

Abandoning the Natural for What is Unnatural

 The Bible and Homosexuality

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Last week we analyzed, as a part of our series on *The Bible and Homosexuality*, how the OT Law relates to the NT Christian. The reason we did this was because many affirming arguments for SSR claim that the OT ethics of the Law were transformed by the gospel of Christ and so no longer have any application to the NT Christian. As NT scholar Dr. James Brownson stated it, "The overall agenda established by the book of Leviticus concerning purity was radically transformed by the gospel of Christ. It is simply inadequate, from a Christian perspective, to attempt to build an ethic based on the prohibitions of Leviticus alone."¹ He means that the condemnation in Leviticus of a male having relations with another male as a female doesn't apply to us because the gospel of Christ radically transformed ethics. Dr. Brownson, by the way, has come full circle in his views on this subject. He is part of the Reformed Church in America and has been a professor in their seminaries for over three decades. In 2005 he came out with an article saying, "God's intention for human sexuality is that it find full expression only in the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman. I do not believe 'gay marriage' to be sanctioned by Scripture."² The following year something happened. His son 'came out' as being gay. He then spent several years re-evaluating the Scripture and concluded that he had been wrong. His book, published in 2013, *Bible, Gender and Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* is the most important work for affirming Christians. If I have seen this once I have seen it a hundred times; a seminary professor has a particular view, the view goes challenged by a personal experience, they change their view. I saw it with Dr. Merrill Unger and his view of demonism. Unger held that a genuine Christian could not be indwelt by demons and then his son went crazy and Unger changed his position. I saw it with Jack Deere. Jack Deere held that the sign gifts had ceased and then he went to Germany and had some dark experiences and changed his position. It's always they had an experience and then went back and re-interpreted the Scripture to support their experience. I have stated this openly and I will state it again; you don't let experience be the guide to interpreting Scripture. It's exactly the other way around, Scripture is the guide to interpreting experience.

Anyway, because Brownson's son came out as being gay he spent a number of years re-interpreting the Scripture and his book is the most important to deal with. He is saying that Leviticus doesn't apply because the gospel of Christ radically transformed ethics. What he's saying, though not overtly, is that the God of the OT is

not the God of the NT. He couldn't be because God's ethics come from His character and they never change. What I tried to show last week was that all Scripture is profitable and thus the Law remains an important part of Scripture but now it must be read through its fulfillment in Christ, who has given us the Spirit so that as we walk by the Spirit the righteous requirement of the Law is fulfilled in us. Each law should be studied for the profitability of discovering the underlying principle and through this we learn about our own sin patterns that need to be addressed as well as the holiness of God. Tonight we turn to the NT to see what it says about homosexuality, if anything.

Romans 1:18-2:1: Abandoning the Natural for what is Unnatural

We come to Romans 1. Romans 1 is considered by many to be the most important passage in the discussion. Even SSRA³ Matthew Vines says, "There's no question that Romans 1:26-27 is the most significant biblical passage in this debate."⁴ While I agree that the passage is very significant I would say that its contribution is only within the greater significance of the overarching theme of Scripture. The issue of God and His view of homosexuality is not based on any one passage but on many passages interpreted within the framework of the overarching theme of Scripture of one man and one woman in a committed lifetime relationship. Never once is any homosexual relationship viewed positively in Scripture, whether it is consensual (Lev 18 and 20) or forced (Gen 19:5; Judg 19:22; Jude 7). The Scriptures are 100% opposed to it. In order to get around this 100% negative stance SSRA must disconnect every passage from the issue and change the overarching theme of Scripture.

We are not surprised then that in Romans 1 the argument is that when rightly interpreted it does not relate to modern, committed, loving SSR. The two basic arguments are, first, that the sin of Romans 1 is excessive lust, not a committed, loving SSR. Popular writer and SSRA Matthew Vines says, "Paul wasn't condemning the expression of a same-sex orientation as opposed to the expression of an opposite-sex orientation. He was condemning *excess* as opposed to *moderation*."⁵ Look at this statement. Notice the terms "same-sex orientation" and "opposite-sex orientation." Those are loaded terms that mean that one's sexual orientation is an immutable characteristic; that is, it is not a choice but a consequence of genetic, hormonal and environmental influences (i.e. the person is a victim of these influences and had no choices that are reflected in orientation).⁶ If one is oriented in a same-sex or opposite-sex way then it can't be sinful to express that orientation. God must have made them this way. All that is sinful is an *excessive* expression of one's sexual orientation. As long as the expression is kept in *moderation* it is not sinful. NT scholar and SSRA James Brownson concurs when he says, it is not sinful "...when these contemporary relationships are not lustful or dishonoring to one's partner, are marked positively by moderated and disciplined desire, and when intimacy in these relationships contributes to the establishment of lifelong bonds of kinship, care, and mutual concern."⁷ So the first argument from SSRA on how Romans 1 does not relate to modern, committed, loving SSR is that Paul is condemning excessive passion for those who are same-sex oriented as well as those who are opposite-sex oriented. The second argument that disconnects Romans 1 from having any relevance to today's loving, committed SSR is that Paul is condemning

