A Response to Dr. Sarah Harris’ Presentation

The NT and Same-Sex Relationships

by William P. Welty, Ph.D.

Introduction: A Call to Normative Dialogue, not to Emotional Posturing

Within hours of the initial delivery of version 1.0 of this Special Communication, copies of it had been disseminated to more than two hundred people affiliated to one degree or another with the Christian community of New Zealand. At least one of the copies was accompanied by an out-of-context inflammatory statement about our assessment of Dr. Harris’ position with respect to how she views the theology of Romans 1:26-27. A copy of version 1.0 of this Special Communication was sent to Dr. Sarah Harris, and I was sent a copy of her initial response, which read as follows:

Thanks…! This has surprised even me! The guy does not even have a PhD in biblical studies but communication! Thanks for forwarding it. I hadn’t seen it.

Perhaps a minor correction is in order here. Dr. Harris is correct when she observes that my Ph.D. is not in biblical studies. It’s in Christian Communications from an American-based Baptist post-graduate school. My Ph.D. dissertation related to my attempts to bring a biblical world view to the professional arena of international telecommunications. But my Master's degree was earned from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School one of the most respected conservative seminaries in the United States. I studied under Dr. Gleason Archer, one of the foremost authorities in biblical languages in the world, and learned from Dr. Walter Kaiser, the now-retired President of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, which was founded by Dr. Billy Graham. I maintained regular...
communication with Dr. Archer until his death, and remain in contact with Dr. Kaiser to this day.

I taught New Testament Greek for ten years at Simon Greenleaf University of Anaheim, California, which was founded by internationally renowned evangelical Christian apologists Dr. John Warwick Montgomery and the late Dr. Walter Martin, both of whom I knew well. (Trinity International University, parent of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, owned and operated by the Evangelical Free Church of America, acquired Simon Greenleaf University in the late 1990’s and now operates it as Trinity Law School.) I sat for a season on the board of advisors of the law school.

As to my affinity for biblical languages, I am a professional Bible translator by full-time occupation. Some of my public contributions to the field of evangelical Christian scholarship are documented to some extent on my personal web site. They include at least the following:

- Production of a *Harmony of the Gospels* from the text of the Greek New Testament and the *Holy Bible: International Standard Version*; and,
- A study entitled *On the Jewish Community’s Rendering of V’i-Asher Formulæ in the Tanakh (JPS 1917, et al)*, a Hebrew language analysis and defense of the NT claim that Zechariah 12:10 contains a prediction that the God of Israel incarnate would one day be impaled by a weapon of war; and,
- A study of principles of biblically-based charitable giving entitled *Emigration to the High Countries: On Converting Wealth to the Coin of the Future Kingdom*; and,
- A study in *Marital Dysfunction in Jacob’s Family*, a Hebrew language analysis of certain aspects of interspousal conflict evident between Jacob and his multiple marriage partners; and,
- *Rethinking the Veil: On First Corinthians 11:2-16*, an essay that addresses a commonly misunderstood passage in the Apostle Paul’s first letter to Corinthis regarding the veiling of women; and,
- Production by me of the base translation of about one third of the text of the Hebrew Old Testament for the *Holy Bible: International Standard Version*; and,
- Serving as Old Testament editor of the ISV from the late 1990’s until the present.

I also contributed to a defense of the West in general and of the Christian faith in particular from attacks against it by conservative, Wahhabi-like, radical Islam, such as:

- A defense of *Thomas Jefferson’s Qur’an*.
- Contributor to *Between Christ and Mohammed*, a book-length analysis of the differences between Christianity and Islam.

I also contributed to an analysis of the complex claims of the NT that the very same God who, as the Creator of the Universe, had appeared to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—and all of Old Testament Israel—also revealed Himself in the fullness of time as the Covenant God-incarnate, fully divine and fully human Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah.

In November 2005, I was appointed Senior Research Analyst in Advanced Communication Technologies and Adjunct Professor of Middle Eastern Studies on the faculty of Koinonia Institute, where I serve pro bono. Koinonia Institute is a conservative, evangelical think tank founded by Dr. Charles Missler and now located in New Zealand. It serves the Christian and international business community and is a division of Koinonia House, which creates, develops, and distributes materials to stimulate, encourage, and facilitate serious study of the Bible as the inerrant Word of God.

In sum, I possess the academic qualifications to speak on the subject matter of the Greek grammar, syntax, and historical context of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Accordingly, the scholarship contained within this *Special Communication* speaks for itself. So we invite our critics to focus their attention on the content of the debate, not on questions concerning the academic background of the debate participants. Observe, if you would please, that at no time have I questioned the theological training of Dr. Harris. I have questioned only her theological positions relating to homosexual behavior and her misunderstanding of Romans 1:24-32, not her academic training. The two items are two separate subjects.

One more thing needs to be said. Dr. Harris also noted that:

> There is one lawyer in town who was really upset by what I said and try as I did to talk with him, he just [sic] think gays are an abomination to God and the scriptures talk about orientation not behaviour. He’s wrong! They talk about behaviour.

I cannot speak to this attorney’s motivations and/or heart attitudes. I also suspect that an inadvertent typographical error caused her to write “he just think” instead of “he must think” gays are an abomination to God. With all due respect to Dr. Harris and her unnamed attorney critic, both of them are in the wrong here. The attorney is wrong to say “the scriptures talk about orientation not behaviour.” Dr. Harris is correct. To use her own words, “They talk about behaviour.”
But the attorney is also incorrect if he actually claims that “gays are an abomination to God.” Strictly speaking, the scriptures say all human sin, springing as it does from what Paul describes in Romans 1:24-32 as an abandonment wrath of God, is an abomination to God. As we note herein, what Dr. Harris calls “being gay” is from a biblical perspective the temptation (and not necessarily the act) of practicing πορνεία, the NT term for general sexual immorality, of which homosexual behavior is but a subset of a larger reality. The NT view of what we call “being gay” is just as serious in God’s sight as any other kind of sexual temptation: it is to be resisted by the power of God.

We are not inexperienced with respect to dialogue with the Christian community about what Paul says regarding homosexual activity. There is much confusion and willful stubbornness being manifested on both sides of the debate. For example, the ISV Foundation received a communication from a Christian pastor about Romans 1:31 a number of years ago, and for the sake of calling all sides of this debate to drop their theological anger and engage in prayerful life examination, we reproduce the entire email thread here. A reader wrote to us as follows:

I am very disturbed that you translated the Greek word in Romans 1:31, astorge as “heartless.” The reason I am very disturbed over this is: The last half of chapter one, the entire context is describing how far the human race has departed from the natural use of men for women, and vice versa. Paul then describes this practice as an “abomination unto God”.

We responded:

You are partially correct. Actually, every act described in Romans 1:29-31 is an abomination to God, i.e., every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, depravity, envy, murder, quarreling, deceit, viciousness, gossips, slanderers, God-haters, haughty, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to their parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Each of these is abominable. And you’re only going to focus, as noted below, on homosexuality? Please, don’t focus on just one abomination in Romans 1. Paul certainly doesn’t. Meanwhile, more on your misunderstanding of astorge, below...

