

THE PAULINE RESPONSE TO TODAY'S SEXUAL AND GENDER CONFUSION

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Two arguments are commonly offered by those in the church who are sympathetic towards the LGBTQ movement. Some contend that the biblical writers were simply unaware of the complexities of same-sex attraction and transgenderism. Others contend that the church over the past two millennia woefully misinterpreted the biblical writers. The first argument undermines Scripture's sufficiency. The second undermines Scripture's clarity. The purpose of this article is to survey the teaching of the apostle Paul in response to these claims. In particular, attention will be focused on the emphases of Paul in the areas of anthropology (the doctrine of man), hamartiology (the doctrine of sin), and soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). As will be seen, Paul not only deals directly with many of the issues being debated today, but he leaves a timeless theological framework through which to respond to these issues in our day.

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Introduction

The pace of change taking place in the culture around us today is nothing short of stunning. This astonishing transformation is particularly observable in our culture's attitude towards sexuality and gender. What was considered utterly unimaginable by the previous generation is now commonplace. Acts of Congress affirmed by overwhelming majorities to defend the good of the nation just two decades ago are now considered hateful.¹

Sadly, much of what has occurred in the culture is mirrored in the church at large. The number of Christian books and articles being written in defense of the

¹ The Defense of Marriage Act, passed by both houses of the U.S. Congress and signed into law by then President Bill Clinton in September 1996, is strongly opposed by many in today's Congress as inherently discriminatory. President Clinton himself has since expressed regret over his previous support of the bill.

LGBTQ agenda is growing substantially. To justify their support of this agenda, proponents generally employ one of two basic arguments: either the biblical writers were ignorant of the complexities of same-sex attraction and transgenderism, or the church woefully misinterpreted the biblical writers when they did address those issues. The first explanation argues that the Scriptures were timely to their original contexts but not timeless for all (and therefore undermines Scripture's sufficiency). The second explanation depends upon revisionist eisegesis to overturn two millennia of exegetical consensus (and therefore undermines Scripture's clarity). In either case, a return to Scripture is necessary—particularly a return to the writings of the apostle Paul.

The apostle Paul's writings have unique importance. First, as church history illustrates, eras of compromise typically follow on the heels of neglect, particularly the neglect of Paul's letters. Second, Paul's letters are letters to *Gentile* churches. If there ever was a place to look for truth to meet the unique challenges posed by our culture, it would be to this corpus—and that is exactly what we find. The three texts which relate most directly to the issues raised by the LGBTQ movement are found in Paul's writings: Romans 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; and 1 Timothy 1:8–11.

But Paul provides more than just these three texts. By surveying his writings—particularly his contributions in the area of anthropology (the doctrine of man), hamartiology (the doctrine of sin), and soteriology (the doctrine of salvation)—a solid framework can be established with which to respond to the challenges raised by the LGBTQ agenda. This is the approach this article will take, and as it does, the following Pauline assertions will be made and articulated: –

1. Paul's Anthropological Emphases
 - 1.1. Humanity's Origin Is Traced to an Historical Man and Woman
 - 1.2. Sex Is a Gift, but Reserved for a Man and a Woman in Marriage
 - 1.3. Gender Identities and Expressions Are Based on God's Creation of Male and Female
2. Paul's Hamartiological Emphases
 - 2.1. Adam's Sin Corrupted the Entire Human Race and the Entire Human Being
 - 2.2. Depravity Expresses Itself in Rebellion against the Image and Rule of God
 - 2.3. Increasingly Abnormal Sexual Desires and Behaviors Evidence God's Judgment
3. Paul's Soteriological Emphases
 - 3.1. Supernatural Regeneration Begins a New Life and a New Identity
 - 3.2. Union with Christ Is not only about Justification, but about Transformation also
 - 3.3. The Lordship of Christ over All Areas of Life Is the Essence of Christianity

1. Paul's Anthropological Emphases

The place to turn first is to the apostle Paul's *anthropology*—his teaching regarding the origin, nature, and purposes of humanity. This teaching can be summarized by three fundamental assertions.

1.1 Humanity's Origin Is Traced to an Historical Man and Woman

First, Paul asserted that the human race traces its origin to one historical man and woman who were created directly and suddenly by God, and who served as the progenitors of all human beings to follow. Any meaningful discussion about human sexuality must start with this fundamental truth.

When Paul addressed the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill, he asserted that “the God who made the world and all things in it” also “made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:24, 26). To proclaim the Christian worldview to those steeped in the cosmology of Stoicism and Epicureanism, Paul not only emphasized the existence of a personal Creator, but also that this Creator made *all* mankind through *one* original, historical man. Paul treated this truth as integral to his defense of the gospel, for it established that all human beings were equally created in God's image, and all human beings were equally responsible before Him (vv. 27–31).

Elsewhere in his own letters, Paul specifically identified this “one man” as “Adam.” Directly citing Genesis 2:7, Paul stated to the Corinthians, “So also it is written, ‘The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL.’ The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor 15:45). In the same way that Paul assumed the historicity of Jesus—“the last Adam”—to make his argument, so he assumed the historicity of the first one.

Furthermore, when Paul wrote to Timothy, also referencing Genesis 2:7, he reminded him that “it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve” (1 Tim 2:13). More than simply communicating the concept of origination, the verb *πλάσσω* (NASB: “create”; ESV: “formed”) emphasizes a particular kind of creative activity—the act of *molding* or *sculpting* by hand.² The verb (found in the LXX translation of Gen 2:7) emphasizes physical or material formation, and points precisely to God's careful shaping of the human *body*. Moreover, that Paul affirmed a sequence to this creative act (Adam first, then Eve; cf. also 1 Cor 11:8), and applied the verb *πλάσσω* equally to both Adam and Eve (according to Gen 2:7), indicates *distinction*. God did not create Adam as the first mold, and then use him to create another Adam. To the contrary, after first molding Adam's body, he then likewise molded Eve's body. All other human beings after them would follow in their likenesses.

