

Brownson, James V. (2013). *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 300 pp.

Foreword, by Wesley Granberg –Michaelson, vii-xi. “The Bible contains no fewer than 326 references to slavery. All but two of them...either condone slavery or assume that it was a given part of the social structure. Yet today, no one needs to be convinced that slavery is utterly opposed to God’s intention, and that opposition to slavery was and is a compelling biblical mandate” (x). Brownson teaches New Testament at Western Seminary (RCA, Reformed Church of America).

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Rom 1:26 Lesbians? (83, 207-09, 224-25, 240, 244; p. 214, crucified messiah (1:16; 3:21-26)→ Hanks 2011:80-81;

“Patriarchy. Some interpreters believe that **Romans 1:26** refers to female-female erotic unions....Yet I will argue...that this ‘lesbian’ interpretation of Romans 1:26 is unlikely, and that a stronger case can be made for understanding Romans 1:26 as referring to noncoital *heterosexual* intercourse, making this a moot point as far as patriarchy is concerned” (83).

“For the first 300 years of the church’s life, **Romans 1:26** (referring to women who ‘exchange natural intercourse for unnatural’) was understood to refer, not to lesbian activity, but to nonprocreative forms of *heterosexual* intercourse. This also suggests that the early church saw the common theme between the sexual misconduct of women in Romans 1:26 and that of men in verse 27 to center on the *nonprocreative* character of both forms of sexual misconduct (rather than the alleged commonality of same-sex eroticism)” (244). “The assumption in ancient patristic writers such as Clement and Augustine that **Romans 1:26** refers to nonprocreative forms of heterosexual intercourse as ‘unnatural’ confirms the...perspective [that sex was for the purpose of procreation]” (240).

“Despite the opinion among some commentators that **Romans 1:26** refers to lesbian sexual behavior, such an interpretation of that verse appears nowhere in the early church prior to Chrysostom in the East, and Ambrosiaster in the West, in the late fourth century. In other words, the ‘lesbian’ reading of Romans 1:26 is completely unattested in the early church in the first 300 years of its life, despite fairly common discussion of this text among the patristic commentators. For example, both Clement of Alexandria and Augustine interpret Romans 1:26 as referring to oral or anal intercourse between women and men. Jeremy Townsley notes that, while there is a close connection between male same-sex activity and idolatry in the ancient world...there are no associations anywhere in the ancient world between female same-sex eroticism and idolatry, making such a linkage less likely in the context of Romans 1, where the larger question in view is clearly the consequences of idolatry (Rom. 1:22-23) (207-9; 208 citing James Miller 1995, not indexed, but not Bernadette Brooten’s 1996 attempted refutation; Townsley’s article is to be “forthcoming” in *Journal of Biblical Literature*).

“What Rom. 1:27 shares most significantly with Rom. 1:26 is not that they both necessarily refer to same-sex eroticism, but that they both, like Rom 1:23 and 25, are ‘exchanges’ of something good for something bad. At the same time, there is a more qualified parallel between Rom 1:26 and 27 in that both deal with sexual issues that are ‘natural’ [procreative] or ‘unnatural’, and that the two verses deal in contrasting ways with males and females....The reference to ‘their women’s’ sexual misbehavior in **Romans 1:26** was not interpreted as same-sex eroticism in the first three centuries of the church’s life, but as noncoital or nonprocreative forms of *heterosexual* intercourse....This suggests...that the violation of ‘gender complementarity’ may not stand at the heart of the claim that these sexual behaviors are ‘unnatural,’ as traditionalists often claim, since some of these ‘unnatural’ behaviors may also occur in sexual relations between men and women” (224-25).

1. Introduction and Overview, 3-15.

“Summing Up” (15)

- “In the midst of polarized and polarizing debates, it is important to ask, not only what a text *says*, but what it *means*. This entails determining the **moral logic** that shapes biblical prohibitions or commands—discerning why a text says what it does and clarifying its underlying values and assumptions.
- Determining this underlying **moral logic** is particularly important when interpreting Scripture in cross-cultural contexts.
- At numerous points in the history of Christian interpretation of Scripture, the church has needed to exercise its imagination to discern a wider and more encompassing form of **moral logic** underlying biblical commands and prohibitions [regarding absolute monarchies, slavery, women, etc.].
- This book seeks to accomplish such an exercise with a renewed and widened imagination regarding the **moral logic** underlying Scripture’s discussion of same-sex intimate relationships.”

[**Note**, an example of “**moral logic**”: if the command to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:27-28) and the death penalty prescribed for non-procreative sexual relations (Lev 20) reflect historical contexts soon after creation and then after Israel’s Exile (586 a.C.), the urgency to procreate is obvious. However, in our modern world, we struggle with the opposite problem of demographic explosion and believe that the original “moral logic” reflected in such texts (“maximize procreation”) no longer applies and that with an alternative moral logic, we should rather encourage family planning—as did China with its “one child” policy, making possible its contemporary growing middle class and prosperity].

Brownson recalls: “Five years before I began writing this book...I took a moderate, traditionalist position on the issues. But then something happened that altered my life in major ways: my eighteen-year-old son told my wife and me that he believed he was gay....I realized...that my former work had stayed at a level of abstraction that wasn’t helpful when it came to the concrete and specific questions I faced with my son. Indeed, the answers that I thought I had found seemed neither helpful nor relevant in the case of my son....That dramatic shock to my life forced me to reimagine how Scripture speaks about homosexuality. The texts had not changed, but my assumptions about what they were self-evidently saying was put to the test. My core Reformed commitment to the centrality of Scripture had not changed; but I needed to confront the equally Reformed conviction that the church must always be reforming itself according to the Word of God” (511-13).

2. The Traditionalist Case and Its Problems: critique of Gagnon on “complementarity” (16-38, 80-1, 122)

Summing Up (37-38; see Loader 2012:27-28)

- “An analysis of the form of **moral logic** underlying most traditionalist positions shows that what traditionalists find most fundamentally wrong with same-sex intimate relationships is that they violate divinely intended gender **complementarity** [Robert Gagnon 2001; 2003].
- But ‘gender **complementarity**’ is really more like a category under which a variety of forms of moral logic may appear. Some of these more specific forms, such as **hierarchy** [Gen. 3:16b] are not universally embraced among traditionalists as the deep meaning of gender **complementarity**.
- The most widely embraced form of gender **complementarity** among traditionalists focuses on the anatomical or **biological complementarity** of male and female. The physical union of male and female in this view represents the overcoming of the incompleteness of the male on his own or the female on her own. [for many the rulership of husbands over wives represents “the essence” of complementarity]
- But this hypothesis raises a deeper question: Is anatomical or biological gender **complementarity** what Scripture assumes and teaches? The central issue here is the interpretation of the creation of woman in **Genesis 2**.
- In response to a variety of traditionalist readings of **Genesis 2**, this chapter has argued the following countertheses:
 1. The original ‘*adam*’ of Genesis 1:26-2:18 is not a binary or sexually undifferentiated being that is divided into male and female in Genesis 2:21.
 2. The focus in Genesis 2 is not on the **complementarity** of male and female but on the **similarity** of male and female.
 3. The fact that male and female are both created in the divine image (Gen. 1:27) is intended to convey the value, dominion and relationality that is *shared* by both men and women, but not the

idea that the **complementarity** of the genders is somehow necessary to fully express or embody the divine image [In the NT Jesus = God' image: 2 Cor 4:4; 1 Cor 15:45; Col 3:19, p. 32].

4. The **one-flesh** union spoken of in **Genesis 2:24** connotes not physical complementarity but a **kinship bond**.

- These countertheses demonstrate that **Genesis 2** does not teach a normative form of gender complementarity, based on the biological differences between male and female. Therefore, this form of **moral logic** cannot be assumed as the basis for the negative treatment of same-sex relationships in biblical texts. Hence we need to look further to discern why Scripture says what it does about same-sex intimate relationships” (37-38).

“Analyzing ‘Gender **Complementarity**’ (18-22; “anatomical and procreative complementarity,” 21);

“Biological Understandings of Gender **Complementarity**” (22-26);

“Critiquing Biological Understandings of Gender **Complementarity**” (26-34)

(1) “The original ‘adam of Genesis 1:26-2:18 is not a binary , or sexually undifferentiated being that is divided into male and female in Genesis 2:22” (26-29).

(2) “The focus in Genesis 2 is not on the **complementarity** of male and female, but on the **similarity** of male and female” (29-31).

(3) “The fact that male and female are both ceated in the divine image (Gen. 1:27) is intended to convey the value, dominion, and relationality shared by both men and women, but not the idea that the **complementarity** of the genders is somehow necessary to fully express or embody the divine image” (31-32; see above, Jesus).

(4) “The ‘one-flesh’ union spoken of in Gen 2:24 connotes not **complementarity**, but a **kindship bond**” (32-34; see Gen 29:14; Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1; 19:12-13; 1 Chron. 11:3). “Conclusions” (35-37)

3. Revisionist Readings (Diversity; progressive revelation; descriptive/prescriptive), 39-53

“Summing Up” (53; see Loader 2012:491-500)

- “Most revisionist positions argue that whatever the Bible says about same-sex eroticism in the ancient world does not directly apply to contemporary committed gay or lesbian relationships.
- Therefore, many revisionist positions resort to broad biblical categories like justice and love for evaluating same-sex relationships [see Margaret A. Farley, *A Just Love*; New York: Continuum, 2006].
- However, though justice and love are *necessary* elements of any sexual ethic, they are not *sufficient* in themselves to develop a full sexual ethic from Scripture.
- What is required is a wider canonical exploration of biblical discussions of sexuality in order to develop a cross-cultural sexual ethic that may have relevance for gay and lesbian relationships today. That kind of exploration is the goal of this book.”

