with that idea does not make it untrue. Indeed, while the biblical portrayal of human origins certainly requires an intellectual defense, I believe it has much more academic respectability than the proposition offered to us by Enlightenment individualism.

Implication of the Creation Order #2: Consistency of Application

There is another angle to consider. I have bisexual friends who think that the whole idea of marriage to one person is bogus to begin with. And of course, there has been a spate of recent articles from GLBTQ and straight people alike saying that monogamy is outdated, impractical, and impossible, at least for some. For example, sociobiologists suggest with all seriousness that since men have an evolutionary interest in spreading their genes as far as possible, male infidelity is ‘natural.’ Given the discussions about Romans 1 about what is ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ to any given person, that’s a significant use of a very significant word. More and more people today favor an open marriage, not just easy divorce, etc. for the same reasons Matt has put forward his case. The challenge involved with Matt’s approach is this: he is trying to retain elements of a very conservative view of marriage, while taking a fairly central aspect of that view and making it negotiable or symbolic. Yet if gender is negotiable, metaphorical, or symbolic, then can’t the number of persons be negotiable, too? Why can’t two really represent three? Or four? And what about permanence in marriage? Why can’t permanence just represent ‘meaningful for the time being’? Or, what makes ‘sexual orientation’ such a firm category for everyone, after all? What if a person does not experience their sexual orientation in a fixed way, but much more fluidly? I know many such people. At least from their perspective, Matt would still be asking them to restrict their choices and their emotional well-being. What basis does he have for saying that God’s vision for them is different from their felt desires?

Is ‘marriage’ subordinate to ‘sexual orientation’? Or is ‘sexual orientation’ subordinate to ‘marriage’? The biblical writers did not speak about, or seem to even know about, the possibility of three or more people in a mutually consensual relationship. Maybe, so one argument goes, this was the result of their limited cultural experience: They never saw such a relationship in a healthy form. But we, to continue with this line of thinking – we in the modern age have (supposedly) experienced it positively, and monogamy is so obviously and sadly restricting because so many people are unable to actually do it. Bisexuality is more fulfilling for the bisexual, and consensual adultery can actually preserve a ‘marriage.’ So what makes Matt’s interpretation so unquestionably right when it feels so narrow to some? Why can we not use an even wider interpretive lens as we read Scripture? I don’t think Matt has offered a solid explanation for why ‘sexual orientation’ can qualify ‘marriage’ only in the particular way that he argues for. In our correspondence, Matt’s lack of response to this question suggests to me that his position is based on a

fundamental arbitrariness. The same arbitrariness is present in the positions of other scholars who make the same argument. As emotionally difficult and challenging as the traditional interpretation is, stability, consistency, and intellectual integrity count for something.

The Law of Sinai and Leviticus 18 – 20: Israel as Partial Restoration of God’s True Humanity

Of course, the biblical story narrates the fall of Adam and Eve. And as far as the discussion about same-sex marriage goes, we read about the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 (which I will skip over for the sake of space), and Moses’ prohibitions against same-sex acts in Leviticus 18 and 20. In his presentation, Matt Vines argues that the prohibitions in Leviticus should simply be ignored. He rightly notes that the New Testament does not place Christians under the Mosaic kosher laws, the ceremonial regulations, etc. Therefore, in his view, the two prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 should also be set aside.

I want to provide my readers with a little more understanding about the role of Israel in the Hebrew Bible. How did Israel understand itself? They knew themselves to be God’s partial restoration of Adam and Eve. He brought Israel through water (of the Red Sea) and placed them in a garden land because He wanted them to enjoy the fruit of His gardening. The significance of this arrangement was not lost upon Israel. It was like what God did in the original creation, narrated in Genesis 1 – 2. The materials making up Israel’s Tabernacle, the dwelling place of God (Ex.34 – 40), were the same materials found near the Garden of Eden, the first dwelling place of God (Gen.2:11 – 12). Later we find in the prophets the idea that when Israel’s relationship with God is restored, the promised land would become like the garden of Eden (Ezk.36:35, Joel 2:3, Isa.35:1 – 10, 51:3) and the renewed dwelling place of God will be the new supernatural source of water like the river flowing out of Eden (Ezk.47:1 – 12, Zec.14:8).

Israel’s land and calendar practices linked Israel back to the creation story as well. In Leviticus 25, God promised Israel that He would water their land, bring forth produce abundantly, and thereby nourish the people even when they did no work on their sabbath day every seven days, their sabbath year every seven years, and in their Jubilee year after every seventh ‘seven’ of years, i.e. every fifty years. The blessing of land and the rhythm of Sabbath obviously comes from Genesis 1:1 – 2:3. In Israel, people were to go free to return to their ancestral family land; debts were forgiven, indentured servants were released without penalty; etc. During these sabbath times, Israel was to simply go out into their land, pick fruit from their trees, and eat (e.g. Lev.25:6 – 7). This echoes the original conditions humanity was intended to enjoy in the creation, where Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the trees of the garden land freely (Gen.2:16) and bestowed the land to their descendants. This is significant in that Israel and Israel alone was the people to whom God was restoring the original creational blessing. While Israel understood that God would eventually bless the rest of humanity would because of His promise to Abraham, they knew that they were the special human partners of God, who called them to bear witness to His original creation order, and His commitment to renew that creation order one day. He would undo human sin. Of course, Christians associate God’s undoing of human sin with Jesus of Nazareth.

This means there is an organic and fundamental relationship between the creation order and the ethics reflected in the Sinaitic Law. So when we read the prohibitions against same-sex sexual activity, we need to have a context for them.

Lev.18:22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

Lev.20:13 If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.

What was at stake in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 was the image of God, expressed fully in the human marriage of a male and a female. Besides the union of opposite genders, the overwhelming, unbroken assumption behind the Sinaitic Law and Israel’s existence as a whole was the carrying on of the creational blessing: to be fruitful and multiply. Israel’s land arrangements absolutely assumed everyone would get married. Their stance against polygamy made room for it, since there was a woman available for every man, and vice versa, at least in principle. Their focus on childbearing presupposed it, and even required it. Their messianic hope was absolutely tied to it. Thus, to engage in a same-sex sexual relationship was to cut oneself off from the people who were meant to express God’s good creation order, an order that Israel saw that Egypt, Canaan, and the rest of the Gentile nations around them had forgotten, to various degrees. In Mosaic Israel, a same-sex relationship was to be drawn into one’s self in a sexual way, to not opening one’s self up to the future God had in mind, rooted in the original archetype of Adam

and Eve, but embodied in children, and literally nurturing Israel's messianic hope for being God's human partner in undoing Adam and Eve's sin, for it was ultimately as a human child that the Messiah would come.

But do these laws transfer over to Christians in the New Testament? As Matt and many others rightly notice, there is a whole ceremonial category of Israel's laws that are symbolic in nature. And he is fair in asking the question why the same-sex prohibitions might also be set aside by the New Testament. These symbolic ceremonial laws served the pedagogical purpose of teaching Israel about life and death and the boundary between them. So, living people who touched the dead or their tombs were ceremonially unclean for a short time period. So were healthy people who touched lepers, whose skin conditions often resembled a corpse. Jews were to not eat pigs and lobsters, which feed on dead or decaying material. They were not to cook a kid in its mother's milk, since that combines life and death. This was part of Israel's ongoing lesson in distinguishing between life and death. A woman's menstruation represents death; it is the womb emptying itself of life-giving potential, especially because blood contained life that, in menstruation, was passing into death. A man's sperm represents life, and a 'nocturnal emission' represented life passing into death. So Jews were not to have sex while the wife was menstruating, because that mixed living sperm with the dying egg. And so on. Some laws taught boundaries and differences among living things, like mixing different materials, various animals, etc. This seems to reinforce the point to Israel about boundaries in creation among the animals. In any case, there is a clear relationship between these situations and the creation order to which it pointed. The relation is more distant, but nevertheless apparent. The creation order was still being used as the overarching framework. God was teaching Israel about the creation order.

So if ceremonial circumcision and kosher laws are set aside for Christians, are these laws against same-sex intercourse also set aside? I know Christians have disagreed about how exactly to understand the relationship between all these Sinai Laws and the teaching of Jesus, i.e. between Mosaic ethics and Messianic ethics. So for simplicity's sake, I'm going to take a modified Lutheran view (articulated best by Douglas J. Moo and N.T. Wright) that sees the Sinai covenant as a unity. The context in which these instances appear – the Sinai Law stated in Exodus 19 through Leviticus 27, reaffirmed in Numbers and Deuteronomy – is indeed set aside for Christians. On that much I agree with Matt. We are not under the Law of Sinai in the covenantal arrangement that Israel had prior to Jesus. But Matt does not take into consideration three major points.

First, according to the New Testament, Jewish Christians are still expected to observe some of the Sinai tradition as part of their cultural inheritance. Matt speaks of Christians categorically being exempted from the Jewish Old Law. But that is not actually true. Jewish Christians are exempted from the theologically binding consequences which Israel accepted as part of this covenant, namely the sad reality of exile for disobedience (Rom.7:1 – 8:4; 14:1 – 15:14). But Jewish Christians are to still observe aspects of their inheritance as a cultural, not theological, matter, without imposing that cultural inheritance on Gentile Christians. Thus, they have some flexibility with regard to kosher laws and such in the presence of non-Jews.

Second, and more importantly, God's vision for marriage does not come from the Sinai Law from Exodus 19 and onwards. It comes from God's creation order from Genesis 1 and 2. The Sinai Law was a partial and temporary arrangement with Israel to teach them about the creation order from which all humanity fell. And, as we will see below, Jesus set aside the Sinai Law as theologically binding because he was getting *all humanity* back to the creation order. God's creation order has never been set aside. Jesus does call all human beings to his renewal of that creation order as he personally reshapes us into God's new humanity. Jesus does not call Christians back to 'Jewishness' as such. That is, he does not call people back to that temporary and partial restoration of the creation order demonstrated in Israel, including the symbolic teaching tools God used, but to the fullness of that restoration, the true substance to which the symbols pointed. Jesus was and is drawing people back to the reality of a renewed humanity.

Third, even if Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 were entirely passed over by the New Testament writers, we would still have to think through their significance and their relation to other texts and themes in Scripture. A note on the use of the Sinaitic Law might be helpful. There are issues – sexual and otherwise – which are mentioned in the casuistic law framework of the Sinaitic Law but not explicitly covered in the New Testament. Take for example bestiality, the goring ox hurting or killing a neighbor, how much thieves should recompense their victims for theft, etc. Even though we don't have explicit teaching on these problems in the New Testament documents, we can make reasonable conclusions about them because we live in a story unfolding from creation to new creation, and because the Sinaitic Law gives us some indication about the magnitude of these issues in a place along the timeline of that

story, even if we don't live in that place and time in the story any more. Hence, Paul appears to take the Levitical prohibition on incest as a true exposition of God's creational ideal in human marriage, and carries it over as valid in the church; he applies it in 1 Corinthians 5, not because we are under the Sinaitic Law as a whole, but because the Sinaitic Law spoke truly about the issue of incest as it was informed by God's original creation order and Jesus' new creation renewal of that order. This is why, even if Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 did not reappear in the New Testament, we would still have to think it through and come to a similar conclusion, minus the civic penalty. However, in our case, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 do in fact reappear in the New Testament, in the writings of Paul, as I discuss below.

Jesus' Teaching on Marriage in Matthew 19:3 – 12: The Renewal of God's Creation Order

I want to set another anchor point that will make my case more clear. Here is Jesus' own teaching on marriage in Matthew 19:3 – 12, an important passage on which Matt Vines does not directly comment in his presentation.

Mt.19:3 Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing him and asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?'⁴ And he answered and said, 'Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female,'⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?'⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.'⁷ They said to him, 'Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?'⁸ He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.'⁹ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.'¹⁰ The disciples said to him, 'If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.'¹¹ But he said to them, 'Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given.'¹² For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.'

Jesus' teaching on marriage in Matthew 19:3 – 12 places marriage and sexuality into an unfolding story. We started with God's creation order. Jesus is renewing that order and us. In Matthew 19:3, the Pharisees ask about the legitimate grounds for divorce, but Jesus treats the subject of marriage more fully than that. Jesus quotes from both Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 (in Mt.19:4) and Genesis 2:4 – 25 (in Mt.19:5) to affirm marriage as monogamous ('two become one'), opposite gendered ('He made them male and female'), and binding ('God has joined together, let no man separate'). This was God's original intent. Significantly, Jesus did not have to refer to 'male and female' (Genesis 1:27) to answer the Pharisees, but he did anyway. By defining God's original intent for marriage more comprehensively than how the Pharisees asked for it, Jesus makes clear that 'male and female' is not an optional inclusion. He affirms that, while each individual person is in the image of God, a 'marriage of male and female' is in the image of God because opposite-sex marriage alone can properly bear the 'fruit' of multiplying human life that mirrors God's own creative activity and enjoyment in making each individual human life. Same-sex unions would fail the creation mandate to multiply; it would not reflect this rather vital aspect of the image of God; and it would thus be an alienation from God's original commission to humanity. Hence, gender is irreducible and non-negotiable. God's intent for marriage involves a union of male and female.

Jesus even identifies *God's authorial intent in Scripture* with respect to the issue of marriage and sexual expression. That's pretty important for postmodern audiences who are skeptical of whether we can know an author's intention. '*He who created them male and female...said...*' In other words, the Creator God of Genesis 1 who made them male and female *said* the words of Genesis 2:24 ('For this reason...'). Matt Vines argues that the primary reason God gives Eve to Adam is separable from having children, and about just having a partner. However, Jesus links Genesis 2:24 inextricably to Genesis 1:27 in a way that Matt tries to separate. Jesus includes opposite gender as part of what it means to have a marriage partner or helper. This is another reason why Matthew 19:3 – 12 is so significant to the discussion. Jesus binds together Genesis 1 and 2. By talking about marriage in this way, Jesus identifies God's authorial intent in Genesis 1 and 2: It was written to remind us of what had once been, and to anchor a beginning point for the story of God and us. This anchors our understanding of God's vision for human relationships and what it means for us to live within that vision in a restored way. There is a straight line of continuity between Genesis to Jesus.