These and other similar texts from Paul evidence his basic anthropology. Paul affirmed God's direct and sudden creation of both Adam and Eve. He affirmed God's intricate attention to their design. He affirmed that that which characterized their

² BDAG, *πλάσσω*, 823. In the NT this verb is found only elsewhere in Romans 9:20, where it is used by Paul to describe what a potter does with clay.

physical bodies was all part of God’s good design, and that which distinguished one from the other—Adam from Eve, male from female—was neither unremarkable nor inconsequential. He also affirmed that all other human beings trace their identity and likeness to this first, historical couple. Ultimately, Paul affirmed a literal reading of that which Moses recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis.³

While this conclusion may appear inconsequential to the discussion, in reality it is of immense importance. This is where it must begin. If Genesis 1–2 is counted as anything other than factual history (myth, symbol, poetry, accommodation to the naïve presuppositions of the pre-scientific world, etc.), then fundamental discussions about marriage, sexuality, and gender distinctions will be untied from Scripture and tethered to the latest social evolutionary theory. Consider the warning from William Van Doodewaard:

[T]he history of hermeneutics on Genesis and human origins, particularly in the last two centuries, reveals a repeated pattern toward an erosion of scriptural inerrancy, sufficiency, and historic Christian theology. Despite naysayers, the history of Genesis hermeneutics across the centuries does provide numerous examples of sequential changes: if these changes do not indicate a “slippery slope,” they certainly indicate consecutive slides. In the history of each of the “schools” of alternative approaches and the institutions and denominations that grant latitude to them, there is an unbroken pattern of progressive movement, initially away from the literal tradition on Genesis 1, then away from the Adam and Eve of the literal tradition toward an evolved Adam, and then to no recognizable or existing Adam and Eve at all. There have been exceptions to—and reversals of—this trend, but they are rare.⁴

The consequences of the hermeneutical erosion described by Doodewaard can be observed in many who profess the Bible as their authority yet who sympathize with the LGBTQ agenda. Certainly, not all who deny the historicity of Genesis 1–2 embrace the LGBTQ worldview. But there is a definite logical connection. If the existence of human life is the product of evolutionary biological processes, then the experiences of human life—including marriage, sexuality, and gender expression—can hardly be understood as anything other than a product of those same processes. Thus, by equivocating on the historicity of Adam, a significant part of the argument over sexual orientation and transgenderism is conceded.

Paul himself never advanced an anthropology at odds from a literal and historical understanding of Genesis 1–2. He treated these chapters as factual history and used their contents concerning the origin and nature of humanity as the foundation for his own teaching.

³ For a detailed defense of the historicity of Adam, see William D. Barrick, “A Historical Adam: Young-Earth Creation View,” in *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, ed. Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday. Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 197–227; William Van Doodewaard, *The Quest for the Historical Adam: Genesis, Hermeneutics, and Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015).

⁴ VanDoodewaard, *Quest for the Historical Adam*, 279.

1.2 Sex Is a Gift, but Reserved Exclusively for a Man and a Woman in Marriage

Second, Paul asserted that sex is a gift from God, but is reserved exclusively for one man and one woman in marriage. Paul fully embraced Genesis 1–2 as factual history, and saw its description of the nature and purposes of marriage as binding for all humanity.

For example, in response to the asceticism threatening the church over which Timothy presided, Paul condemned any teaching which diminished the dignity of marriage and maligned its status as a good gift from God. He wrote to Timothy, “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, *men* who forbid marriage For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude” (1 Tim. 4:1–5).

Similarly, in response to the Corinthian church’s drift towards celibacy (they had stated to Paul that it was “good for a man not to touch a woman”; cf. 1 Cor. 7:1), Paul affirmed that marriage was to be that exclusive relationship where sexual desires could be satisfied in the context of mutual respect.⁵ In antithesis to the cultural extremes of both asceticism and abusive male dominance, Paul commanded that “The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*” (vv. 3–4). To advocate celibacy as the right response to sexual desire —whether in terms of remaining unmarried, or in terms of living as if single although married—was a totally wrong-headed approach (vv. 2, 5, 9).

Yet as Paul made clear through these instructions, the capacity of marriage to provide this sanctified context for fulfillment did not justify its redefinition to include *more* than two human beings (polygamy or polyamory) or to include the same *kind* of human beings (homosexuality). Despite his exhortation that it was “better to marry than to burn” (v. 9), he never opened the door for this “burning” to be satisfied outside of a lifelong, loyal, heterosexual marriage. Simply stated, marriage was to be understood as a man “having his own wife” and a woman “having her own husband” (v. 2). Those who were married were to give themselves only to their spouses for the rest of their lives (vv. 10, 39). If they had for some reason left their spouses, they were to pursue reconciliation and not remain separate. But if they could not achieve reconciliation, they were not permitted to look elsewhere to satisfy their desires (v. 11). New one-flesh relationships were an option only for those whose spouses had died (vv. 39–40). In fact, so sacred was this one-flesh covenant that even in cases where one spouse believed the gospel but the other remained in unbelief, the believing

⁵ Some have contended that Paul exhibited a negative view of marriage and sexuality in 1 Corinthians 7, only to express a positive perspective later in Ephesians 5:22–33. But when it is taken into consideration that Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 7 are in response to a unique set of problems which had arisen in the context of the Corinthian church, there is no need to see discontinuity between Paul’s two key texts on marriage. For a helpful summary on this point, see David E. Garland, *First Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 242–45.

spouse was to remain in the marriage and fulfill all of its responsibilities—unless that unbeliever initiated divorce (vv. 12–14).