The reader responded (incorrectly, as we’ll point out, below):

He is not saying in verse 31, “heartless” = ISV, nor other modern versions “unloving”. The context rules out the use of a basic translation such as this, and Paul is very explicit in using this Greek word astorge because what he is discussing is UNNATURAL AFFECTION, he is not saying “unloving”, because the misdirected love of lesbians and homosexuals is very strong, indeed.

We attempted to correct this error. We wrote:

Your ignorance of basic Greek (astorge as the only use of the root word storge, which means natural affection coupled with the alpha privative that turns it into “without natural affection”) is appalling. The “unnatural affection” about which Paul is talking isn’t homosexual behavior. That’s because his discussion on sexual behavior ends at the conclusion of verse 27 and a new subject begins in verse 28.

We are not inexperienced with respect to dialogue with the Christian community about what Paul says regarding homosexual activity.

For Paul to say they lacked natural sexual affection would require him to add the alpha privative to eros; i.e., to invent a Greek word such as aneros (or the like, meaning “without sexual affection”). Instead, the “natural affection” spoken of by Paul in Romans 1:31 as being lacking refers, strictly speaking to being “without parental affection”. Think of today’s “pro-choice” movement that induces women to kill their unborn children and you won’t be far from the mark. But astorge as homosexual behavior? Not hardly, sir. That’s described in verse 26-27.

As I just mentioned, by the time you get to verse 28, Paul has passed beyond the sins of homosexual behavior and is now discussing “degraded minds that perform acts that should not be done.” Paul's statement of the landslide of degradation does not end in homosexual behavior in verse 27. Instead, it continues beyond that sin to other things. Reread Romans 1:26-32 again. Disobedience to parents (verse 30) and ruthlessness (verse 31) are farther down the scale of depravity than is homosexual behavior. Do keep that in mind next time you address your church's youth group, won't you? The meanness with which young people can mock others their age relentlessly, picking on those who are different in dress, mental capacity (above or below theirs, attacking “geeks” or the mentally challenged) or their disrespect and/or rebellion
to their parents is listed by Paul in Romans 1:28-32 as worse on the list of debauchery than is homosexual behavior—even though homosexual behavior is clearly the result of “degrading passions” (Romans 1:26). Next time you're tempted to rail against homosexual behavior, do remember, won't you, to conclude by pointing out that the sins in verses 29-31 are worse than homosexual behavior.

But the reader responded:

I, as a retired minister, have counseled with this type of person, and they do have great (but entirely “misdirected”) love for each other! “Unloving”?— NO!

So we replied:

This comment misunderstands Romans 1:31. As noted above, these sins are on the list farther down than homosexual behavior. Paul changed his subject matter from homosexual behavior when he began verse 28. That’s why we begin it with the words, “Furthermore, because…”

To all of this the reader responded with remarkable stubbornness:

Paul is describing in this passage what an abomination lesbians and homosexuals are to God because the entire context is about UNNATURAL LOVE, men to men, and women to women.

So we replied:

No. Again, the discussion of homosexual behavior ended at the conclusion of verse 27. Verse 28 is a whole new list of “acts that should not be done”; i.e., sins that spring from the behavior of not thinking “it worthwhile to retain the full knowledge of God”. Not the full knowledge of straight sexuality, by the way.

But this reader continued to maintain his view that…. Your translation of this Greek word to “heartless” is totally incorrect,…

So we reminded him:

No. It’s totally correct for the context, since by the time verse 31 comes along, Paul has left homosexual behavior and gone on to the next level of depravity noted in verse 28.

And he continued to respond:

...it misses the point (the teaching of the context) altogether.

So in our final response, we wrote:

You missed the context. The context of homosexual behavior was concluded at verse 27. Verse 28 starts a new, more grievous list of sins to which people have been given over by God through mental deficiencies of some kind (verse 28). By the way, Jesus noted that there was a sin greater than homosexual behavior. He said that Capernaum would see the judged sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah rise at the resurrection and condemn them, because if the mighty works that had been done in that town had been done for Sodom and Gomorrah, those two cities would have remained until Christ’s day.

So Jesus himself said that to reject his message is worse than is homosexual behavior. That’s a better message for evangelism, wouldn’t you think, than discussing homosexual behavior? After all, those folks are so blind to their sexual sin that they can't tell good from evil. But they can and do know that they’ve rejected Jesus' command to repent! They'll be blind to your condemnation of their sexual activity, so why not tell them that your own sin before you met Christ was worse than theirs?

You had rejected the message of Jesus, and one day the homosexual practitioners of Sodom and Gomorrah might have risen to condemn you, but for the grace of God. And then tell them to go and do likewise. Tell them to repent of not believing the gospel, and the forsaking of homosexual behavior will follow on naturally as the Holy Spirit grants them repentance.\(^3\)

We invite our critics to remember that we have not attacked all of Dr. Harris’ views about the Bible, Christian life, or sin in general—only her conclusions regarding what the homosexual and lesbian community and its adherents call a “gay lifestyle”. To make things abundantly clear in regards to this, we’ve taken the liberty of marking in yellow highlighter that portion of the Harris Presentation with which we have no fundamental objection.

An observant reader will note that only a small portion of the Harris Presentation causes us concern. You’ll see them not marked in yellow highlight. But then again, it’s the nature of poisons that only small amounts can be fatal. A little arsenic permeates throughout the entire drink, and as a result, a single sip

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\(^3\) This thread was originally posted as part of the ISV Foundation’s Catacombs blog web site.
can kill. Christ's comments about how a small amount of leaven can penetrate an entire batch of bread dough come to mind here, I do believe. To sum up, we request that both sides of this discussion engage in calm, orderly, and normative debate, and refrain from ad hominem arguments and emotional diatribes. But now it's time to begin our analysis.

1. The Importance of Proper Context: Toward a Cogent Hermeneutic of Romans 1:26-27

The larger context of Romans 1:24-32 must be studied as a matter of first principle before we proceed to analyze the claims regarding same-sex relationships advocated in the Harris Presentation. The complete passage reads as follows in the Holy Bible: International Standard Version (and in the indented Greek text set forth below):

An observant reader will note that only a small portion of the Harris Presentation causes us concern.

24 For this reason, God delivered them to sexual impurity as they followed the lusts of their hearts and dishonored their bodies with one another. They exchanged God's truth for a lie and worshipped and served the creation rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

25 For this reason, God delivered them to degrading passions as their females exchanged their natural sexual function toward females and burned with lust toward one another. Males committed indecent acts with males, and received within themselves the appropriate penalty for their perversion. a

26 Diá touto perédwken autóous ὁ θεὸς εἰς πάθη ἄτιμας, αἳ τε γὰρ θήλειας αὐτῶν μετήλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν, ὥστε καὶ οἱ ἄρσενες ἀφέντες τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἀφένεις ἐν ἀρεσίᾳ τῆς ἁγιομοσύνης κατεργαζόμενοι καὶ τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν ἣν ἔδει τῆς πλάνης αὐτῶν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀπολαμβάνοντες.