Also, in the course of this conversation with the Pharisees, Jesus helpfully explains how we are to view the Jewish Sinaitic Law today. Jesus says that the Sinaitic Law code given in Exodus 19 and onwards to Deuteronomy was a temporary concession to human 'hardness of heart.' It was a deviation from the creation order given from Genesis 1 and 2. Marriage 'from the beginning' (in Mt.19:4 and 8) did not include divorce. The intermediate 'divorce certificate' of Deuteronomy 24:1 – 4 was 'permitted' and not 'commanded.' Notice the critical shift in language from the Pharisees' question to Jesus' response. They asked, 'Why then did Moses *command*...' But Jesus replied that Moses did not command; 'Moses *permitted*.' Jesus indicates that some aspects of the original creation ideal of marriage were retained and commanded (e.g. monogamy, male and female), while others were reluctantly relaxed (e.g. binding permanence into divorce). All the references in the Sinaitic Law to marriage and sexuality, not simply the ones referring to same-sex intercourse in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, are best understood as part of this larger story. Adultery, rape, promiscuity, incest, and bestiality all violate the original creation order as well. Those aspects of God's original creation ideal of marriage were not relaxed to accommodate for Israel's hardness of heart.

Matt Vines makes a statement heavy with significance when he says that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 do not apply to us anymore because Christians do not live under the Sinaitic Law. I affirm that we are not living under the Sinaitic Law *per se*. That largely explains why we do not carry out the *civic* punishments specified there because we do not have a specific *civic* vision of life and devotion to God. Christians are not bound to a land as Mosaic Israel was; we are not a separate civil society; etc. In fact, once again Matthew 19:3 – 12 is very helpful because Jesus shows that only his followers are capable of living in such a way. After all, they are the only human beings who have allowed Jesus to remove their 'hardness of heart.' This immediately means that the teachings of Jesus cannot simply be politically legislated on non-Christians. But the Sinaitic Law does indeed serve to illustrate for Christians what it means to *live within the story* between original creation and Jesus' new creation. It expresses prophetic hopes that inform the *moral* vision of life and devotion to God that Jesus opens up before us and calls us into.

Is Jesus only talking about 'heterosexual divorce' here? Some have argued that position. But I think Jesus is being broader than that. The rather abrupt way in which Jesus offers the dreaded 'eunuch' option to people lends further support to why I think he is talking about all deviations from God's original creation intent. If, in fact, 'heterosexuality' was just the particular circumstance of the person asking the question, then Jesus probably would have inquired further about what made it so hard for his disciples to accept his definition of marriage when they reacted by saying 'it is better to not get married' (Mt.19:10). After all, it is possible, and probably likely, that some of Jesus' disciples (certainly out of the 120 disciples numbered at Pentecost in Acts 1 – 2) felt some level of same-sex attraction. Moreover, the Pharisees, disciples, or someone in the 'large crowd' (Mt.19:2) could feel challenged by *any* of the three main parts of Jesus' vision of marriage. Perhaps the idea of marrying only one spouse created feelings of stifling claustrophobia (an inclination against monogamy). Perhaps same-sex attraction made opposite-sex marriage unattractive (an inclination against male-female union). Perhaps the duration of marriage seemed hopelessly long (an inclination against the one flesh life-long bond). Perhaps someone had already committed adultery and caused a previous marriage to fail, a condition which seems to disqualify that person from another marriage, at least as far as I can tell. Probably any and all of those aspects (and perhaps more) of his definition of marriage challenged people in various ways. I suspect he was perfectly aware of all those feelings.

Yet we are not even sure why the disciples complain about how hard Jesus' standard of marriage is (Mt.19:10), for in Matthew 19:11 – 12, Jesus does not ask, 'Why do you say that? What aspect of my definition challenges you? Let me qualify what you might have misunderstood about God's intention from creation.' In this particular passage where the disciples express their reservations about Jesus' high bar, Jesus is not interested in exploring further why they feel this. He is not even encouraging people to get married. He is primarily interested, it seems to me, in protecting God's interest in imaging Himself into the fundamental human relation, so as to bear witness through a human marriage to the creation. And he is unapologetic about it.

Challenging as it is, Jesus introduces the eunuch category for all who cannot or will not accept his definition of marriage. In the wider theological story being told in Scripture, the emphasis from creation on marriage and childbearing as a universal expectation for all of God's people comes to an end with Jesus. This is because Jesus himself is the fulfillment of the prophetic hopes for a deliverer, born of human flesh as the 'seed of the woman' (Gen.3:15). Jesus is the climax of the covenant, a covenant which called for human participation with God throughout, not least through childbearing. However, marriage does not lose its original shape. Heterosexual divorce appears to be only the prompt for Jesus to discuss the larger question of what he calls for in human marriage.

What if sexual orientation is something that is set from birth? While Jesus talks about eunuchs, he makes a passing comment that things can go wrong with human beings starting from the womb. 'There are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb.' (Mt.19:12) This corresponds with the general Christian understanding that the physical world, including our own physical bodies, has been damaged or is incomplete because human beings abandoned their dependence on God as the life-source of all things, and aborted God's mandate to bring the created world to the next stage of life and perfection. Thus, in Paul's words, we groan with the creation in its longing for the consummation of all things, especially when our physical bodies are affected by the chaos present in the natural world.

Why does Jesus teach this return to the creation order or eunuch-hood? Because Jesus is not only restoring *marriage* to God's original creation ideal, he is *inviting all humanity* back to God's original creation ideal, through his own person and work. We see this in the larger context of Matthew's literary structure. Matthew divides his Gospel up into five main blocks of Jesus' teaching, with narrative material that fills it out.

- When Jesus had finished these words... (Mt.7:28)
- When Jesus had finished giving instructions... (Mt.11:1)
- When Jesus had finished these parables... (Mt.13:53)
- When Jesus had finished these words... (Mt.19:1)
- When Jesus had finished all these words... (Mt.26:1)

The literary allusion to Israel's Pentateuch is reasonably straightforward. Furthermore, there are other narrative similarities between Matthew's Gospel and the Pentateuch surrounding the story of Israel. Like Israel in the Pentateuch, Jesus is the true descendant of Abraham, Jesus is hunted as a baby boy by a foreign ruler, Jesus goes to Egypt with his family, Jesus emerges out of Egypt, Jesus later gets baptized in the Jordan River and goes through the wilderness for forty days (echoing Israel's forty years), Jesus then gathers a new people, pronounces blessings and curses, is blessed and takes on the curse, and finally, in his resurrection, goes with his people into a new inheritance from a mountaintop. All this reminds any reader of Israel's story in the Pentateuch. Matthew brings his Gospel to a close with a scene very much like the ending of the Pentateuch. Jesus is on a high mountaintop in Mt.28:18 – 20, like Moses was on a high mountaintop in Dt.34. Jesus is overlooking a vast inheritance, just like Moses was overlooking the inheritance back then. But this time, Jesus is not dying alone on the mountain; his death and resurrection had already occurred; and now Jesus is going out to conquer, not land but people's hearts, as his inheritance. So he says to his disciples, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.' A fitting conclusion for a well designed teaching manual: a commission to use it and reproduce it. Jesus' mission thematically builds upon Israel's spreading throughout the garden land, which itself builds upon Adam and Eve's spreading the garden throughout the land. No surprise: He is God's new humanity, or rather renewed humanity, bringing human beings back into the original creation order.

Jesus is the new Israel, the Messiah who sums up Israel in himself and carries Israel's story to a new and fresh conclusion, the conclusion Israel could not reach by itself. He becomes the new humanity that God was trying to make of Israel, who failed because of the internal corruption of sin. Israel had failed, and gone into exile in Babylon, which is highlighted so prominently and poignantly in Mt.1:1 – 17. But Jesus has become the new Israel, the true Israel, who also represents all humanity, because he is the renewal of Adam, that is, God's true humanity. He is the one who is restoring humanity to the plan God intended from the beginning.

What was the big difference between human beings before the fall and after it? 'Hardness of heart' is one idiomatic way Scripture has of describing it. A pollution and corruption of human nature now exists in human beings which God never intended. The major point of this diagnosis is to assert that human evil is not merely the result of circumstances external to us, like bad laws, bad schools, and broken families; our problem is also deeply internal. Jesus claims to be reversing this problem of 'hardness of heart,' which had set into humanity after the fall, including Israel, in order to renew the creation order. That includes marriage and sexuality. Jesus speaks of the need for heart level transformation not only in Mt.19:1 – 12 but also 15:19 – 20: 'Out of the heart come evil thoughts, adulteries...' The motif of heart level transformation occurs in the first major teaching section of Matthew, called the Sermon on the Mount (5:1 – 7:29). The theme of Jesus transforming the human heart is the main focus of this section.

- Blessed are the pure **in heart**... (Mt.5:8)
- But I say to you that everyone who is angry [in his **heart**] with his brother... (Mt.5:21 – 26)
- He who looks on a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her **in his heart**. (Mt.5:28)
- But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you [**heart** attitude of self-defense vs. self-giving]. (Mt.5:38 – 48)
- Your Father who is in heaven sees your **secret** motives. (Mt.6:4, 6, 18)
- Where your treasure is, there will your **heart** be also. (Mt.6:21)
- Beware of the false prophets, who...**inwardly** are ravenous wolves. (Mt.7:15)

This means the Sermon on the Mount can only be the ‘new covenant’ prophesied by Jeremiah, written on the human heart (Jer.31:31 – 34). Jesus seems to have intentionally given it on a mountain, as God gave the Ten Commandments before on Mount Sinai. In fact, in the very next section, Matthew 8 – 9, Jesus does ten miracles by his word: a new ten commandments, reflecting back on the new, transformative ‘law of the heart’ that this is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, and the surpassing of the Sinaitic Law.

This is another data point in the discussion on same-sex marriage. Jesus sees the creation order being restored through his teaching and person. This would have been clear to a Jewish audience because Jesus says about false prophets that their ‘fruit’ is, ironically, only thorns and thistles (Mt.7:16), which are not really fruit at all in the literal sense, but are ‘fruit’ in the sense that they are the ‘results’ of still being ‘inwardly ravenous wolves’ who have not yielded to Jesus’ heart-transforming word. Thorns and thistles were emblematic of the fall into sin in Genesis 3. Jesus’ use of those terms signifies that those who do not wrestle on the level of the heart to receive Jesus’ word are still in the realm of sin and resisting Jesus’ work of renewing the creation order. By contrast, a true follower of Jesus bears fruit that is nourishing (Mt.7:17ff.), emblematic of the life-bearing life forms God created in Genesis 1 and 2. Moreover, Jesus echoes the creation order by his dense usage of the terms ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in 7:11 and 7:17 – 19. Everything about how Jesus envisions the human heart being responsive and obedient to God is how the human heart was supposed to be in the creation. Jesus’ vision of human life lived in trust of the Father was informed by the creation order: relationally (5:21 – 48), spiritually (6:1 – 18), and materially (6:25 – 34). Jesus is helping us understand what he means by ‘pure in heart’ (5:8) and how he will be restoring our hearts to that state. By delivering this ‘new law for the heart,’ Jesus is renewing the creation order in the heart of his followers. Marriage according to Mt.5:27 – 32 is a return to the creation order, as he expands on in Mt.19:1 – 12. This is what it means to overcome ‘hardness of heart.’

Matt raises the question of knowing believers by their fruits. The phrase appears in this very context, Matthew 7:16 – 20, and also Luke 6:43 – 44 in a very similar context. He takes the phrase ‘know them by their fruits’ in a way that assumes that same-sex unions should be included in those ‘fruits.’ But here, Jesus speaks of ‘fruit,’ in contrast with ‘thorns and thistles,’ as referring to the originally good creation order in contrast to the products of human sin. As I maintain above, God’s original creation order involved male and female made in His image to bear the ‘fruit’ of more human life. The play on words here between Genesis and Jesus is intentional. ‘Fruit’ is about the reproduction of life. In particular, throughout the narrative of Scripture, ‘fruit’ refers to a physical object which has life in itself physically to bring forth more life, whether the fruit is an apple which has seeds in itself for more apple trees, the union of male and female in a marriage which has a seed in itself of more human life in male and female genders, or the union of the believer with Christ by the Spirit which issues forth in the seeds of new life meant to be planted in another person. The very language Matt is using, that of reproduction of plants and humans, draws from God’s original design from Genesis 1 and 2, founded in the physical world. The same-sex couple does not physically have life in their union. Nor do they, at the very least, represent the original design of the male-female union of Adam and Eve. Thus, a same-sex couple as a couple does not bear fruit either physically or spiritually. For example, Paul makes human marriage a metaphor for our union with Christ in Romans 7:1 – 6. Paul says that we are ‘married’ to Christ in his death, and also ‘married’ to him in his resurrection; we are drawn into oneness with him as we share in his new humanity by his Spirit. Then, perhaps playfully extending this sexual pun, Paul calls us to ‘bear fruit for God’ (Rom.7:4). This innuendo about childbearing draws from the sexual relationship of male and female in marriage. The physical representation is a sacramental window into the spiritual designed to help our understanding. To now speak in the context of Matthew 7 of the ‘fruit’ of a transformed life is to speak of the union of the Spirit of Christ with the believer, reproducing the spiritual life that human beings were originally intended to bear from the creation, and restoring men and women to the original design of the physical union of marriage from the creation order. So when Matt Vines says that the traditional interpretation simply does not bear good fruit, I

cannot agree with him. Matt is using words without much regard for the way Jesus and the Gospel writer Matthew used them and situated them. In effect, on this particular point, he is making his assumption his conclusion.

Thus, Jesus' teaching on marriage and sexual ethics in Mt.5:27 – 32 and 19:1 – 12 take their natural place in this larger framework demonstrated by the entire literary structure of the Gospel of Matthew itself. What is stated in these smaller passages is also stated by the entirety of the larger context in which we find them. While making room for the single eunuch who does not get married, Jesus removes 'hardness of heart' from human nature and restores the creation order as far as marriage and sexuality are concerned. 'He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'' (Mt.19:5 – 6).

Implications for This Study: Loneliness and Friendship

In his appeal, Matt speaks movingly about the problem of the feeling of loneliness. He sees marriage as the answer to that problem, or at least a large part of the answer. I think this concern is important to address. I write as a Japanese-American Christian male living, with my wife and two children, in a mostly black neighborhood in Boston. We live in a Christian intentional community doing urban neighborhood ministry based out of my home, which is a three-family house. The friendships and relational support that I have seen and experienced around me between like-minded Christians, married and single, has been very significant. Members of this Christian community have bought property in this immediate neighborhood. Around the corner, two older single Christian women live with three young single mothers; each single mom has a young child. In one house up the street is a residential living program for young people ages 18 – 25, headed up by a married couple and an older single woman. The adults in this Christian community – who are of different ethnicities and generations – meet once a week for dinner and prayer, and most of us worship at our house church. For my part, I was inspired to live in Christian intentional community because of role models: As I came to Christ late in high school, I saw older Christian adults (later my mentors – a married couple and their two single, adult male friends) living in intentional Christian community in a suburban house in Anaheim, California. Prior to getting married, I lived in a Mexican immigrant community in California also doing residence-based ministry. Thus, I am somewhat critical of the white evangelical church's tendency to group people according to life stage and marital status rather than sense of mission and vocation.

