

Homosexuality Revisited in Light of the Current Climate¹

by Calvin Smith

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Last December, an elderly Christian couple complained to Wyre Borough Council for promoting gay awareness by distributing gay lifestyle magazines in staff areas. In their letter, they wrote: -

If gay people made the decision not to think gay, they would not act gay... Whatever they are giving their attention to will eventually mould them into its image.

They suggested the Council was "pandering" to minorities and asked for Christian literature to be displayed also. The Council reported the matter to the police, who interviewed the couple. Although no further action was taken, a police spokesman told the press that "words of suitable advice were given", adding: -

Hate crime is a very serious matter and all allegations must be investigated thoroughly.²

This is not an isolated incident. During a debate on BBC Radio *Five Live* last year, the author and broadcaster Lynette Burrows suggested homosexuals should not be allowed to adopt, arguing that placing a small boy in the care of two *homosexual* men was as

¹ Conference paper originally presented to the Tyndale Fellowship (Triennial Conference, 3-6 July 2006, Regents Park Conference Centre, Nantwich, England) on 5 July 2006, and entitled *A Re-examination of the Biblical View of Homosexuality in Light of the Current Climate*.

² BBC News website, 23 December 2005.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/lancashire/4555406.stm.

much a risk as placing a young girl with two *heterosexual* men. A listener complained and Mrs Burrows was interviewed by the police.

She later stated: -

*They were leaning on me, letting me know that the police had an interest in my views. I think it is sinister and completely unacceptable.*³

Earlier this year, the Muslim leader Sir Iqbal Sacranie was investigated by police after saying homosexuality was “harmful”, both medically and morally, during a radio debate.⁴ Leaving aside the irony that Sacranie himself seeks hate law protection for Islam, nevertheless it is disturbing that simply expressing one’s views on homosexuality (even during a political debate) can lead to police investigation.

Some police action has bordered on the hysterical. Earlier this year, an Oxford student out celebrating after graduating (and perhaps a little drunk), approached a mounted police officer and asked if his horse was ‘gay’. Within minutes, several police cars arrived, the student was arrested, kept overnight in a cell, and issued a fixed penalty.⁵

This issue is not going to go away. Consider, for example, the Sexual Orientation (Provision of Goods and Services) Regulations back from public consultation. Conceivably, it could criminalise Christian retreat centres or churches refusing to rent their facilities

³ Daily Telegraph (online edition), 10 December 2005. URL: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/12/10/ngay10.xml>

⁴ Daily Telegraph (online edition), 12 January 2006. URL: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/01/12/nsacr12.xml>.

⁵ Daily Telegraph (online edition), 12 June 2005 (URL: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/06/12/nhorse12.xml>).

to gay and lesbian groups, or churches that refused to bless same-sex partnerships.⁶

Quite clearly, the past 30-40 years have witnessed a massive shift in perceptions of homosexuality. For some police forces hate crimes such as homophobia and racism now take precedence over other crimes,⁷ and we have reached a stage where simply to express views on homosexuality can easily be misconstrued and lead to police investigation.

In short, Evangelicals can no longer ignore the political ramifications of holding a traditional view of homosexuality. Not only will this issue not go away, a collision with the authorities appears inevitable. The situation is exacerbated by some denominations and movements who take a pro-homosexual stance, including some Evangelicals, which further isolates traditionalist.

So why are the majority of Evangelicals so out of tune with society and others within Christendom? Could we possibly have it badly wrong, appealing to an interpretation of Scripture that is simplistic and fundamentally flawed? Also, in light of the current political climate, how do we respond to homosexuality, both ethically or pastorally?

These questions originally led me to offer this paper. I must state from the outset that this is not my field. Yet as a Theology generalist and interdisciplinarian with a special interest in

⁶ Also, teachers might have to promote gay and lesbian month, while homosexual sex education could be put on a par with heterosexuality.

⁷ For example, Humberside Police (see Daily Telegraph, 10 December 2005 (op. cit.), and 9 April 2004 URL: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/04/09/ncctv09.xml>).

Christianity and politics, I wanted to explore this issue further. Offering to present this paper provided me with an opportunity to do so. My aim here is simply to survey the nature of the current biblical debate on homosexuality, as well as make several observations in light of the current cultural and political climate. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the topic and the various specialisms represented here today, I have sought to present the material simply and avoid technical language wherever possible.

The material is presented in three parts. The first (largest) section surveys some of the main revisionist (i.e. pro-homosexual) exegetical arguments, together with traditionalist responses. Part two looks briefly at and comments on the view that homosexuality is biologically inherited. I conclude with some philosophical and political comments, together with some practical suggestions for Evangelicals concerning how to deal with this thorny issue.

This is an ambitious agenda for such a short paper, so it is important to realise we are only really scratching the surface. But if the paper helps to clarify the main issues for some, and encourages us all to consider the topic in greater depth, then it has accomplished what it set out to do.

1. REVISIONIST EXEGESIS AND COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

Thomas Schmidt's useful study of the homosexuality debate identifies two broad revisionist approaches.⁸ The first takes the

⁸ From Thomas Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow: Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Leicester: IVP, 1995).

biblical passages traditionally believed to condemn homosexuality (Gen 19 & Judg 19, Lev 18:22 & 20:13, Rom 1:26-27, 1 Cor 6:9-10, and 1 Tim 1:10), offering alternative exegetical outcomes, and arguing the Bible does *not*, in fact, condemn homosexuality. A second revisionist approach concedes the Bible *does* prohibit homosexuality, but argues it is plain wrong. Instead, this approach focuses on wider biblical themes (eg an ethic of love), or draws on liberationist and feminist approaches to reject the Bible's prohibition of homosexuality.