28 Kai kathós oúk ἐδοκίμασαν τὸν θεὸν ἐξειν ἐπηγινώσκει, παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ἀδόκιμον νόον, ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα, 29 πεπληρωμένους πάση ἀδικία πονηρία πλεονεξία κακία, μετοσκούσαις φθόνου φόνου ἐρίδος δόλου κακοπιστίας, ψιθυριστίας, 30 καταλάλους θεοστιγμένας ὑβριστὰς ὑπερφηνάντας ἀλαζόνας, ἐφευρέτας κακῶν, γονεανυσίδως ἀπεθείθες, 31 ἀσυνέτους ἀσυνήθετοις ἀστρόγγυλοις ἀνελήμφονας,

b1:27 Or deviation

Dr. Piper's presentations includes practical pastoral counsel from a conservative, evangelical, reformed, Calvinist, Baptist perspective for individuals who are concerned about homosexual tendencies, either within themselves or within their relatives.

Dr. Piper’s presentation Position Paper on Homosexuality has been published as a guide for church polity and practice by Bethlehem Baptist Church, from which Dr. Piper is retired as Teaching Pastor.

4 See, for example, Dr. John Piper’s excellent exegetical analysis of Romans 1:24-32 (Part One and Part Two), and a sermon entitled Discerning the Will of God Concerning Homosexuality and Marriage.

5 All English language scripture translations quoted herein are from the Holy Bible: International Standard Version, v2.0. Copyright © 1995-2013 by The ISV Foundation of La Mirada, California. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED INTERNATIONALLY.
A marked unfamiliarity with and/or a deliberate overlooking of Koiné Greek language grammar, syntax, and historical context of the text of this NT passage is also discernible in the Harris Presentation.

2. Executive Summary: A Plethora of Truthful Statements Mixed with an Abundance of Presuppositional Errors

The focus of the Harris Presentation is on the Apostle Paul’s statements in Romans 1:26-27. The Harris Presentation is characterized by a large number of accurate and biblically true statements that have been interspersed with many destructive and deceptive assumptions that spring from flawed and erroneous thinking. Dr. Harris is correct when she asserts that “what makes us distinct as evangelicals is the way we look to the authority of scripture”, refusing to “hide from its message” or taking “away the parts of it that do not fit comfortably with ourselves or our culture,” but she reaches problematic conclusions from Romans 1:26-27 because of a number of presuppositional errors that reveal a basic misunderstanding of the NT milieu in which the Apostle Paul wrote the larger context of Romans 1:24-32.

Therefore, the presuppositional errors that inform her theology cause Dr. Harris to depart from the tenets of historical, orthodox Judeo-Christian doctrine and practice, thus leading to endorsement of same-sex relationships as her recommended normative posture with respect to homosexual behavior. The result is that Dr. Harris has embraced a social posture for the Christian church that stands irredeemably opposed to the faith “that was passed down to the saints once and for all” (Jude 3) in the Scriptures.

The effect of this departure from the faith is that in her presentation, Dr. Harris denies the authority of scripture that she claims to believe. She hides from its message, and avoids the parts of Romans 1:26-27 that—to use her own words—“do not fit comfortably” with her or with her adopted, non-evangelical culture. Romans 1:26-27, she claims, is “at odds with trends in our society where we have a guiding paradigm of inclusion” because “Paul’s view on homosexual and lesbian sex is clear—it is sinful.” Nevertheless, she affirms outwardly that “the NT speaks repeatedly about what a transformed life looks like—and sexual sin…often leads the list” of what has been eliminated from a transformed life.

As Harris rightly observes, “What we do with our bodies matters to God. Theology and ethics work together; that is, what we believe about God has inherently practical application with how we act.” For Dr. Harris, the real problem that vexes her understanding of Paul’s statements in Romans 1:26-27 is that what the Apostle actually wrote does, in fact, stand “at odds with trends in our society” in the twenty-first century.

And so Dr. Harris chooses to apply a flawed hermeneutic to Romans 1:26-27 in order to conclude that same-sex relationships are not so sinful in God’s sight as the plain grammar, syntax, and historical context say that they are.

The first four paragraphs of the Harris Presentation contain what appears at first to be evangelical orthodoxy, but then her descent into unorthodoxy begins in the middle of paragraph five on page one. Dr. Harris correctly observes that “immoral behaviour follows on from idolatry which began when humans rejected God as Creator in the fall, and this led to a downward spiral of sinful behaviour,” but then claims that in Paul’s wider list of sins, the Apostle “is not isolating same-sex relationships as worse than gossips, slanderers, or people who are rebellious to their parents.”

But surely this claim by Dr. Harris cannot be relied upon. Quite the opposite, the Apostle documents a three-fold abandonment by God of the unrepentant and rebellious sinner into His wrath:

- First, Paul states in Romans 1:24 that “for this reason (a refusal to retain a knowledge of God

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8 Ibid., ¶2.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.
on the part of sinners), God delivered them” (Gr. Διὸ παρέδωκεν αὐτούς ὁ θεὸς) to sexual impurity (Gr. ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμιαῖς). This resultant dishonoring (Gr. τοῦ ἄτιμαζοντος) of their bodies resulted in further degradation of the human condition as they exchanged God’s truth for a lie (Gr. μετήλλαξαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ ψεύδει) and focused their worship and spiritual service on God’s creation rather than on God Himself (Gr. καὶ ἔσεβθησαν καὶ ἐλάττευσαν τῇ κτίσει παρὰ τόν κτίσαντα), which is the very essence of idolatry.

- Second, Paul claims that a non-repentant response to God’s first stage of abandonment wrath causes God to deliver them “for this reason” (Gr. Διὰ τοῦτο) to degrading passions as their females exchanged their natural function for one that is unnatural” (Gr. εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν), while males burned with lust (Gr. ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει) toward one another, committing indecent acts (Gr. ἄρσενες ἐν ἄρσεσιν) with males and receiving within themselves a penalty suitable for their behavior that had been deviating (Gr. ἀπολαμβάνοντες) from God’s standard of holy sexual behavior.

- Third and finally, Paul claims that “Furthermore” (Gr. Καὶ καθὼς)—i.e., as a consequence of their non-repentant response to God’s second stage of abandonment wrath, God delivered them (Gr. παρέδωκεν αὐτούς ὁ θεὸς) to a “degraded mind” (Gr. εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν), a Pauline term that connotes a warped worldview of life in general, so that all sorts of “acts that should not be done” (Gr. ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθίκειντα) are performed.

The end result of living under Paul’s third stage of God’s abandonment wrath is precisely the situation in which Dr. Harris finds herself at the present time. Specifically, Dr. Harris knows “God’s just requirement—that those who practice such things deserve to die” (Gr. τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιγνόντες ὅτι οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες άξιοι θανάτου εἰσίν), but the posture of the Harris Presentation is that she is appealing others who practice” (Gr. καὶ συνευδοκοῦσιν τοῖς πράσσουσιν) these kinds of activity.