Only when a person could successfully restrain sexual desires did Paul advocate celibacy as a “good” option (1 Cor. 7:8). Certainly, there were advantages to singleness in that it enabled one to give much greater attention to the Lord’s work—as Paul knew from personal experience (vv. 6–8, 32–35). But celibacy as a demand of the gospel or as a morally-superior lifestyle was not part of Paul’s doctrine. He assumed celibacy as the exception, not the rule. He even later argued that the apostles had “a right” to “take along a believing wife” on their ministry travels—a right he even reserved as an option for himself (9:5).

Ultimately, Paul’s teaching on marriage was anchored to a key Old Testament text—Genesis 2:24. This comes out most vividly in his instructions to the Ephesian church. After explaining the distinct responsibilities of husbands to wives and wives to husbands (Eph 5:22–30), Paul revealed the principle which provided the basis for such exhortations: “FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH” (v. 31; citing Gen. 2:24). Paul affirmed without reservation the ongoing authority of this creation ordinance. The marriage relationship was not simply defined by the concept of covenant; if Paul had wanted to affirm that, he could have cited many other texts affirming this principle of steadfast covenant loyalty. Rather, the essence of marriage was also defined by its composition of one man and one woman. It included the severing of ties to one’s father and mother, the establishment of an exclusive covenant between the man and his wife, and the entrance into a physical relationship to join them together for life. This principle was derived from the fact that Eve was formed out of Adam’s flesh (Gen. 2:21–23). Although Eve was made from Adam and not from the dust as he was (v. 7), she was not his clone. She was different, uniquely shaped as a complement to Adam in more than just emotional or psychological respects. Separate they would each be incomplete (v. 18). But through marriage they entered into a “one-flesh” existence wherein Eve completed what was lacking in Adam (vv. 23–24), just as every subsequent wife would do for her own husband. So sacred was this enduring one-flesh union between a man and a woman that Paul used it to describe an even greater reality—the mystical union between Christ and his church (Eph. 5:22–30).

Consequently, any attempt to experience this one-flesh relationship outside of this narrow standard of a life-long relationship between one man and one woman was considered by Paul to be *πορνεία*, “immorality” or “unlawful sexual expression.”⁶ No amount of burning, mutual consent, fidelity, sacrifice, or love could justify such activity outside of the context of a life-long covenant between one man and one woman. So when a member of the Corinthian church initiated conjugal relations with his father’s wife, Paul called it “immorality” (1 Cor. 5:1), and his response to it was severe (v. 5). He stated that those who practiced adultery or homosexual practice “would not inherit the kingdom of God” (6:9–10). He strongly rebuked those who had entered into a one-flesh relationship temporarily, through a prostitute (v. 16). Indeed, the Gentile culture of Paul’s day presented an abundance of alternatives to

⁶ BDAG, *πορνεία*, 854.

monogamous, heterosexual marriage. But Paul remained steadfast in his narrow teaching on human sexuality, which is summed up well in his exhortation to the Thessalonians: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality [πορνείας]; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thess. 4:3–5).

Ultimately, only through a radical revisionist reading of Paul’s letters can one conclude that Paul viewed marriage as anything other than a life-long covenant reserved exclusively for one man and one woman. For Paul this was not a personal conviction or social construct. It was a fundamental truth established by God at the beginning of history and binding on all humanity.

1.3 Gender Identities and Expressions Are Based on God’s Creation of Male and Female

Third, Paul asserted that gender identities and roles are based on God’s creation of man as male and female. In other words, Paul advocated a binary worldview on gender which portrayed gender identity and expression as fixed by the physiology determined by the Creator.

Before examining Paul’s teaching on the issue, it is important to summarize the debate taking place today over the understanding of “gender.” The *essentialist view* understands gender to be inseparably connected to one’s biology. Since there are only two biological sexes (as determined by chromosomes, hormones, and anatomy), one’s gender—the personal expression of this biological reality—must match the particular biological sex determined at conception. Moreover, although the essentialist view does recognize a degree of cultural relativity to the expressions of masculinity and femininity (what it means to dress like a man in one culture can differ from what it means to dress like a man in a different culture), it still contends that within cultures themselves gender distinctions are to be maintained (a man should not dress as a woman does in his own culture, and vice versa).

But over the past two decades in particular the essentialist view has come under intense attack in the Western world. For more and more Westerners, gender is merely an evolving social construct with little or nothing to do with biological realities. In fact, it is increasingly argued that the issue of gender must be left completely to an individual’s personal preference⁷—a preference which very well may fluctuate back and forth as the individual matures and experiences various relationships. It has become offensive for government, community, parents, or even doctors to presuppose any gender identity based on physiology. Young children in particular are encouraged to imagine and explore the different possibilities of their identity without feeling any limitation imposed by a birth certificate, a bathroom sign, or society at large. Whereas the experience of nonconformity between one’s gender identity and one’s biological sex used to be considered a symptom of psychological illness (“gender

⁷ Beginning in 2014, the social networking website Facebook also began allowing subscribers to choose from over 50 gender options when creating their online profile.

identity disorder”), such nonconformity is increasingly considered normal. The disorder now is identified as the lingering “psychological distress” certain individuals feel over such incongruence (“gender dysphoria”), a distress that is blamed on outdated social, culture, and religious norms.⁸