“Understanding Revisionist Positions” (40-44); emphasizes our cultural distance from the seven classic anti-gay “clobber texts”: Gen 19, Sodom; Lev 18:22 and 20:13; 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10; Rom 1:24-27; Jude 7;

“Difficulties in Revisionist Positions” (44-46); Deut 22:28-29 on rape of a virgin not betrothed and the levirate marriage law in Deut 25:5-10, pose similar difficulties regarding our cultural distance from the Bible.

“Justice, Love, and Sexual Ethics” (46-49); for needed treatments on the meaning and God’s purposes for human sexuality see William Stacy Johnson (2012), Eugene F. Rogers (1999), Rowan Williams (1996) and James Alison (2001)

“A New Chapter in the Debate over Same-Sex Relationships” (49-52). “A canonical approach that seeks to identify shared themes, values, images, and concerns across the biblical witness assists the cross-cultural reading of the Bible in three specific ways”: (1) establish the *diversity* of the canonical witness; (2) show the *progressive* and unfolding nature of the canon; (3) distinguish between the *normal-descriptive* from the *normative-prescriptive* patterns in Scripture (51).

4. Patriarchy, 57-84 (1 Cor 14:33b-35 authentic; Rom 16 Egalitarianism; Loader 2012:339-429 similar).

“Patriarchy and Egalitarianism: Contrasting Streams in the Creation Narratives” (57-58); “Contrasting Streams in the Old Testament” (58-60); “Contrasting Streams in the New Testament” (60-64); “Resolving the Tensions” (64); “The Place of Galatians 3:27-28” (65-67); “Revisiting the New Testament Patriarchal Texts” (67-71); “1 Corinthians 11:2-16” (71-73); “1 Corinthians 7:3-5” (73); “1 Corinthians 14:33b-35” (taken as authentic but citing Gordon Fee 1987; 74-75); “1 Timothy 2:8-15” (75-77); “The ‘Household Codes’” (77-80); “Implications for ‘Gender Complementarity’” (80-81); “Implications for the Homosexuality Debate” (81-84).

“Summing Up” (84).

- “We see the presence throughout Scripture of **contrasting patriarchal and egalitarian streams**.
- These tensions are best resolved by the eschatological vision of the New Testament, which holds in tension the ways in which we ‘already’ have entered into the new life of the world to come (and thus have left patriarchy behind) and ways in which we still live in this world, and have ‘not yet’ fully entered into the life of the world to come (and thus are still bound, in some ways, by the structures of society, including—in the ancient world—patriarchal structures).
- But the canonical witness as a whole portrays the egalitarian vision as the eschatological destiny of human life, and invites people to live into that destiny, as long as such life does not disrupt the everyday functions of the Christian community.
- This means that the hierarchy of the genders cannot be used today as a form of gender complementarity, which is allegedly violated by same-sex intimate relationships [*pace* Gagnon].
- However, to the extent that hierarchical assumptions shape the Bible’s negative portrayal of same-sex eroticism (and such assumptions are evident in multiple places), these texts may be limited in their ability to speak directly to same-sex relationships today—in a context where such hierarchical assumptions no longer apply.” .

5 One Flesh, 32-36/38, 85-109). “The ‘one-flesh’ union spoken of in Genesis 2:24 connotes, not physical complementarity [*pace* Gagnon], but a kinship bond.... ‘One flesh’ means ‘one kinship group.’ This is in keeping with the parallels to ‘flesh and bone’; the reference implicit in ‘one flesh’ here is not to the recovery of a mystic or primordial unity but rather to the establishment of a kinship bond.... If the ‘leaving’ [of father and mother] of the first half of the verse connotes the dissolution of one primary kinship tie, the ‘one-flesh’ language at the end of the verse connotes the establishment of a new one, between husband and wife. This approach to the text is confirmed by the way Jesus himself interprets Genesis 2:24 [Mark 10:8 on divorce].... The same essential line of interpretation is found in Paul’s reference to Genesis 2:24 in 1 Corinthians 6:16-17.... The focus in Genesis 2 is not on the complementarity of male and female but on the similarity of male and female [‘bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh’]” (32-38). “‘One Flesh’ in Genesis 2:18-25” (86-90); “‘One Flesh’ and Jesus’ Teaching on Divorce (90-97); “‘One Flesh’ in Ephesians 5:21-33 (87-101; marriage “‘sacramental’ in a more general sense”); “Sex and One Flesh: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20” (101-104); “Implications for the Debate over Gay and Lesbian Relationships” (104-09; cf. Galileo; slavery; women).

Bibliography: “One flesh”

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6. Procreation, 110-126. “The emphasis in the Old Testament falls on the *father’s name* [honor]: one of the central purposes of children was to carry on their father’s name.... Closely related to this concern was the need for the orderly transmission of inheritance, particularly the land...(Deut. 21:17). Keeping procreation within married households ensured the orderly transmission of the land given by God through the coming generations [**Note:** “orderly,” manifesting divine justice to avoid the accumulation of most land in few hands]. “Some...point to the procreative command found in Genesis 1:27-28.” However, “the words ‘be fruitful and multiply’ are more properly understood as a *blessing* rather than a *command*. In fact, every usage of the phrase ‘be fruitful and multiply’ in Scripture occurs in the context of divine blessing (see Gen 8:17; 9:1, 7; 35:11; Lev 26:9; Jer 23:3; Ezek 36:11)” (115). See below Jesus and Paul on celibacy and eunuchs.

Song of Songs 116, 123, 165: “**Genesis 2**, which explores the one-flesh marital bond in detail, does not mention procreation at all.... Similarly, the most extended meditation on sexual love in the entire Old Testament [Bible, including NT!], the **Song of Songs**, makes no mention of issues related to procreation at all, focusing entirely on the delights of physical love. If procreation is the essential purpose of sex and marriage, one is hard-pressed to explain its absence from this entire book of the Bible that is devoted to sex and marriage” (116).

“Heterosexual marriage does not exist solely or even essentially for the purpose of procreation. Marriage exists as a context where deep bodily joy is received, given, and celebrated as a gift (**Song of Songs**)” (123).

“From a wider, canonical perspective, it is impossible to claim that the Bible as a whole views sexual desire itself negatively, particularly in light of the extended celebration of desire that we find in the **Song of Songs**....The plain sense of the Song of Songs words...express a profound celebration of the beauty of sexual desire itself. In the light of this book, no canonical interpretation of sexual desire can ever claim that desire itself is evil” (165).

7. Celibacy, 127-146. “Celibacy—in the sense of a lifelong commitment to singleness—does not appear in the Old Testament” (128). [Note. But see Jeremiah 16:1-4; Hanks 2013:121-22]. For “occasional avoidance of sexual intercourse, even by married couples” in the Hebrew Bible, see Ex. 19:15; 1 Sam 21:1-6; 2 Sam 11:11; cf. Lev 15; Ezek. 44:22 (Brownson 128; see detailed treatment in William Loader 2012:66-73). “In the New Testament, however, the picture changes. Jesus himself remained unmarried throughout his life” (128; Lk 18:29-30; 131-32, eunuchs in Mat 19:12; 132-40, Paul in 1 Cor 7; cf. 1 Tim 4:3; Heb 13:4; details in Loader 2012:430-90; Stoic-Cynic Debates on Marriage (129-31). Brownson emphasizes that both Jesus and Paul made clear that celibacy can be God’s call for some, but is not for all (146). He cites the conclusion of the American Psychological Association that “Efforts to change sexual orientation are unlikely to be successful and involved some risk of harm” (142-43) and wisely warns: “Encouraging heterosexual marriage in such cases is fraught with peril. It is morally and ethically problematic to marry a partner who expects to be fully desired, both personally and sexually, when a person is not able fully to meet those expectations. Even when partners hope that a change in their sexual orientation will allow them to be faithful partners, such hopes often end in difficulty or disaster. Already, many marriages fail because one partner finally acknowledges that his or her sexual orientation is not compatible with heterosexual marriage. Encouraging marriages that are likely to end in divorce is not Christian faithfulness” (143).