This second approach need not concern us today. Not only is there insufficient time, but given our commitment to the Bible as the final authority in doctrine and practice, we will focus instead on revisionist exegesis and traditionalist responses in a bid to understand the Bible's view on homosexuality.

Genesis 19 and Judges 19

Both these narratives are very similar. In Genesis 19, Lot shelters the two angels who visit Sodom, while in Judges 19 a man offers shelter to a Levite visiting Gibeah. In both cases, the men of the city demand that the hosts give up the visitors to them, that they might 'know them' (Gen 19:5), or 'have intercourse with him' (Judg 19:22). The traditional view understands both passages to refer to male rape, thus associating the sin of Sodom with homosexuality (hence the term 'sodomy').

In 1955 D. Sherwin Bailey, an Anglican whose work helped to decriminalise homosexuality in Britain, challenged this

understanding of the Sodom narrative.⁹ He said the Hebrew word `know' (Heb. *yâda*) in Genesis 19:5 appears in the Old Testament 943 times, yet in only a dozen or so does it mean `to have intercourse with'. Thus, *yâda* is better translated `to get acquainted with'.

Bailey points out how in both narratives Lot and the man offering the Levite hospitality were aliens in Sodom and Gibeah. Therefore, in an age when cities relied on their defences, the male inhabitants of both cities were suspicious of these visitors being harboured by aliens. So they wanted to *get to know them* to determine whether or not they were spies sent to reconnoitre their city. In other words, they did not wish to know them *sexually*, but rather, *interrogate* them and verify their credentials. In a culture that greatly valued providing hospitality to strangers, the forcible interrogation of Lot's guests represented a most *inhospitable* act. Thus, Lot offered his daughters as a tempting bribe to help protect his guests and ensure hospitality conventions were maintained.

To support his view, Bailey points out how other Bible passages alluding to Sodom's sins (eg Jer 23:14, Ez 16:46ff) never mention homosexuality, while Ezekiel 16:49 seems to suggest Sodom's sin was indeed inhospitality: -

This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.

⁹ D. Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, 1955)

One passage *supporting* the notion that Sodom's sin was homosexuality is Jude 7, which describes how the inhabitants went after 'strange flesh'. But Bailey rejects this, suggesting the verse is drawing on traditions describing humans having sexual relations *with angels*, rather than males with males (cf Gen 6:1ff, also Book of Jubilees). An alternative rendering, supported by revisionists John Boswell and Robin Scroggs, argues that Sodom's sin only became associated with homosexuality in late intertestamental Jewish writings, in response to encroaching Greek culture and its widespread practice of pederasty (sex between men and boys). Thus, Jude relies on later traditions that inaccurately describe Sodom's sin, and as such cannot be used to reject Bailey's inhospitality theory.

Traditionalists are not impressed with these arguments.¹⁰ Firstly, concerning Bailey's statistical data about the word *yâda*,, Derek Kidner points out how statistics are no substitute for contextual evidence ("otherwise the rarer sense of a word would *never* seem probable").¹¹ Others also point out how context takes precedence over statistical usage. P. Michael Ukleja observes how *yâda* is used twelve times *in Genesis*, ten of which clearly denote sexual intercourse.¹² Also, what of the fact that *yâda* is used again just three verses later, in Genesis 19:8, in the context of Lot's

¹⁰ David F. Wright notes that Bailey, "(borrowed, often slavishly, by a number of later writers) has had a far longer innings than it deserves, and is now rarely put in to bat", 'Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible' in *Evangelical Quarterly* 61:4 (1989), 292.

¹¹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: IVP, 1967, reprinted 1999), 137.

¹² P. Michael Ukleja, 'Homosexuality and the Old Testament' in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (1983), 261.

daughters never having `known' (i.e. had sexual relations with) a man? As Schmidt points out: -

*No scholarly interpreter of Genesis has ever suggested a shift in meaning of yâda between verses 5 and 8.*¹³

Thus, if indeed *yâda* means `to interrogate', one wonders what Lot hoped to gain by offering his daughters to the men of Sodom for interrogation!

Concerning the view that Sodom's sin became associated with homosexuality in the late intertestamental period, James B. De Young demonstrates how this link is made in much earlier Jewish intertestamental writings, which pushes the tradition back.¹⁴ Meanwhile, Schmidt argues that if indeed the Judges account is a reworking of the Sodom narrative (as Bailey believes), this makes the tradition linking Sodom with homosexuality even older. Schmidt also points out how revisionists citations of Ezekiel 16:46-49 in support of the hospitality theory rarely venture on to verse 50, where the references to Sodom's `abominations' offers a linguistic echo of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 (which condemn same-sex relations).¹⁵

These counter-arguments lead Guenther Haas to observe how even some revisionists concede there *is* a sexual element in both

¹³ Schmidt (op. cit), 87.

¹⁴ James B. De Young, `A Critique of Prohomosexual Interpretations of the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha' in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990), 437-54.