A large part of the Protestant evangelical church in the U.S. holds up marriage as the dominant answer for loneliness as well. The suburban family ideal fuels it. That ideal set into American culture from the post-World War II era, when the G.I. Bill helped young, white families afford homes in the suburbs. Many African-American servicemen did not qualify for this assistance because of racist provisions in the law. Unfortunately, white American evangelical churches based their assumptions about ministry and life around this new white suburban demographic. Many well-meaning but short-sighted white evangelicals assumed that everyone would and should get married, especially against the rising pornographic quality of American culture. Consider how most church small groups are organized around life stages, separating singles from young married couples or married with children. The 'eunuch' category that Jesus spoke of, which the apostle Paul commended in 1 Corinthians 7, which the early church held up as honorable, was simply left aside. The idea of a church-based 'extended family' that once sustained single people in meaningful friendships deteriorated. Significant adult friendships became harder to form because people commuted everywhere and tended not to center their friendships around a home-based locality, or a missional and vocational purpose. I am hopeful that concerns like Matt's may cause American evangelicals of all backgrounds to reevaluate how we 'do church.'

This suburban family ideal also fed the myth of romance, that is, the idea that marriage is the greatest cure for the feeling of loneliness. Unlike Matt, I am personally doubtful that marriage should be considered to be the antidote for loneliness. As I wrote above, I do not think that that is the correct meaning of Genesis 2. I know many Christians, including myself, who had very high expectations for emotional and spiritual connection with their spouse, but found that to be much harder in reality. For instance, when my wife and I got married, we entered into a painful disagreement that lasted for five years, which mostly revolved around how to interpret certain people and relate to them, and we experienced that conflict as a deep question about how much we respected and trusted each other's judgment. For this and other reasons, both of us needed to find meaningful support and counsel from friends outside our marriage. So when I listen to Matt's concern about loneliness, I wonder whether he is simply fueling the myth of romance, placing too much weight on marriage, more than it is really able to bear. I certainly believe that deep friendships can be just as meaningful, and I find it unfortunate that Matt does not address that.

Implications for This Study: The Value of Personal Struggle

What about sexual desire? Let me address the struggle faced by gay Christians who are committed to abstinence or considering it. When we ask *Whose family?* and *Which union?* as we read the unfolding of the biblical story, all the evidence points in the direction of *God's family* and *God's union with us*. God's family was and is taken from the creation order, where human beings are called to be His image-bearers and His life-bearers. The only way for human beings to do that is through the creation order vision of marriage as a loving relationship between male and female. And God is calling each person into union with Himself. Sexual union is not the ultimate expression of union, although the sexual union of husband and wife, in lifelong service to one another, physically represents something about it and still serves as a pointer to it. So does parenting, reconciliation, forgiveness, and friendship. The ultimate union for which we are destined and called is eternal, personal, loving union with God, through Jesus by his Spirit.

Although sex drives do differ from person to person, this does mean a significant personal struggle for most people with same-sex attractions. But I do think there is a purpose for us to *struggle* to align our sexual lives with Jesus' teaching. That purpose is to have a deeper experience of Jesus and deeper identification with him. If you, as a reader of this essay, have made it this far, I think that somewhere near the center of your labors to understand Scripture is the question of whose human experience determines reality, and what meaning does our human experience, especially our suffering and struggle, have in relation to that reality. Whose human experience can be taken as normative? And do our lives and struggles have any meaning? My response is that Jesus of Nazareth is the only human being whose experience of God, experience of human life, and interpretation of that experience are normative for all human beings; his sufferings and struggles can give meaning to ours, even to people struggling to give their sexuality to him. Jesus did not hold up every particularity of his life for imitation, such as his carpentry, geographic location, 'eunuch' status, or the languages he spoke. But as Jesus saw his life and teaching relate to the character of God, he did put himself forward as God's normative humanity around which our lives are called to revolve for meaning and light. Jesus started this experience at his conception, when he took to his divine nature an alienated human nature, what John calls 'the flesh' (Jn.1:14), the most negative way of speaking about us.

Did Jesus take on a human nature that also included internal genetic damage? If his incarnation means that he entered into as much of the human experience that he could, then I suspect that he did. And what this meant for him we can barely apprehend, but I think we can glimpse it. He fought, every moment of his life, to realign his own flesh with the love of the Father. Never in thought, emotion, word, or deed did he sin, because he struggled against sin at its source: in his very own heart and mind as he gave his life to the Father at every moment. This is why Jesus struggled through the wilderness and Gethsemane, the examples of intense temptation that bracketed his public ministry and characterized his earthly life throughout. This is also why Paul says, 'God condemned sin in the flesh' of Jesus (Rom.8:3). God's wrath did not fall *upon* Jesus at the cross alone, but *within* Jesus and *upon* the corruption in his flesh, throughout his whole life as he chose to love the Father. He is the only human being who totally welcomed God's perfect love for himself as a person, and embraced all of God's resistance to, and judgment upon, the corruption of human nature in his physical body. So it is necessary to also say this from another angle, a deeper angle that opens up to us God's purpose in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus did for each of us what we could not do for ourselves. He alone cleansed, elevated, beautified, and glorified human nature, transforming it in his own body into a God-soaked, resurrected, new humanity, which he shares with us by his Spirit to begin a lifelong process of transformation in us, a process fraught with struggle and joy. In our uniqueness, limitations, and frailty in cultivating our love for Jesus and fidelity to him, we bear witness to him, to the struggle between his two natures in his own body, and there is purpose in that, perhaps the highest of purposes. In our struggling, we bear witness to the person and work of this Jesus, and the sacred road he walked on each person's behalf. And in fanning the flame of our love for him, we cast a small light, but a light nevertheless, towards the hope for which all creation yearns: the return of Jesus, the redemption of our bodies, and the renewal of all things in the love of God.

PART TWO: THE WRITINGS OF PAUL

I want to reiterate before delving into Paul that my case does not actually rest on Paul's writings. It is interesting to me to see how much energy is spent on Paul, since the case for the traditional, orthodox position on marriage and sexuality can rest entirely on Genesis and Jesus without even considering Paul. But, since the discussion must at

least include Paul, and raises the very good question of whether Paul at least agrees with Genesis and Jesus, I'll comment further on him.

Paul, the influential and perennially controversial Jewish-Christian theologian and church planter in the Greco-Roman world, makes specific negative comments that have been traditionally interpreted as being against same-sex sexual relations. Among some pro-gay advocates, Paul is critiqued for being unaware that same-sex unions can be loving and lasting. Therefore, these advocates argue that Paul spoke too categorically against such unions. In this theory, Paul was simply not exposed to loving, committed same-sex relationships, so it was the *type* of same-sex relationships he was rejecting, or should have been rejecting, not the whole category. Had he been exposed to an appropriate level of commitment and love between equal, same-sex partners, so the argument goes, he would have qualified what he was saying. Or, alternatively, other pro-gay advocates argue that Paul was simply unaware that homosexual orientation is natural to some from birth. Therefore, in this understanding, Paul is roundly critiqued either for being ignorant or being linguistically unable to express what he truly thought, or, at least, what he should have truly thought. In this theory, had he understood that sexual orientation should qualify everything the Jewish and Christian tradition taught about marriage, he would have made much more careful and generous statements.

Therefore it is important to understanding the historical context in which Paul lived and wrote. According to same-sex-marriage proponent John Boswell, 'Many Greeks thought gay people were inherently better than straight people' (*The Church and the Homosexual: An Historical Perspective*, 1979). Classical Roman culture, through many periods, was the same. Boswell notes that 'gay marriages were also legal and frequent in Rome for males and females. Even emperors often married other males. There was total acceptance on the part of the populace, as far as it can be determined, of this sort of homosexual attitude and behavior. This total acceptance was not limited to the ruling elite; there is also much popular Roman literature containing gay love stories.' According to an anthropologist named Jenell Williams Paris, in her book *The End of Sexual Identity* (2011), Paul would have known about committed, long term same-sex relationships: 'There is literary evidence of loving, long-term same-sex relationships between men, and of relations between high-status Roman men and freeborn boys and girls. Some argue that Roman sexual ideals around the time of Christ are best viewed as numerous, including a high value on procreative, marital sex with room for same-sex relations among youth, between dominant men and social subordinates, and between men as equals' (p.65). 'Ancient Greek and Roman artifacts and literature show long-term, loving, same-sex sexual relationships between social equals' (p.68). This background is important to understanding what Paul would and would not have understood about same-sex sexual relationships.

Paul in Romans: Jesus and His Restoration of God's True Humanity

What is the story behind Paul's letter to the Romans? In the winter of early 57 AD, the middle-aged Jewish Christian named Paul sat in the small house of a friend named Gaius in the city of Corinth, overlooking the Mediterranean Ocean. For a number of years, Paul had been working hard planting new Christian communities all over the Eastern Mediterranean, teaching, mentoring, and risking his life. Now, his work in that area was finished. He sums this up in Romans 15:19, 'From Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.' Now, he was going to return to Jerusalem one last time, then he was going to set sail for the Western Mediterranean, and to the mighty city of Rome. In Rome there was a group of Christians that Paul had heard about but never met. And it's to this group of people that he dictates this letter. Why does he write? First, since Paul was going to Spain, he probably wanted to establish a base of operations in Rome, which would also link him with his friends in the Eastern Mediterranean. Paul's mission – really, the mission of Jesus – was the frame for everything he did. Second, Paul was concerned about Roman anti-Semitism. The Emperor Claudius had kicked out all Jews from Rome in AD 49. If you don't have Jewish Christians in the Christian community, then you start to forget that we're supposed to reach out to Jewish people as well, and create a space for them in the church. So Paul was seeking to reaffirm Christian community and mission across both Jewish and Gentile lines. Third, Paul was fundraising for famine victims. He was taking regular trips back to Jerusalem with famine relief contributions and he wanted the Romans to contribute to that relief fund. It helped the Jewish Christians talk about Jesus with Jewish non-Christians. So Paul linked famine relief and mission. And fourth, Paul wanted to teach and strengthen these Christians in Rome. Some traditions say that Simon Peter had already been in Rome by this point, but that's unclear. And it was vitally important that these Roman Christians have a solid understanding of Jesus, because 'all roads led to Rome'; and thus they had the critical opportunity to communicate Jesus with people from everywhere throughout the known world.

Paul works towards all these purposes simultaneously by explaining how Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's Scriptures, for the sake of the whole world. This is no artifice or contrived rhetoric. It was the firm conviction of every Jewish Christian, and of Jesus himself. Jesus had brought God's covenant relationship with Israel to a climax by His own personal appearance in the midst of Israel, to be Israel's true representative, the Messiah. And since Israel's outlook had always been towards all humanity, Paul, therefore, wants to explain how both Gentiles and Jews – every human being – needs Jesus. It is in the context of examining human sinfulness (Rom.1:18 – 3:20) that he says this:

Rom.1:26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,²⁷ and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Matt Vines starts to challenge the traditional interpretation of this section by examining the words 'natural' and 'unnatural.' What if Paul simply did not know about inborn sexual orientation, so that what he observed was heterosexual people acting unnaturally relative to their own sexual orientation? Or, alternatively, what if Paul did not have the conceptual and linguistic ability to differentiate between heterosexuals misbehaving and other people with a same-sex orientation trying to forge loving, lasting romantic relationships? Matt also notes that the word for *nature*, the Greek word *physin*, seems to have different meanings in different places in the New Testament, even in Paul's own use of that word. Hence, in Romans 1:26 – 27, Matt argues that the phrase '*para physin*' should mean 'unnatural relative to their own personal sexual orientation.' As Matt points out, the big question is how we understand the word *physin* and then the two phrases *para physin*, which means *against nature*, and *kata physin*, which means *in accordance with nature*.

For the sake of thoroughness, I will address Matt Vines' treatment of Romans in his presentation, and consider four distinct possibilities for understanding Paul in Romans 1:26 – 27 which he has woven together:

1. Paul is referring to violations of the creation order. All acts listed in Romans 1:21 – 32 are against that creation order. This view sees same-sex erotic acts as being categorically against God's creation design.
2. Paul should be understood, or re-understood, as referring to individual sexual natures, at least when the topic of sexual activity comes up.
3. Paul is referring to violations of the cultural, customary order. This is based on his use of *physin* in 1 Corinthians 11. In this view, same-sex relations in Rome were not accepted because of the stigma against an adult Roman man playing the 'passive' and 'womanly' role to another man, and Paul was making a rhetorical point within his 1st century context, drawing upon his audience's agreement with him on this point.
4. Paul is referring to acts 'beyond nature' or 'in excess of nature' but not 'against nature.' In this view, same-sex erotic acts are done out of an excess of lust, after one has exhausted opposite-sex relations. Paul would be condemning experimental pan-sexuality done by people who are heterosexual in orientation but carried in excess by lust past the appropriate boundaries for that heterosexual person.

Evaluation of Option 4

I will address each of these possibilities in reverse order. Option 4 tries to read into Paul more than he actually says. Matt Vines quotes a first century Stoic philosopher, Dio Chrysostom, as an example of one attempt at explaining same-sex behavior. Dio believed that, 'The man whose appetite is insatiate in such things [referring to heterosexual relations]... will have contempt for the easy conquest and scorn for a woman's love, as a thing too readily given... and will turn his assault against the male quarters... believing that in them he will find a kind of pleasure difficult and hard to procure.' The explanation offered by Dio Chrysostom for the same-sex erotica they observed, namely that it was the result of those people's insatiable heterosexuality-turned-bisexuality, is certainly interesting. Likewise, Matt also cites 'a fourth-century Christian writer' who offers a theory as to how same-sex behavior develops (p.7). This source says that same-sex activity comes from an excess of lust that goes beyond the appropriate boundaries: 'You will see that all such desire stems from a greed which will not remain within its usual bounds.' Matt's citation comes from John Chrysostom, the eloquent fourth century archbishop of Constantinople. But interesting as these citations are, his comments are not only a misreading of these authors, but are irrelevant for our particular discussion.