breaking a 1st century cultural norm that is no longer the cultural norm today. That is to say, the culture has changed and so Romans 1 is irrelevant to our culture. Referring to Romans 1:26-27, Vines says, "...the terms *natural* and *unnatural*... were boundary markers between what did and did not conform to customary gender roles in a patriarchal context."⁸ Since the culture then was patriarchal and men were not supposed to take the passive role of a woman then Paul is rejecting it in that culture. Now that the culture has shifted to an egalitarian culture then we no longer should reject loving, committed SSR since they are consistent with our culture. In the same vein Brownson writes, "Such same-sex intimate relationships were never considered by the biblical writers."⁹ In other words, the kind of SSR that we are seeing today simply are simply not addressed by the Bible. In his view there is a gap between what the biblical text addresses and what the modern church is addressing. He then strongly encourages the church to realize how important it is that we recognize this gap and use discernment in this discussion, even though he admits that we do so without much Scriptural guidance. The ultimate controls become one's experience of being sexually oriented and not being able to change that orientation and so we must interpret the Bible as supportive of committed, loving, consensual SSR.

Summing up their arguments, the sin of Romans 1 is excess lust and not conforming to customary gender roles in a bygone culture. Therefore Romans 1 does not directly relate to modern, loving, committed and disciplined SSR.

What is Paul teaching in Romans 1? The main verses under consideration are 1:24-27 but they fall inside a greater context. In Romans 1:18-3:21 Paul is teaching that the whole world is condemned. Romans 1:18-32 shows that pagan Gentiles are condemned because they know God through creation and yet they suppress this truth in unrighteousness. Romans 2:1-13 shows that moral Gentiles are condemned because they know God through conscience and yet violate their conscience. Romans 2:14-3:8 shows that Jews are condemned because they know God through the Law and yet they violate the Law. Romans 3:9-20 concludes by showing that all men, Jew and Gentile, are under sin and therefore justly condemned by God.

The verses of particular interest are found in Romans 1:18-32 where Paul is teaching that pagan Gentiles are condemned because they know God through creation and yet suppress this truth in unrighteousness. In Romans 1:18 Paul says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven..." The word "wrath" means "strong indignation directed at wrongdoing with a focus on retribution." This wrath is "of God" meaning it is sourced in Him. The verb "revealed" is in the present tense and means that the wrath of God is presently being revealed. This revelation of His strong indignation is coming from "heaven." We are to know then that what follows is a revelation on earth of God's strong displeasure in heaven. What God is strongly displeased with in verse 18 is "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." "Ungodliness" refers to pagan religion and "unrighteousness" refers to pagan behavior which accompanies pagan religion. These men "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." The participle "suppress" means "holding down." What they are holding down is "the truth." They know the truth but they are holding it down so that it is not on the forefront of their conscience. The holding down of truth is the

wickedness that has evoked God's strong indignation. It is not something unethical that they have done that has evoked God's wrath but something epistemological that they have done, something in their mind, suppressing the truth.

In Romans 1:19 Paul depicts what truth in particular they are suppressing. It is specific knowledge about God. "Because that which is known about God is evident within them." This means that they do not have to go anywhere to find knowledge about God. It is knowledge that is known immediately within them. It is therefore inescapable knowledge. Why? Paul says, "for God made it evident to them." God placed this knowledge within them so that all men know Him from the least to the greatest. And yet, verse 18 told us that they hold down this knowledge and that this is terribly wicked and that because of it God is pouring out His wrath such that they are involved in pagan religion and pagan behavior.

In Romans 1:20 Paul explains that all men in the history of the world have known God immediately through creation and this is why they have no excuse for not worshipping Him. "For since the creation of the world" sets the time marker at the beginning of time so that no one is excluded. "His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen." Even though invisible all men clearly see His invisible attributes. By "eternal power and divine nature" Paul means to say that they clearly see the one true God and not merely a general concept of a supreme being. How do they clearly see His invisible attributes? "Being understood through what has been made." The Craftsman can be clearly observed through His craftsmanship, and in particular they see that He is immensely powerful and divine. The result or purpose of such knowledge is stated "so that they are without excuse." The created world including ourselves and all that is outside of ourselves gives immediate knowledge of God. This knowledge is not mediated by human reason or interpretation of evidence but is immediate. As verse 19 said, God "made it known to us" so that there is no excuse. The word "without excuse" is a legal word that means no defense in a court of law.