When turning to the apostle Paul, however, we never see any hint at deviation from a black-and-white, binary framework.⁹ While he emphasizes the equality of male and female through their spiritual immersion “into Christ” (Gal. 3:27–29), he firmly upholds the notion of two genders—male and female—and the distinctions between them. Man and woman were created distinctly; their expressions of manhood and womanhood were thus to be distinct.¹⁰

Paul’s instructions to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 11:3–16 is of particular importance with respect to this issue. The men and women in the Corinthian church were exhorted to keep their physical appearances different according to their sex (vv. 14–15). It was “disgraceful” for the woman to wear her hair as the men did in that culture, and vice versa (vv. 4–6).¹¹ Moreover, this distinction extended to roles and conduct in the church itself. When praying or prophesying, men were to do so as those with a position of authority; women could only do so while showing that they were under the authority men (vv. 7–10)—a distinction he will even press harder later on in the epistle (cf. 14:34). To ignore this instruction was to dishonor the Creator and sow chaos in the church.

It is important to note that the emphasis of Paul’s exhortations in 1 Corinthians 11:3–16 is not rooted in the desire to appease cultural norms. There are no nuances in the text to suggest Paul’s emphasis on distinctions had anything to do with a lack of educational opportunity among the women in Corinth or anything else related to social status. Rather, Paul anchors his teaching on distinctions in the creation record of Genesis 2, referring both to the order and to the purpose of God’s creation of man as male and female (compare 1 Cor. 11:7–9 with Gen. 2:21–24). This was his consistent teaching throughout the churches (1 Cor. 11:16; cf. also Eph. 5:22–33; Col.

⁸ Compare the entry for “Gender Identity Disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000) with the entry for “Gender Dysphoria” in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

⁹ William Webb, advocating the “redemptive-movement hermeneutic,” argues that while Paul did not directly advocate the elimination of gender distinctions, he initiated the trajectory for the church to do so later on (*Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001]). For a sound refutation of Webb’s argument, see Wayne Grudem, “Should We Move Beyond the New Testament to a Better Ethic? An Analysis of William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*,” *JETS* 47 no. 2 (June 2004): 299–346.

¹⁰ It is not the purpose of this article to provide a thorough analysis of the Pauline texts dealing with gender. The reader is encouraged to consult *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), particularly chapters 5–9 which deal with the exegesis of 1 Cor. 11:2–16; 14:33–36; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:21–33 and Col. 3:18–19; and 1 Tim 2:11–15.

¹¹ This was consistent with what Moses had prescribed in Deuteronomy 22:5, “A woman shall not wear man’s clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman’s clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.”

3:18–19; 1 Tim 2:8–15). In fact, Paul even argued that the proper expression of gender was a concern for the angels (1 Cor. 11:10).

At the same time, Paul saw no inconsistency with emphasizing these gender distinctions while affirming ontological equality. For Paul, “in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman” and “as the woman originates from the man, so also the man *has his birth* through the woman; and all things originate from God” (vv. 11–12). After all, this equality-diversity framework demonstrated the nature of the Trinity itself: “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ” (v. 3). Certainly, many who wish to minimize or erase gender distinctions immediately retort with Paul’s supposed Magna Carta on human equality: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).¹² Yet as even some egalitarians admit, Paul in the context of Galatians 3 is arguing for something much different than the elimination of gender.¹³

In reality, Christian egalitarianism must be held responsible for the confusion it has sown in the church over the issue of gender. By minimizing or even denying gender distinctions, egalitarians have cultivated a deep suspicion—if not hostility—towards the notion of identifiable gender distinctions. It considers male-female distinctions largely as the construct of sinful society rather than a gift from God for human flourishing. Physiological differences are necessary for the purpose of procreation, but they do not provide any basis for establishing functional differences in the family, church, or society. Consequently, egalitarianism has advocated arguments that are—as Albert Mohler has argued—“hauntingly similar” to those who advocate same-sex marriage.¹⁴ To hear of evangelical feminists, who previously opposed same-sex marriage, undergoing “a change of heart” regarding homosexuality is not at all surprising.

The apostle Paul, however, leaves no room for confusion—or a continuum. He recognizes no gender spectrum beyond just male and female—and no blurring of the line between them. To live to God’s glory required one to embrace the gender sovereignly determined by God at conception and revealed through anatomy, to understand its distinct vertical and horizontal responsibilities, and to live it out for one’s entire life. Andrew Walker summarizes this well: “The design of humanity is purposeful and good, and part of our design is that we are men and women. To deny or overturn that distinction is to nullify God’s revelation both in nature and in Scripture.”¹⁵

¹² E.g. Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 142; Rebecca M. Groothuis, *Good News for Women: a Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 25.

¹³ B. Witherington, “Women,” *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 6:959; N. T. Wright, “Women’s Service in the Church: The Biblical Basis,” a conference paper for the Symposium, ‘Men, Women and the Church’ (September 4, 2004, Durham, England).

¹⁴ Albert Mohler, Jr., “God, the Gospel and the Gay Challenge: A Response to Matthew Vines,” in *God and the Gay Christian? A Response to Matthew Vines*, ed. Albert Mohler Jr. (Louisville, KY: SBTS Press, 2014), 20.

¹⁵ Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gender Identity?* (The Good Book Company, 2017), 146.

2. Paul's Hamartiological Emphases

The second place to turn in the debate over same-sex orientation and gender confusion is to Paul's *hamartiology*—his teaching about the nature of sin. Any worthy position on these issues must explain why there is even confusion and debate in the first place. The apostle Paul is precisely the place to turn. His teaching can again be summarized by three fundamental assertions.