First, I believe Matt is misreading the word ‘lust.’ In the West, we tend to shift the word ‘lust’ into the realm of psychology as if it only referred to ‘selfish motivation’ or ‘an attitude of take, take, take.’ We define ‘lust’ as if its opposite were simply ‘self-giving.’ That has some truth, but is an anachronistic rendering. The word ‘lust’ was used by the biblical writers to describe any desire that carried a person beyond the ordinances of God (e.g. Rom.1:24; 6:12; 7:14 – 25; Jas.1:14 – 15, 4:1 – 3), which in the case of our discussion here, comes from the creation order. Thus, the difference between love and lust also involves *the object* of one’s desire, and not just one’s *motivation*. According to Matthew 19:1 – 12, a man whose first marriage fell apart because he cheated might, years later and with more maturity, have the proper motivation to have a godly marriage. But that does not mean he can. He has sabotaged himself because of his past actions, and now the *object* of his desire – a second wife – is not appropriate. According to Jesus’ teaching on lust in Matthew 5:27 – 32, a married man who lusts after a woman who is not his own wife may have all the good intentions in the world to accompany that lust with every other acceptable motivation of self-giving. But still the *object* of his desire is inappropriate. This is why the early Christian theologians simply used the word ‘lust’ to refer to all desires that carried their host towards objects that lay beyond what God ordained was appropriate.

Hence, this distinction – between lust as wrong motivation and lust as pursuit of the wrong object – is false. I have studied John Chrysostom fairly deeply on the issue of greed, wealth, and giving, and my impression is that he does not make that distinction. For him, disoriented desire and inordinate desire are equivalently and equally the result of ‘lust’ and/or ‘greed.’ The biblical writer James speaks of lust that way with respect to material things (Jas.1:14 – 15; 4:1 – 3), in which the orientation/object of one’s desire and the inordinateness of one’s desire are one in the same, because the object of desire is the same. I suspect that John Chrysostom would not make that distinction when it comes to sexuality either. But in any case, John Chrysostom’s suggestion about how *an individual person* develops a same-sex attraction is an addition to what Paul is relating in Romans 1:21 – 32, and an attempt to explain Paul further. Paul himself does not get quite so specific. Paul linked same-sex attraction and activity generally to the fall, but not to any particular theory of individual psychology or biology. That is because John Chrysostom and others simply attribute *any* desire to go beyond God’s proper bounds as ‘lust’ or ‘greed.’ They follow the early Christian understanding that when the *object* of one’s desire is inappropriate, that desire is considered a ‘lust.’

Second, I don’t think these quotations are relevant to understanding Paul. Paul roots his understanding of same-sex acts in a theological, God-centered framework, not a psychological one. For him, it is not simply the result of individuals exceeding the limits of passion, but an aspect of corporate humanity’s historic fall and ontological corruption. The very passage we have been examining, Romans 1:21 – 32, is a treatise on fallen human *desires*. Much of Paul’s description of fallen humanity is emotional, registering on the level of desire: They did not ‘give thanks’ (1:21); ‘God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity’ (1:24); ‘they worshiped’ other created things (1:25); they ‘burned in their desire toward one another’ (1:27); they were ‘filled with... greed... envy... strife... malice’ (1:29); emotionally they became ‘haters of God’ (1:30) and gave ‘hearty approval’ (1:32) to others who did the same things. Paul is not describing an individual’s experience, as if there were a strict sequence of actions by which someone goes from rejecting God, to self-deception, to idolatry, to sexual impurity, to same-sex activity, to disobedience to parents, and only then to unkindness and unforgiveness. Paul is describing humanity’s fall in general. Hence, Romans 1:21 – 32 is never read by anyone, to my knowledge, to be the strict roadmap of an individual’s progression into sin. He is describing broad categories of ways human beings express their alienation from God. Ephesians 4:17 – 19 is a similar passage. So for Matt to cite Dio Chrysostom is appropriate to highlight his usage of the phrase *para physin* as part of a linguistic comparison group to Paul, but not because Paul and the Stoic philosopher shared a common understanding of the development of human sexuality. In fact, they do not share a common understanding about such matters. So citing Dio’s explanation as a condition for validating Paul or not is out of place.

Thus, since I do not think *para physin* in relation to sexual acts can be parsed as Boswell does, and since I do not find that reading pagan or later Christian attempts at explaining same-sex attraction and activity is the same thing as reading Paul himself, I don’t think option 4 can stand.

Evaluation of Option 3

On option 3, and on making a direct parallel between 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16 and Romans 1:21 – 32, we must look carefully at all the usages of the term *physin*. I very much appreciate Matt’s desire to be thorough about this word and its uses in Romans 1:26 – 27, Romans 11:17 – 24, and 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16. On the surface, there seems to be uncertainty, if not outright discontinuity, between each of the three uses listed there. But the solution is found by

comparing the thought categories of Hebrew and Greek. To begin with, the Hebrew language had no single word equivalent to the Greek term *physin*. In the Hebrew worldview, reality was fundamentally relational, constantly referencing God as Creator and extending into relationships. So the Hebrew language spoke of ‘the creation’ regularly but not of ‘nature’ per se, or of the ‘nature’ of something as an independent thing. Greek philosophical thought, however, moved in the opposite direction. And thus in Greek, to speak of ‘nature,’ or the ‘nature’ of something, immediately abstracted it from the Creator-creature relationship that the Hebrew worldview held so tightly. Aristotle, for instance, believed that to understand the essence of an object, you had to isolate it from all other relationships, and only once you had done this were you able to comprehend an object truly. But this foundational maxim in Greek thought had to be explicitly rejected in the Trinitarian debates because the Christian Nicene theologians of the 3rd and 4th centuries understood that God was fundamentally and indivisibly relational, and that the Hebrew mind was correct in perceiving ontological matters in a relational way. Relationships, they concluded, were fundamental to reality, and not incidental. Hence, theologian Thomas F. Torrance, after carefully studying the patristic sources, and following the great theologian Karl Barth in his own return to those sources, developed the phrase ‘onto-relational’ to say that ontological reality itself, as designed by God, is a relational reality. Thus, when we are dealing with the term *physin* in the Greek New Testament, we must attend to the immediate context in which it is being used. For the translation of a fundamentally Hebrew thought about ‘nature’, or the ‘nature’ of a particular object, into the Greek language involves relational categories by necessity. The questions we must attend to whenever a Hebrew writer uses the Greek word *physin* are: The nature of something with respect to what other being, thing, or question? What relationships are being discussed here? This immediately renders the mere ‘word study’ method of approaching *physin* in these three New Testament locations, or in other locations, to be inappropriate. Failure to do this lands everyone in vague puzzlement about all three passages here (Romans 1:26 – 27, Romans 11:17 – 24, and 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16) and the seven other passages found in the New Testament (Romans 2:27; Galatians 2:15 and 4:8; Ephesians 2:3; James 1:23 and 5:17; 2 Peter 1:4)

Recognizing Hebrew onto-relational categories clears the air of at least one rather weak argument. When some people cite Romans 11:17 – 24, that God changes the ‘nature’ of the wild olive branch, or acts against its nature, as evidence that Paul in Romans 1:26 – 27 was merely speaking of heterosexuals acting ‘against their own personal nature’ by acting homosexually, I’m surprised at why they perceive this to be an argument ultimately in favor of the pro-gay position. For anyone who says this is claiming as a matter of settled conviction that God can and does act against a person’s own ‘nature’, according to Romans 11:17 – 24. So if the argument can proceed as sloppily as that, then, on the one hand, Romans 1:26 – 27 becomes technically indeterminate for the purpose of establishing any sexual norms other than anti-pederasty, which might be considered a victory for defanging that passage. However, on the other hand, Romans 11:17 – 24 can now serve as an argument that God can act against the ‘nature’ of a person, in the case of a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person, the ‘nature’ of their sexual orientation. God simply acts and commands things against a person’s ‘nature,’ even individually defined. Since, arguably, the overall argument does not actually rest on Paul but on Genesis and Jesus, anyone in the pro-gay position handling *physin* in this way is trying to barricade the front door while losing the entire house through the back. In any case, rather than go down that path, we must attend to the relational context of the things discussed in each passage in order to understand how Paul, or any other Hebrew writer, is using the word *physin*. To neglect it is not only inappropriate with respect to the thought patterns actually present, but also lacking in seriousness with respect to how real arguments might actually be sustained.

Matt is right to point out that the word *physin* by itself does not simply mean ‘the order of creation’ in every single context it is used. After all, in Romans 11:17 – 24, a wild olive tree does not differ from a cultivated olive tree in a biological sense, in the ‘order of creation.’ An olive tree is still an olive tree in that biological sense. Notice that other attempts at translating *physin* like ‘cultural custom’ or ‘descent’ wouldn’t even be apt translations here either, for the wild and cultivated olive trees cannot be said to differ by those categories. But if Paul is using *physin* to describe, not some sort of ‘absolute intrinsic difference’ but the particular relationship between the two olive trees with respect to one’s wildness and the other’s cultivatedness, then there is no confusion or awkward translation at all.

Similarly, when Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:14 uses *physin* with respect to how men and women culturally present themselves in hairstyle and dress, he is not making an awkward appeal *in that regard* to an ‘order of creation.’ Paul read as well as we do that Adam and Eve were initially naked, and certainly without hats and scissors. Nor is he making an appeal to some absolute ‘custom’ or ‘descent’ of dress and hairstyles, since fashion has never been a particularly stable facet of human life, with clear lineage and such. Paul is simply saying that when men and women

pray and prophesy, they should look like men and women, respectively, with respect to each other in their cultural context. There were those who believed women needed to appear as men in hairstyle and dress, on the Greek conviction that women were defectively made men, a thought which shows up in the Gospel of Thomas verse 114 where that document says that women will become men in the soulful realm after death. But Paul was firmly against that Greek gnostic view because he was a Jewish creational theologian who believed that male and female represented God in some particular way. So women should not appear as if they were men because God's eschatological affirmation of women as women was clear in the Old Testament; Simon Peter in Acts 2 quoted Joel 2 about the Spirit speaking through both men and women, without collapsing women into men, or vice versa. Incidentally, I think this is why women's appearance as women represented the 'authority' (not subjection) given to them (1 Cor.11:10): God gave them as women authority, like a crown, which was typically denied them in their cultures, to deliver His word in prayer and prophetic utterance. Notice that women's hair coverings did not connote 'authority' in pagan Greek culture, whereas taken up into the Christian argument for the equality of the sexes, it does in a general sense. That is, the particular form that women's dress or hairstyle took was not the precise issue, but rather its difference from men's dress and hairstyle. Men and women are to appear with respect to their genders as men and women – and that general difference is quite understandable across all cultures – for it plays a theological role in presenting God's redemption for both men and women equally, His missional-prophetic use of men and women as such in their gendered beings, especially God's granting women authority as women.

For the sake of thoroughness, I'll comment briefly on the New Testament's uses of *physin* in other places (four more in Paul, two in James, and one in 2 Peter) to show that the relational or conceptual context matters in determining what *physin* is referring to. Paul in Galatians 2:15 refers to those who are Jews 'by nature': that is, nature with respect to the covenantal difference between Jews and Gentiles because of circumcision and upbringing in the Sinaitic Law, not with respect to there being some genetic difference between Jewish humanity and Gentile humanity. And so in Ephesians 2:3, Paul refers to all human beings – both Jew and Gentile – being 'by nature children of wrath': nature with respect to being now corrupted by sin internally, despite the difference between Jews and Gentiles. This shows that Paul uses *physin* in ways that highlight the relational issue or context that he is talking about at the time. Similarly, in Galatians 4:8, Paul refers to 'beings that are by nature no gods at all': nature with respect to the intrinsic difference between the angelic, elemental powers and the one true God known in and through Jesus Christ, a discussion which seems to encompass origin, essence, status, etc. This usage is present in James, who speaks of our 'natural face' (Jas.1:23), and of Elijah being a man with a 'nature like ours' (Jas.5:17), which speaks of our humanity as both a relational reflection of God, dependent on Him, and yet sinful. So, the New Testament writers use *physin* as meaning *nature with respect to a larger relation*. It does not always mean 'essence' nor 'cultural custom' but must always reference a larger question or framework. This makes the biblical usage of the term different from the Hellenistic philosophers' usage of the word, which proceeded along the Aristotelian premise of compartmentalization, atomization, and intrinsic separation from all other things. With the exception of Peter's reference to 'the divine nature' (2 Pet.1:4), *physin* does not refer to a stand-alone essence. (And even in the case of the divine nature, God's nature is still intrinsically relational, which is discussed even in 2 Peter by God the Father sharing his glory in the transfigured Jesus (2 Pet.1:17 – 18) and then with us (2 Pet.1:2 – 9), promises that were made and fulfilled by the Holy Spirit operating in human beings (2 Pet.1:21). Thus, the Nicene theologians realized that they had to use the Greek word *ousia* to refer to 'a relational essence,' not simply 'an undifferentiated essence' when used in reference to God. See T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*.)

How, then, do we treat Romans 1:26 – 27? When we come to the term *physin* with respect to sexuality and gender in Romans 1:21 – 32, and especially the term *para physin*, we find that Paul was indeed referring to 'the creation order' and God's design of male and female for the purpose of sexuality. Paul begins, 'For since the creation of the world,' God's power has been evident in 'what was made' (Rom.1:20). Humanity's fall involved a temptation towards knowledge of a sort, which was in fact detrimental, so Paul describes the fall of the human mind in those terms: 'They became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools' (Rom.1:21 – 22). Rather than live as the 'image of God' which we were created to be, we worshiped 'an image in the form of corruptible man' and creatures and debased ourselves (Rom.1:23ff.). Hence, the word 'image,' which occurred first in Genesis 1:27, appears, but in an ironic form describing sin as an irony. Very significantly, Paul calls God 'the Creator' (Rom.1:25). And most interestingly, he does not use the standard Greek terms for 'women' and 'men' (Rom.1:26 – 27) but instead uses the terms 'female' and 'male,' probably referring to Genesis 1:27, 'male and female He created them.' Sexual relations between same-sex partners are *para physin*, against their nature with respect to how male and female was created by God.