III. Exploring the [negative] ‘Boundary Language’ of Rom 1:24-27—4 categories: lust, impurity shame, unnatural (149-255; see especially 259-67 on Rom 1:24-27);

8. Lust and Desire, 149-78 → Rom 5:5; Love the sinner, hate the sin?

The Larger Context of Paul’s Letter to the Romans (150-53); Robert Jewett defines the core problem driving covetousness as ‘the sin of asserting oneself and one’s group at the expense of others’ (2007:449) but also shows how Paul’s rhetorical trap (1:18-32), initially sprung in 2:1, is sprung repeatedly throughout Romans and how Paul’s “concern for mutuality and cooperation among Christians lies at the heart of Paul’s overall agenda ...urging the competing factious and disparate Roman tenement and apartment churches to welcome each other (15:7) and to unite together in support of Paul’s planned gospel mission to Spain (15:22-24)” (Brownson 153). Passion and Lust in Romans 1—and in the Larger Historical Context (153-56); lust expresses idolatry (153). A Possible Allusion to the Roman Imperial House? (156-161; see Neil Elliot 2008:79ff on Caligula.); Lust in Rom 7 (161-63); Is Sexual Desire Itself Evil (163-65); positive *epithumia*: Phlp 1:1:23; 1 Thes 2:17 Implications for the Homosexuality Debate (165-67; ignorance of orientations; excessive sexual lust); Where Does the Focus Lie when Paul Speaks of ‘Lust’ (167-69); may be neutral or positive (167, note 31) On Distinguishing Orientation and Behavior (170-77; higher attempted suicide rates among gay youth, 173).

“Summing Up” (177-78)

- “Paul clearly expects his readers to join him in outrage over the sexual behavior he describes in Romans 1:24-27 as an expression of excessive, self-centered desire. He describes this behavior as an expression of ‘lusts’ (1:24), as driven by ‘passions’ (1:26), and as ‘consumed’ or ‘burning,’ ‘with passion’ (1:27).
- This is in keeping with the general perception of same-sex relations in the ancient world: that they were driven by insatiable desire, not content with more normal sexual relationships. Jews and Christians opposed to same-sex eroticism show no awareness of the modern notion of sexual orientation.
- In Romans 1:24-27, Paul may be alluding to the notorious excesses of a former Roman emperor, Gaius Caligula, whose idolatrous patterns and sexual excesses—including same-sex eroticism—were well known, and whose murder by being stabbed in the genitals markedly echoes Paul’s words in Romans 1:27: ‘receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.’
- Paul does not regard sexual desire itself as evil; it is only when desire gets out of control that it becomes lust and leads to sin.

- Many traditionalist interpreters of this passage focus on the ‘objective’ disorder of same-sex relationships, but when Paul speaks of these behaviors as ‘lustful,’ the focus falls on their excessive nature: out-of-control, self-seeking desire.
- Modern attempts to differentiate between same-sex orientation and same-sex behavior tend to minimize Paul’s concern with out-of-control lust in this text, focusing instead on the ‘objective’ disorder of same-sex intimacy. Yet this move leaves gay and lesbian Christians with little help in wrestling with their ‘subjective’ sexual orientation, which is in most cases highly resistant to change.
- Ultimately, Scripture does not sanction a sharp split between sinful acts and the inclination toward sinful acts. If an act is sinful, the inclination to that act is also a manifestation of one’s sinful nature. This calls into question whether the orientation/behavior dichotomy in many traditionalist approaches to homosexuality is theologically and ethically viable.
- But if we keep Paul’s focus in Romans 1:24-27 on out-of-control desire firmly in focus, we will recognize that these concerns may not be reflected in committed gay or lesbian relationships, opening up the possibility that these relationships may not be ‘lustful’ and thus not directly addressed by Paul’s polemic in Romans 1.”

Rhetorical trap (150-51). “[Romans 1:29-31] is not the end of Paul’s argument. As Richard Hays has argued, Paul engages here in a ‘homiletical sting operation.’....This rhetorical ploy helps Paul expose the more subtle but no less deadly sins of judgmentalism and selfish ambition in the second chapter of Romans” (150-51), citing **Douglas A. Campbell [2009]** who argues “that Paul speaks in the voice of a Jewish reader whom he opposes in Rom. 1:18-32, and then exposes the problems with this voice in the following chapters....Whether this more ambitious hypothesis can be sustained remains to be seen” (151, note 2). **Note.** Brownson does well to recognize Paul’s rhetorical ploy in 1:18-32 but fails to see that Paul’s laying of a **rhetorical trap** in 1:18-32 (with a series of four purposefully ambiguous terms to make the trap effective) undermines Brownson’s certainty regarding their negativity. Moreover, although he helpfully analyzes the four usually pejorative categories in Romans 1:24-27, he fails to note how Paul deconstructs three of these categories later in Romans, leaving only covetousness/lust/strong desire as a continuous prohibition for believers throughout Romans..

9. Purity and Impurity, 179-203; 1:24 deconstructed → Rom 14:14, 20? P. 189f ; WC 184, 195f

“Why does Paul characterize the excessive sexual behavior in Romans 1 as ‘impurity,’ and what are the implications of this characterization [Rom 1:24] for sexual ethics today?” (184). “We need to consider Paul’s repeated characterization of sexual misbehavior as ‘impurity.’ Paul is not simply being inconsistent here with his statement in Romans 14:14: ‘I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.’ Impurity still exists and must be avoided, but distinguishing clean from unclean requires new, gospel-centered criteria....I will ...delineate three basic movements that mark the New Testament’s reinterpretation of purity and impurity in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus....First, we see a movement away from defining purity *externally* toward defining purity in terms of the motives and dispositions of the *heart and will* [Matt 5:21-30; Mark 7:21; 2 Cor 5:12]...[Paul] insists in Romans 14:14 [+14:20!] that some foods are indeed unclean for someone who *thinks* that they are unclean” (189). “This focus on internals is...reflected in Paul’s use of the language of impurity with reference to sexual ethics....Therefore, I disagree with L. William Countryman when he attempts to argue, in reference to Romans 1, that “[the same-sex eroticism described in Rom. 1] was not in itself sinful, but had been visited upon the Gentiles as recompense for sins—first and foremost the sin of idolatry but also those additional sins of social disruption listed in verses 29-31 [citing Countryman 2007:116]....Moreover, Paul’s own statement in Romans 14:14, ‘I know and am persuaded in the lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself,’ speaks clearly and powerfully against an ‘objective’ understanding of uncleanness and impurity (198).

Note. Brownson calls attention to Countryman’s argument relating “uncleanness/impurity” in Rom 1:24 to the Gospel transformation declaring all *things* clean in Rom 14:14, 20 (see similarly Titus 1:15) and recognizes that, although Rom 14 involves a controversy over foods, the Greek literally refers to “things” applied, but not limited, to foods. However, he usually neglects Countryman’s evidence that the “uncleanness” of Rom 1:24 relates to ambiguous vocabulary, mainly pejorative but at times positive (but see texts Brownson cites, 2013:164!); and he fails to detect Paul’s strategy of setting (Rom 1:18-32) and then throughout the letter repeatedly springing his rhetorical trap (see Jewett 2007).

10 Honor and Shame, 204-222 (Rom 1:26, 83, 207-09, 224-25, 240, 244 → p. 214, cruc mss 1:16; 3:21-26)

“Summing Up” (221-22; Rom 12:10; James 2:6)

- “Paul’s characterization of the sexual misbehavior in Romans 1:24-27 as ‘degrading’ and ‘shameless’ requires that we understand this form of **moral logic** [see Luke 13:10-17; patriarchy implied].
- This language must be understood in the context of an honor-shame culture in which public esteem is valued very highly, and where male and female roles are clearly and sharply delineated.
- In this context, the reference to ‘their women’ in Romans 1:26 probably does not refer to same-sex activity but to dishonorable forms of heterosexual intercourse. The reference to degrading acts between men probably refers both to the ancient assumption that same-sex eroticism is driven by excessive passion, not content with heterosexual gratification, and also to the general assumption in the ancient world that a man was inherently degraded by being penetrated as a woman would be.
- Although the need to honor others is a universal moral mandate, the specific behaviors that are considered honorable and shameful vary dramatically from one culture to another.
- In the past, the church has often contributed to the toxic shame of gay and lesbian persons by the ambivalent response, ‘We welcome you, but we abhor the way you operate emotionally.’
- What is shameful about the sexual behavior described in Romans 1:24-27 is the presence of lust, licentiousness, self-centeredness, abuse and the violation of gender roles that were widely accepted in the ancient world.
- The church must wrestle with whether all contemporary gay and lesbian committed relationships are accurately described by Paul’s language. If not, then perhaps this form of moral logic does not apply to contemporary committed gay and lesbian relationships.”

Dishonoring/dishonorable(shameful) occur in each verse of Rom 1:24, 26-27 (204; male competition)
“Anthropological/Cultural Perspectives on Honor and Shame” (205-207; ascribed/acquired; challenge/riposte);
“Interpreting Romans 1 in an Honor-Shame Cultural Context” (207-211; honor a limited good: win → lose);
“Evaluating Honor-Shame as a Form of Moral Logic in Cross-Cultural Settings” (211-215; 1 Cor 11:14-15);
“Implications for the Homosexuality Debate in the Churches: The Meaning of Shame” (215-217);
“Pastoral Responses to Shame” (217-221).