¹⁵ Schmidt (op. cit), 88.

narratives.¹⁶ Thus, Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Mollenkott suggest Sodom's sin was heterosexual *perverts* abandoning their natural sexual instincts to engage in homosexual activity (rather than homosexual *inverts* involved in monogamous relationships).¹⁷ Yet as Richard Lovelace observes, if 4+% of the population may be regarded as homosexual (some claim a higher figure), and *all* of the men of Sodom sought to rape the angels (cf Gen 19:4), then at least *some* homosexual 'inverts' were preparing to engage in sexual depravity, which discounts Scanzoni's and Mollenkott's theory.¹⁸

Bailey's approach is a useful corrective against the view that Sodom's *only* sin was homosexuality. Clearly the city was guilty of depravity expressed through a range of sins, epitomised by its sexual perversion, including a desire to rape the angels. Perhaps, as some suggest, male rape was practiced in parts of the ancient world to express dominance over strangers, or else to humiliate your defeated enemy. Either way, this passage clearly refers to homosexuality, which is portrayed as sexual perversion (especially in light of other texts and greater themes in the Bible, discussed later).

¹⁶ Guenther Haas, 'Hermeneutical Issues in the Use of the Bible to Justify the Acceptance of Homosexual Practice' in *Global Journal of Classical Theology* Vol 1 No 2 (1999). Available online at <http://www.trinitysem.edu/journal/journalmain.html>.

¹⁷ Letha Scanzoni and Virginia R. Mollenkott. *Is The Homosexual My Neighbour?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

¹⁸ Richard F. Lovelace, *Homosexuality and the Church* (London: Lamp Press, 1978), 101.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

Some revisionists argue that these passages refer to rape or non-consensual homosexuality, and therefore cannot be used to condemn modern homosexual practices. Yet Schmidt declares such claims as “dubious” and “a purely modern imposition on the text.”¹⁹ He rightly points out that the onus is on the revisionists to supply evidence to justify a change in the common understanding of these texts.

Two other interrelated revisionist suggestions are more subtle and deserve closer attention. One view argues these texts, found in the Leviticus Holiness Code, are not so much moral declarations as calls for ritual purity.²⁰ As such, they are no different than instructions not to cut one’s beard in a certain way (Lev 19:27), or to mix different textiles or seeds together (Lev 19:19). If the ceremonial laws have been abrogated in the New Testament, the revisionists ask, why should we impose them on homosexuals today? Thus it is argued that these texts cannot be used to prohibit modern-day loving relationships between homosexuals. Revisionist John Boswell even appeals to history, claiming the early church did not draw on the Leviticus verses.

Yet traditionalists point out that even if the Leviticus Holiness Code is about ritual purity, this does *not* do away with a moral element. Consider, for example, adultery, child sacrifice, or

¹⁹ Schmidt (op. cit.), 90.

²⁰ See, for example, Scanzoni and Mollenkott, and also Ralph Blair, *An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963).

bestiality, all listed in the section prohibiting homosexuality. Few would argue these are not immoral acts, and Ukleja concludes: "Ceremonial purity and moral purity often coincide."²¹ Moreover, David Wright rejects Boswell's claim that the early church did not draw on these verses, explaining how the early church did often cited or appealed to these verses often.²²

A related revisionist approach claims Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are injunctions against cultic practices associated with the Canaanites, which involved male temple prostitution.²³ Therefore, these ceremonial laws were aimed at separating Israel from the Canaanites, nothing more, and so cannot be used to condemn homosexuality.²⁴

Yet Gunther Haas argues there is no evidence to suggest these texts refer to Canaanite cultic practices.²⁵ Schmidt agrees, pointing out that cultic prostitution is dealt with elsewhere in the Mosaic law (Deut 22:22-29, 23:17-18).²⁶ Robert Johnston even goes so far as to suggest there is *no* clear evidence that male prostitution formed part of the Canaanite cultic rituals.²⁷ (His is an older work, and I would be interested to learn of more recent research that might challenge this assertion). Moreover, bestiality is

²¹ Ukleja (op. cit.), 263.

²² Wright (op. cit.), 294. See also David F. Wright, 'Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of *arsenokoitai* (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10)' in *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984), 125-152.

²³ For example, G.A. Edwards, *Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984).

²⁴ For example, Scanzoni and Mollenkott (op. cit.).

²⁵ Guenther Haas (op. cit.).

²⁶ Schmidt (op. cit.), 90.

²⁷ Robert K. Johnson, *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), see chapter 5.

discussed in the Leviticus passages but I am not aware of anyone who suggests *this* was a Canaanite cultic ritual. Finally, one struggles to determine how, exactly, same-sex relations might be employed in Canaanite fertility rituals.²⁸

Romans 1:26-27

Here, revisionists take a variety of approaches. Boswell suggests Paul is speaking about heterosexuals who set aside their *natural* desires towards the *opposite* sex and practice homosexuality.²⁹ Thus, Paul condemns heterosexuals for seeking thrills by experimenting with homosexuality. (D. Sherwin Bailey also differentiates between *inversion* – those who by nature have homosexual tendencies – and *perversion*, i.e. those who lay aside their natural sexual orientation). Yet commentators point out how Boswell's claim of perverted heterosexuality simply does not hold up linguistically.³⁰ There is no evidence for it, and Boswell is reading something in the text which is simply not there.