2.1 Adam's Sin Corrupted the Entire Human Race and the Entire Human Being

First, Paul asserted that Adam's sin corrupted both the entire human race and the entire human being. He taught both original sin and total depravity as described in Genesis 3.

Explaining the origin and spread of sin, Paul declared to the Romans that “just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12; cf. also vv. 17, 19). He then named this “one man” specifically as “Adam” (v. 14). To the Corinthians he likewise stated, “For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:21–22). Even more specifically, Paul affirmed the history of Genesis 3 when he stated to Timothy, “And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (1 Tim. 2:14; cf. Gen. 3:6–7).

The impact of original sin extended to all humanity. To the Romans Paul asked, “What then? Are we [Jews] better than they [Gentiles]?” (Rom. 3:9a). He then answered, “Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin” (v. 9b). To illustrate his point as consistent with antecedent revelation he then strung together several Old Testament texts, introducing them with the significant citation formula, “as it is written” (καθὼς γέγραπται; vv. 10–18). Paul also described the depth of sin's impact on all humanity when he wrote to the Ephesians:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Eph 2:1–3; cf. also Col 2:13)

As Paul instructed the churches, he consistently operated upon the conviction that “all have sinned” (e.g., Rom. 3:23), and that such sin was not limited to external behavior but infected the innermost thoughts and desires of the self. Sin could not be traced simply to environmental factors; it sprung from the depth of the soul. It affected every aspect of human existence—every thought, intention, feeling, attitude, word, deed, relationship, culture, and institution. Even in his regenerate state Paul recognized the continuing depravity of his unredeemed flesh: “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (7:18a). In fact, Paul taught that sin's

influence permeated the entire realm of creation, which now “groans” because of Adam’s sin (8:19–22; cf. Gen. 3:17–19).

The apostle Paul did not exhibit a positive or optimistic view of the state of humanity. He took Genesis 3 seriously. For him the human heart was more deceitful and wicked than anything else. Human beings were not born with clean slates or in innocence. As those at enmity with God “by nature” (Eph. 2:3), human thoughts, intentions, and desires could *not* be trusted as wholesome or even neutral. They were oriented towards perversity from birth by an attraction that operated from within. In the words of John Calvin, “man’s nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols.”¹⁶

A proper understanding of Paul’s teaching on original sin and total depravity is critical for this discussion. When these doctrines are even slightly ignored or minimized, forms of Pelagianism quickly spring up and flourish, and that is precisely what has happened. Among the literature of those in the church who are sympathetic to or who directly advocate the LGBTQ agenda there is a woefully deficient view of human sinfulness and an astonishingly positive view of human nature and its desires. A return to the apostle Paul’s understanding of depravity is the need of the hour.

2.2 Depravity Expresses Itself in Rebellion against the Image and Rule of God

Second, Paul asserted that human depravity expresses itself particularly in rebellion against the image and rule of God. Depravity concentrates its efforts on maligning God’s image in human beings and on undermining his authority over them, particularly through sexual sin.

In calling the Ephesians to walk worthy of their divine election, Paul reminded them of their previous life:

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness (Eph. 4:17–19).

Having made themselves “callous” to the law of God, sinners have intentionally given themselves over to ἀσέλγεια, “sensuality” (v. 19a)—a term which denotes a “lack of self-constraint which involves one in conduct that violates all bounds of what is socially [or in this case, morally] acceptable.”¹⁷ It is a deliberate rejection of the rule and blessing of God evidenced in the pursuit of that which is antithetical to it. And that which is antithetical to God’s law Paul described as ἀκαθαρσία, “impurity” (v. 19b)—a term which refers to “filthiness, dirtiness, vileness, degradation.”¹⁸ In

¹⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox, 2006), I.11.8.

¹⁷ BDAG, ἀσέλγεια, 141.

¹⁸ BDAG, ἀκαθαρσία, 34.

other words, in order to defame his Creator the sinner actively strives to debase that aspect he bears which displays God's glory and rule over him through a pursuit of desires and behaviors directly antithetical to God himself.

This effort to defame God is particularly exhibited through sexual sin. As Paul said to the Corinthians, "Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body" (6:18b; cf. also Rom. 1:24–27). For the unbeliever, sexual immorality was heinous enough; his body was the image of God. For the believer it was even worse; his body was now also the residence of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). Sexual immorality was the antithesis for the purpose for which the body was created—to glorify God (v. 20).

The same emphasis can be observed in Paul's vice-lists (1 Cor. 6:9–10; Gal 5:19–21; 1 Tim. 1:8–10). Dominant in these lists is the focus Paul places on sexual sins as the manifestation of human depravity. In his letter to the Galatians, three kinds of sexual sin begin his list of fifteen works of the flesh: *πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, ἀσέλγεια*—"immorality, impurity, sensuality" (Gal 5:19). Of the ten categories of sinners listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, four are guilty of sexual sins: *πόρνοι, μοιχοί, μαλακοί, ἄρσενοκοῖται*—"fornicators," "adulterers," "effeminate," and "homosexuals" (v. 9).¹⁹

Of particular importance to the discussion is Paul's use of the terms *μαλακοί* ("effeminate") and *ἄρσενοκοῖται* ("homosexuals") in 1 Corinthians 6:9. While Paul's employment of these terms has throughout church history been taken as a clear prohibition of homosexuality in all its forms, in recent times those sympathetic to same-sex orientation have sought to revise this long-held understanding.²⁰ Justification for such a revision has been focused on four lines of reasoning: (a) Paul was ignorant of the true nature of same-sex attraction as it is understood today (i.e., Paul was operating simply according to the social presuppositions of his culture); (b) Paul was not condemning same-sex relationships per se, but only the excessive passions of those who—while heterosexual by orientation—were led against their orientation into relationships with those of the same sex (i.e., adulterous bisexuality); (c) Paul was condemning homosexuality according to its common practice in temple prostitution (i.e., apart from life-long, monogamous commitment); and/or (d) Paul was only condemning abusive homosexuality (i.e., homosexual rape or pederasty—adult male relations with young boys).²¹

¹⁹ In comparison, only one of the "ten words" of the Mosaic covenant, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18) focused on sexual sin.