3. On Paul’s So-called “Silence” in not Discussing “Sexual Orientation”

Dr. Harris claims that the Apostle Paul “does not say anything about sexual orientation.” Technically speaking, Dr. Harris is correct about this claim because the term “sexual orientation” is not used in the Bible. However, this claim is irrelevant to the context of Romans 1:24-32 because her argument is from silence. “Sexual orientation” is a modern term of theological use or cultural discussion. Its use was foreign to the thinking and theological vocabulary of the first century of the Christian era in which the Apostle wrote, even though homosexual behavior by both men and women is a well-documented phenomenon. Its existence in the human condition is a consequence, Paul writes in Romans 1:26-27, of God’s abandonment wrath. But then again, we must constantly be reminded that biblical writers do not make much of a distinction between the temptation to sin and committing the sin itself.

Accordingly, if NT writers were to be asked about “sexual orientation,” they would suggest that what our culture today calls “being gay” should more accurately be called “temptation to engage in homosexual behavior”. Biblical writers would tell us that it should be resisted after the same manner of Christ’s warning that not only after someone with the intention of committing sexual immorality carries the same guilt before God as does committing the act in real time. And they would say that the Christian church should deal with homosexual behavior after the same manner as it has been instructed to deal with the unrepentantly immoral: they are to expel the unrepentant Christian from the fellowship of believers if the disobedient person rejects admonitions to turn from the sinful behavior.

Dr. Harris is on shaky, untrustworthy exegetical grounds when she says “being gay is not a sin. Neither Paul here, nor any writer of scripture, addresses sexual orientation; being gay is not a sin.” The truth is that “being gay,” which must be defined biblically as “being tempted to homosexual behavior,” is to be resisted by all who wish to become godly believers. Dr. Harris is not on shaky grounds when she says:

the heart of what Paul is saying to the church in Rome when he says you deserve to die, Paul understands that all sin separates us from God and brings death, but that salvation brings life in the Spirit and transformed lives to all, on condition of faith. [He] wants people to choose life.

But she cannot get from that true statement to her conclusion that “…it is not a sin to be gay.” The only conclusion that can be exegeted properly from the Greek grammatical syntax, the historical context, and

18 Ibid. ¶6.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
the cultural milieu of Romans 1:26-27 is that “being gay” is a temptation from which all Christians should flee because, as Dr. Harris admits, all of us are “sinners in need of salvation.”

The Apostle Paul’s instructions concerning sexual behavior are clear and unequivocal.

To sum up, the Harris Presentation’s claim is essentially accurate in so far as Paul’s aim in Romans 1 is not to prove the inherent evil of homosexual acts, because “his aim is to explain how such behaviour is an expression of God’s wrath,”22 As Dr. Harris puts it succinctly, “The language sound harsh; it is—he is making a strong statement about the power of sin.” 23

But Dr. Harris goes astray in her failure to distinguish between temptation and behavior.

The Apostle Paul’s instructions concerning sexual behavior are clear and unequivocal. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, he writes:

1 Now then, brothers, you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, as in fact you are doing. We ask and encourage you in the Lord to do so even more. 2 You know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For it is God’s will that you be sanctified: You must abstain from sexual immorality. 4 Each of you must know how to control his own body[a] in a holy and honorable manner, [b]not with passion and lust like the gentiles who do not know God. 5 Furthermore, you must never take advantage of or exploit a brother in this regard, because the Lord avenges all these things, just as we already told you and warned you. 6 For God did not call us to be impure, but to be holy. 7 Therefore, whoever rejects this instruction[b] is not rejecting human authority but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. (ISV v2.0)

3 To this yar estin thelema tou theou, o angaisimos umon, anpecheothe uma ap la tis porneias, 4 einede ekaston umon to exaustou skeuos koudhai en anagiasom kai tymi, 5 um en paidei etipumias kathaperi kai ta ethn ta mi idota ton theon, 6 to mi uperbaieinai kai pleso-vektein en tw pragmati ton adeiathon avtou, ido eido kurios peri paon toukow, kathos kai proeihame umin kai dieumartramaetha. 7 ou gar ekallesean humas o theos epi akatharsoia alla en anagiasom. 8 toigarev o athetw oik anarthmon atheit alla ton theon ton [ka] didonta to pneuma avtou to agion eis humas.

Note the Apostle Paul’s use of the special term of theological art that the ISV translates as “sexual immorality” (Gr. porneias). Christians are not merely commanded, they are admonished to abstain from this behavior (Gr. apécheothe uma ap la tis porneias).

The general word porneia used by the Apostle in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 connotes a plethora of sexual behavior. This all-encompassing word contains within its meaning concepts of forbidden sexual behavior, including (but not merely limited to) sexual relationships with animals, children, or individuals other than the spouse, rape, prostitution, participation in sex slave and sex trade industries, pre-marital seduction, and even some forms of physical abuse of the spouse when that abuse is motivated by aberrant attitudes of sexual domination.

In short, all forms of those “variegated patterns of sexual behavior”24 that Dr. Harris admits are mostly rejected by modern culture are included in the Pauline definition of porneia. Paul’s warning is severe: “the Lord avenges all these things” (1 Thessalonians 4:6b).

Finally, we must remember that pre-marital sexual activity is also a subset of porneia. Homosexual activity before marriage is just as forbidden as is heterosexual sexual activity. We’ll have more to say about this, below.

4. On Pederasty, “Committed Same-Sex Relationships,” and Dr. Harris’s Argument from Silence Regarding the Historical World of Romans

Basing an argument from silence is like building a house on sand: the building is subject to collapse at

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., Page 2, ¶3.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., Page 2, ¶5.
any moment. The Harris Presentation maintains that “it is often suggested that when Paul writes to the Romans he is addressing pederasty [i.e., homosexual sex with a minor] and not committed same-sex relationships”. Meanwhile, she concedes that “it was considered shameful to be the passive partner.” It would have been more enlightening, we suggest, for Dr. Harris to have written more accurately about pederasty that in first century Roman culture “it was considered shameful to be victim of child rape.”

Paul does not employ the Greek word for pederasty in Romans 1:24-32 because he doesn’t need to do so, since prohibitions against pederasty are included in biblical injunctions against sexual behavior with any individual other than the spouse. As noted above, the Greek term πορνεία includes pederasty as a subset of general immorality. Furthermore, strictly speaking, the Apostle Paul does not refer to “homosexuality” or “homosexuality” per se in any of his writings, since these terms were foreign to him and to the cultural milieu of NT faith and practice. Instead, what is now referred to in our twenty-first century culture as “homosexuality,” “homosexuality,” and “sexual orientation” are called in the NT temptation—that is, to the more general, all-encompassing sexual sin of πορνεία. Dr. Harris is incorrect when he states that Paul describes two equals who “exchange close to describe one’s inborn sexual orientation” are called in the NT temptation—that is, to the more general, all-encompassing sexual sin of πορνεία. Dr. Harris is incorrect when he states that Paul describes two equals who “exchange...