Paul's reference to 'nature' in Romans 1:26-27 is picked up by several other revisionists. They reject the suggestion that homosexuality is unnatural, arguing the word 'nature' can simply mean convention, a typical cultural practice, or fashion. Thus, they claim Paul is merely arguing from a Jewish cultural perspective which condemned homosexuality, which he is seeking to impose upon his Jewish readers. But that is *not* to say homosexuality *is*

²⁸ Several traditionalists make this point.

²⁹ Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Mollenkott make a similar suggestion about the inhabitants of Sodom.

³⁰ See, for example, David F. Wright, 'Homosexuality' in Gerald Hawthorne and Ralph Martin (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 413.

unnatural. To bolster such claims, 1 Corinthians 11:14 is often cited (“Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him?”).

Yet in Romans 1 Paul quite clearly *is* arguing from nature, rather than drawing on cultural baggage. He appeals *all the way* back to creation (cf Romans 1:20, 25), and his discussion of sin is rooted in the Fall. (It is worth noting that several of Paul’s contemporaries, Philo and Josephus, also appeal to nature when discussing homosexual acts.)³¹

Another approach suggests Paul is not condemning all same-sex relationships, but rather, pederasty, which it is argued is a perversion most homosexuals today would also reject as immoral.³² But Malick asks if this is indeed what Paul had in mind, why does he refer to ‘males with males’ when Plato, actually referring to pederasty, spoke of ‘males with boys’?³³ Various commentators also point out that there are no records in the ancient world of a female version of pederasty. So why does Paul refer to same-sex *female* relationships in the same vein, if indeed he had pederasty in mind?³⁴ In fact, there is arguably no linguistic evidence to suggest Paul is limiting his discussion in Romans 1 to pederasty.

³¹ Joseph P. Guidel, ‘“That Which is Unnatural” – Homosexuality in Society, the Church, and Scripture’ in *Christian Research Journal*, Winter 1993), 7.

³² For example, Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

³³ David E. Malick, ‘The Condemnation of Homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27’ in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993), 338.

³⁴ Various commentators make this same point.

Several other points ought to be mentioned in passing here. It is suggested Romans 1:18-32 is a single unit in which Paul does not set out his *own* views. Rather, his diatribe describes the view of Hellenised Jewry (who condemn the Greeks for their behaviour) in order to attack them (the Jews) in the very next section. In other words, Paul is setting up the Jews in Romans 1 by highlighting what they regarded as vile Gentile practices, before going on to condemn them in chapter 2 for their own sinful actions. Thus, homosexuality is not sinful at all; it was merely perceived to be so by the Jews. But again, this argument totally ignores the fact that Paul appeals to nature (and not Jewish baggage), tracing his argument all the way back to the Fall to condemn *all* sinful behaviour.

Some see homosexuality as a punishment for idolatry, as described in Romans 1. Thus, homosexuality is regarded as incidental, rather than sinful.³⁵ It is true that Paul's argument describes how idolatry led God to give humanity over to depraved behaviour, including sexual perversion. But it is also essential to note that Paul's discussion revolves around the Fall and man's rebellion towards God. The Fall marked the beginning of the *inversion* of God's created order: men worshipping the creature rather than the Creator, and eventually men with men, and women with women.³⁶ Thus, homosexuality is presented in Romans 1 as a perversion arising out of the Fall, a degrading inversion of God's

³⁵ John T. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews, McMeel, 1976); James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978).

³⁶ Lovelace (op. cit.), 92.

natural order, and any attempt to change Paul's argument so as to suggest it is *not* a sinful activity is disingenuous and appeals more to linguistic gymnastics than sound exegesis. At least those who recognise Paul's arguments, say he was plain wrong, and look elsewhere to justify homosexual activity, are more honest.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10

⁹ Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, **malakoi**, **arsenokoitai**, ¹⁰thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers - none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor 6:9-10. NRSV)

¹⁰ ...fornicators, **arsenokoitais**, slave-traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching... (1 Tim 1:10. NRSV)

Arsenokoitai ('homosexuals') is a compound of two words, *arseno* (male) and *koitê* (intercourse, from which we get the word coitus). But as Schmidt points out "a compound word does not denote the sum of its parts (for example, 'understand' does not mean 'stand under')", thus a word "denotes what people use it to denote".³⁷ *Malakoi* is similarly problematic, which is translated in various ways (*effeminate*, KJV, NASB; *sexual perverts*, NRV; *male prostitutes*, NRSV, NIV; *catamites*, JB).

In Paul's day (or even in the patristic period) there *was no word* for homosexuality. Rather, homosexuality was described.³⁸ This, and the fact that *arsenokoitai* does not appear in this form prior to 1 Corinthians 6, leads some to claim we cannot be sure

³⁷ Schmidt (op. cit.), 33.

³⁸ Guidel (op. cit.), 7.

what it means. Hence, the definition of both words represents an important battleground for revisionists arguing that the Bible does *not* condemn loving and stable same-sex unions. Boswell even believes these passages do *not* refer to homosexuality *at all*. Because *malakos* means `soft', he translates 1 Corinthians 6:9 as `loose', that is, `licentious', or lacking self-control, and draws on a medieval church view that this was, in fact, a condemnation of masturbation (not homosexuality). Meanwhile, he suggests *arsenokoitai* could mean male prostitutes.