Honor and Shame and the Gospel of a Messiah crucified naked 1:16; 3:21-26) → p. 214,

“At many points the New Testament...challenges the honor-shame codes of its day. Its proclamation of a crucified Messiah implied a radical revision of what should be considered honorable and shameful. Jesus repeatedly pushed the boundaries of honor-shame codes, associating with tax collectors and sinners, allowing himself to be touched by a menstruating woman, and to be publicly kissed by a woman known to be a sinner (Luke 7:36-50). Paul repeatedly declares that he does not worry when others regard his behavior as shameful, because he is confident that he will be vindicated (i.e. honored) by God (e.g. 1 Cor 1:27; 4:10; 2 Cor 6:8; Phil. 1:20). In other words, wherever the honorable shame codes in the ancient world were felt to contradict core values of the gospel, they were readily and quickly challenged or set aside. Paul was quite willing to be considered a fool in the wider culture in order to be faithful to Christ (2 Cor 11). A large part of learning to live by the gospel in the New Testament entails learning to relinquish both true and false shame, to give up worldly honor, and to relearn the meaning of honor and shame, in light of the overwhelming love of God revealed in Christ. This capacity to live counterculturally, to reframe prevailing codes of honor and shame in light of the gospel has continued in various ways throughout the life of the church” (214). Thus, although not recognized by Brownson and other commentators, the shame/dishonor references in Rom 1:24, 26-27 constitutes a third element that Paul deconstructs in the rest of the epistle (1:16; 3:21-16; see similarly “uncleanness” and “unnatural”; Hanks “Romans,” QBC, 2006).

11. Nature 223-255 (detailed critique of Gagnon).

“Nothing has been more central to the debates over homosexuality in the churches than Paul’s language regarding ‘nature’ in Romans 1....The importance of the references in this passage to ‘nature’ becomes evident when the recurring use of the language of ‘exchange’ is noted on Romans 1 [1:23, 25-26 + 27, men “giving up” intercourse with women]” (223). **Note.** “Nature/supernatural” are not biblical, but neoplatonic/Stoic concepts and to defend “Supernatural Christianity” is to defend neoplatonism, not the Bible, which refers rather to God’s “creation” and Jesus’ “miracles.” “The first place to look, in discerning the meaning of ‘nature’ for Paul, is Paul’s own use of this word elsewhere in Romans [11:24!] and in his other letters, as well as the word’s usage in the rest of the New Testament” (226).

Summing Up (254-55)

- “Central to the debates about the applicability of Romans 1:24-27 to contemporary committed gay and lesbian relationships is Paul’s claim that the sexual misbehavior he describes in these verses is ‘unnatural,’ or ‘contrary to nature.’ We must understand the **moral logic** underlying this claim in order to discern how to apply these verses to contemporary life.
- The Greek word that Paul uses for ‘nature’ here (*phusis*) does not occur in the Septuagint, the early translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. Rather, it arises in Jewish discourse after 200 BCE, when Jewish writers make use of it as a Stoic category in order to interpret Jewish ethics to Gentiles [Note above].
- In the ancient world there were three dimensions to the understanding of *nature*, and we find each of these reflected in Paul’s use of the word:
 - (1) Nature was understood as one’s **individual nature or disposition**. Paul’s language in Romans 1 thus reflects the ancient notion that same-sex eroticism was driven by an insatiable thirst for the exotic by those who were not content with ‘natural’ desires for the same sex. The ancient world had no notion of sexual orientation.
 - (2) Nature was also understood as what contributed to the **good order of society** as a whole. In this sense, it looks very much like social convention, and many ancient understandings of what is natural, particularly those concerning gender roles, seem quaint at best to us today.
 - (3) Nature was also understood in the ancient world in relationship to **biological processes, particularly procreation**. Paul’s reference to sexual misbehavior in Romans 1:24-27 as ‘unnatural’ spring in part from their nonprocreative character. Yet there is no evidence that people in the ancient world linked natural gender roles more specifically to the complementary sexual organs of male and female, apart from a general concern with the ‘naturalness’ of procreation.
- While we modern persons should still seek a convergence of the personal, social and physical worlds, just as the ancients did under the category of nature...even apart from the question of same-sex relationships... this convergence will look different to us than it looked in the ancient world.
- The biblical vision of a *new* creation invites us to imagine what living into a deeper vision of ‘nature’ as the convergence of individual disposition, social order, and the physical world might look like, under the guidance and power of the Spirit of God. This might also entail the cultivation of a vision for how consecrated and committed gay and lesbian relationships might fit into such a new order.

→ **Rom 11:24 Even God acts against nature, 241-42, 248-49, 255.** “For Gagnon, what ‘nature’ teaches most centrally about sex is ‘the anatomical fittedness of the male penis and the female vagina...Gagnon argues that [Rom 1:19-20] focuses on what is visible, or ‘plain’...[However] when we consider Paul’s other uses of the word ‘nature,’ it does not appear that he focuses particularly on the visible aspects of nature. For example, Paul speaks in Romans 11:24 of wild olive branches that, contrary to nature, are grafted [by God] into a cultivated olive tree. It is hard to see how this text focuses on visual elements with any particular emphasis at all” (241-42). “In Romans 11:24, God acts ‘contrary to nature’ by grafting the (Gentile) wild olive branches into what is ‘by nature’ a cultivated (Jewish) olive tree” (248). “The biblical vision of a *new* creation invites us to imagine what living into a deeper vision of ‘nature’...might look like under the guidance and power of the Spirit of God” (255). **Note:** Unlike so many commentators (Jewett 2007), Brownson notes and in his argument makes use of the unique parallel expressions in Rom 1:26-27 → 11:24; however he fails to signal the significance of Paul’s repeated deconstruction of this and the other key pejorative elements in Rom 1:24-27 (uncleanness, dishonor, change). Arland Hultgren (2011:96) also recognized that later in Romans Paul refers even to God as acting “against/beyond nature” (11:23-24) but failed to see the significance for the interpretation of Rom 1:26-27 .

“‘Nature’ as ‘What Comes Naturally’: The Place of One’s Individual Nature in the Wider World” (226-228);

“Nature as Individual Disposition in Romans 1” (228-32);

“Nature as Communal Well-Being: The Social Dimensions of What Is Natural” (232-37);

“Nature, Biology, and Anatomy” (237-244);

“Summarizing the Nature Debate in Romans 1:26-27: Three Streams” (244-47);

“Nature and Redeemed Life in Christ” (248-250)

“Natural Law, the New Creation, and Committed Gay Unions” (251-54).

12 Conclusions, 259-80: for (7) on Rom 1:24-27, see pp. 5-8 above.

(1) **Genesis 19 (Sodom and Gomorrah) and Judges 19 (the Levite's concubine).** Both stories show the same pattern: “A foreigner spends the night in the house of a local host. The men of the town surround the house, and they demand that the visitor be brought out; their intention is to rape him. In both cases, the owner of the home offers a woman from the house to the locals as a substitute victim....Both stories regard a man being raped by other men as an expression of violence and extreme degradation; both assume that the rape of female members of the household would be preferable to the rape of the male visitors, which underscores the deep violation of male honor that is assumed in both stories to be attached to the rape of a male by another male....Christians should...recognize that these stories are of no more value in assessing lifelong, loving, committed same-sex relationships than stories of heterosexual rape can be used to morally evaluate loving heterosexual relationships” (268; see 279).

(2-3) **The Levitical Prohibitions of “Lying with a Male as with a Woman” (Lev 18:22; 20:13).** “The wording itself suggests that *treating a man as if he were a woman* is the core problem” (83). “The prohibitions in Leviticus against ‘lying with a male as with a woman’ (18:22; 20:13) make sense in an ancient context, where there were concerns about purity, pagan cults, the distinctiveness of Israel as a nation, violations of male honor, and anxieties concerning procreative processes [to maximize procreation]. However, these prohibitions do not speak directly to committed and consecrated same-sex relationships. Nor are they based on a form of moral logic grounded in biology-based gender complementarity” (279; see 269-73)

(4-5) **References to Same-Sex Erotic Behavior in two NT Vice Lists (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10).** “Focus attention on the ancient practice of pederasty—the use of boy prostitutes in male-male [anal] sex. As such, they ...do not address committed and mutual same-sex relationships today”(280, see 273-75)

(6) **Jude 7.** “One other New Testament passage that is often cited when considering the Sodom and Gomorrah story is Jude 7, where Sodom and Gomorrah are condemned because they pursued ‘unnatural lust’ (NRSV). But the Greek text here (*apelthousai opiso sarkos heteras*) cannot refer to same-sex desire. The phrase *sarkos heteras* literally means ‘other flesh,’ and the word ‘other’ means ‘another of a different kind.’ It is the same word from which we get the English word *heterosexual*! The sin envisioned in the text is not lusting after someone of the same sex, but the sin of lusting after the angelic visitors—who are not human—hence the NRSV’s rendering of the phrase ‘unnatural lust.’” (42, note 2; note 5 cites Boswell 1980:107). “The canonical treatment of [the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah] elsewhere in the Bible does not focus on the offense of male-male sex, but rather on violence and inhospitality....[In Jude 7] Sodom and Gomorrah...serve as an example of ‘unnatural lust’ [NRSV paraphrase]” because of the desire of the residents for the angelic visitors, though the language used in Jude cannot be understood to focus on same-sex eroticism (268-69).