Dr. Harris is just plain wrong here. The Greek word ἄρσην used in Romans 1:27 does not mean merely an adult male. It means a male of any age. Juvenile males of any age are included in Paul’s use of the word ἄρσην by definition, and therefore sexual relations with children are included within the condemnation set forth by the Apostle as being a consequence of God’s abandonment wrath that comes upon humanity as a result of their disobedience and idolatry. As Louw and Nida explain in their Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament:

ἄρσην, ev. gen. ἐνος; the male of any living creature—‘male, man.’ ἄρσην καὶ θηλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς ‘he made them male and female’ Mt 19:4; oi ἄρσενες

It is irrelevant to the grammar of Romans 1:24-32 that “while pederasty was well known, so also were the union of two adults which Paul’s description implies” because pederasty and homosexual unions are both included in the results of the abandonment wrath of God in effect within the behavior of rebellious, but “consenting” adults.

5. On “Nature” and “Natural”: The “Mystery of Iniquity” at Work in Humanity’s Fallen Nature

Dr. Harris correctly observes that for Paul, “‘nature’ is firmly centered in God’s creation.” But she descends into a humanistic, relativistic worldview when she wrongly concludes that “against nature’ or ‘contrary to nature’ never means ‘what is natural to me.’” To adopt such a relativistic world view would have been foreign to Pauline thinking within the context of Jewish and Roman culture of the first century A.D. We concede that certain pro-gay commentators “almost universally agree that Paul does not use the language of ‘nature’ to describe one’s inborn sexual disposition.”

Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.
But surely this “agreement” by the pro-gay community of theological commentators merely demonstrates that they, too, are subject to the same abandonment wrath that informs the text of Romans 1:24-32. Conservative evangelicals claim that these pro-gay theologians are subject to having been given up as a consequence of their non-repentant response to God’s second stage of abandonment wrath—i.e., God delivered them (Gr. παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς) to a “degraded mind” (Gr. εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν), a Pauline term that connotes a warped worldview of life in general, so that all sorts of “acts that should not be done” (Gr. ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα;) are performed. We suggest that sloppy exegetical practices with respect to Romans 1:24-32 are included in the acts that should not be done by those who have been abandoned to divine wrath.

Dr. Harris would do well to rethink the concept of Paul’s use of the Greek word “nature” in the NT in general, and in Romans 1:24-32 in particular. In other passages of the NT (which we won’t take the time here to discuss), the Apostle hints at the profound complexity of sin: he calls it a “mystery of iniquity” (to use that old, quaint, King James term) that is at work within the lives of the disobedient.

How far this mystery of iniquity has penetrated the human condition is never spelled out completely in Scripture—we’re only told that the condition is eternally fatal and that the one and only cure for the affliction is for us to confess with our mouth and believe in our hearts that Christ has taken our place in punishment so that we can be saved from this condition.

Meanwhile, has the mystery of iniquity penetrated not merely into the human spirit and soul? Could it be that the mystery of iniquity has infected the very DNA of the human genetic code itself? If sin has infected the human genome, the homosexual community may well be correct when they claim that male-female “complimentary does not exist in same-sex relationships.” Most importantly, the Old Testament rejects homosexual practice (Lev 18:22; 20:13) as does post-biblical Jewish literature and the church fathers. Paul’s condemnation of same-sex behaviours (1 Cor 6:9-11) is consistent with the Old and New Testaments, all Jewish and early Christian traditions and many Graeco-Roman traditions.

In the meantime, we do find it likely that the homosexual activists may well be correct when they claim that same-sex relationships. But we claim that this lack of “complimentary” is a consequence of sin that has infected the human condition. As Dr. Harris concludes:

Greek and Roman authors regarded all homosexual acts with disdain. Most importantly, the Old Testament rejects homosexual practice (Lev 18:22, 20:13) as does post-biblical Jewish literature and the church fathers. Paul’s condemnation of same-sex behaviour is consistent with the Old and New Testaments, all Jewish and early Christian traditions and many Graeco-Roman traditions.

It may well be true that, as Dr. Harris contends, “In the ancient world there is also evidence that some believed there were those disposed ‘by nature’ to be gay,” and there may well be “some evidence of committed same-sex relationships.”

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55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., Page 3, ¶1.
37 Ibid., ¶2.
38 Ibid.
But even if Dr. Harris is correct about these unsupported allegations, we contend that these “committed same-sex relationships” existed within the confines of that certain hedonistic, unbelieving, and idolatrous culture that encompassed the first century A.D. Roman empire and which was the focus of his treatment of the causes of sin’s depravity set forth in Romans 1:24-32.

This is why the observation by Dr. Harris is most assuredly correct that “when Paul wrote Romans it is almost certain that he would have been aware of committed homosexual relationships and his rejection of homosexual behaviour addresses all the forms of same-sex practice we know today.”

But the point is moot. Romans 1:24-32 categorically condemns same-sex πορνεία as one of the consequences of the abandonment wrath of God.

6. On the “Silence” of Jesus in not Endorsing Same-sex Relationships: A Problematic Interpretation of the Choice to be a Eunuch for the Kingdom of God

Dr. Harris leaves unaddressed (but not unmentioned) what she calls “the question of Jesus’ silence on same-sex relationships.” Before concluding our response to the Harris Presentation, we’ll briefly examine this statement. The Gospels record a discussion held by Jesus with His disciples concerning the subject of marriage and divorce. Matthew 19:8-12 reads (ISV):

>8 λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Μωϋσῆς πρὸς τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν ἐπέτρεψεν ὑμῖν ἀπολῦσαι τὰς γυναῖκας ὑμῶν, ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς δὲ ὦ γέγονεν οὕτως. 9 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι ἄν ἀπολύσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ μὴ ἐπί πορνεία καὶ γαμήσῃ ἄλλην μοιχαίται.

10 Ἀλλ’ οἱ μαθηταὶ ἦσαν οἱ ἀνθρώποι μετὰ τῆς γυναῖκος, ὥστε συμφέρει γαμῆσαι. 11 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι ἄν ἀπολύσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦτον ἀλλ’ οἶς δέδοται, ἡ διὸ δεῖται. 12 εἰσὶ γὰρ εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς ἐγεννήσαντο οὕτως, καὶ εἰσὶ εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνούχισθησαν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ εἰσὶ εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνούχισθησαν εὐαυτοῦ διὰ τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν ὀφανῶν, διὸ διενόμενος ἡμῖν ἑωρέτω.