²⁰ A noteworthy effort in this regard is Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014). Vines states his purpose in writing the book as follows: "My larger argument is this: *Christians who affirm the full authority of Scripture can also affirm committed, monogamous same-sex relationships*" (3).

²¹ For a helpful rebuttal of these arguments, see Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), especially chapter 7, "Not That Kind of Homosexuality," pp. 79–88. There is real sense in which the advocates of these four arguments mimic the reductionist approach of the Pharisees Jesus referred to in Matthew 5:27–30. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their cunning restriction of the concept of "adultery" to a particular *form* of adultery. It allowed them to enjoy the sin in its more respectable forms while condemning to death those who engaged in its worst manifestations.

But Paul's choice of the unique term ἀρσενοκοῖται—which is found only in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10—shows his intent to connect his argumentation directly to the teaching of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.²² Paul does this by taking two key words used in the LXX text of both Leviticus texts—the terms ἀρσενο (“male”) and κοίτης (“bed”)—and joining them together to coin this new word.²³ In other words, whatever Moses meant in Leviticus about the “abomination” of “a man lying with a man as one does with a woman,” is what Paul meant here also. The term cannot be defined through the prism of first-century Greco-Roman norms or taboos, as same-sex defenders are forced to do. Instead, it must be read in the light of antecedent Scripture. And even though Paul taught the Corinthian church that it was not under the stipulations of the Mosaic Law (e.g. 1 Cor. 9:20), this particular stipulation regarding same-sex relations remained steadfastly in place. This was no inconsistency, for Moses' prohibition in Leviticus on homosexual relations simply reflected what was already commanded prior to the Mosaic Law—that only a man and a woman were to be joined as one flesh (Gen. 2:24).²⁴

Paul's use of the term μαλακοὶ (“effeminate,” v. 9) in the vice-list of 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 is also noteworthy. The term has at its root the notion of “soft.”²⁵ Unlike ἀρσενοκοῖται (“homosexuals”), μαλακοὶ was used more frequently and in a variety of ways prior to Paul, making it more difficult to define precisely in this context.²⁶ It shares lexical similarities with ἀρσενοκοῖται, though it still must be differentiated from it since both terms appear in the same list. Some take it to refer to the *passive* participant in the homosexual act (the male who offers himself as a female, possibly a young male—a catamite), with ἀρσενοκοῖται referring to the *dominant* participant. But in light of how the term is employed elsewhere, Fortson and Gram argue for a slightly broader understanding of μαλακοὶ and their assessment appears warranted:

The evidence, however, suggests a distinction between those men [μαλακοὶ] fully immersed in a feminine way of life—including unrestrained, sexually loose behaviors that could be passive, homosexual, or bisexual—and men

²² Leviticus 18:22 – “You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination”; 20:13 – “If *there is* a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.”

²³ The term is not found in Gk literature prior to Paul. See S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 297; James White and Jeff Niell, *The Same Sex Controversy: Defending and Clarifying the Bible's Message about Homosexuality* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2002), 146–50. But even if Paul himself did not create this word, its etymology nonetheless forces the reader back to the Leviticus texts.

²⁴ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 242.

²⁵ BDAG, μαλακός, 613.

²⁶ For a very helpful survey of the interpretations of μαλακοὶ in 1 Cor 6:9, see Peter James Goeman, “The Law and Homosexuality: How Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 Should Influence the Church's Understanding of Homosexuality” (unpublished PhD dissertation; Sun Valley, CA: The Master's Seminary, 2017), 216–25.

[ἀρσενικοῖται] engaged in homosexual acts, possibly in secret. The distinction, then, might be between those possessing an open, effeminate orientation [μαλακοῖ] and those who merely commit homosexual *acts* [ἀρσενικοῖται], whether open or secretive.²⁷

In other words, it is as if Paul uses these two terms—terms which are somewhat redundant but also somewhat distinct—to show his intent to cover the entire spectrum, to speak not simply of particular acts related to the behavior but to speak of all acts related to the behavior. As such, Paul’s condemnation extends also to all of it, whether it was practiced openly or in secret, passively or actively, consistently or occasionally. Regardless of role or kind of participation, all who engaged in such activities defiled the image of God and rebelled against the creation ordinance of Genesis 2:24. Paul consequently echoed Moses (who described such male-with-male acts as “an abomination”; Lev. 18:22) by stating twice that those who practiced them “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

Ultimately, Paul looked at sexual deviation as a unique kind of sin in that it was an attack on the human body. The body was created to reflect God’s glory and serve as the residence of the Holy Spirit. Sexual sin in all forms—including all forms of homosexual behaviors—perverted this purpose.

2.3 Increasingly Abnormal Sexual Desires and Behaviors Evidence God’s Judgment

Third, Paul asserted that increasingly abnormal sexual desires and behaviors evidenced God’s judgment upon sinners. In other words, although Paul described unbelievers as “having given themselves over [ἐαυτοὺς παρέδωκαν]” (Eph. 4:19) to unrestrained sexual sins, he also described God as one who “gave them over [παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς]” (Rom. 1:24, 26) to unrestrained sexual sins as part of his judgment.