In Romans 1:21 Paul explains why there is no excuse. "Because even though they knew God" shows that they came to know Him definitely, but "they did not honor Him as God or give thanks" when they came to know Him definitely. It was their responsibility and remains the responsibility of all men. That is to say that they did not want Him in their knowledge and so they suppressed the truth about Him by not giving Him the "honor" due Him for His immense power and divinity manifested through all creation "or" the "thanks" due Him for His daily sustenance of them. As a consequence two things took place. First, "but they became futile in their speculations." The verb "became futile" is passive and means "they were rendered futile" in their speculations. "Speculations" is the word for "thinking patterns" or worldview. Because they knew God and did not honor Him or give thanks to Him they were rendered futile in their thinking patterns or worldview. Second, "...their foolish heart was darkened." The "heart" refers to the "entire inner life of man, especially his thinking." Their "heart" is considered "foolish" because they knew God and did not honor Him or give thanks to Him. "Darkened" is in the passive and means clarity of understanding in the inner life was lost. Because of the two passives, "became

futile" and "darkened" we must conclude from the later context as Conzelmann concluded, these are "a punishment for the perversion of the knowledge of God."¹⁰ Because they rejected Him in their thinking He rendered their thinking patterns and consequent worldview as futile and without understanding.

In Romans 1:22, "professing to be wise, they became fools." To "profess" means "to claim, to assert." Even though they were futile and without understanding they professed that their thinking patterns and worldview were "wise." But "they became fools" or better, "they had become fools" or "had been made fools."

In Romans 1:23 we see the chief manifestation of this foolishness. "and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." They made an "exchange" of "glory" for "an image," of "the incorruptible God" for "corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." In short, they exchanged the creature for the Creator. What took pre-eminence in their thinking was that the creature rather than the Creator is the integration point for supplying meaning and knowledge. It could not have been stated more clearly than in the title of the book by Reuben Abel, *Man is the Measure*.¹¹ When a man rejects God man becomes the final measure or standard by which all things are judged. However, this is a futile thinking pattern that leads to an equally futile worldview emanating from a mind that lacks understanding.

All of this is epistemological or intellectual until this point. In Romans 1:24 we now find the ethical or behavioral consequences of not honoring or giving thanks to God whom all men know because God made it evident to them both immediately in themselves and in creation. Note that the expression in 1:24 is consequential. "Therefore God gave them over..." Note the same consequential expression in 1:26, "For this reason God gave them over..." And again the same expression in 1:28, "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over..." Three times it is emphasized that God gave them over as a consequence for their suppressing the knowledge of Him which is the most terribly wicked thing to do. In other words, God's present wrath is giving them over to the behaviors Paul discusses. In turn these behaviors will ultimately be subject to God's future wrath. Put still another way, these behaviors are His present wrath.

In Romans 1:24-25 we see God's wrath revealed in giving them over to impurity in heterosexual relations. "Therefore, God gave them over." The verb "gave over" means God actively removed his restraint. He let them go, so to speak, to fulfill their lusts, their self-determination and their self-destruction. God gave them over "in the lusts of their hearts" meaning that these lusts or desires were already in their thoughts as a part of their darkened worldview. He was giving them over to the practice which is characterized as "impurity." "Impurity" means "filthy, dirty, unclean" and is especially used in the NT of "sexual sins." Sex outside of marriage is "unclean" because it is promiscuous. Promiscuity is the propagator of sexually transmitted diseases. They wanted promiscuity and God allows them to have it but not without the consequences. The result stated is "so that their bodies would be dishonored among them." Promiscuous sex dishonors the body which is not designed for sexual promiscuity but for the Lord (cf 1 Cor 6:13). The reason God gave them over to this is re-stated in verse 25

to remind us. The thought is similar to that in verse 23. "For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie..." Technically it says "the lie." The one great "lie" is that man is wise for exalting himself to be the measure of all things. This is embodied in the next phrase, "and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." Worship is non-negotiable. All men worship. No one is neutral. Men worship either the Creator or the creature. But to exchange worship of the Creator for the worship of the creature is not without consequences in the realm of sexual immorality and sexual immorality is not without consequences in terms of well-being and health.