Notably, when referring to sexual acts, other Hellenistic Jewish writers used the phrase *para physin* in the same way Paul did. The Hellenistic Jewish commentator Philo of Alexandria, speaking of the Judaic understanding of marriage, says, ‘What are our marriage laws? The law recognizes only sexual intercourse (or mixing, union) that is in accordance with nature (*kata physin*), the [intercourse a man has] with a woman, and that only for the procreation of children.’ (Philo, *Abraham* 26.135; *Special Laws* 2:14.50; 3:36; cf. A.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexuality*, 2001, p.166 – 167; Romero Penna, *Christian Anthropology and Homosexuality – 4. Homosexuality and the New Testament*, 2005) Philo, being enamored with Greek philosophy, seems to fall into the tradition of Plato, who, in his creation story the *Timaeus*, called same sex acts *para physin* because they could not produce children. Philo also said, commenting on Genesis 19, ‘But God, moved by pity for mankind whose Saviour and Lover He was, gave increase in the greatest possible degree to the unions which men and women naturally [*kata physin*] make for begetting children, but abominated and extinguished this unnatural [*para physin*] and forbidden intercourse, and those who lusted for such He cast forth and chastised with punishments...’ (*Abraham* 133 – 141). Josephus refers to the same-sex relations of the people of Elis and Thebes as *para physin*, including it with incest as some of the ‘monstrous and unnatural [*para physin*] pleasures’ of the Gentiles (*Against Apion* 2.273 – 275). Pseudo-Phocylides (dated between 100 BC – 100 AD) urges that ‘the limits of sexual intercourse set by nature not be transgressed by intercourse between males’ (lines 190 – 192). The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (ca.150 BC – 200 AD) speaks disparagingly of corrupters of boys and Sodom, ‘which exchanged the order of its nature.’ Second Enoch 10:4 reads, ‘This place [of torment], Enoch has been prepared for those who do not glorify God, who practice on earth the sin which is against nature, which is child corruption in the anus in the manner of Sodom...’ Moreover, Paul’s argument about Gentile sin and idolatry in Romans 1:21 – 32 is very similar to the one found in the *Wisdom of Solomon* (dated to the 1st or 2nd century BC). Hence, even when Jewish writers other than Paul are speaking about sexual acts, they reference God’s creation order using the term *para physin*. They speak about what is ‘natural’ (*kata physin*) or ‘unnatural’ (*para physin*) not as measured against individualistic desires, but against biological and/or theological realities larger than us.

While Greek culture was certainly permissive and often enthusiastically so, the Greeks used the phrase *para physin* to refer to being against the biological order, though mostly without a moral judgment. Plato (fourth century BC) writes, ‘When male unites with female for procreation the pleasure experienced is held to be due to nature [*kata physin*], but contrary to nature [*para physin*] when male mates with male or female with female’ (*Laws* I, 636C). He speaks categorically of same-sex unions. He goes on later to say that he is referring to reproductive capacity, and hence the biological order, not just active-passive sex roles and who plays what role (*Laws* I, 839A). The Stoic-Cynic philosopher Dio Chrysostom, the one Greek thinker who seemed to condemn same-sex acts, says that the goddess Aphrodite ‘stands for the natural [*kata physin*] intercourse and union of the male and female,’ whereas a society that permits brothel-keeping and other vices will soon find that human lusts will carry people still further: ‘Is there any possibility that this lecherous class would refrain from dishonoring and corrupting the males, making their clear and sufficient limit that set by nature [*physin*]?’ The male whose appetite is insatiate in all things...will turn his assault against the male quarters...’ Diodorus Siculus (~50 BC) discusses a case of mistaken same-sex relations as *para physin*; the woman received ‘unnatural [*para physin*] embraces’ (*History* 32.10.8 – 11). Plutarch (~100 AD) contrasts ‘natural’ [*te physei*] love between men and women to ‘union contrary to nature [*para physin*] with males.’ He repeats shortly afterwards that those men who consort with males do so *para physin* (*Dialogue on Love* 751 C, E). Hence, *kata physin* (natural) and *para physin* (unnatural) was standard and consistent language among the Greek moral philosophers for the biological order, and they used it to refer to opposite-sex and same-sex relations, respectively, without any further qualification given for the emotional or relational quality of such relationships. More examples of pagan and Jewish usage of *para physin* are found in Richard B. Hays, ‘Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1’ in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1986), p.191; J.B. DeYoung, ‘The Meaning of ‘Nature’ in Romans 1 and Its Implications for Biblical Perspectives of Homosexual Behavior’ in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31 (1988), p.429 – 447; Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p.59 – 60; V. P. Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), p.58 – 67.

Hence, what is ‘natural’ (*kata physin*) or ‘unnatural’ (*para physin*) is not measured against individualistic desires, but against biological and/or theological realities larger than us. Plato, Plutarch and the other Greek commentators on same-sex relations have the biological order in mind when they think of what is ‘natural.’ This coincides with Josephus and other Jewish sources, who as Jews, think of God’s creation order as ‘natural’ with the fall as a disturbance in that order and a disruption of it.

Significantly, most Greek writers were not maligning same-sex unions, but were only using the words *para physin* and *kata physin* to describe it. The Stoic-Cynic philosopher Dio Chrysostom seems to be the only writer who clearly maligns it. Plato and Plutarch are approving and encouraging it. They recognize that it goes against the biological order, but they are not attaching a moral judgment to it. Far from it. Many Greek men thought lower of women, many idealized male friendship including male-male erotica, the Stoics even despised the biological order and sex altogether. To the average Greek, the biological order ranged from neutral to despicable. This would make the question of the origins of sexual orientation completely irrelevant to them. If a person wanted to attribute it to nature, nurture, or choice, what difference would it have made to them? Gay relationships and gay sex were virtues in themselves. If you first felt same-sex attraction at age 22, age 13, or from as far back as you can remember, it was all good to them.

All this makes Paul in Romans 1:26 – 27 more clear in scope and foundation. Yes, Paul employed the same semantic words – *para physin* and *kata physin* – as those Greek moral philosophers who identified same-sex coupling as against the biological order, whatever they thought of that. But fundamentally, Paul goes a step further than the Greek philosophers by saying that the biological order is derived from the theological order of creation. In this sense, Paul is in both *semantic and moral/theological agreement* with his most appropriate peer group: the Jewish writings. Paul follows Jesus as a Jewish creational theologian who saw marriage as originally designed for male and female, and restored to be such for those who undertake marriage. Genesis 1 – 4 and Matthew 19:1 – 12 demonstrate that God’s creational identity, which He invested into humanity by virtue of making us in His image, and God’s creational commission, which involved childbearing and spreading out over the earth, were the responsibility of each and every human being to be, to do, and to speak about. Paul’s thought fits in seamlessly with this line of thought. To read *para physin* in any other way completely neglects Paul’s cultural context and how other people used that phrase during his very own time period. And I have shown that Genesis 1 – 2 and Jesus, not least in Matthew 19:1 – 12, are really the true sources of Paul’s thought, since Paul gives indications that Genesis 1 – 4 was uppermost in his mind when he dictated Romans 1:21 – 32. Paul’s use of *para physin* and *kata physin* indicates that he is thinking as an orthodox Jew who sees Israel’s destiny and ethics as being fulfilled in Jesus. For Paul, same-sex marriage violates the theological order of creation and redemption.

In support of options 3 and 4, John Boswell suggests we parse out *para physin* into two separate terms – *para* and *physin*. He claims, on that basis, that *para* sometimes means ‘in excess of’ or ‘more than’ or ‘beyond.’ His observation about the word *para* is true enough by itself, but unfortunately, the terms cannot be parsed that way in this context. When discussing sexual behavior, the terms conjoined make a stock phrase that always means the same thing. Boswell’s methodological approach falters here, and the literature overwhelmingly shows it. Greeks referenced the biological order and saw it as not conforming to the natural world on the basis of reproduction, or, in some cases, to the physical fit of the penis in the vagina. And while it is true that they had different evaluations of same-sex erotic acts, their usage of the phrase *para physin* conforms without exception to these meanings. Jews, however, referenced the creation order, a theological framework, and saw it as a sin against God; this is surely more important to any study of Paul and his audience because it means we are not simply going around in circles interpreting Paul’s use of *para physin* in isolation; there is, in fact, an outside measurement voicing ample disapproval. In fact, not only in every instance of Hellenistic Jewish literature, but in every instance of Hellenistic philosophy and literature *en toto*, the phrase *para physin* means ‘contrary to nature,’ or ‘against nature.’ The fact that Jewish writers referred to Israel’s God and His creation when speaking of sexual acts makes this clear. And the Stoic usage is a secondary point of corroboration. With reference to sexual acts, *para physin* is a stock phrase with consistent meaning.

Did Paul have a prejudice against same-sex activity because he had a bias against women? And since gay male sex was thought to make the passive partner play the woman’s role, perhaps his disapproval of same-sex relations can be explained really as a bias against women? I have written elsewhere about the affirmation of women by the Old Testament, Jesus, and Paul; there is too much ground to cover here. Suffice to say that Paul was actually very affirming of women in church leadership, and certainly affirming of women’s sexuality. In the Old Testament, on a social level and a sexual level, the status of a woman was nothing to be despised, in and of itself. To the contrary, women were appreciated and celebrated. When God’s creation reaches its crowning crescendo in the Hebrew Scriptures, it does so not in the creation of the man, but of the woman! A woman’s sexuality was poetically seen as a deep well whose waters would quench her husband’s thirst. This is why the ‘woman at the well’ is a consistent biblical literary motif stretching back through the Old Testament to the creation itself: Eve was presented to Adam by the river flowing out of Eden; Eleazar met Rebekah by a well and brought her back to Isaac at another well;

Jacob met Rachel by a well; Moses met Zipporah by a well; the Proverbs describe a wife as a well of fresh water (Pr.5:15 – 19); the Song of Songs as a garden and a well of fresh water (Song 4:15), a reminder of Eden itself. In the Song of Songs, the sexual union of husband and wife is celebrated for its own sake, without any reference to childbearing. And the Song of Songs is a play with a strong woman character who speaks easily over half the lines. What anti-woman worldview produces such literature? Pro-gay advocates like Boyarin, Nissinen, Brooten, et.al, are importing the deeply Greek anti-woman prejudice into their reading of the Old Testament. But it doesn't originate there, doesn't belong there, and fails to explain the biblical data. What is at stake in any biblical passage about marriage and sexuality was the image of God, expressed fully in the human marriage of a male and a female. Besides the union of opposite genders and whatever else gender signifies (though I suspect gender cannot ultimately be reduced to something else), the overwhelming, unbroken assumption behind the Genesis creation account, Israel's Sinaitic Law, and Israel's existence as a whole was the carrying on of the creational blessing, especially the messianic hope for a child who would undo Adam's sin and deliver the world from evil.

Moreover, the presumption that option 3 must make about the 'customs' of sexual practices is not supported by the historical evidence. If Paul was relying on a cultural consensus among his audience that Roman gay sex was against the current custom, it is not clear that he had it. Mark D. Smith says, 'Canterella demonstrates that in the Roman Republic, pederasty was considered the 'Greek vice,' which true Romans reviled, but that did not prevent them from engaging in other forms of homosexual activity. By the early second century BCE Rome had passed the *Lex Sca[n]tina* and the edict *De adtemptata pudicitia* which made pederastic behavior, and even the attempt to seduce a freeborn boy, liable to criminal prosecution. By the time of the Principate, pederasty becomes extremely rare in the sources, while at the same time there appears to be a significant increase in homosexual activity between consenting adults.' ('Ancient Bisexuality and the Interpretation of Romans 1:26 – 27', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. 64 Sum, 1996, p.223) Yet evaluations of this period don't seem to agree on how public versus private this behavior was. John Boswell himself believed that same-sex activity was widespread. One historian claims that in the first century, the cultural and political Roman climate elevated the ideal of the Roman man who was able to dominate others – militarily, sexually and otherwise – and was never dominated by another, and that this had a corresponding effect on sexual attitudes. Same sex acts were conducted privately; between men it was socially and legally rejected. A Roman master practiced it with his slave girls and slave boys (Angelo di Berardino, *Christian Anthropology and Homosexuality*, 1997, p.3 – 4). Perhaps gay sex was driven into the closet for men for a time. But then again, perhaps not. The recently discovered wall paintings at the Suburban Baths at Pompeii (preserved from 79 AD by volcanic ash) show men and women being equally depicted as 'active' and 'passive,' and often at the same time in group sex. This evidence from Roman culture of the same time period is significant. And still other sources show that lesbian sex in Rome enjoyed a personal, social, and economic liberation unparalleled until the present day (Roy Bowen Ward, 'Why Unnatural? The Tradition Behind Rom.1:26 – 27', *Harvard Theological Review*. Vol. 90:1997, p.279; Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, 2003). Option 3 supposes that Paul was trying to find common ideological ground with his audience about the nature of sin, based on 'custom.' But are we to read Paul as simply taking one position in a Roman culture war? Did Paul apparently want to win a cheap rhetorical victory, without making a point of larger substance? And if he thought he had the grounding from his culture to critique gay male sex, what did he think grounded his critique of lesbian sex? Thus, I do not find that option 3 makes sense of history or of Paul. Paul does not appear to be appealing to unified cultural opinion or tradition.

Evaluation of Option 2

The idea that Paul was actually referring to people's individual natures is another argument Matt Vines advances in his presentation. He says that Paul's argument in Romans 1:21 – 32 is an argument with idolatry in the sense that people are doing things that are unnatural to them. And since acting straight is unnatural to someone who is gay, Paul is not taking issue with gay couples who are in a committed, loving relationship. People should act according to their own, individual, *nature*. In effect, Matt suggests that Paul's stance towards sexuality might be summarized by the following statement: 'To thine own self be true.'

Perhaps my Japanese-American heritage and upbringing helps me to be both interested in and suspicious of individualistic solutions. While this sounded attractive to me at first glance, the questions this leaves me with are many. I listed some of them when I discussed Genesis 1 – 2, above. The questions I have might be rolled together into these: 'Is sexual nature and even human nature completely plastic? What if different people make different claims about what our nature is? Does God have a say in what human nature is or is becoming?' I know people who are committed bisexuals who renounce conventional marriage as completely arbitrary. Is it in their 'nature' to

have sexual partners of both genders at the same time? Other acquaintances of mine, as well as many popular voices, argue that male infidelity is 'natural' since the 'nature' of men is to spread our genes as widely as possible. Incidentally, the loudest advocates of this view that I know are men. Given the use of the term 'natural' in Romans 1, this is a very significant question. Thus, they argue for open marriages, easy divorce, consensual adultery, etc. I know people who say that their sexual orientation changed while they were married, and with children; they saw challenges and pain no matter what alternative they considered. Is it in some people's 'nature' to have a fluid and vacillating sexual orientation? On what basis would Matt or anyone else who holds to an individualistic approach to the word 'nature' be able to say anything normative about anything?

More importantly, the analysis I have provided above demonstrates that what is 'natural' (*kata physin*) or 'unnatural' (*para physin*) is not measured against individualistic desires, but against biological and/or theological realities larger than us. Plato, Plutarch and the other Gentile critics of same-sex relations have the biological order in mind when they think of what is 'natural.' This coincides with the Jewish sources like Josephus, Philo, and others, who as Jews, supply a moral and theological evaluation to that term. They think of God's creation order as 'natural.' In their view, the fall brought about a disturbance in that order and a disruption of it. Paul firmly belongs in this latter group.