This passage in Matthew is the only portion of the Gospels that records comments by Jesus regarding what it means “to become a eunuch” with respect to the Kingdom of God. But the Greek word εὐνοῦχος is not a reference to sex change, cross-dressing, or transgenderism of any kind. The ISV has rightly translated the word for “eunuch” as “celibate”. The term refers to forsaking the sexual unions of marriage between a man and a woman, as Louw and Nida affirm:

εὐνοῦχος, ou m: a human male who without being castrated is by nature incapable of sexual intercourse—‘impotent male.’ εἰσίν γὰρ εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς ἐγεννήσαντο οὕτως ‘for there are impotent males who have been so from birth’ Mt 19:12a.

εὐνοῦχος, ou m: a male person who abstains from marriage without being necessarily impotent—‘celibate.’ εἰσίν εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνούχισαν εὐαυτοῦ διὰ τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν ὀφανῶν ‘there are men who are celibate who do not marry for

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8 λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Μωϋσῆς πρὸς τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν ἐπέτρεψεν ὑμῖν ἀπολῦσαι τὰς γυναῖκας ὑμῶν, ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς δὲ ὦ γέγονεν οὕτως. 9 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι ἄν ἀπολύσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ μὴ ἐπί πορνεία καὶ γαμήσῃ ἄλλην μοιχαίται.

10 Ἀλλ’ οἱ μαθηταὶ ἦσαν οἱ ἀνθρώποι μετὰ τῆς γυναῖκος, ὥστε συμφέρει γαμῆσαι. 11 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι ἄν ἀπολύσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦτον ἀλλ’ οἶς δέδοται, ἡ διὸ δεῖται. 12 εἰσὶ γὰρ εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς ἐγεννήσαντο οὕτως, καὶ εἰσὶ εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνούχισθησαν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ εἰσὶ εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνούχισθησαν εὐαυτοῦ διὰ τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν ὀφανῶν, διὸ διενόμενος ἡμῖν ἑωρέτω.

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39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., ¶4.
the sake of the kingdom of heaven’ Mt 19:12c.\textsuperscript{41}

Succinctly stated, the reason why Jesus appears to remain silent regarding the issue of same-sex relationships is because there is no place in his discourses for a theology of allowable sexual immorality, of which homosexual activity is a subset.

Christ’s comments regarding celibacy are made in light of the sobering reality of the seriousness of marital commitment. Even Jesus’ disciples, as dense as were in so many other things, were able to grasp the significance of Christ’s standards for marital union: given the seriousness of the commitment, it might be better not to marry at all! \textit{And Jesus never rebuked them for making this conclusion!} It can be a wiser choice, Jesus commented, to remain celibate rather than to place oneself in a situation where multiple “commitments” or “committed relationships” are entered into by men and women. The One who made Man and Woman from the Beginning never intended otherwise. Only hardness of heart—and that hardness came from the abandonment wrath of God, Paul claims in Romans 1:24-32—kept the one husband-one wife relationship from becoming the norm of human existence.

Accordingly, the concept of a “committed relationship” outside of marriage is foreign to the thinking of Jesus, the Law, the Prophets, and all NT writers follow as a matter of course, and so Jesus and all OT and NT writers are silent on the concept of “committed relationships” outside of marriage.

7. The Counsel of Jesus: Is There a Sin More Grievous than Homosexual Behavior?

We have no greater authority than Jesus Himself toward whom we may turn for counsel regarding sin. And when it comes to homosexual activity, Jesus reminds His followers that there is a sin more grievous to God than homosexual behavior. That more grievous sin is rejecting Him and His claims. In Matthew 11:23-24, Jesus said:

\textit{And you, Capernaum! You won’t be lifted up to heaven, will you? You’ll go down to Hell!} Because if the miracles that happened in you had taken place in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. \textit{Indeed I tell you, it will be more bearable for the land of Sodom on Judgment Day than for you!}\textsuperscript{42}

God incarnate walked the streets of Capernaum, presenting Himself as the Messiah of Israel who would become the Passover Lamb slain to redeem His people from their sin. And the residents of Capernaum rejected Him, His claims as Messiah, and His right to rule over them. And by doing so, they earned the wages of sin, which to them was that it would be more bearable for the land of Sodom than for them.

Those individuals who find themselves immersed in dialogue or debate with representatives or advocates of the homosexual community would do well to remember that for the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:24-32, homosexual behavior is only one stopping point along a tragic downward slide to degradation and eternal reprobation.

There are other sins that follow on after this. Paul writes in Romans 1:29-31 of the effects of not retaining a right view of God:

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, quarreling, deceit, and viciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, haughty, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to their parents, \textit{foolish, faithless, heartless, and ruthless.}

The grocery list of wicked behavior listed by the Apostle Paul in these verses should serve as a constant reminder that anyone can stray into the shadows of idolatry. Even continual disobedience to parents is a symptom suggesting rather subtly that a further descent into the abandonment wrath of God has occurred or is about to occur.


8. On the Error of Assuming Government Should Be Dictating the Definition of Marriage

Before concluding our critique, we think it advisable to address an assumption that seems to have infected the so-called “straight vs. same-sex” debate here in the United States. As we note in our final section below, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) recently ruled against the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act and overruled an appeal by opponents of a same-sex marriage law that sought to overturn a California state court ruling that declared unconstitutional a voter-approved law forbidding same-sex marriage.

In the midst of this debate, has anyone other than this writer bothered to question the wisdom of assuming that any federal, state, regional, or municipal government should be involved in defining what marriage is? Marriage is biblically defined as a transcultural institution crafted by God during humanity’s brief, unfallen state at the beginning of human history. Its specificity isn’t spelled out in exact details as to its parameters, except that it’s to be entered into between one man and one woman. Man-with-man or woman-with-woman relations are excluded in the parameters. And death of the spouse alone is supposed to be the final separator of the married couple. Divorce was allowed by Moses, Jesus reminds us, due to the hardness of human hearts.

Christianity became the great leveler, eventually eliminating all pagan forms of marriage as the societal norm.

It has been well-documented by historians that the cultural milieu of first century Rome included about a dozen different types of marriage ranging from the cohabitation of slaves on one extreme to the exalted wedding ceremonies of the Emperor himself on the other. Christianity became the great leveler, eventually eliminating all pagan forms of marriage as the societal norm except for adopting the marriage ceremony of the Emperor and his bride as a heavenly type and role model for the bride and groom.

Human governments should have no say in what constitutes Christian marriage. That debate should be embraced by the Christian community itself, and if divisions come because of this debate, they should be settled “in house,” so to speak. As noted herein, the historic position of the Christian church and of the Jewish community has always been that marriage is to be between one man and one woman with the warning cited in Deuteronomy 22 that if pre-marital seduction occurs, this activity can be grounds to prohibit divorce in the future. Human government should not interfere with Judeo-Christian freedom of religious expression in defining the parameters of marriage. If human governments wish to legalize non-Christian civil unions as an inclusivist gesture relating to taxation, government-supplied benefits, and other social activist motivations, that’s the prerogative of a majority of the electorate in a representative democracy. But let us make no mistake—in such a representative republic a Christian majority has just as much a prerogative to lobby that their view be adopted as the societal norm for our twenty-first century culture as do neo-evangelical liberals such as Dr. Harris. And in all things, we urge the calmness of spirit that should characterize thoughtful conversation.