Brownson on sexual ethics for all 251, 276f-8. “Some...concerns clearly transcend their particular cultural setting and continue to serve as forms of moral logic that should shape Christian moral frameworks today. This is particularly true with concerns about [1] rape and other forms of sexual violence [2] concerns about pederasty [3] sexual slavery and other forms of nonmutual, short-term sexual behaviors, [4] as well as those concerns that focus on excessive lust and prostitution” (276). “The evidence suggests that there are no forms of moral logic undermining these passages [the 7 clobber texts] and that clearly and unequivocally forbid all contemporary forms of committed same-sex intimate relationships. This is particularly clear when these contemporary relationships are not [1] Lustful [2] Or dishonoring to one’s partner, [3] Are marked positively by moderated and disciplined desire, [4] And when intimacy in these relationships contributed to the establishment of lifelong Bonds of kinship, Care, And mutual concern” (277). **Concluding Evaluation.** Brownson’s work, profoundly impacted by the discovery that he has a gay son, is a highly commendable effort, to convince traditionalist Christians (like many in his own denomination, the Reformed Church of America), that they can maintain their faith in Biblical authority while welcoming those gays and lesbians who live according to the norms for sexual ethics he believes are biblical requirements for all. However, this overriding concern—to establish a Biblically based sexual ethics applicable to all—perhaps leads him to interpret some of the texts on sexual minorities in ways that fail to do justice to the *diversity* of perspectives in the Bible (on prostitutes, see Rahab in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25; Theodore Jennings 2013; Hanks 2000/08; 2006; 2010/12; 2011/2012; 2013;).

“In his Foreword to Brownson’s book, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson notes that our ‘polarized debate about same-sex relationships is creating painful divisions, subverting the church’s missional intent, and damaging the credibility of its witness.’ Broken lives, broken families, lost life and lost faith are tragic examples of what he’s talking about. They’re among the latest tragedies in the here-today, gone-tomorrow conflicts that have ruptured and ruined lives throughout church history. Sadly, before this one’s resolved toward an increasingly profound appreciation of Jesus’ Golden Rule, many more people will have suffered and died. After they’re gone, Christians will, once again, shake their heads in disgust and shame, bewildered about what in the world all the brawling was about.

“Brownson underscores the importance of historical distance between ancient texts and applications today. For instance, any sex acts between men in the ancient world involved assumptions of status difference between them. Pushing today’s same-sex marriages into ancient texts is an act of abuse against both couples and texts. He argues that moral logic transcends ancient settings of rape, pederasty and sex slavery, but that other aspects are culture-specific, requiring ‘cross-cultural perspective when we attempt to apply them in contemporary contexts.’ Ancient oppressive and violent same-sex acts ‘explain Scripture’s negative stance toward the types of same-sex eroticism the Bible addresses, but they do not directly address the case of committed and loving same-sex relationships.’

“As other scholars have recognized, Brownson concludes that ancient writers ‘show no awareness of the modern notion of sexual orientation’ [255; **Note:** Plato’s citation of Aristophanes’ humorous myth does indicate ancient awareness of persistent same-sex preferences. Bernadette Brooten (1996:8-9, 115-41, 242-43) pointed out other ancient evidence for such awareness (astrological causes, etc.) which make clear that such ancient awareness is not equivalent to modern scientific explanations (see Chandler Burr’s article in Hanks 2013:70-79). William Loader summarizes well the case for ancient awareness of stable, enduring same-sex preferences [2010:20-23]. However, if Paul was a repressed homosexual, as Gerd Theissen and Bishop Spong conclude (Hanks: Excursus in my review of Loader 2010) we would expect him to realize that he did not “choose” such a persistent preference, which no amount of praying could change; 2 Cor 12:7-10]. On sexual impurity, [Brownson] sums: For Paul, ‘impurity focuses on internal attitudes and dispositions, particularly lust (excessive desire) and licentiousness (lack of restraint)’ and strongly questions whether ‘committed gay and lesbian unions, which seek [the] discipline...of lifelong commitment, should still be characterized as “impurity”.’

“Contrary to today’s common assumptions about ‘one flesh’, Brownson explains that the ‘entire discussion of one flesh in Genesis (and indeed throughout the Bible) takes place without even a hint of concern with procreation.’ He writes: “one-flesh” union...in Genesis 2:24 connotes, not physical complementarity, but a kinship bond.’ He penetratingly critiques Robert Gagnon’s exegesis of Genesis, on which Gagnon builds his antigay argument.

“He well notes the importance of ‘honor-shame’ assumptions in biblical culture. ‘Paul’s characterization of the sexual misbehavior in Romans 1:24-27 as “degrading” and “shameless” requires that we understand this form of moral logic.’ He suggests, as even prominent early church fathers did, that ‘references to “their women” in Romans 1:26 probably does not refer to same-sex activity.’

“Brownson identifies Galatians 1:27-28 as the New Testament’s ‘most sweeping text [on] patriarchy’ and—countering others’ carelessness—he renders it, in Christ ‘there is no longer male and female’ (Paul’s reference to Genesis 1:27).

“Discussing what’s ‘natural’, he reminds us that, for Christians, the ‘created order’ is no longer ‘normative.’ He concludes: ‘The biblical vision of a new creation invites us to imagine what living into a deeper vision of “nature” as the convergence of individual disposition, social order, and the physical world might look like, under the guidance and power of the Spirit of God’ and he leaves room for how ‘committed gay and lesbian relationships might fit into such a new order.’”

Excursus: Ancient awareness of persistent same-sex preferences and attempts to explain the cause/s:

“The ancient world had no notion of sexual orientation” (Brownson 2013:255)

“The ancient myth of woman’s creation from man [Genesis 2] is one of the very early explanations of sexual desire as the desire to reunite. *In the Beginning according to Aristophanes in Plato’s Symposium*. Writing in the late fourth century B.C.E. Plato, in his *Symposium*, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, has the comic playwright, Aristophanes, tell a similar story to account for sexual drive. According to Aristophanes human beings once existed in three forms: male (with two sets of male genitalia), female (with two sets of female genitalia) and mixed (with one each). One day they annoyed the god Zeus, who in a fit of rage cut them in half from top to bottom. The result of their being cut in half is that ever since the halves have sought their other half: males seeking females; males seeking males; and females seeking females. Aristophanes was making a case for what we call both heterosexual and homosexual union. This is very different from the account in Genesis, but it shares the notion that something happened in the past to account for sexual desire between partners and it belongs to human nature. The differences are telling: the sexual drive in Genesis is not a punishment but an element of God’s [good] creation, something positive. Similarly, Genesis does not contemplate categories beyond simply male and female, and this remains a constant feature in Jewish thought of the time, so that any other than that, such as homosexual desire, is seen as deliberately perverse” (William Loader 2013:11; cf. Jesus on those “born eunuchs” in Mat 19:12; Paul’s imagined heterosexist reaction to Aristophanes, 2013:139). **Note:** Plato and Paul may have laughed at the myth’s explanation but recognized that some persons do have persistent homoerotic preferences, which the myth pretends to explain; moreover, Plato’s myth raises the question of the cause for heterosexual desire and not just why some persons are homosexual).

John Boswell (1980:109). “Boswell had suggested that Paul assumed a distinction between homosexual and heterosexual men and was targeting the latter not the former. He argued that this made best sense of the logic of exchange. These heterosexual men were engaging in homosexual acts. That was an outrage, whereas, he claimed, Paul would have considered it quite inoffensive if homosexual men were engaging in same-sex acts, which would have been natural for them” (Loader’s summary, 2010:20, followed by reference to Brooten).

Bernadette Brooten (1996:8-9, 115-41, 242-43, 360-61) pointed out ancient evidence (astrological causes, etc.) making clear an awareness of persistent same-sex preferences. Such awareness, however, is not equivalent to modern scientific explanations of sexual orientations (see Chandler Burr’s article in Hanks 2013:70-79). In my review (*More Light Update* March-April 1997, p. 17) I warned: “Particularly our often-repeated affirmation that sexual orientation was unknown in antiquity requires careful attention. Brooten cites ancient astrological materials that attributed same-sex attraction to the stars, and thus showed some awareness of lifelong same-sex erotic preference. However, we should not equate this astrological superstition with modern biological and psychological understandings of sexual ‘orientation’ (a term Brooten uses, but which does not occur literally in her sources).” Similarly, William Loader says that Brooten “shows that there is evidence that many people were aware of men and women whose sexual preferences were directed to people of their own sex, including lifelong orientation. She finds evidence in magical practices, and in discourses of medicine, astrology and philosophy” [citing 1996:8-9]. Loader adds that such discussions are not to be equated, with the complex modern theories of orientation and are at best rudimentary, “but were nevertheless sufficient and sufficiently widely attested to have been within Paul’s knowledge. It is difficult to measure whether Paul was aware of such distinctions and then how he might have responded to them, with assent or dissent” (2010:20-21). In evaluating the kind of evidence Brooten presents, we need to distinguish support for the mere existence of persistent same-sex preferences and the prescientific explanations for such preferences (Aristophanes’ myth, astrology, etc.) as distinguished from modern scientific explanations (biological, etc.).