But was Paul limited by his conceptual and linguistic horizons? John Boswell and others observe that words corresponding to the terms 'gay' and 'straight' did not exist in Greek or Latin. Of course, I concur with him on that particular point. He suggests that Paul was conceptually and linguistically unable to make the appropriate differentiation between gay and straight. Is it true that concepts don't exist in people's consciousness until a singular word exists to define it? Sometimes, but not always. Many Asian cultures have special words for 'older brother' or 'younger sister' or various family members, or people who are of Asian descent but have been raised elsewhere, or foreigners at various degrees of remove. But this does not mean that people lacking singular words for those categories in their languages are unaware of them. It's just that in other cultures, those categories do not *determine* how relationships unfold to such a significant degree that they merit the use of a more economical way to talk about them. Similarly, the word 'Trinity' did not exist before the Nicene Creed, yet the concept of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was firmly imprinted upon the mind of the early church, as witnessed by the spontaneous, decentralized development of the so-called 'Apostles' Creed' throughout the church in the Mediterranean, Africa, and Asia. When various heresies crept up that threatened the integrity of that concept of God, though it did not have a name, the church responded vigorously. Centuries later, they named the concept which they had been defending all that time. So it is quite plain that the concept existed before the singular word. As another example, the word 'wrist' did not exist at the time of Jesus; so the apostolic writers say that the nails were driven through his 'hands,' because the word 'hand' back then was thought to encompass what we now call 'the wrist.' And yet would they not be able to identify where on his body they meant, knowing that only a stake driven between the radius and ulna would be able to partially support the weight of a human body, whereas the fleshy part of the 'hand' (the 'hand' as we now call it) would simply tear?

Perhaps the question Boswell is overlooking is this: What if Paul and others use different words and phrases than the ones we are looking for, especially if they categorized it under a larger label? After all, why do we assume Paul was heterosexual? *How do we know Paul himself wasn't gay?* He spoke of 'coveting of all kinds' (Rom.7:7 – 13) and the 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor.12:7). And if that were the case, how would he describe it? He would describe it using Jewish theological terms. Whether Paul was or not, I don't know, of course. But I maintain that Paul does show an awareness that people's sexual and other desires may be oriented towards the wrong objects in a way that is connected to a corrupted genetic inheritance. This is precisely the meaning of Romans 1:21 – 32 and Ephesians 4:17 – 19. To describe those desires, he used phrases that referred back to the fall from God's creation order. As I said before, Romans 1:21 – 32 is never read by anyone, to my knowledge, to be the strict roadmap of an individual's progression from rejecting God to self-deception to idolatry to sexual impurity to same-sex activity to parent-child disobedience to unkindness and so on. Things do not happen in that particular order in a lock-step way for every person. What Paul is doing is describing humanity's fall in general. Boswell appears to have been looking for Paul to demonstrate an individual, psychological, and physiological understanding of sexual orientation in isolation from all other issues because that is how we look for it today. But Paul's language is categorical, physical, and theological. His word for all wrongly oriented desires is simply 'lust.' His understanding of the physical source of those desires in us is 'the body of sin' (6:6), or 'the flesh' (7:14 – 25; 8:3), the corruption that has set into human nature from the fall, which affects us all in different ways. Thus, Boswell's observation that Greek and Latin did not have terms for 'gay' and 'straight' is mildly interesting but it lacks the ability to say anything more than that.

So the terms 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' have to do with people (1) verbally identifying themselves by their sexual orientation and (2) expecting that designation to matter in relationship with others, whether in a positive or negative way. So Boswell makes unwarranted presumptions when he suggests that people before the 1848 Central European coinage of those words had no real way of signaling their sexual preferences, for example non-verbally; or that people had no way of observing that their own orientation, or that of others, seemed permanent; or that ancient literature gives us exhaustive knowledge about those people's conceptual and linguistic range of awareness. He jumps to conclusions and demonstrates a lack of basic anthropological and sociological understanding about how communication works.

Evaluation of Option 1

Furthermore, options 2, 3, and 4 all ignore Paul's many references to the entire creation and discount his background as a Jewish creational theologian now impacted by Jesus. This is especially true of Romans 1:21 – 32 but it extends beyond that passage to Romans as a whole. In Romans, Paul situates his entire argument from within 'the holy Scriptures' (1:2), which is emphatically a story that begins with God's creation and His creation order, and demonstrates God's commitment to restoring His fallen creation. Significantly, in the midst of his argument about Abraham, Paul refers to God as He 'who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist' (4:17), which is a reference to Abraham, but behind Abraham, to the Genesis creation. Then he proceeds to make the case that although Adam damaged creation and humanity, God is bringing forth a new creation and new humanity in Jesus by the Spirit (6:1ff.). He makes a very important remark about the created world as groaning under the weight of corruption and subjected to futility because of him (i.e. Adam) who subjected it thus; but God will renew the created world along with humanity as well (8:18 – 25). And all the way at the end of the letter, Paul says, 'The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet' (16:20), which refers to God's promise at the fall to be victorious over the serpent through a messianic seed. Thus, Paul's mind throughout Romans is reaching from the original creation to the consummation of the new creation, the full scope of the Scriptures – its history as well as its prophetic hope.

Paul's purpose in writing the letter, in fact, is to defend the 'righteousness of God' (1:16 – 17), which means Paul is explaining that God revealed in Jesus Christ has not abandoned His promises to Abraham and Israel to undo the sin of Adam. This link between Israel and Adam undergirds Paul's thought, not least on marriage and sexuality. The covenant between God and Israel is the central dramatic plot sequence in the narrative from creation to new creation. Far from abandoning His covenant with Abraham and the Sinaitic covenant with Israel, God has inaugurated their fulfillment in Christ, the one in whom Israel is truly represented. Thus, in Romans, Paul is aware that he must explain or corroborate the narrative of Israel's Scripture and point to the need for both Gentiles and Jews to come to Jesus, and then to explain on what terms they are to live together and turn outward in mission to the world. Paul is condensing the vast narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures into concrete examples of the corruption of all human nature, demonstrated in particular actions that violate God's creation order (1:18 – 3:20). He then explains Abraham's role as God's human partner (4:21 – 25) in undoing the sin of Adam which resulted in death for humanity (5:12 – 21) until Jesus Christ brought resurrection life available on the other side of death (6:1ff.) therefore undoing the fall. Paul therefore sees Israel as an ironic hero (2:17 – 3:8), and the Sinaitic covenant established between God and Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex.19ff.) as an honored but transfigured covenant fulfilled and surpassed by Jesus (7:1 – 8:4; 9:1 – 11:36). How would Paul have read and understood the very Scriptures he celebrated and on which he anchored his message? Options 2, 3, and 4 do not make much attempt to engage Paul's stature as a Jewish creational theologian who has completely centered his understanding of God's work on Jesus. It certainly does not explain Paul's firmly Jewish view of marriage as taught by the Pentateuch in Romans 7:1 – 4.

After considering each of these four options, I conclude that option 1 is the only way to understand Paul in Romans 1:26 – 27. He was, through and through, a Jewish creational theologian. He described same-sex unions as violations of the creation order, like all Hellenistic Jews before him and contemporary with him. All acts listed in Romans 1:21 – 32 are against that *creation order*, which is the only plausible explanation I can think of for Paul's usage of the phrase, the 'ordinance of God' (1:32), which he says all have violated in some way, shape, or form. What other explanation for the phrase 'ordinance of God' fits all the data I have considered so far?

This is where the argument from Scripture's supposed silence breaks down. Matt makes that argument in p.10 of his document. That argument goes: Since the Bible is completely silent about loving and committed same-sex relationships in particular, it must approve of them. But this argument fails to perceive the relationship between

what is prohibited negatively and what is commanded positively. Arson, for instance, is never singled out as a problem in the Bible at all. However, respect for other people and their property is mentioned repeatedly, so this certainly indicates that arson would be a sinful act. Making a false ID is never singled out as a problem. But telling the truth and bearing true witness are repeatedly commanded, so this certainly means that making a false ID would be sinful. Bestiality is never singled out by the New Testament. Yet there is a lot of material in the New Testament on human sexuality, and from this we are certain that bestiality is prohibited by the New Testament despite the fact that it is not mentioned there explicitly. We know this because there is a relationship between what is prohibited negatively and what is commanded positively, since the former flows out of the latter. The argument from silence is shortsighted and overly narrow in its request to see one issue taken out of the whole and singled out for explicit comment. God's original vision in creation is that human marriage be monogamous, male and female, and binding.

Implications of This Study: Words and Their Meanings

At this point, some readers of this essay will ask, 'Why expend all this effort in a debate about words and their meanings? Is it even worth continuing to read?' I understand that kind of frustration, and at times have felt it myself. But let me respond by asking this: Don't we often ask other people what they mean when they use the following words with us: love, justice, friends, values, integrity, relationship, marriage, personhood, good, evil, God, rights, and life? Our personal and political conversations are all characterized by our struggle to define, anchor, and persuade others of the definitions of these words, and then to trust others and entrust ourselves to others when we reach some understanding of them. This is no small matter, generally, and it is no small matter here. It is precisely because God and people matter so much that great care must be taken on all sides.

Consider the fact that many American Protestants believed that they could take the biblical word *slavery* and define it for themselves. They read a few verses in Scripture where the word slavery appeared. Into this word, they poured the full and horrid weight of the institution of trans-Atlantic slavery they practiced. But the rest of the English speaking church around the world had no illusions about this. They knew the Bible condemned slavery of that sort. How did they know that the underlying meaning was so different? For many reasons related to the literary and historical context of Scripture. For example, in the Old Testament, Israel was commanded to assist runaway slaves, to explicitly not return such a runaway to his master, and to even help a runaway slave settle down (Dt.23:15). That means that the institution of slavery in the Old Testament was dramatically different from that practiced in America. In reality, it was a contract of labor and not a ceding of one's body or personhood. Only self-indenture or penal servitude was present. Kidnapping a person into slavery or buying and selling a person were strictly forbidden. And slavery – or rather, indentured servitude in Israel – existed for the benefit of the servant trying to work off a debt or avoid poverty. (I have written extensively on this topic and maintain that information on my website.) But the interpretive mistake involved taking a biblical word and neglecting its original historical and literary context, shifting its meaning so that the word itself took on an entirely different meaning. This had disastrous consequences.

To make a parallel to a more distant but still relevant issue: A similar dynamic occurred during the fourth century when Arius defined the Fatherhood of God according to his own experience as an earthly father. His experience was that he was a man, and that there was a time when he was not a father; but when he had a son, he became a father. He therefore applied that reasoning to the Triune God, saying, 'There was a time when the Son was not.' In effect, he reasoned that the use of human language to point to a deeper reality about God justified fully importing all human experience and connotations behind that word into it. In essence, he drained the word 'Father' of its normative biblical content with which Jesus had filled it in Scripture, and filled it with new content, his own content. This is why Athanasius, one of the most articulate defenders of the full divinity of Christ in the fourth century, said that Arius was 'reasoning out of a center in himself.' In the thought of Arius, though Arius himself didn't want to admit it, the word 'Father', in principle had become an empty cipher to be filled by whoever wanted to adjust its meaning. And if that proceeded, then eventually, more of our experiences of our own broken earthly fathers would be projected onto God the Father. That trajectory would have destabilized our ability to personally know anything about God at all.

In my observation, Matt Vines is shifting the underlying meaning of the words 'nature', 'natural', 'marriage', and sometimes even 'love.' He clearly does care about Scripture, and I am impressed by his efforts at every turn. But at the same time, he effectively drains the word 'nature' and other important words of their biblical content, and in place of that content, supplies his own definition. He modifies the underlying biblical content which is meant to fill those terms. So he remains committed to the *words* of Scripture, but not the underlying *substance* behind those words and the context which gives those words *meaning*. In one email to me, Matt argued that Christians have used

‘the natural order’ to defend slavery, racism, misogyny, and oppression of all kinds. But I find that they merely used the *language* of the natural order while redefining the underlying *content*. They were doing precisely what I find so inaccurate: taking the *current, fallen* state of human society or human nature and saying that that state was normative. In truth, it is precisely the creation order that weighs against those arguments.

Human nature, relationships, justice, cultures, and societies have all become distorted by the fall. But Jesus’ response to this is not to dilute the creation order. He maintains it, because that order, which is present in his own teaching, serves as the only reference point by which any normative ethical expressions can be articulated. If we are concerned that structures of power are distorted from God’s ideal, it helps to know what that ideal is, and originally was. Unlike theological mistakes surrounding the word ‘father’, which has a much narrower range of humanly possible meanings, the words ‘nature’ or ‘natural’ or ‘marriage’ have a wider range of potential meanings, and ‘sexual orientation’ is hard to distinguish from ‘desire’ in general. That is why Matt’s proposal is actually quite vulnerable to those who sit further along the individualistic spectrum from him and me. There are many who wish to define the words ‘nature’, ‘natural’, ‘marriage’, and ‘love’ from *their* own perspective and experience. If the meaning behind biblical words is treated with this kind of methodological slipperiness, one will lose the ability to say anything normative at all, whether about God or ourselves.

Paul and 1 Corinthians: The Moral Implications of Jesus’ Resurrection

Finally, I will look at Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians as well, to examine Paul’s use of the word *arsenokoitai* (1 Cor.6:9), commonly translated ‘homosexuals,’ as one of the behaviors that the Corinthians had given up when they came to Christ. In this letter, as with his letter to the Romans, Paul expands on the connection between Jesus’ resurrection and the creation. Notably, in chapter 15:1 – 58, which is all about resurrection, Paul makes numerous links between creation and resurrection, categorically. (1) He makes his familiar comparison between Adam and Jesus, speaking of the original humanity and Jesus’ new humanity (15:21 – 22). (2) He refers to Jesus’ reign over all other rule and authority, including death itself, which is a creational motif of Adam ruling in creation (15:23 – 26), meaning that Jesus as God’s true humanity has brought about the restoration and expansion of God’s creation order while also undoing the fall within and through his very own humanity. (3) He quotes Psalm 8, ‘He has put all things in subjection under his feet’ (15:27), which is Israel’s reflection on the dignity God has given humanity in the creation order, and finds fresh significance in it because he knows Jesus has been elevated to be God’s truly human being. (4) He speaks of the relationship between our current physical bodies and our future resurrection (i.e. even more physical) bodies as like the relationship between a seed and a fully grown plant (15:35 – 44). The dynamic of reproduction established in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 thus becomes an illustration of human destiny, for it is perhaps the only physical illustration available to us if we want to speak of going from one order of life to another; and hence reproduction, as I have argued above, is *necessarily* connected to fully bearing the image of God. The one is definitely connected to the other, but in a relation like what we would call ‘an order of magnitude’ of change. When he speaks of the *soma pneumatikon*, Paul is not speaking of an ethereal body, but a body which is even more invested with the Spirit (*pneuma*) of God. It is more physical, not less; imperishable, not perishable; immortal, not mortal. (5) He speaks again of Adam and Jesus, quoting Genesis 2:7, and contrasting them (15:45 – 50) as the sources of two different types of life: Adam’s *psychikos* and Christ’s *pneumatikos*. (6) Paul thus exclaims that Jesus’ resurrection is the defeat of death, into which humanity fell at the fall (15:51 – 58). Paul is unmistakably a Jewish creational theologian who has now centered the whole story of God around Jesus, Israel’s Messiah who represents *Adam*, thus simultaneously representing Israel and every other human being. And from what we find in 1 Corinthians 15, resurrection is not just tied to the creation order, but is simultaneously grounded upon it and fulfills it.