9. The Slippery Slope Argument—Is Polygamy Next?

In an insightful essay that addresses the inevitable slippery slope argument by asking the question Is Polygamy Next? Koinonia House of Coeur d’Alene, Idaho discusses the dangers inherent in social activism engendered by the same-sex doctrinal views advocated in the Harris Presentation. In commenting on the United States Supreme Court’s recent ruling apparently striking down America’s Defense of Marriage Act, the July 2, 2013 newsletter observed that prior to the SCOTUS ruling,

[m]any homosexual activists claimed that Christians were promoting a “slippery slope” argument that did not exist, that legalizing homosexual marriage would lead to legalizing other forms of marital unions which, today, are outside of the mainstream. They contend that just because homosexuals would be able to marry, that does not mean that polygamous (same-sex) or polyamorous (many mixed-sex partners) unions would eventually become legal.

They are sadly mistaken. Both polygamists and polyamorous activists celebrated the Supreme Court’s decision to strike down DOMA (the Defense of Marriage Act), claiming the move to promote same-sex marriage in the U.S. promotes polygamy as well.

The Supreme Court voted to declare The Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional and not hear further arguments regarding Proposition 8 in California, which sought to ban any redefinition of marriage.

43 Accessible at http://www.khouse.org/enews/2013-07-02/print/#2
Many have suggested that the move heavily favors same-sex marriage prospects for the rest of the U.S., and now polygamy advocates have said the idea of traditional “family values” is dying. “I was very glad... The nuclear family, with a dad and a mom and two or three kids, is not the majority anymore,” said Anne Wilde, a polygamy activist. “Now it’s grandparents taking care of kids, single parents, and gay parents. I think people are more and more understanding that as consenting adults, we should be able to raise a family however we choose.”

Gay rights advocates have long sought to distance themselves from polygamists in order to undermine social conservatives’ slippery-slope argument, but their arguments have become hollow as more people realize the ramifications of defining marriage and the traditional family.

As talk radio host Bryan Fischer tweeted on Twitter: “The DOMA ruling has now made the normalization of polygamy, pedophilia, incest and bestiality inevitable. Matter of time.”

Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor seems to agree. During the hearing for the case, Justice Sotomayor asked, “If you say that marriage is a fundamental right, what state restrictions could ever exist, meaning, what’s the restriction with respect to the number of people that could get married, the incest laws—mother and child. What’s left?”

What is left indeed? Polygamists in the United States have taken cues from the homosexual rights movement, and have tried to position themselves as freedom-minded advocates trying to ally themselves with conservatives. The media—both news programs and entertainment venues such as the T[he]L[earning] C[hannel] reality show Sister Wives—have tried to convince the American public that their lifestyle can be wholesome and normal.

While some same-sex marriage advocates have attempted to distance themselves from polygamists by saying the “slippery slope” argument is a myth, others have abandoned all pretense. Slate writer Jillian Keenan argued in her article “Legalize Polygamy!” that the practice is “no better or worse than homosexual marriage.”

“Legalized polygamy in the United States is the constitutional, feminist and sex-positive choice,” she wrote. A number of Christian advocates have been pointing out for years the link between the unbiblical redefinition of marriage and the harder-to-defend practices such as polygamy, self-marriage, and the end of marriage altogether.

“Redefinition has no logical stopping point. Its logic leads to the effective elimination of marriage as a legal institution. This will harm women, children and society as a whole,” Ryan T. Anderson, a William E. Simon Fellow in Religion and a Free Society at The Heritage Foundation, wrote for The Christian Post. Though DOMA has been repealed and calls for same-sex marriage and polygamy may increase, Christians are continuing to try to stem the assault on God’s institution.

“Marriage has been defined between one man and one woman for over a millennium, and it is our view that the courts should not get involved at this point in time and fundamentally change the institution of marriage,” said David N. Bossie, President of Citizens United whose National Committee for Family, Faith and Prayer filed a brief in the DOMA case.

Tim Wildmon, president of the American Family Association, says that striking down the traditional definition of marriage as between a man and a woman delegitimizes the moral argument against polygamy. “It opens up Pandora’s Box in how you define marriage in this country,” he says. “Why not have three men and two women marry if they love each other? Why limit it to two people?”

Mark Goldfeder, a law professor at Emory University, believes that DOMA had a significant impact on the future of polygamy in the United States. Goldfeder, who specializes in the intersection of law and religion, says that the courts will need to find other justifications to keep anti-polygamy statutes in place.

“It’s one hundred percent likely that these polygamist cases will come, but they will no longer turn on whether a relationship is immoral,” Goldfeder says. “The court will look at whether these relationships cause third party harm.” But others believe that time and society is on their side. According to Wilde, “I’m not a fortune-teller, but it seems like if more people are accepting of gay marriage, it would follow that polygamous marriage wouldn’t be criticized quite so much. ... Let’s not pop the corks just yet.”

We need to work to keep the champagne in the bottle.

William Welty
July, 2013

William P. Welty, Ph.D.  
By permission of an electronic image of my signature to the document, left, I hereby certify that I am the author of this document.  
9/23/2013, 15:27:50 -0700

[14] Welty — A Response to Dr. Sarah Harris
The NT and same-sex relationships

Thank you for coming tonight – I know this is a critical issue currently for the church in NZ and I believe the most important thing we can do is to keep listening to Jesus through his Word and by his Spirit and to keep genuinely loving and welcoming each other.

My focus tonight will be primarily in dealing with Romans 1:26-27.

As we begin, I want to remind us that what makes us distinct as evangelicals is the way we look to the authority of scripture and we do not hide from its message. We may struggle to understand and apply the message, but we do not cut out the parts we disagree with. God has given us all of scripture from creation in Gen 1 and 2 to recreation in Revelation and we will not take away the parts of it that do not sit comfortably with ourselves or our culture. My prayer for myself and for you tonight is that we keep listening to God through the scriptures.

Romans 1 is at the storm centre of the Bible in this debate for Paul’s view on homosexual and lesbian sex is clear; it is sinful, but this is at odds with trends in our society where we have a guiding paradigm of inclusion. But for all NT writers, inclusion is one of universal access to God’s salvation and it is not a free pass or a magic wand that allows any lifestyle. The NT speaks repeatedly about what a transformed life looks like- and sexual sin (and there is no difference between hetero or homosexual sin) often heads the list. What we do with our bodies matters to God. Theology and ethics work together; that is, what we believe about God has inherently practical application with how we act. This is true in Romans 1 where Paul identifies a disconnect between who God is and people’s behaviour.

He argues that immoral behaviour follows on from idolatry which began when humans rejected God as Creator in the fall, and this led to a downward spiral of sinful behaviour.

He says...