In Romans 1:26-27 we see God's wrath revealed in giving them over to degrading passions in homosexual relations. "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions." The reason being verse 25, the exchange of worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator. The word "passions" refers to "an experience of strong desire."¹² The word "degrading" means "dishonorable, shameful." The Greek construction indicates it should be translated as "passions that are of a dishonorable nature."¹³ The nature of what is dishonorable is then stated clearly; "for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another..." The interpretation of SSRA is that what is dishonorable in patriarchal culture was for a male to be in the passive role or a female to be in the active role. Thus, they would prefer to translate the terms "natural" and "unnatural" as culturally "normal" and "abnormal." By application, Paul would be saying to us that in sexual relations we should conform to the normal gender roles in our culture, whatever they may be. Of course these may change as they have in our lifetime. This is not convincing for several reasons. First, in 1:20 Paul indicated that God's revelation of Himself has been since the beginning of creation. It follows then that if God's revelation of Himself has been the same since the beginning then God's wrath that is revealed has been the same since the beginning. In other words, if there is no change in the revelation of God then there is no change in the revelation of God's wrath. Culture may change but God does not change. Second, the terms "natural" and "unnatural" do not mean culturally "normal" and abnormal. "Natural" means "in accordance with the basic order of things in nature,"¹⁴ that is, in accordance with their order and design. Men and women have a particular design. "Function" means "usage" and "state of intimate involvement with a person, *relations, function*, especially of sexual intercourse."¹⁵ In other words, there is a proper usage of each sex and this is defined by anatomical gender notwithstanding claims to the contrary. In verse 26 the "natural function" of the woman is according to her design for intimate involvement in sexual intercourse with a man. The wrath of God is revealed when women exchange that function for sexual intercourse with another woman contrary to her design. In verse 27 Paul says, "and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another." The word "abandoned" means they "moved away from." What they moved away from was what is natural with a woman which is sexual intercourse. What they moved to was a burning "desire toward one another." The word "burned" means "to have a strong desire for, *be inflamed*." This being "inflamed" was manifested at Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 19, which Jude 7 says spread to other surrounding cities when

they refused virgin women and went after men. It was also manifested in Gebah of the tribe of Benjamin in Judges 19 when the men of the city preferred sexual intercourse with a man over a woman. To be inflamed with lust for another man is also a common way modern homosexual men express their preference for sex with other men. I don't know all of the reasons why the deed is particularly inflaming. I speculate that it is due to a feedback mechanism in the brain that is due to the abnormally high amount of sex among homosexual men, something not common among homosexual women. In fact, some homosexual women practice abstinence. For women it is often communication rather than sex that attracts them into a homosexual relationship. Whereas for men it is sex and lots of it and more often than not with multiple partners throughout life, numbering often in the hundreds and this hormonal feedback mechanism only inflames them more and more in a vicious cycle. As Paul says, "men with men committing indecent acts..." The word "indecent acts" means "shameless deed." It is prefaced by the definite article and means "the shameless deed." That is, something that ought not to be done because it deviates in appearance from the standard, which is sex with a woman. And yet they are shameless, meaning they are not ashamed of it, they flaunt it. This is exactly what is happening today, not only in pagan society but within Christian society. Vines has a section in his book *God and the Gay Christian* where he encourages same-sex Christians to "come out" in order to be free, to have a more peaceful relationship with Christ and to encourage other gay Christians to "come out."¹⁶ Paul concludes verse 27, "and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error." The word "due penalty" means being inflamed toward another man is a consequence of a negative choice. The words "of their error" means "of their wandering." They made a choice to wander away from the God of the Bible and consequently God gave them over to being inflamed toward one another.

Now, what I just suggested, and this is not being said without careful consideration and analysis, nor without grace and compassion, because I think we have to make every effort to preserve unity in the Spirit with those who profess to be Christians. But it seems to me that for a Christian to affirm same-sex relationships is a consequence of rejecting the one true God of the Bible. That is to say, they cannot and do not believe in the same God that we believe in and their homosexual affirmation and behavior is a consequence of rejecting the one true God. What it is they are rejecting, in particular, is the biblical teaching about who God is. The Bible teaches that God is Trinity and there is subordination within the Trinity; there is one God but the Son submits to the Father and the Spirit submits to the Father and the Son. That God is Trinity and there is subordination within the Trinity is the foundation for Marriage as One Flesh and subordination within the one flesh; the two are one flesh and yet the woman submits to her husband. Then the fact that marriage is one flesh and subordination with the one flesh points to the one Church and there is subordination within the Church; there is the Church and Christ is the head of the church and the church submits to Christ. All of these biblical paradigms are destroyed by Christians who affirm homosexuality and practice homosexuality.