Paul’s argument in Romans 1:18–32 is crucial for understanding the nature of such abandonment. Paul began with a summary assertion: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (v. 18). But prior to this current revelation of divine wrath there was a different kind of revelation—a clear, undeniable revelation of God’s attributes through creation (v. 20). Humanity, however, rejected this creation-based knowledge and refused to give God the glory He deserved. Through a series of three “exchanges” Paul defined humanity’s guilt: they “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God” for idols (v. 23); they “exchanged the truth of God for a lie” (v. 25); and they “exchanged the natural [sexual] function for that which is unnatural” (v. 26).

In response, the “wrath of God” now manifests itself through various kinds of divine abandonment. First, Paul indicated that “God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among men” (v. 24). As in Ephesians 4:19, where unbelievers give themselves over “to sensuality for

²⁷ Fortson III and Grams, *Unchanging Witness*, 294.

the practice of every kind of impurity [ἀκαθαρσία],” so here in Romans 1:24 the term used for “impurity” is ἀκαθαρσία, a term which refers to “filthiness, dirtiness, vile-ness, and degradation”—primarily of a sexual kind. Thus, while sinners throw off all restraint and plunge themselves into various forms of heterosexual immorality, God also removes natural restraints and in judgment permits sinners to drink the dregs.²⁸

The second kind of divine abandonment is described in Romans 1:26–27: “For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” Here, the focus is clearly on homosexual practice. While some have sought to restrict these words to “excessive sexual passion” as opposed to moderation within homosexual relations,²⁹ Paul’s language simply resists such reductionism.

First, the problem was not with the quantity of these desires but with their quality. Paul describes these passions with the term ἀτιμία (v. 26), referring to that which is “dishonorable” or “shameful,”³⁰ not simply excessive. Second, these desires themselves are what “God gave them over to” (v. 26). Their desires are in themselves the mark of divine judgment. Third, to emphasize the consensual nature of what is depicted, Paul described the direction of these desires using the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλους: they “burned in their desire toward *one another*” (v. 27). Fourth, Paul taught that such desires were realized by “exchanging the natural function for that which is unnatural” (v. 26). The concepts of “natural” and “unnatural” here refer not to Greco-Roman cultural norms (e.g., “patriarchal gender roles”³¹), but to the norms established in the creation account of Genesis 1–2. Both Paul’s reference to “the creation of the world” in the preceding context (v. 20), and his use of the unusual Greek terms referring to “men” and “women” (ἄρσην, “male,” and θῆλυς, “female”—both of which are found in the LXX of Genesis 1, and both of which emphasize physical distinctiveness) suggest Paul is evaluating what is “natural” and “unnatural” according to the standards revealed by God for humanity in Genesis 1–2.³² Fifth, Paul not

²⁸ As Douglas Moo states, “God does not simply let the boat go—he gives it a push downstream” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 111).

²⁹ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 95–115. Vines argues, “Paul wasn’t condemning the expression of same-sex orientation as opposed to the expression of opposite-sex orientation. He was condemning *excess* as opposed to *moderation*” (105). This kind of thinking appears to be behind Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase in *The Message*: “Don’t you realize that this is not the way to live? Unjust people who don’t care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don’t qualify as citizens in God’s kingdom” (1 Cor 6:9–10, MSG). His rendering of 1 Tim 1:9–10 and Rom 1:26–27 lean in the same direction. This explains Peterson’s recent ambiguous statements on LGBTQ issues, and why Christians who use his popular paraphrase have difficulty believing claims that the Bible prohibits same-sex relations.

³⁰ BDAG, ἀτιμία, 149.

³¹ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 108–11.

³² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 114 fn 114; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 94–95; Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 290–91.

only referred to male-with-male homosexuality in vv. 26–27 but to lesbianism as well. In fact, Paul mentioned lesbianism first in this order, describing female counter-creation behavior before turning to address the same behavior by men. This particular order (females first, then males), coupled with Paul’s other creation terminology in the context, strongly suggests he was deliberately reversing the chronological order of creation (male first, then female, Gen 1:27) to emphasize homosexuality’s perversion of God’s original design.³³

Paul closes this particular argument with the third kind of divine abandonment: “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper” (Rom. 1:28). He then produces another vice-list which included everything from gossip to deceit to murder (vv. 29–32). Consequently, it is important to observe that while descent into homosexuality is a vivid manifestation of divine abandonment, it is not the only one. God’s judgment in response to humanity’s suppression of the truth revealed through creation is equally revealed in heterosexual immorality and general moral degradation.

As scholars of all perspectives admit, Romans 1:26–27 is the most crucial text in the discussion over homosexuality. When interpreted carefully and in context, it cannot but yield a meaning that is wholly antithetical to the LGBTQ agenda to normalize same-sex attraction and behavior. Only a minority who champion that agenda are bold enough to admit this reality. For example, Louis Crompton—a non-Christian, gay academic—has written in response to Paul’s words in Romans 1, “Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstances. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any Jew or early Christian.”³⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson concedes the same:

I have little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says, through appeals to linguistic or cultural subtleties. The exegetical situation is straightforward: we know what the text says. But what are we to do with what the text says? We must state our grounds for standing in tension with the clear commands of Scripture, and include in those grounds some basis in Scripture itself. . . . I think it important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us.³⁵

³³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 114 fn 114.

³⁴ Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 114.

³⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, “Homosexuality and the Church: Scripture & Experience,” June 11, 2007, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/homosexuality-church-0>, accessed August 30, 2017. Another example is William Loader, “Homosexuality and the Bible,” in *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, ed. Preston Sprinkle (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 17–48.

Such tempering of Paul's inspired words with experience, is not an option for those who would claim the Scriptures—including the writings of Paul—as their ultimate authority.