For non-Greek or linguists specialists the arguments are complex. It suffices to point out that David Wright's rebuttal of Boswell's position is thorough and scathing.³⁹ Wright questions not only Boswell's arguments, but also his linguistic abilities, and Wright notes Boswell is almost alone in taking this position.

Ralph Blair believes Paul's condemnation in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 concerns same-sex *abuses*, much like sexual abuse within heterosexual relationships (hence these verses do not condemn homosexuality in itself).⁴⁰ However, Malick asks if this is so, why does Paul not specifically *list* those abuses, like he lists several *heterosexual* abuses (eg adultery, fornication)? Any attempt to suggest otherwise is pure presuppositionalism.⁴¹ Meanwhile, Turner points out how Paul uses the word *pornoi* earlier in verse 9,

³⁹ Wright, `Translating *arsenokoitai*' (op. cit.) and `Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible' (op. cit.).

⁴⁰ Blair (op. cit.).

⁴¹ David E. Malick, ``The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9' in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993), 479-492.

translated as 'fornication' and referring to *any* form of heterosexual depravity *except* adultery, for which Paul always uses a different word. So if 'fornication' and 'adultery' indeed cover all forms of heterosexual depravity, then *malakoi* and *arsenokotai* must surely refer to homosexuality.⁴²

Robin Scroggs suggests Paul merely took over "a conventional vice list" and is condemning a very specific form pederasty. But Wright has highlighted a major problem here. If Paul simply borrowed an existing vice list referring to very general sexual vices, including widespread and very general forms of pederasty, how can Scroggs then suggest Paul is identifying a very precise form of this vice?⁴³ A number of other exegetes concur.

Concerning this suggestion that Paul is only referring to pederasty, Malick concedes both words *could* be alluding to pederasty, which was so common in the ancient Greek world. For example, *malakos* could mean 'call-boy', or something similar, and both words together could be referring to the active and passive roles in the homosexual act (thus *malakos* would be the male performing the female role during sex). But Malick argues the terms clearly mean *more* than this, that linguistically they cannot be limited to this understanding alone (other traditionalists agree). Thus he criticises John Stott for *limiting* his definition to rent boys and those who used them. (Malick: "This allows for the conclusion

⁴² P.D.M. Turner, *Biblical Texts Relevant to Homosexual Orientation and Practice*. A paper prepared for the June 1997 issue of *Christian Scholars Review* with additions and emendations. Available online at the New Westminster Diocese website: <http://www.nwnet.org/~prisca/HomotextUnicode.htm>.

⁴³ Wright, 'Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible' (op. cit.), 296.

that Pauline condemnations are not relevant to homosexual adults who are both consenting and committed to each other.”)⁴⁴

It is David Wright who provides us with a way of reconciling the views that Paul is referring both to pederasty *and also* something much more. He observes that so widespread was pederasty, that this is how homosexuality came to be known (this is even the case today, where we refer to ‘rent boys’, even though they are adults).⁴⁵

Far more importantly, though, is Wright’s rebuttal of the view that *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* do *not* appear elsewhere in ancient literature. In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament), Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 echo very similar language to that used by Paul. Wright argues convincingly that Paul, a devout Jew who undoubtedly knew the Septuagint, draws on the Septuagint in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 to condemn homosexuality.⁴⁶ He also points out how most revisionists (with the exception of Scroggs) are completely *unaware* of the Septuagint terminology in Leviticus. The final nail in the revisionist coffin is this: if Paul is drawing on the Septuagint in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1, then he simply *cannot* have pederasty in mind, as Leviticus is not concerned with this at all.⁴⁷ Thus, in these two texts

⁴⁴ Malick, ‘The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9’ (op. cit.), 482 (footnote 10).

⁴⁵ Wright, ‘Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible’ (op. cit.), 298.

⁴⁶ Other concur. See, for example, Malick, ‘The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9’ and Gundel (op. cit.).

⁴⁷ Wright, ‘Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible’ (op. cit.), 298.

Paul may well be drawing upon a Greek obsession with pederasty, but we simply cannot limit his meaning to that.⁴⁸

In summary, then, despite an unceasing revisionist onslaught which seeks to change the meaning of the proof texts condemning homosexuality, the traditional remains convincingly firm.

2. RESPONDING TO THE BIOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

We often hear of scientific studies suggesting our sexuality is biologically inherited. This so-called *Nature versus Nurture* debate (i.e. whether our sexuality is biologically inherited or socially conditioned) is problematic for Evangelicals. If homosexuals are “born that way” they cannot be held responsible for a practice the Bible condemns as sinful. Thus many Evangelicals expend much time and energy challenging the biological argument.

I want to make several comments about this issue. Firstly, we should not reject science out of hand. Fundamentalists are often very suspicious of, even hostile towards, scientific enquiry, which they regard as an enemy of Christianity. However, it appears biology may indeed contribute towards our sexuality. What first led me to consider this might be a factor were several Dutch brain studies which demonstrated similarities between transsexuals’ and females’ brains.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ As Gudel (op. cit.) points out, “Virtually every Greek lexicon” translate these words in the traditional sense.” Meanwhile, Ukleja also identifies these terms in several examples of classical Greek literature, which clearly refer to homosexuals. See also P. Michael Ukleja, ‘Homosexuality in the New Testament’ in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (1983).