Robert Gagnon (2001; 2003:101-102). Evidence like Brooten’s convinces Robert Gagnon of Paul’s awareness of sexual orientations, as reflected in his allusions to people as soft or effeminate in 1 Cor 6:9, but that Paul nevertheless condemned all same-sex acts by men and by women. When he refers to exchange (Rom 1:26) he describes actions, not orientations, but this doesn’t change the fact that the act is wrong. “Having such dishonorable passions is no excuse for acting them out, since they manifest “innate passions perverted by the fall and exacerbated by idol worship” and actually “modern-day theories of sexual orientation are compatible with Paul’s concept of sin” (Gagnon Notes 142, cited in Loader 2010:21, notes 42-43). **Mark D. Smith (1996;223-56).** According to Smith, most reported same-sex activity appears to have been associated with men who also engaged in sex with women (similarly Philo on the Sodomites)

William Loader (2010). Loader (2010:20-23) summarizes well the case for ancient awareness of stable, enduring same-sex preferences, concluding that “In all likelihood, [Paul] would have believed ultimately that all people are heterosexual on the basis of the creation stories according to which God made them male and female and/or because this was what he saw as natural. Most who continue even in the light of Brooten’s observations to espouse this view see the assumptions of both Boswell and Gagnon, that Paul operated with categories equivalent to homosexual and heterosexual as used in contemporary discussion, as anachronistic” (2010:21, citing Raymond F. Collins 2000:142; Andrie B. du Toit 2003:104; Dan O. Via 2003:16); see Chandler Burr’s article comparing homosexual orientation with left-handedness (Hanks 2013:70-79).

Loader 2012. (293-319). “Paul sees same-sex intercourse as disorder and sets it in parallel to the disorder when people stop worshipping God and worship idols instead. Not only are the two disorders parallel: one is the consequence of the other. God lets people continue their denial of God’s reality into denial of reality in their own lives. So they not only deny God’s reality, they deny their own nature as heterosexual human beings, and engage with those of their own sex instead of with the opposite sex. So this is not simply a transgression of a biblical prohibition which Paul assumes (Lev 18:22; 20:13); it is a deliberate perversion of God’s intention and their nature. In addition, Paul links it to shame, which goes beyond simply the shame of sin to include the shame of men behaving as women or having others do so. He also highlights the role of sexual desire and passion, not in order to condemn them as such, but to show how , unchecked and ill-directed, they can lead to such perverted intent and behaviour” (227). **Note.** First, Loader attributes same-sex desire to the change from monotheism to *idolatry* (which in Romans 1:18-27 was a decision made by an undesignated sector of ancient humanity—“a deliberate perversion”). Second, sexual desire and *passion*, unchecked and ill-directed can lead to such perverted intent and behaviour.

→ “**Why Christian males should avoid sex with idolatrous pagan prostitutes (1 Cor 6:12-20)**” (below)

Why Christian males should avoid sex with idolatrous pagan prostitutes (1 Cor 6:12-20):

¹²["For me all things are authorized/permitted["]—but not all things are beneficial!; ["For me all things are authorized/ permitted["]—but I will not be mastered/ruled by anything! ¹³["Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods["]—but God will destroy both these and that! The **body**, however, is not for [heterosexual] **porneia-prostitution**, but for the Lord and the Lord for the **body**. ¹⁴And God both raised the Lord and through his power will also raise us. ¹⁵Don't you [pl] know that your **bodies** are members of Christ? Therefore, taking Christ's limbs and organs, shall I make [them] members of a [fem., idolatrous] **porne-harlot**? May it not be! ¹⁶Or don't you [pl] know that he who clings to a [fem., idolatrous] **porne-harlot** is one **body** [with her]? For he/it says "The two [m.+ f.] will become **one flesh**" [Gen 2:24 LXX]. ¹⁷But the one clinging/being joined to the Lord is one **spirit** [with him]. ¹⁸Flee [heterosexual] **porneia-prostitution** [see Joseph in Gen 39; cf. "flee idolatry," 1 Cor 10:14]! Whatever [other] sin that a man may commit is *outside* the **body**; but he who **commits** [heterosexual] **prostitution-pornéo** sins against his own body. ¹⁹Or don't you [pl] know that your **body** is a shrine/temple of the indwelling Holy Spirit whom you have received from God, and that you are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price? So glorify/honor God in your **body**/with your **bodily life**.

How [heterosexual] Christians [m. + f.] may avoid **porneia** (7:1-7):

¹Now concerning the things you wrote about: ["It is good for a man not to touch [have sex with] a woman["]; ²but because of **porneia-prostitution**, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³The husband should pay/fulfill his [marital] debt to his wife; and likewise also the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife has no authority over her own **body**, but the husband; and likewise the husband has no authority over his own **body**, but the wife. ⁵Don't deprive one another unless by agreement [mutual consent] for a time in order that you may have leisure for prayer and then come together lest Satan tempt you [pl.] for your [pl.] lack of self-control. ⁶Now this I say as a concession, not as a command. ⁷To be sure, I wish all men were as I am; but each has his own gift [*chaisma*] from God, one this, another that.

Note. Two roots dominate 1 Cor 6:12-20:

1. **Body** (gr. *sóma*): 8x (6:13a, 13b, 15, 16, 18a, 18b, 19, 20)—not the neo/platonic prison of the soul! Paul uses *soma* to denote the whole person, the "*interpersonal, social, public mode of being a Christian....The Christian lifestyle is more than a private 'inner' state; it manifests itself in 'bodily' action and behavior in the public domain*" (Thiselton 2006:94); related words, stomach, 6:13, 2x; members, 6:15, 3x; flesh, 6:16.

2. **Prostitution: (1) gr. pórneia**: 2x (6:13, 18a); **(2) gr. pórne**, 2x "[idolatrous, female] prostitute /harlot" (6:15, 16); **(3) gr. pornéo**: 1x, "have relations with a prostitute" (6:18); the same root a total of 5x.

1 Porneia. According to **Kyle Harper**: "Ultimately Christian understandings of *porneia* develop out of Paul's letters, especially 1 Corinthians 5–7" (JBL 2012:376-77) and "1 Corinthians 6:12-20 must be the crux of any interpretation of Pauline *porneia*" (378). However, in 1 Cor 6:12-20 Paul has not composed a rationalistic philosophical ethical exposition but a letter that uses rhetoric to persuade heterosexual Christian males not to seek out pagan (idolatrous) female prostitutes. As in all his letters, the Apostle addresses a specific historical situation: heterosexual prostitution with idolatrous pagan harlots (6:18; 10:14) and employs generalizations, even hyperbole, that should not be misinterpreted as philosophical or scientific absolutes without exceptions (7:6-7). Versions differ widely regarding the theme and most appropriate title for 1 Cor 6:12-20: NJB and NIV ("Sexual Immorality"); NRSV ("Glorify God in Body and Spirit"). Harper indicates his agreement with **Gaca's** claim that the prohibition of *porneia* marked a fundamental break with Greco Roman sexuality, but says "I significantly depart from her argument that *porneia* for Paul and the early Christians was principally religious exogamy" (2012:366, note 8, citing Gaca 2003:151). Later, commenting on Paul's reference to incest as *porneia* (1 Cor 5:1), he elaborates: "Gaca's understanding of *porneia* as religious exogamy cannot stand here...in perhaps the most important canonical usage of the term *porneia*. Paul's objection is not rooted in the woman's alien religious status. He specifies that the relationship is *porneia* insofar as (*oste*) she was the man's father's wife, and Paul evokes the LXX language of Leviticus to describe the illicit union" (2012: 377, note 63): However, in her interpretation of *porneia* in 1 Cor 5-7 (151-52) Gaca's conclusion that Paul mainly *emphasizes* religious exogamy does not constitute a negation of diversity in usage of this slippery term.

Loader 2012:169-182. Loader cites Renate Kirchhoff (1994:18-37) who concludes “that whereas the words [*porneia* and *porne*] refer to prostitution in pagan literature and are used infrequently, they have a broader compass in Jewish and Jewish Christian sources. The translation, sexual immorality, for *porneia* is appropriate and for *porne* one could include any woman who engages in sexual intercourse beyond what is permitted, including prostitutes, but not limited to prostitutes” (168 note 72).

Brian Rosner’s often neglected or misinterpreted work (1998:336-51) points to the linking of apostasy and idolatry with sexual immorality (342-45) and in particular to 1 Cor 10:7 which he argues assumes presence of prostitutes at temple meals and where the same kind of slogans of freedom occur (348-51), to 6:9-11 which also links sexual immorality and idolatry, but especially to the imagery of 6:19 (345-47). “Thus a solution to the puzzle of the historical context of 1 Cor 6:12-20 presents itself when we recognize the link between feasting and *porneia*, and note that both the Corinthian Christians who were eating in pagan temples and those who were using prostitutes were defending their behaviours with the same slogan: ‘all things are lawful for me.’ It is this: some Corinthians were attending temple feasts and using prostitutes who offered their services on such festive occasions (350).(Loader 2012:180, note 112).