They repeatedly reject the idea that within the Trinity there is subordination of role. They repeatedly deny that within Marriage there is subordination of role. They repeatedly deny that within the Church there is

subordination of role. This is all a sign that they have left the one true God in Trinity. Consequently, as Paul said, their minds are darkened and they have endorsed another worldview, the worldview of feminism. The stated goal of feminism is “to eliminate all gender based roles in society, up to and often including roles that are purely biological in nature.”¹⁷ Consequently their stated goal is to look at the text through the lens of the feminist worldview and re-interpret all NT texts in such a way as to eliminate all gender based roles in the church and in marriage. Descriptions of marriage as mere ‘kinship bonds’ avoiding all gender language reveals this much deeper problem. I propose that when one rejects that within God as Trinity there is subordination of role he inevitably ends up rejecting that within marriage there are gender differences and subordination of role. It seems strange to me that one can read a text like Jesus Himself stated in the divorce context of Matt 19:4-6 and not conclude that marriage has always been and will always be between one man and one woman, “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 (GENDER SPECIFIC) SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE (GENDER SPECIFIC), 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.” God does not join two members of the same sex into one flesh. Men may do that but God does not do that. God gives them up to that. But the behavior alone is, according to Romans 1, a revelation of the wrath of God that only stores up for the future wrath of God (Rom 2:5).

And yet that is not all that God has given those who reject Him over to. In Romans 1:28 we see God’s wrath revealed in giving them over to a depraved mind. “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer.” The word “acknowledge” means “to truly know.” They did not see fit to know God truly any more. They did know Him truly but they did not want that knowledge anymore and so they made an exchange. So “God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.” He then lists 21 things that are not proper. They are visible revelations of God’s wrath in a society, “being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips,³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,³¹ without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;” All these things are abundant in our culture today. They are results of rejecting the one true God and consequently a revelation of His wrath. God’s present wrath is the giving of people over to these behaviors because they did not want to truly know the one true God, they did not want Him in their knowledge. And these are not the worst of it, because in verse 32 we read the absolute end of a society. When you reach verse 32 it’s over. That society has come to the end. “and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.” When a society says that what is wrong is right that society has come to the end. The majority of the citizens in this country may not think that it is right but when the Supreme Court of the United States of America says that homosexuality is right it’s saying a lot. I think it’s safe to say that our society has come to an end. We only remain because of the mercy of God. Interpreted under the principle of Sodom and Gomorrah, as long as there are some righteous among our nation, our nation will remain. But when the

righteous are removed by the rapture then the future wrath of God will fall upon the earth in the Tribulation. I think until that time we are to be lights in the darkness and refuse to be like Lot who, though he was a believer, struggled to leave his city and its sinful pleasures. We are in a fix friends and I do not see America turning back.

What we can do, among our Christian brethren, until we are raptured, is proclaim to them the one true God as Trinity with subordination of role within the Trinity. Jesus said, Paul said in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one." By that He meant that God as Trinity is one in essence. Paul said in 1 Cor 11:3, "God is the head of Christ." This means that within the Trinity the Son is subordinate to the Father. In the same verse Paul continued and applied this to marriage saying, "and Christ is the head of every man and the man is the head of the woman." This means that marriage is one flesh and there is subordination within the one flesh, the woman is subordinate to the man. The subordination of role has never and never will imply inferiority of essence. It is a necessary feature of God and marriage. That is why any deviation from who God is in Trinity with subordination will necessarily result in the downward cascade of Romans 1 which begins with the darkening of the mind, acquisition of a false worldview that seeks to destroy gender distinctions and it's outworking in God giving them over to homosexual affirmation and practice. It is not biblical. It is not genetically, culturally and environmentally determined. It is not an immutable orientation. It is a revelation of the wrath of God and it is very telling when the Supreme Court proclaims that wrong is right.

¹ James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, p 273.

² Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, p 168.

³ SSRA = Same-Sex Relationship Advocate

⁴ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, p 96.

⁵ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, p 105.

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_orientation

⁷ James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, p 277.

⁸ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, p 109.

⁹ James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, p 277.

¹⁰ Hans Conzelmann cited by Renald Showers, "Humanity's Rejection of God's Moral Absolutes," *Israel My Glory* (July/August 2015), p 39.

¹¹ Reuben Abel, *Man is the Measure*, The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976.

¹² BDAG.

¹³ "passions" is the accusative direct object and "degrading" is the genitive of nature.

¹⁴ BDAG.

¹⁵ BDAG.

¹⁶ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, p 176.

¹⁷ Donald Campbell, *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p 335.