⁴⁹ For example, see Frank P. M. Kruijver, Jiang-Ning Zhou, Chris W. Pool, Michel A. Hofman, Louis J. G. Gooren and Dick F. Swaab, ‘Male-to-Female Transsexuals Have Female Neuron Numbers in a Limbic Nucleus’ in *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* Vol. 85, No. 5 (2000), 2034-

This made me think about other inherited aspects of our person. For example, I have five children, all raised in the same environment in the same way. But one of them – Dominiq – is quite unlike the others. In short, he is mischievous and at times, downright exasperating! He constantly pushes the boundaries, gets in to trouble all the time, and is *nothing* like the other children. Relatives have told me how he is exactly like my father when he was a boy.

Note that I am not arguing for arguing for biological reductionism here, but it *does* appear that more than environment is responsible for our make-up, including shaping behaviour we consider sinful. For example, scientists believe alcoholism may have a genetic basis. Some people are born with hormonal imbalances. Sex drives differ from person to person, while some people struggle to control their sexual desires (so-called sex maniacs). Some are born with schizophrenia, which may lead to violent behaviour. What of those diagnosed with Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy who desire to hurt those closest to them? Meanwhile, some people are far angrier than others.

I have certainly oversimplified things by not wishing to trawl through various dry medical papers. But I believe the point is made, that biology may play *some* role in shaping us. And one need only consider hermaphrodites (children born with both sets of sex

2041; J.N. Zhou, M.A. Hofman, L.J. Gooren and D.F. Swaab, 'A Sex Difference in the Human Brain and Its Relation to Transexuality' *Nature* 378 (1995), 68-70.

organs) to see that biology can get it wrong. So we should take care not to dismiss science out of hand simply because we are uneasy with the theological ramifications. Of course, neither am I suggesting we embrace all science uncritically. I recognise that science, like any other discipline, has its own agendas and research is often politicised. Furthermore, study samples can be compromised or so small as to render a study useless. Consider A.C. Kinsey's landmark 1948 study, which suggested homosexuality was far more widespread than originally believed (Kinsey said between 10-15%).⁵⁰ Yet his interview sample included a many former prison inmates, where we know there is a disproportionate amount of homosexual activity.

While biology may be a factor, it appears some homosexuals, though happy that such studies are publicised by the media as they help secure their acceptance in society, are *not* convinced about the biological argument. Others see a genetic basis for homosexuality as dangerous, as it could eventually lead to abortions for prospective homosexuals. Thus, Schmidt speculates on the paradoxical situation whereby gays and pro-lifers lobby to stop abortions!⁵¹

Despite all I have said, it is very important not to overlay the biological argument. It remains a controversial issue, and the various scientific studies have not reached a consensus. We know

⁵⁰ A.C. Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1948).

⁵¹ Schmidt (op. cit), 141.

that upbringing, culture, and environment also play a major role in shaping a person. In fact, Evangelicals who worry that biological arguments exonerate people for their sinful behaviour should note that social conditioning could similarly do likewise. Why else are we so concerned about children being adopted by homosexuals, or seeing Section 28 repealed, if not over concern about moral brainwashing? But leaving this aside, it appears that our sexuality is attributable to a range of factors: biological, social, moral, and Thomas Schmidt has produced a useful table, which encompasses these various factors, to suggest where we get our sexuality from (handout).

So what are the theological ramifications of the great nurture versus nature debate? Actually, I think very little. It is a complete red herring.⁵² The fact is (as already discussed in Romans 1) we are *all* a product of the Fall, which resulted in an *inversion* of God's created order. Consequently, we all have deficiencies - physical diseases, psychological disorders, or sexual disorders and depravity. We *all* have a propensity to sin. But that in *no way* exonerates us as sinful creatures before God who need forgiveness.

Thus, the whole thrust of Galatians 4 and 5 makes sense: that despite being products of the Fall, Sonship through Christ leads God to give us His Spirit, through whom we can lay aside the deeds of

⁵² I reached my conclusions, as set out here, some time before I came across Thomas Schmidt's work, together with another useful piece which similarly echoes the position that the biological debate, which might have some foundation, is nonetheless irrelevant from a theological perspective (see Sherwood O. Cole, 'Biology, Homosexuality, and the Biblical Doctrine of Sin' in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (200), 348-61). These studies express the position far more eloquently than I ever could.

the flesh and live the sanctified life God wants for us. When Paul lists the various vices in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, he goes on to say (verse 11) "*and so were some of you, but you have been washed, sanctified...*". For this reason, Paul's call in Galatians is that we walk by the Spirit, so that we do not carry out the desires of the flesh.

The biggest theological problem with homosexuality within the church is *not* people who have homosexual thoughts. (We all struggle with the old nature, Paul, and there will be people within our congregations who daily struggle to crucify the flesh). Rather, the problem in the church is that some *deny* they are committing a sin. How, then, can God forgive unless we recognise and confess that our behaviour is contrary to His will?

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

When I first explored this issue, I did so with an open mind and wanted to let the facts speak for themselves. Yet the weak revisionist exegetical arguments, together with far more convincing traditionalist rebuttals, have led me to affirm the traditional view more firmly than ever. As some traditionalists have pointed out, the exegetical argument has been won and it is time to move on. I agree, and am convinced the political arena will increasingly become the place where this battle is fought out.