Loader cites authorities who call into question or deny the existence of sacral prostitution at Corinth in the Roman period, but here (2012:180, citing pp. 24,30-31) does not seem to recognize **Rosner’s** clear distinction between such sacral or cultic prostitution (where the prostitutes constituted part of the temple cult) and ordinary prostitutes who took advantage of cultic feasts and religious celebrations as places and occasions to offer their services (2010:73 and note 40, which cites Rosner’s reference to prostitutes “linked“ to the temple as “uncertain“ but fails to note Rosner’s distinction between cultic/sacral prostitutes and others who simply took advantage of religious sites and celebrations to offer their services). In addition to Rosner’s clarification regarding the different types of temple-venue prostitution, **Ted Jennings** argues that the search for [heterosexual] *fertility cult* parallels in Canaanite religion has been fruitless, because “the *qedeshim* are indigenous to the cult of YHWH. They make whatever religious sense they make not in the framework of a fertility cult but in the context of a phallus cult, in the context of the adoration of a male deity on the part of male (and possibly also female) devotees” ((*Jacob’s Wound* 2005:126). Thus “the *qedeshim* of the southern kingdom are parallel to the *bene-hanebi’im* [sons of the prophets] of the northern kingdom” (125). David Garland (2003) includes Rosner (1998) in his bibliography but does not cite it; Thiselton (2000 and 2006) even omits it from his bibliographies. Von Thaden (2012) cites both Rosner and Fisk (208) and Fisk (253-55) but fails to cite Rosner later when relevant and calling into question his argument (257-58).

The common neglect/misinterpretation of **Rosner’s 1998** article would appear to be due to the adherence of so many to Bruce Fisk’s influential 1996 article, of which Loader says: “Fisk, ‘Body Violation,’ commenting on the use of Gen 2:24 notes that for Paul: ‘sexual sin is uniquely body-defiling because it is inherently body-joining’ (556). To violate the body is to violate God’s house (557)“ (**Loader 2012:176, note 101**). However, if Rosner is correct in identifying the prostitutes referred to in 1 Cor 6:12-20 as idolatrous and associated with pagan temples (without necessarily being temple/cult/sacral prostitutes), then Paul’s argument may reflect more the dangers of submitting oneself to idolatrous figures and not to sex or prostitution *per se*. The exhortation to “Flee/avoid *porneia*“ (6:18) may be practically equivalent to “Flee/avoid idolatry“ (10:14)

2 “One Flesh,” Brownson 32-36/38, 85-109. “The ‘one-flesh’ union spoken of in Genesis 2:24 connotes, not physical complementarity [*pace* Gagnon], but a kinship bond.... ‘One flesh’ means ‘one kinship group.’ This is in keeping with the parallels to ‘flesh and bone’; the reference implicit in ‘one flesh’ here is not to the recovery of a mystic or primordial unity but rather to the establishment of a kinship bond....If the ‘leaving’ [of father and mother] of the first half of the verse connotes the dissolution of one primary kinship tie, the ‘one-flesh’ language at the end of the verse connotes the establishment of a new one, between husband and wife. This approach to the text is confirmed by the way Jesus himself interprets Genesis 2:24 [Mark 10:8 on divorce]....The same essential line of interpretation is found in Paul’s reference to Genesis 2:24 in 1 Corinthians 6:16-17....The focus in Genesis 2 is not on the complementarity of male and female but on the similarity of male and female [‘bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh’]” (32-38). “‘One Flesh’ in Genesis 2:18-25” (86-90); “‘One Flesh’ and Jesus’ Teaching on Divorce (90-97); “‘One Flesh’ in Ephesians 5:21-33 (87-101; marriage “‘sacramental’ in a more general sense”); “Sex and One Flesh: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20” (101-104); “Implications for the Debate over Gay and Lesbian Relationships” (104-09; cf. Galileo; slavery; women).

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Excursus: unity (“unitivity”?) + diversity (hospitality)

1 Unity (“Unitivity”?): “One flesh” (Gen 2:24; 1 Cor 6:16; Mk 10:8-9 // Mat 19:5; Eph 5:31).

Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his woman/wife and *they* [“the two,” LXX → Mk 10:8 // Mat 19:5; // Eph 5:31; see 1 Cor 6:16] become one flesh.

Regarding Paul’s reference to “one flesh“ (Gen 2:24) in 1 Cor 6:16, **William Loader** comments: “Here Paul cites the LXX *eis sarka mian* (‘one flesh’). While the Hebrew focuses particularly on the creation of kinship [“they“], Paul, following the LXX [+ ‘the two’] focuses more on the effects of the act of sexual intercourse in creating ‘one body’“ (2005:90-91, cited by **Anthony Thiselton**, 2006:96-97). Evangelical **Gordon Wenham** says concerning “one flesh” in Gen 2:24: “This does not mean merely

[1] the sexual union that follows marriage [Herman Gunkel 1901:10], or

[2] the children conceived in marriage [Gerhard von Rad 1972:85], or even

[3] the spiritual and emotional relationship that it involves [Franz Delitzsch 1987; **Claus Westermann** 1976/84-82/86, I:233], though all are involved in becoming one flesh [see the love that creates a spiritual unity, a more complete personal communion; Col 3:14; Eph 5:31]. Rather it affirms that

[4] just as blood relations are one’s flesh and bone [Gen 2:23], so marriage creates a similar kinship relation between man and wife. They become related to each other as brother and sister are.

“The laws in Lev 18 and 20, and possibly Deut 24:1-4, illustrate the application of this kinship-of-spouses principle to the situation following divorce or the death of one of the parties. Since a woman becomes on marriage a sister to her husband’s brothers, a daughter to her father-in-law, and so on, she cannot normally [see Levirate marriage!] marry any of them should her first husband die or divorce her...The kinships established by marriage are therefore not terminated by death or divorce” (1987:71; *Genesis 1-15*, WBC; Waco, Texas: Word). See Jesus with his beloved disciple and Mary (→ John 19:25-27), implying that Jesus and John had a one-flesh relationship that transcended death in the continuing mother-son relationship between the beloved disciple and Mary (Theodore Jennings 2003:24-28; Tom Hanks 2010:103; 2012:63).

The phrase “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23) “are a poetic formulation of the traditional kinship formula. For example, Laban said to his nephew Jacob, ‘You are my bone and my flesh’ (29:14); cf. Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1; 19:13-14 [12-13]) (Wenham 1987:70). Moreover, as **William Countryman** points out, rather than any teaching regarding male-female differences and modern ideologies of “complementarity” Adam’s delight in the woman is grounded in her identity with him, not her difference: ‘This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh’ (Gen.2:23, AV)“ (2007:242; *pace* Karl Barth and Robert Gagnon, whom he cites). Countryman also indicates that “By ‘one flesh’...Jesus understands not sexual intercourse, as Paul did..., but full kinship. The simple fact of sexual intercourse would not prohibit divorce” (2007:170; cf. Paul, p. 243). .

“And sticks [cleaves] to his wife’ [Gen. 2:24]. According to Wenham “This phrase suggests both passion and permanence should characterize marriage (1987:71). However, as **Countryman** points out, had the writers and editors of the Hebrew Bible interpreted Gen 2:24 as requiring that marriage always be permanent, they would not have included the divorce law of Deut 24:1-4, nor the demands of Ezra 10 and Neh 13 that Israelite males divorce their foreign wives (2007:243-44). Wenham adds: “Israel is repeatedly urged to stick to the LORD (Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:5, etc.). The use of the terms ‘forsake’ and ‘stick [cleave]’ in the context of Israel’s covenant with the LORD suggests that the OT viewed marriage as a kind of covenant” (1987 71). However, although the Hebrew Bible never explicitly refers to marriage as a covenant, Jonathan is said to “be knit” to David and their relationship three times is said to be expressed in their making a covenant with one another:

(→ 1 Sam): **18:1-4**. ¹When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul/life (*nefesh*) of Jonathan was knit (*qashar*) to the soul/life (*nefesh*) of David, and Jonathan loved (*'ahab*) him as he loved himself [see Lev 19:18,34; → Rom. 13:8-10]. ²From that day on, Saul would not let [David] return to his father's house. ³Then Jonathan made a **covenant** with David, because he loved him as he loved himself. ⁴And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and he also gave him his tunic and even his sword, and, what is more, his bow and even his girdle [see their further "covenants" 20:40-41; 23:17-18].

Finally, at Jonathan's death David declared that Jonathan's love for David surpassed the love of women:

2 Sam. 1:26. "Your love (*'ahab*) for me was more delicious than the love (*'ahab*) of women" [having eight wives and ten concubines, David had considerable basis for comparison!].

Regarding 1 Corinthians 6:16 **William Countryman (2007:198)** comments:

"Sex with a prostitute might seem to establish no relationship at all beyond the brief one required for the satisfaction of desire. Paul, however, in a daring interpretation of Genesis 2:24, claimed that every sexual act between a man and a woman established a union of flesh like that of marriage, although not, apparently, indissoluble. In other words, the prostitute and the man who has used her actually belong to each other for the duration of their sexual intercourse, although not beyond. The man who rented the prostitute no doubt thought of this 'ownership' as being entirely on his side. No so, according to Paul; he also becomes her property and makes his body part of hers. In Paul's own terminology the relationship thus established is 'one body', but in the terminology of Genesis, it is a relationship of 'one flesh.' For Paul 'flesh' referred not to the whole person but to what in us resists God, so he could also argue that the union created by an isolated sexual act is animated by 'flesh' and therefore pulls one away from God. The believer's bodily union with Christ, on the other hand, is not 'one flesh,' but 'one spirit.' That is to say, it is animated by the principle that draws one toward God."