Before I explore 1 Corinthians 5 – 7, I want to consider the whole of 1 Corinthians as Paul’s treatment of the topic of ‘the body.’ If 1 Corinthians were a tapestry, it would look like a sequence of five rectangles: a blue rectangle at the top, underneath it a green rectangle second, then a purple rectangle third, a red rectangle fourth, and at the bottom, a rectangle that has all four colors – blue, green, purple, and red – brilliantly interwoven. The letter is composed of five major sections that are connected to each other in the fifth section. Each section has to do with our bodies and Jesus’ body. In the first section, chapters 1 – 4, the issue is the unity of the corporate body, the community. That is tied to the last section, chapter 15, which is about Jesus’ resurrection body and our future resurrection body. Because Jesus has one body, those who are ‘the body of Christ’ must also relate in a oneness – not in terms of worshipping in one place but in terms of good relationships. In the second section, chapters 5 – 7, the issue is sexuality and our individual bodies. That is tied to the last section, chapter 15, about Jesus’ resurrection body and our future resurrection body. Because Jesus has a purified body, we are to have purified bodies. In the

third section, chapters 8 – 10, the issue is about differences in food, cultures, and disciplining our bodies for Christian mission. That is tied to the last section, chapter 15, Jesus’ resurrection body and our future resurrection body. Because Jesus offers his body to all humanity, so our mission is to offer our bodies to his mission. In the fourth section, chapters 11 – 14, the issue is worship as one body. That is also tied to the last section, chapter 15, Jesus’ resurrection body and our future resurrection body. Because Jesus’ body is physically filled with the love of God, so the Christian body – corporately – must be physically filled with the love of God.

Paul teaches us here how to think in a Christian way about our bodies. *Everything* about our bodies and how we use our bodies is connected to the resurrection body of Jesus. If Jesus never rose from the dead, and if his body decomposed in the grave, then our bodies really don’t matter to God. And if that is the case, as virtually all Greeks believed in some form, then we can do whatever we want with your bodies; the Epicureans especially embodied that ethic; though some Greeks went the opposite route and completely deny their bodies, like the Stoics tended to. Jesus’ resurrection body answers all the questions about the future of our bodies and all the questions related to how we use our bodies in the present. This is what it means to think, speak, and live consistently if we say that Jesus rose from the dead.

Hence, 1 Corinthians challenges our culture like no other biblical document. For here, Paul says that we are not actually the primary owner of our bodies. God is the primary owner of my body, of your body, of all our bodies. You are the secondary owner of your body. You have been entrusted with your body to share it with God. God has a vision for how we all use our bodies. That vision is for our bodies to house Him. This is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19: ‘Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?’ Even though it ‘feels’ to us that we, from the day we are born, are the only ones totally invested in our bodies and entitled to our bodies because we are the only ones who ‘live’ in our bodies – who else is there? – the radical Christian idea is that the Spirit of God was meant to live in our bodies. We make a personal choice to open ourselves up to him, and he becomes the leading partner in an adventure in our bodies to redeem his physical and spiritual world.

Christian Ethics of the Body – A High Level View

I’ll briefly restate the ethical considerations for sexuality and marriage, and then move onto the epistemological considerations of what constitutes true knowledge of the physical world and human beings. Here is a contrast of the ethical positions of classical Greek versus Christian ethics, focusing on the nature of the body and the ethics of the body:

Greek Culture and Philosophy	Christian Story and Ethics
The immortal, good soul wants to escape the bad physical body	We were created good, both body and soul
Expected ‘disembodiment’ – the separation of soul from body	Expected ‘resurrection’ – the renewal of the physical world, including our bodies; God’s true humanity will be raised from the dead
Death is inevitable and is the end; no one comes back from the dead (cf. Homer)	Death is the enemy of God’s good creation; it will be overthrown in a fresh new creation
Caring for the poor is not important since the body is not important	Caring for the poor is important because people’s bodies are important
Caring for other people-groups is irrelevant (elite vs. barbarian)	Caring for other people-groups is fundamental (universal concern)
Sexuality – where does it come from? Who knows?	Humans were created into marriage: monogamous, heterosexual, loving and with no pre-marital sex, adultery, desertion, or divorce
Have sex with anyone since the body is not important (e.g. Greek Epicureans)	Sexual ethics are important because Jesus is restoring us to the Genesis creation order

The Greek view says that the immortal soul, which is good, wants to escape the physical body, which is bad. So the Greeks expected and hoped for ‘disembodiment,’ the separation of the soul from the body. When would that happen? At death. Death is inevitable and is the end of the terrible union of soul and body; Homer said that no one comes back from the dead. That is why Achilles believed that the only way to gain immortality on earth is to

become famous, to have your name remembered. The important thing to note here is that story leads to action. If our souls just want to leave our bodies, then why care for the poor? Other people's bodies just aren't that important. And if your body isn't important, then why not have sex with whoever you wanted? The Epicureans believed that.

Ironically, the Greeks were the first civilization to have developed ideas about democracy and the first civilization to use mass slavery of foreigners. According to Yale historian David Bryon Davis and Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson, certain Athenian men were able to lounge around in the gymnasium and on rooftops philosophizing about democracy because they made slaves do all their work for them. Spartans, meanwhile, used the helots, that class of people who did their farming for them. That's the ironic legacy of the West: freedom for some built on the slavery of others. For if others people's bodies don't matter that much, neither does the way you treat them.

But into this swirling mess of Mediterranean injustice came another story. A variation of Judaism sprang up from Israel and confronted the Greco-Roman world with a very different story. It was Christianity. The Christian story draws on Genesis 1 – 11 to say that we were created good, both body and soul. It was good to be physical. It was good for the soul to be in the body. The problem is that human sin messed things up, and we have sin in our souls and disease and decay in our bodies. But the answer to that is not disembodiment but resurrection. They wanted to come back into renewed, immortal bodies, permanently. The hope was not to be weightless souls floating around in the clouds. Rather, the hope was to have both feet physically on the ground, and more solid than before. This is where we get the expressions, 'She is a person of substance,' or, 'He's heavy.' The more good you are, the more solid you are. After all, if God created the world good, and human bodies good, then the problem is decay, death, and sin. God will deal with those things, but He will renew us. And Jesus' bodily resurrection affirms the fact that soul and body will be reunited when the rest of Jesus' people are bodily resurrected.

What were the ethical implications of the Christian story? Christians wanted to care for the poor because people's bodies mattered. That's why the early Christians rescued and adopted baby girls that were left on Roman doorsteps to die. They established hospitals in peoples' homes. They resigned from warfare positions in the Roman army because they wanted to love their enemies, not kill them. They were emancipators and then abolitionists; Constantine made kidnapping and enslaving children punishable by the death penalty in 315 AD; and Christian rulers and churches eventually abolished the slave trade and slavery in France (late 600's AD), Hungary (1000 AD), England (1102 AD), Iceland (1117 AD), Ireland (1171 AD), the city of Bologna (1256 AD), Norway (mid 1200's AD), Sweden (1335 AD). They also had very high sexual standards. They believed in the restoration of marriage as it was in God's original design: monogamous, with no multiple wives for political purposes of advancing the family through diplomatic marriages, heterosexual, loving, with no adultery and very little divorce. Suddenly men couldn't divorce their wives on a whim. They had to love and be faithful to one wife each. So the early Christians lived lives of purity and justice. The saying that Christian men were spiritually mentored into was, 'We share all things but our wives.' It was a strong check on the power of men. Thus, sexual ethics and pro-active, responsibility-centered social justice (as opposed to the negative right to not be interfered with) go together, absolutely. If you have one, you have the other. If you don't have one, you don't have the other. There is enormous consistency here based on the Christian theology of the physical body affirmed and undergirded by Jesus' bodily resurrection.

Christian Sexual Ethics in 1 Corinthians

Ethically, this creation-to-resurrection framework is explicitly present in 1 Corinthians 5 – 7, as sexual relationships relate doubly to our individual bodies and to the corporate body of Christ. Paul is certainly thinking about the creation order because he quotes from Genesis 2:24 in 1 Corinthians 6:16: 'For He says "The two shall become one flesh."' Like Jesus in Matthew 19 before him, Paul ascribes authorship of that statement to God Himself, not simply to Moses. Throughout this section, he corrects the places where the Corinthians had gone wrong against the creation order and God's original vision for marriage from Genesis 1 and 2. First, he condemns the sexual relationship between a man and his stepmother (5:1 – 13); this violates the creation order of marriage even though the man and his stepmother did not share a blood relationship. Next, he uses the problem of believers suing each other in court as an example of how sin, illustrating at a distance the issue of sexual sin, disrupts the life of the corporate body and its mission to the world (6:1 – 8). Then, Paul presents a 'vice list' which focuses on sins of the body or sins against someone else's body (6:9 – 10), saying that 'neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor *malakoi*, nor *arsenokoitai*, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.' I will consider the contested Greek words below. The one who worships idols bows his body inappropriately before an idol and performs a denigrating service to it; the one who commits sexual sin uses his own body and another's inappropriately; drunkards inappropriately take substances into their bodies; the greedy and the swindlers

violate the realms of other people's bodies; etc. Then, as he dismantles the popular Greek wisdom of how to handle the body, since the Greeks said 'food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food' ergo our sexual organs are similarly and simply 'meant to be used' (6:12 – 14), Paul brings to bear the fact of Jesus' bodily resurrection and, through him, God is revealing a new order of physical bodies which will be different from our current physical bodies, but somehow but still historically connected to them like a full grown oak tree is connected to its previous acorn form. He brings this up to urge the Christians not to unite themselves with prostitutes because that produces a one-flesh union that seems to have future ramifications as well as present ones (6:15 – 18). This one-flesh union is rooted in the creation order, but it has hidden implications for us in the resurrection order. In that sense, sexual sin is a sin against one's own body, in addition to being a sin against someone else's body as well. Then Paul states the guiding conviction of his theology of the body: our bodies were meant to house the Spirit of God (6:19 – 20).

Coming to the contested passage, then: When Matt reads the word '*arsenokoitai*' in 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 11 and 1 Timothy 1:10, he rightly states that this word was rare in Greek literature, and Paul was in fact the first to use it in history as far as we know, here in 1 Corinthians. He gives a fair caution that the meaning of compound words is not necessarily derived from the two words used to construct them, citing as examples the words *understand*, *butterfly*, and *honeymoon*. So the words *arsen* (male) and *koitai* (bed, with a sexual connotation) may or may not mean 'to lie in bed with a male' just straightaway. He suggests that the nature of the 'vice lists' here and elsewhere indicate that economic-sexploitation is in view, like prostitution, not loving and committed same-sex relationships. He believes that the other 'vice lists' are primarily economic in nature. All of which are good points to bring up and consider.

However, Matt does not mention that the Greek Septuagint translation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is translated as follows: 'Whoever lies with a man as with a woman [*meta arsenos koiten gynaikos*], they have both done an abomination.' Duke Professor of New Testament Richard B. Hays, following Robin Scroggs, says, 'This is almost certainly the idiom from which the noun *arsenokoitai* was coined.' (Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p.382) Paul appears to have taken the verb form *arsenos koiten* into its noun form *arsenokoitai*. Now the absence of the word *arsenokoitai* in every other place in the extant Greek literature up until that point makes a very different case and paints a very different picture: Paul was quite familiar with the Greek Septuagint translation of Leviticus; he was deeply committed to being a Jewish creational theologian in his own right as a Pharisee; he was now living under the teaching of Jesus, the consummate Jewish creational theologian, including of course Jesus' own teaching on marriage; and he had no other reason to put these two words *arsenos* and *koiten* together as a single noun except that the Greek Septuagint already did in verb form. In his exegesis, Matt does not treat this question or consider its significance. Given that Paul makes a compound word *arsenokoitai* from the Greek Septuagint wording of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, which were unambiguous blanket prohibitions on same-sex intercourse, we can in fact say that the male same-sex prohibition verses *are* cited in the New Testament. Not directly in Romans, but in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. Given that Paul was also very much a Jewish creational theologian in the same mold as Jesus and deeply devoted to what Jesus taught as far as new creation ethics, we can further understand why he would say this.

Furthermore, Paul's 'vice list' in 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 10 does not have economics in view, but the *human body*. He refers to sins against one's own body and/or other people's bodies: 'neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor *malakoi*, nor *arsenokoitai*, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers...' We would be hard pressed to say that idolatry, fornication, adultery, drunkenness, and reviling – which constitute 50% of the items on this list – are economic problems.

The 'vice list' in 1 Timothy 1:10 includes examples of violations of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1 – 17), because Paul's purpose in 1 Timothy is to help his apprentice Timothy teach and preach from the Old Testament appropriately. Notice this comparison:

¹ Tim.1:8 But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious (generally against God's authority in principle), for the ungodly and sinners (violations of the 1st and 2nd commandments to worship God and not idols), for the unholy and profane (violations of the 3rd and 4th commandments about the Lord's name and the sabbath), for those who kill their fathers or mothers (violation of the 5th commandment to honor one's parents), for murderers (violation of the 6th commandment against murder) ¹⁰ and immoral men and homosexuals (violations of the 7th commandment against adultery and other sexual sins) and kidnappers (violations of the 8th commandment against stealing) and liars and perjurers (violations of the 9th

commandment against bearing false witness), and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching (an implicit reference to coveting, prohibited by the 10th commandment? – notice that Paul returns to coveting in some depth at the end of 1 Timothy, in 6:1 – 19)'

Hence, I cannot agree with Matt when he says that the 'vice list' in 1 Timothy 1 is about economic sins. The clear intention of Paul running throughout his first letter to Timothy is the appropriate use of the Old Testament in Christian teaching. He therefore gives a systematic list of sins to illustrate the Ten Commandments. This particular usage of *arsenokoitai* is paired with 'immoral men' to illustrate and refer to violations of the 7th commandment, against adultery and, implicitly, sexual sins of all kinds. Whatever else Paul is doing in 1 Timothy, he is affirming that there is some basic continuity between the Law of Sinai and the teaching of Jesus as far as the ethical shape of relationships to be lived out by God's people. Christian ethics do not stop here, which is the probable meaning of the phrase, the 'law is not made for a righteous person.' The teaching of Jesus goes deeper and reaches farther than this for those who are his followers. But ethical norms seem to have a general beginning point here to point out how certain heart attitudes and behaviors are against God and His creation order.