Starting with Kinsey's 1948 study, Bailey's work leading to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK, the gay movement successfully attaching itself to the civil rights movement - the pace of change has been dizzying and attitudes have changed

massively.⁵³ Moreover, the issue has found a home within a western liberal society intent on deconstructing its Christian past and relativising morality. Tolerance is today's buzzword, except of course when some in society (mainly Christians) challenge society's core values. Thus, a 'tolerant' society is paradoxically most *intolerant* of intolerance. We are at a moment in time where morality is determined by what is legal, so that what is illegal is immoral. Consider, for example, how it is fast becoming illegal to express a view of homosexuality openly, while such views are deemed immoral! No wonder Thomas Schmidt believes homosexuality can no longer be ignored, and that it "increasingly appears to be the battleground for all the forces seeking to give shape to the world of the next [ie 21st] century."⁵⁴

Meanwhile, society has successfully shaped the way we now think. If nothing else, we think very carefully about whether and how to express our views on homosexuality, while in the background hover society's sentinels – the police – who zealously investigate anyone who expresses a view contrary to society's values. At present, we may find protection in the courts, where the law is interpreted somewhat less zealously. But what happens when the current philosophy trickles down to a new generation of liberal elites, judges who interpret the laws somewhat differently? I do not think it is particularly hysterical to suggest that Christians in Europe

⁵³ For details of the history of the gay movement since the mid twentieth century see, for example, Guidel (op. cit.), Lovelace (op. cit.), and James Beck, 'Evangelicals, Homosexuality, and Social Science' in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40/1 (March 1997), 83-97.

⁵⁴ Schmidt (op. cit.), 11.

face real political challenges – even dangers of being criminalised - in the foreseeable future, as we grapple with the issue of homosexuality (less so in the ` States, where society holds the same values, but arguably where free speech is championed more).

Aside from the political arena, we Evangelicals also face a massive pastoral challenge in our treatment of homosexuality. Too often, we come across as cold, heartless, demoting homosexuality to the most heinous of sins (despite what Paul says in 1 Cor 6:11). Whatever one thinks of their theology, at least *some* revisionists were motivated by *genuine* pastoral concerns, seeking to deal with some decent, respectable, gay people they knew. When it comes to homosexuality, we Evangelicals sometimes lack this compassion.

So our attitudes as Christians must reflect a real compassion for homosexuals, to help them be set free in Christ. That is *not* to dismiss their behaviour as acceptable or harmless. (The medical consequences are particularly startling, but these are rarely discussed).⁵⁵ Our survey of Scripture has demonstrates this is far from so. But perhaps we *do* need to change the way we deal with the issue. After all, why do we tell the sinner to come to Christ so that He can help you with your sin, but almost appear to say to the homosexual, give up your sin then you can come to Christ? It is also important not to minimise our own sexual sins by singling out

⁵⁵ Schmidt devotes a whole (graphic) chapter to this issue in a medically sourced essay that details a range of psychological, emotional and physical consequences of homosexuality (apart from AIDS). He believes this issue is too often ignored. See also Ronald Sider, 'AIDS: An Evangelical Perspective' in *Christian Century* 105:1 (2006), 11-14.

homosexuality. We remove the speck in some else's eye while stumbling over the log in our own.

Pastoral approaches must also include meaningful counselling and advice providing genuine and constructive ways forward. We counsel the alcoholic within our churches, so why not the homosexual? Many pastors feel woefully ill-equipped to deal with this issue and perhaps ministries that reach out to gays have something to teach us here. Neither must we assume that all homosexuals, once converted, will never have such thoughts again. We *all* struggle to crucify the flesh, and it might be appropriate to differentiate between orientation (the thought) and practice (the deed). In light of Scripture we should never condone the latter, but we should seek to counsel and pray for the person struggling with the former. Also, 'cures' (not exactly a politically correct term in this context; alternatively, perhaps *sexual orientation realignment*, or *sexual re-orientation?*), though massively controversial, surely have a role, especially as success rates are slightly higher than treating alcoholism.

Finally, we need to establish and clarify in our minds a theology of sexuality, rather than engage in simple proof-texting against homosexuality. Yes, revisionist attempts to change what the Bible says have failed. But proof texts *alone* are not the basis for any theological argument. These texts must be utilised as part of a *far wider* biblical discussion of sexuality as whole. In fact, the traditional view is further greatly strengthened (and the revisionist

argument weakened yet more) when we take these proof texts *together with* Paul's appeal to nature and creation, the teaching in Genesis 1 and 2 that God's intended order was male *and* female (and *not* male and male, or female and female), and also Jesus' affirmation of the male-female union in His teaching.⁵⁶ Such a metanarrative is, of course, the basis of biblical theology.

On a related point, it is important for us to get our biblical theology straight when we discuss this issue. Too often, I have seen someone on television ask a Christian why we use the Old Testament to condemn homosexuality, but do not observe other aspects of the Mosaic law. We need to be able to explain our position concerning the law and these prohibitions concisely and with clarity.

It might also be a good idea for Evangelicals in each country to set up working groups to draft statement on the issue of sexuality-homosexuality, that are thoughtful, theologically sound, and pastorally relevant. Such approaches should involve scholars (eg Tyndale, Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics), and pastoral practitioners and representatives (eg Evangelical Alliance representatives, denominational leaders). At the very least, such statements might accord Evangelicals some legal protection when accused of hate crime.