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

This is not all Paul says.... In vv. 29-31 Paul goes on to give a wider list of sins and does not claim that any one sin is “worse” than another – he is not isolating same-sex relationships as worse than gossips, slanderers or people who are rebellious to their parents (listed later in the chapter); he gives this example because it is the quintessential Jewish example of gentile sinful behaviour. His wider argument in chapters 1-3 is that, “no one is righteous” (Rom 3:9) and “all people have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (3:23). Paul’s argument is simply that every person is in desperate need of salvation from sin. So what does Paul say?

Firstly, he does not say anything about sexual orientation – being gay is not a sin. Neither Paul here, nor any writer of scripture, addresses sexual orientation; being gay is not a sin.

Secondly, when he goes onto say at the end of ch 1 that ‘these people deserve to die’ he is not aiming that at the gay community – he aims that at you and at me. One scholar tells a great story... when preaching on salvation from Romans a lady came to him and said ‘It’s just, I don’t think I’m good enough.’ He replied, ‘Dear woman, your far, far worse than you realise. But this offer of God’s grace is not designed for good people, it’s designed for people who know they are lost and broken.’

That is at the heart of what Paul is saying to the church in Rome when he says you deserve to die. Paul understands that all sin separates us from God and brings death, but that salvation brings life in the Spirit and transformed lives to all, on condition of faith. His wants people to choose life. So (1) it is not a sin to be gay and (2) we are all sinners in need of salvation.
Let’s go on...

Paul’s argument is that people “exchange” the incredible glory of God for inglorious created things (1:23), and “exchange” the truth of God (which Paul knows is life-giving) for a lie (which is not) (1:25), and this then leads to “exchanging” the natural role of sex for the unnatural (1:27). The textbook example for Paul as a Jew, is women and men doing what is sexually unnatural with each other. In the case of men, the consequences of their deeds are the physical consequences associated with homoerotic acts, in Paul’s words, are the “due reward for their conduct.” This might be an ancient idea and yet even the AIDS foundation acknowledge the greater health risk of anal sex. Paul’s biology is less out dated than some might think.

However, Paul’s central claim in Romans 1 is not to prove the inherent evil of homosexual acts or the health risks; rather, his aim is to explain how such behaviour is an expression of divine wrath. God punishes humanity for dishonouring him by allowing them to dishonour their own bodies. Hence God deliberately “gives them over” to the over-powering of their desires (1:24, 26). In this giving-over, the restraints on dishonourable desires and the inhibitions towards impurity are simply removed. This language sounds harsh; it is — he is making a strong statement about the power of sin.

But how do we understand Paul’s argument today here in Aotearoa, NZ? In the 21st C we are separated from the biblical world by various cultural differences (language, culture, time, situation)... yet NT writing is not separated by covenant. Both Paul and Christians today are within the new covenant. This makes Paul’s perspective on same-sex relationships particularly relevant and applicable. It does not, however, negate our need to consider Paul’s historical and literary context if we are to adequately interpret his message for today.

The Historical World of Romans

In the ancient world there were variegated patterns of sexual behaviour many of which we now reject (the ancients’ sexual practices make K Road look tame), and it is often suggested that when Paul writes to the Romans he is addressing pederasty and not committed same-sex relationships invalidating his words for today. Pederasty, homosexual sex with a minor, was largely accepted in Graeco-Roman society, although the practice was beginning to wane at the time Paul wrote. Older men took younger boys as sexual partners with the older penetrating the younger, whilst it was considered shameful to be the passive partner. But we can be sure that Paul is not referring to pederasty. He specifies lesbianism alongside homosexuality which precludes this option, he does not use the Greek word which specifically denotes pederasty, and Paul describes two equals who “exchange natural intercourse” and we find that “men” commit acts with “men” and not with “boys.” This points to reciprocity rather than abuse. Additionally while pederasty was well known, so also were the union of two adults which Paul’s description implies.

Paul portrays same-sex relationships as “against nature.” The question is asked whether he is addressing a heterosexual person who acts against nature by living as a homosexual. Therefore, is Paul only censuring the person who does not act in line with their “natural” orientation?

Central to Paul’s critique is his use of the word “nature” and “natural. The idea of “nature” is socially constructed — if we watch the Discovery Channel we might find nature a wonder to behold; but it we live in the pre-industrial Amazon rainforest, nature might be the enemy who can take away our lives. For Paul, “nature” is firmly centred in God’s creation, and so his phrase “contrary to nature” expresses his view that there is a natural biological use of sex organs. This does not simply imply procreation; it implies design. A study of Greek literature has found that the phrase “against nature” or “contrary to nature” never means, “what is natural to me.” Commentators almost universally agree that Paul does not use the language of “nature” to describe one’s inborn sexual disposition, he points us to God the Creator who made male and female as complementary. This complementarity does not exist in same-sex relationships.
Paul is not alone in his view... While there was some social acceptability with sex between males, something not true of lesbianism, other Greek and Roman authors regarded all homosexual acts with disdain. Most importantly, the Old Testament rejects homosexual practice (Lev 18:22; 20:13) as does post-biblical Jewish literature and the church fathers. Paul's condemnation of same-sex behaviour is consistent with the Old and New Testaments, all Jewish and early Christian traditions and many Graeco-Roman traditions.

In the ancient world there is also evidence that some believed there were those disposed “by nature” to be gay, and there is some evidence of committed same-sex relationships, be that alongside a functional social marriage. Therefore, when Paul wrote Romans it is almost certain that he would have been aware of committed homosexual relationships and his rejection of homosexual behaviour addresses all the forms of same-sex practice we know today. We have a resource list on the Carey website where you can access the specifics on these details.

**The literary context of Romans 1**

Paul's central argument that same-sex relationships are to be rejected is firmly grounded in the story of creation (Gen 1-3; Rom 1:20, 23-25). He directly refers to the “creation of the world” (1:20), created “images” (1:23) and calls God “Creator” (1:25). He uses specific Greek words for “male” and “female” which the writer of Genesis uses (Gen 1:27) and are always used when the creation story, sex, or birth are being discussed (some examples are Gen 1:27; 5:2; 6:19; 17:14; Matt 19:4; Mark 10:6; Luke 2:23; Gal 3:28; Rev 12:5). When ancient writers wanted to talk about “men/husbands” or “women/wives,” they used another set of Greek words. Therefore, Paul directs the Roman church to the story of creation where God alone stands as the architect and designer. For Paul, “nature” is divinely planned and it is the blueprint which sets healthy parameters for daily life. With the recollection of humanity’s rejection of God in Genesis 3 and the idolatry and immorality Paul sees around him, Paul presents Jesus Christ as Lord as the solution to the problem of sin. His letter addresses universal sin, but in greater detail outlines the grace and power of God. Paul is not ashamed of the gospel, he is proud of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of all on condition of faith (1:16-17; 3:22) and his goal is transformed lives (12:1-2). This is the context for interpreting Romans 1.26-27. Paul presents the problem of sin and the solution to sin; but will we listen and obey? That is the question we as evangelicals must ask and answer.

There is much more than could be said, but over the evening much of it will be covered in discussion. One particularly important point is the question of Jesus’ silence on same-sex relationships… but George will speak to that. So, I am going to hand over to him.