I will mention some technical points. Various scholars have suggested that the meaning of *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* should be understood in a more limited way than same-sex relations generally. One pro-gay scholar, Robin Scroggs, limits the meaning of these terms to refer to the older/active and younger/passive roles in pederasty. His main source on that is the Alexandrian Jewish commentator Philo, who voices his disapproval of man-boy pederasty by citing Leviticus 18:33 and 20:13. However, two other scholars, Daniel Boyarin and Saul Olyan, who also happen to be pro-gay theologically, take other Jewish commentators on Leviticus 18:33 and 20:13 as speaking against anal sex by all male couples without respect to age. But what permits Scroggs to take Philo as the sole Jewish authority when limiting those verses to pederasts? I am not sure how Scroggs can know Philo's full intent or why he privileges Philo's literary output above all other Jewish commentators on this point. Boyarin's and Olyan's data show that Scroggs is arbitrary when he simply enlists Philo as the authoritative Jewish commentator on the subject.

Also, Scroggs does not adequately explain why Paul condemns lesbian coupling in the same language with which he presumably condemns male pederasty in Romans 1, if that is indeed what he was talking about there. Sappho and the other examples of Greco-Roman lesbianism that we know of were not pederastic. If, in Romans 1, Paul was really writing against male pederasty in particular but lesbian coupling en toto, that would be remarkably uneven.

Finally, when I examine what Scroggs said about limiting the *arsenokoites* to being the active adult partner, and the *malakos* as the younger boy probably held against his better judgment, surely against his will at the outset, and sometimes against his will in an ongoing way, I'm left with more questions. Is this a good explanation for why Paul lists *malakos* in a 'vice list' of this sort? Is Paul really holding these young boys responsible for something they were probably not morally responsible for? That interpretation poses its own, rather significant, difficulties.

The reason why Richard B. Hays and others reject Scroggs' limitation of Leviticus 18 and 20 to pederasty is because the historical-cultural context of Leviticus does not support limiting *meta arsenos koiten gynaikos* that way (since Canaanites practiced same-sex intercourse both at home and in their temples), nor does the theological context of Leviticus support it (since it takes the Genesis creation order as its frame), nor does the historical-cultural context of Paul's ministry support limiting *arsenokoitai* that way (since gay sex was not merely pederastic), nor does the theological context of Paul's ministry support that (since he too took the Genesis creation order as normative, following Jesus). So, I would agree with the traditional interpretation of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* as referring to the passive and active partners in gay male sex. Paul appears to be saying that the Corinthians Christians have left certain behaviors and mentalities that were characteristic of Greek culture, with its lower view of the body, and have been shaped, and continue to be shaped, by a distinctly Jewish and Christian view of the body, which was quite high. This is all undergirded by the connection between the creation order and the resurrection of Jesus which honors that creation order.

From this central conviction, Paul works out the ramifications of marriage, singleness, and a smattering of other very practical questions in 1 Corinthians 7. In connection with this passage, Matt asks whether 'the gift of celibacy' can be imposed on a whole group of people, namely those who have same-sex attraction if they are committed to upholding the historic, orthodox position. Is that Paul's intention? He is right to ask whether any such thing can be found in Paul, especially in the very chapter where he speaks of celibacy as a 'gift' (7:7). Paul is not answering that particular question in this passage. Although, I will say again, it is important to note that Jesus himself articulated

that position in Matthew 19:1 – 12. Nevertheless, what Paul says here has bearing on the question of celibacy, albeit one step removed. In this context, Paul is confronting a cultural attitude that threatened God's creation order: the Greek denigration of the body, and of women and marriage in particular as one of the downstream implications of that earlier view. The Greek language does not have quotation marks to tell us when Paul is quoting a view that he rebukes. Suffice to say, I read the opening lines of chapter 7 as follows: 'Now concerning the things about which you wrote, 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.' The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband...' (7:1 – 3). Paul stresses that 'immorality' is not the reason for marriage as an institution, as if God made marriage merely as a concession to human sexual urges, which some (though not all) Greeks, like the Stoics, took to be negative and 'dirty.' Rather, Paul sees marriage as entailing responsibilities in love between husband and wife, and that's why he uses the language of 'duty' in 7:3. 'Duty' in Paul's mind is a positive responsibility to fulfill an honorable role, and a husband and wife have duties one to another to respect each other's sexual desires, not to denigrate them or see them, within their marriage, as dirty and tainted. This again points back to Paul's very different understanding of our bodies as originally good from God's creation order, and marital sexual expression as good from that same order. The difference between Paul as a Jewish creational theologian and the Greek denigration of the body, with its chaotic variety of outcomes, could not be more different here.

Then, Paul gives balanced advice about whether his Christian readers should get married or not. Significantly, he corrects the Corinthians' denigration of marriage by referring to husband and wife specifically: 'But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.' (1 Cor.7:2 – 3). Paul takes it for granted that Christian marriage is opposite-gendered. If he did not actually believe that, here was an opportunity for him to affirm loving and committed same-sex marriage as a possibility, and encourage Christians to pursue that as a viable option. But he did not do so, and the fact that he did not is quite significant on its own right. He was clearly a Jewish Christian theologian consciously working, like Jesus did, out of a creational paradigm uniting Genesis 1 and 2, where the 'two' – i.e. 'male and female' persons – 'shall become one flesh.'

But at the same time, while honoring the body and the creation order, Paul wants 'to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord' (7:35) in terms of discretionary time and energy to pursue the mission given by Jesus to his church; this is the subject to which he turns in 1 Corinthians 8 – 10 when he talks about challenging his own body and his own bodily desires for the sake of Christ's mission and Christ's love for others. His central conviction that the Spirit indwells each Christian's body means that commitments that Christians make, even to other Christians, and even in marriage, are not ultimate. We must think carefully and, at times, sit loose to any relationship that involves us ceding the use of our bodies to any other authority than Jesus himself. For the Spirit of God has primary ownership of our bodies, as stated in 6:19 – 20, and Paul is demonstrating how a Christian works out that core conviction while we live in the midst of other human relationships and commitments. These commitments need to be refined, and in some cases renegotiated, limited, and avoided. Even the marriage of male and female must not become all-consuming, and Paul says, 'But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none...' (7:29), not in the sense that the spouses can cheat on each other as if their marriage did not exist, but as a limit to the narcissism that can develop within a married couple. Now that Christ's love and mission towards the world is a factor, Christian marriage itself must be qualified and limited. Our desires – sexual and otherwise – must be qualified and limited in light of the dawning of Jesus' resurrection and all its implications: 'and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away' (7:30 – 31). Also, Paul discouraged upward mobility through self-enslavement, since some forms of self-enslavement had that potential and appeal: 'do not become slaves of men' (7:23). He asked Christians to weigh other priorities besides the desire to be married, asking people to consider singleness. And in this context, he called celibacy a 'gift' (7:7), not in the same sense as the supernatural charisms we call 'spiritual gifts,' but the situational 'gift' of life station.

The relevance of this whole discussion about singleness is that Paul does not regard marriage and sexual expression as a 'right' in the sense we feel about it today. He sees them, within the creation order in which God holds it and extends it to us in trust, as good. Paul is no Greek Gnostic. On that basis, it seems that Jesus and Paul would have refused other people the 'right' to marriage as well: those who committed adultery in a previous marriage, for example. But he also sees the resurrection of Jesus, and our future resurrection, and the mission to the world that exists in between these two points in time, as the higher good to which we are also called. That calling has

implications for our use of our bodies. What is very challenging to us today is how willing Paul is to challenge his own body for the sake of God's larger call. What he eats or not (8:1 – 13), whether he marries a believing wife or not (9:5), whether he receives financial support for his bodily needs or not (9:6 – 15) are all questions he submits to Christ. Even the things of which he is able to avail himself based on his vocation as an apostle, by the ordinance of Jesus, he does not claim, for there is a larger claim upon him, and upon his body. His summary statement is: 'Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave...' (9:25 – 27). If Paul thought that way about desires that operated properly within God's creation order, he was all the more challenging about desires that went outside it. Hence when he gives his vice-list in 6:9 – 10, he is naming behaviors that Christians must renounce and desires that they must resist in favor of cultivating our desire for Jesus and his healing of us.

Implications of This Study: We Are Human *Becomings*, Not Just Human *Beings*

Such a strong conviction needs further explanation, I think. Why did Paul think this way? This leads me to Paul's Christ-centered epistemology, not just ethics, regarding human nature and the human body, which he had based on his personal access to the resurrected Jesus; that encounter constituted him to be an apostle (1 Cor.9:1). In light of Jesus' resurrected body, Paul understands that our own human bodies have not fully matured, in a sense. Not only is the human body infected with the disease of sin, thus corrupting our original genetic inheritance in various ways, it has not undergone the same profound transformation that Jesus' own body went through in his resurrection, which was intended for all of us from the creation. Paul sees that there is a connection between deeds done in the body now and the quality of our body in the eternal future. This might be illustrated by the fact that Jesus' hands and feet and side had holes in them or scars on them. Somehow, there is a line of continuity between what we do in our bodies now, in this life which has been given to us by God in trust and partnership, and the bodies which He will give to us when He renews all things. Acts of love, faith, and self-sacrifice, it seems, however large or small, will somehow be physically reflected upon and within our bodies. When we appear in glory, and when Jesus transfigures the accidents of our genetics, the varied external circumstances of our lives, and the devastation of sin within us and around us, then what he will reveal in our bodies will be our desire for him which we have cultivated, our trust of him, and our acts of love and self-sacrifice done in partnership with him, whatever that meant for each of us, in our own particular ways. The way we lived our lives apart from Jesus will also be somehow manifested, perhaps by the absence of the marks of love for Jesus. This is probably why he warns the Corinthians that sexual sins in defiance of the creation order are sins committed against one's own body (1 Cor.6:15 – 18): not just my body today and in this lifetime, but my body as it will exist in its resurrected state. There is some kind of relationship between the two. Something about our inward choices for or against Jesus will be manifested by our physical, resurrected body. The name of Jesus written on our hearts will be manifested by the name of Jesus written on our foreheads. What is hidden will be revealed. What was done privately within will be made public without.

This is another reason why I cannot agree with Matt in taking the word 'nature' individualistically or from the current state of our bodies and human nature. Whatever knowledge we gain about the human body and human nature using whatever science we have at our disposal today cannot serve as norm and a standard. Even the things that we think of as permanent and unchanging about ourselves, like one's sexual orientation for those who experience it that way, will be shown to be only the temporary context for showing forth what is deeper, more true, and more real about us. All the scientific knowledge that we can accumulate in the present is not determinative for Christian ethics, or for a Christian understanding of ourselves. We simply cannot conclude, using scientific methods, that our bodies have a destiny far beyond what we experience in the here and now. That deduction lies beyond the reach of the physical sciences. However, for Paul, and for all the apostolic writers, real knowledge about human nature and human desire comes from the eschatological *future*, not merely the present, and certainly not without regard for the creation order. That future is exemplified and embodied in the person of Jesus, whose body has already undergone that transformation because of his faithfulness on our behalf, and now is a concrete historical data point suitable for public examination based on historical and theological grounds. 'Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is' (1 Jn.3:2). 'For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory' (Col.3:3 – 4). 'The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly' (1 Cor.15:47 – 49).

Only when we look outside ourselves, namely in the creation order prior to the fall, and in the resurrection which will transfigure that creation order with fresh glory, will we be at all able to hold fast to 'what should be' and not relapse into simply 'what is.' This knowledge about ourselves and our humanity continues to come from the irruption of God's saving activity in history in the person of Jesus and culminating in his bodily resurrection. Christian knowledge is real, and really knowable, because the resurrected Jesus is attested by both history and Scripture, and knowable in personal encounter through the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence, this knowledge about our humanity is historical, literary, metaphysical, physical, personal, and objective. So the Christian stands by conviction upon a platform of legitimate knowledge: Our bodies are neither what they should have been, nor what they will be, for they will come to us in the future from God through Christ by the Spirit. And the ramifications of our choices are not fully understood in the present either, because that, too, will be revealed in the future.

Many say that it is supremely unkind and a disservice to people who are gay to ask them to conform, by whatever combination of personal and spiritual strength they find, to a creation order and resurrection hope that denies them the expression of their desired sexuality. I can affirm that it is indeed a tall order, especially for late teens and young adults. But I have two objections to the accusation of unkindness. (1) First, that statement also tends to assume that the intensity of our sexual desires stays the same and that other desires cannot become more weighty and significant to us than our sexual ones. In Japan, for example, a growing proportion of the population said that they had 'no interest' in or even 'despised' sex (interestingly, 36% of male respondents and 59% of female respondents aged 16 to 19, reports the Japan Family Planning Association). Whatever the underlying reasons are for that, and while I suspect it's going to be far more difficult in the U.S., since our culture is hyper-sexualized (although some aspects of Japanese culture are, too, so that remains a mystery to me), still I wonder if something remains to be learned. (2) My second objection to this assertion is that one must also assume that the relationship between the creation order and the resurrection order, and above all Jesus, who mediates both to us, is not the way that the biblical writers understood it. In other words, we are *human becomings*, not just *human beings*. Part of the pastoral response, therefore, must include the fact that we are all still in the process of becoming. There are choices that we make regarding our bodies and desires in the present that will somehow have an impact on our bodies and desires in the future. We have a hard time understanding human experiences that we have not yet gone through, yet we are invited to imagine it nevertheless as we reflect on Jesus' own resurrection. What will our bodies be like on that day Jesus returns? They will be like Jesus' body, but what will that be like? My small children have no idea what it will feel like to inhabit bodies that will one day be bigger and stronger than the ones they inhabit now. But we know that there are things they can do now that will prepare their bodies and minds to be healthy and ready for that day. That is an analogue to our own situation, spiritually, as we peer into the resurrection future which Jesus' people will share with him. And just as my children experience flashes of strength and beauty in the process of maturing from childhood to adulthood, we can experience in our own selves, by the presence of Jesus' Spirit, glimpses of that hope and strength, and yes, even purity, which will one day be fully ours. I am not saying that a person's struggle with same-sex attraction will necessarily go away because of Jesus, if indeed he or she chooses to struggle with it. But I am saying that Jesus, at the renewal of all things, will make that struggle worth it.