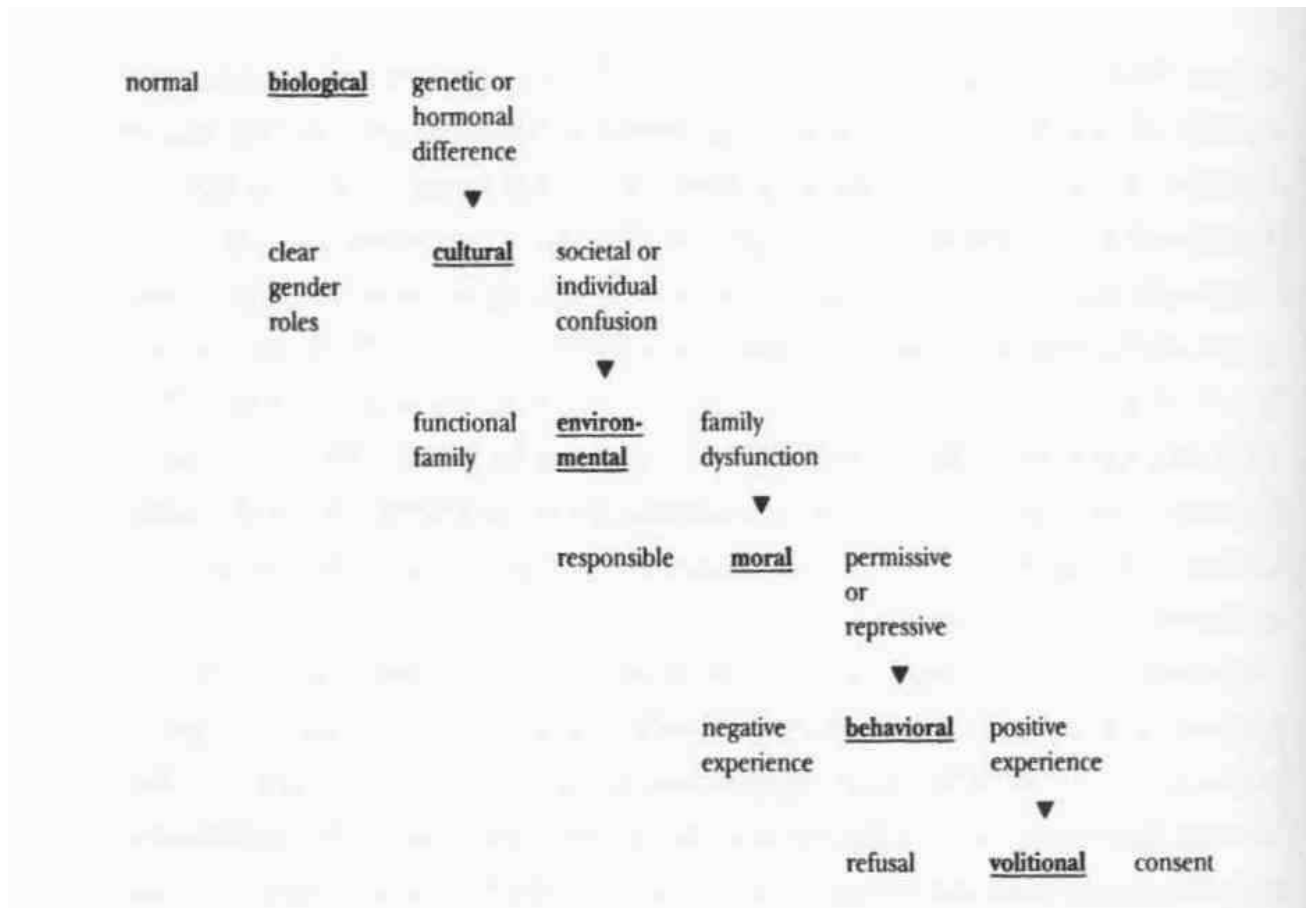
⁵⁶ A point made by several traditionalists. Consider, for example, Brian Edgar, *The Sexuality of God: Thinking About Theology and Sexuality* (Forum Booklet No. 8, 1996); John C. Yates, 'Towards a Theology of Homosexuality' in *Evangelical Quarterly* 67:1 (1995), 71-87.

There are many, many issues I could have discussed today. Moreover, I fear we have only scratched the surface and perhaps even oversimplified the issue.⁵⁷ The issue is also highly politicised, and as such many issues often cited as fact actually deserve closer scrutiny.⁵⁸ Yet time here simply does not permit. Nonetheless, I sincerely hope this brief presentation has helped to clarify some of the main issues and given us cause to go away and consider more fully some of the political and pastoral challenges we as Evangelicals face.

⁵⁷ The body of literature on this issue is vast. For a recent survey of some of the latest studies, see Guenther Haas, 'Perspectives on Homosexuality: A Review Article' in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45/2 (June 2002), 497-512.

⁵⁸ See, for example, a discussion by Joseph P. Gudel, 'Homosexuality: Fact and Fiction' in *Christian Research Journal* (1992), 20-23, 30-33. This article, while brief, raises some important issues anyone exploring the topic should bear in mind.

Handout: Multiple Variable Model For Homosexual Identity



From Schmidt, Thomas. *Straight and Narrow: Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Leicester: IVP, 1995).