2 Diversity (Hospitality). **B.N. Fisk** says of 1 Cor 6:12-20: "Paul grounds his prohibition of sexual immorality [*porneia*] in three distinct but closely related arguments ...related respectively to Christ violation [vv. 15], body-violation [16-18] and Spirit violation [19-20]" and because intercourse with a prostitute is "uniquely body joining, it is uniquely body-defiling" (**1996:557-58**). Paul perceived the sexual act "as one of intimacy and *self-commitment which involved the whole person*, not the mere manipulation of some 'peripheral' function of the body" and thus was far ahead of first-century cultural assumptions (**Thiselton 2000:474**, citing D.S. Bailey 1959:9-10). David **Garland** adds: "In the context, sex with a prostitute severs the union with Christ and sabotages its resurrection destiny" (**2003:238**)

However, nothing in the context of Genesis 2:24 would indicate the "one-flesh" relationship between Adam and Eve established an ethical norm of exclusivity. Later in the same book the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob had concubines and multiple wives, and Jacob's taking Rachel as a second wife, after being tricked by Laban into marrying her older sister Leah, is narrated approvingly (→ 1-2 Kings on concubines and polygamy). Similarly, today, someone tricked by religious leaders into a heterosexual marriage to "cure" their homosexual orientation might eventually enter into a same-sex relationship/marriage, that (as in the case of David and Jonathan with their previous marriages) would more authentically fulfill their need for a loving "one-flesh" relationship. Nor does Genesis 2:24 establish life-long marriage an ethical absolute: The Hebrew reference to "they" becomes "the two" in the LXX. Jesus' citation of Gen 2:24 (LXX) in his teaching on divorce (→ Mk 10:8-9 // Mat 19:5) does not condemn all divorce, since he recognizes exceptions (Mat 19:9; Paul provides another, 1 Cor 7:15).

"The way Paul deals with *porneia* is soaked in the logic of pollution and invasion. This is sexual immorality that involves a member of the church and an outsider. How Paul would have dealt with fornication (that is, sexual intercourse between unmarried persons not involving adultery on either side) within the church is unknown since he nowhere addresses the subject in his letters. Doubtless he would have disapproved, but he appears not to have considered it a very real possibility....The logic of invasion...applies to sexual intercourse only when one partner is outside the body of Christ. When two Christians commit fornication, there seems to be little danger that the body of Christ is implicated in copulation with the world. Copulation that crosses the boundary of the body of Christ, on the other hand, implicates Christ's body in coitus with the cosmos and makes the entire body dangerously susceptible to pollution and dissolution" (**Dale Martin 1995:179**)

Inductive Study, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

6:12 How does 6:12-20 relate to its context? See 5:1-13 y 7:1-40; 6:1-11. In 6:12 is Paul citing two of the Corinthians' maxims/ slogans? and what did they mean? See NJB note 6:12 g and cf. 8:9 and 10:23.

6:13-14 Does 6:13 cite another of their maxims/slogans? Cf. 8:8. How did the Corinthian believers understand the meaning of sexual relations? Is a similar materialist interpretation common among us today? With what arguments does Paul respond to the reductionist maxims/slogans? See 6:13, 14, 15-16, 17, 18, 19, 20. Does Paul agree with the maxim/slogan in 6:13? **Note.** Fee (255) agrees that sex and food have something in common, but says Paul emphasizes the differences: food is a *thing*; but sexual relations are between *persons* created in God's image with spiritual implications and consequences. See NJB note 6:14 h.

6:15 Does 6:15 refer to the religious prostitution (idolatry) common in pagan fiestas and/or fertility cults common in pagan temples? See 6:19-20; 10:7-8, 14 (with 6:18).

6:16 How does Paul understand "one flesh" in Gen. 2:24 LXX, which he cites?

6:18 "Flee porneia"; see 2 Tim. 2:22; Gen. 39:12; cf. 1 Cor. 10:14, "Flee idolatry." How should we interpret Paul's affirmation that "Whatever [other] sin that a man may commit is outside the body; but he who commits [heterosexual] *porneia*-prostitution sins against his own body" (6:18). The Word "other" of the NIV is not in the original text, but in the Greek sometimes is only implicit (Mat 12:31; cf. NRSV). What would Paul say, then, of the person who is drunk/alcoholic (6:10; 5:11); see gluttony, drugs, cigarettes, suicide, etc.; Phlp. 3:19.

6:19 Who represents the image of the Temple here—the individual? Or the Christian community? (as in 3:16; 12:12-30; 2 Cor. 6:16; with Christ the "head" in Col 1:18; 2:19 or the corner stone in Eph. 2:20-22).

6:20 What are the characteristics of the slave market reflected here? Does the change in ownership result in freedom? See 7:22; Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Rev. 5:9; 14:3. "Glorify God..." (see Mat 5:14-16; Rom 1:21, 23; 15:6, 9; 2 Cor 9:13; Gal 1:24). Does praise complete the enjoyment? (WCF and Shorter Catechism Q.1).

Limited Horizons?

1. Paul's warning to Corinthian males/husbands tempted to visit idolatrous female prostitutes gives the impression of despising prostitutes as persons (6:15-16). Is Paul's attitude toward prostitutes coherent with the Hebrew Bible (Tamar, Gen. 38; Rahab, Jos. 2 with James 2:25 and Hebrews 11:31; Hos 1-3) and with Jesus' example and teaching? See Rahab in his genealogy in Mt 1:5; cf. Mt 21:31-32.

2. Is 1 Cor 6:18 simply hyperbole? Does it fail to take into account other sins committed against our bodies? **Bruce Fisk** affirms that 1 Cor 6:18: "declares sexual sin to be profoundly (and even uniquely) self-destructive....Sexual sin, as a bodily act...forges a bodily union....Other sins may be physically destructive (e.g. suicide, gluttony), corporately destructive (e.g. gossip, divisiveness), or spiritually defiling (e.g. idolatry) but for Paul, because sexual sin is uniquely body-joining, it is uniquely body-defiling" (1996:557-58; cited, **Gagnon 2001:296**).

3. Could the logic of 6:16-17 also be used to eliminate marriage and all sexual relations?

4. If all sex must be limited to permanent, exclusive marriage, how should we evaluate the levirate practices, concubines, polygamy, masturbation, etc.?

5. How should contemporary medical and scientific perspectives (psychology, sociology, economics) contribute to our sexual ethics?

6. If *ágape*-love is fundamental for all of life and especially for Christian sexual praxis (1 Cor. 13), then why does Paul fail to refer to love in 1 Cor. 5-7? See. 7:3-5 and the couple's eager desire to please one another (7:33-35); cf. Eph. 5:25-35. In 1 Cor 5-7 does Paul substitute "holiness" (purity) for love as the basis of marriage and sexual praxis (see 6:19)? How would you relate these two norms for human sexuality?

Permanente Values for the church in Paul's teaching:

1. Paul's critique of the reductionist "sex = food" analogy (cf. likenesses + *differences*).

2. The eternal significance of our bodies and their ethical-moral acts in the light of (a) our creation in God's image (13b + the Hebrew Bible, Gen 1-2; Psalm 104); (b) our redemption (19-20); the resurrection (14);

3. Prostitution as an institution generally is condemned as incompatible with God's Kingdom, which faults it as: (a) a system of exploitation, violence and domination of prostitutes; but cf. 6:18; (b) tending to promote impersonal sexual relations, lacking love (6:12; 7:4); treating other persons as things (like food).

4. Such sexual acts may establish relations between humans and idolatrous spiritual “powers” that transcend the purely physical (6:16; Gn.2:24; Fee 1987:253; Martin 1995:176-77; Garland 2003:233).

5. The development of a sexual praxis in a positive context of love (1 Cor.13) and the resurrection of the body (1 Cor.15); the rejection of idolatry (1 Cor.8-10) as the ideology of oppressors (especially empires).

6. The (imperfect) analogy between God or Christ (Eph. 5) in relation to the believer (or the church) and the ethical ideal of a sexual relation that is exclusive and permanent (6:13, 15-17; 7:1-4). This ideal commonly is promoted as a norm, but should we accept this common tradition and interpret it an “absolute law”?

7. The Christian’s body belongs to our resurrected Lord (13c, 15^a, 17) and should glorify God (20).

Conclusions Fee (1987:266) proposes two basic applications:

1. Against contemporary sexual failures, “Sexual immorality is still sin, even though it has been justified under every conceivable rationalization....Our bodies belong to God through the redemption of the cross; and they are destined for resurrection.”

2. Greek dualism “would negate the body in favor of the soul....In the Christian view there is no dichotomy between body and spirit that either indulges the body because it is irrelevant or punishes it so as to purify the spirit.” Fee concludes that such a dichotomy is reflected in the tendency of those who would “save souls” while ignoring people’s material needs. See 1 John. 3:16-18; James. 2:14-17.

Which elements in Paul’s argument are of greatest permanent value for Christian theology and contemporary sexual ethics? Does the text contain other elements of limited historical (contextual) value but which we cannot accept literally in their original form as universally valid today? How would a poor secular prostitute (not idolatrous) react to Paul’s teaching in 6:12-20 today? Could this text be of help in sharing Jesus’ Good News with prostitutes? Or would it only be helpful for a church that included no prostitutes? **Which elements in Paul’s address to [heterosexual] Christian males seeking idolatrous, pagan harlots might be applicable to same-sex (non-hierarchical) exchanges of sex for pay/material reward (a place to live, as in marriage)?**