3. Paul's Soteriological Emphases

The third place to turn is to *soteriology*—his teaching on God's solution to humanity's sin problem. This, too, is a critical focus of the discussion, for those who may affirm a Pauline anthropology and hamartiology may still yet disagree over the impact that the gospel should have over those who experience same-sex attraction or gender confusion. In response, Paul's soteriology can be summarized by three fundamental assertions.

3.1 Supernatural Regeneration Begins a New Life and a New Identity

A central emphasis in Paul's writings is the present state of the believer "in Christ" or "with Christ." The frequency with which he employs these prepositional phrases (and other related ones) far exceeds that of the other New Testament writers.³⁶ Over and over again he reminded his readers that "in Christ" their old lives and identities have passed away, they have been made alive to God, and along with this new life comes a whole new identity—a brand new way of understanding themselves and what it means to be a human being. As one writer explained, "The heart of Paul's religion is union with Christ. This, more than any other conception . . . is the key which unlocks the secrets of his soul."³⁷ This is precisely where we must turn, since the issue of "identity" plays such a significant role in the debate over same-sex attraction and transgenderism.³⁸

As Paul explains, this new life begins by God's gracious act of regeneration in those who were formerly by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:4–5; cf. also Col. 2:13–14). This act of regeneration rendered the sinner "a new creature," bringing to an end "the old things" which defined his past identity (2 Cor 5:17). Christ is now the source of the sum of the believer's life (Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:4), the believer's "wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

Paul did recognize that some previous identities remained in place for those who had been united in Christ. He directed identity-specific teaching at the unmarried and married, men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and children, and slaves and masters. He even maintained a distinction between Jews and Gentiles with respect to God's future purposes (e.g. Romans 11). But the identity of being immersed

³⁶ Bruce Demarest states that there are 216 references to the believer's union with Christ in Paul's writings. The next highest amount is found in the writings of John, with twenty-six references [*The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006], 313].

³⁷ James Stewart, *Man in Christ* (1935; repr., Vancouver: Regent College, 2002), 147.

³⁸ This issue of identity is not just pertinent to this discussion but to all of the Christian life. As Paul David Tripp has stated, "We are always living out of some sense of identity. You are constantly telling yourself who you are, and the identity you assign to yourself has much to do with how you respond to the difficulties of life" (*Broken Down House: Living Productively in a World Gone Bad* [Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2009], 35).

into Christ superseded even these: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28; cf. also Col. 3:11). It even transcended the believer’s basic identification with the first Adam (Rom. 5:12–21).

At the same time, past identities related to that for which Christ came to die were definitely gone. Christ conquered sin on the cross, and any true believer had been identified with that crucifixion (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20). Certainly, “the flesh” still lingered and struggled to subvert these spiritual realities and regain control of the believer’s life. Paul called the believer to life-long war against this flesh (Rom 8:13; Col. 3:5–17). But at the same time Paul was quick to remind believers of a fundamental reality: “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24) and “you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).

Consequently, Paul could not have approved of a believer continuing to conceive of and identify himself according to that condemned and deceased life. To do so would indicate a critical failure in understanding the essence of the Christian life and impede the practical outworking of this spiritual union in the Christian’s life.³⁹ For Paul, you either identified with the first Adam and his transgression, or the second Adam and His righteousness, but not both. The new life in Christ was not an add-on feature to the old nature.

The profundity of this doctrine is perhaps nowhere better expressed than in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, where Paul wrote,

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Ultimately, 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 is not simply a vice list, but an identity list. The catalogue of descriptions Paul gave is not of behaviors but of persons. Paul’s simple phrase, “and such *were* some of you” (v. 11) expresses in the simplest of language the incredible power and efficacy of the regeneration.⁴⁰ Consequently, the identity titles of “gay Christian,” “transgender Christian,” “queer Christian” and the like not

³⁹ As John Murray argued, “It is not simply a step in the application of redemption; when viewed, according to the teaching of Scripture, in its broader aspects it underlies every step of the application of redemption. Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ” (*Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 171).

⁴⁰ This truth also has definite implications for those who have *not* experienced regeneration. As John Street states, “Many well-meaning Christians have stumbled here, trying to provide biblical help to homosexuals who were incapable of a heart-level spiritual response. This only leads to discouragement and frustration on the part of both” (“Hope, Holiness, and Homosexuality,” in *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong: A Biblical Response to Today’s Most Controversial Issues*, ed. John MacArthur [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009], 99).

only fail to correspond with God's revelation on matters of creation, sexuality, and gender—even if those who use them never act out their desires. These identity titles also malign and obfuscate the purpose and power of the gospel.⁴¹ As Walker states, "Someone can embrace a transgender identity or find their identity in Christ, but not both."⁴²

3.2 Union with Christ Is not only about Justification, But about Transformation also

Second, Paul asserted that spiritual union with Christ experienced by the believer is not only about justification, forgiveness of sins, and the promise of eternal life, but also about real transformation to the likeness of Christ beginning already in this life. Spiritual union inaugurates the process of progressive sanctification, whereby the believer is increasingly transformed to the likeness of the One with whom he has been identified.⁴³

A key concept here is that of the Christian's *walk*, or conduct of life. For example, to the Romans Paul wrote, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Having been recreated in Christ, believers are now God's "workmanship," "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Again and again Paul exhorted believers to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling" and "no longer just as the Gentiles walked" (Eph. 4:1, 17; cf. also 5:8).

In order to know just what to aim for in this walk, Paul exhorted his readers to look to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:2; Col. 1:10; 2:6; etc.). The more sanctified a person became, the more he reflected the glory of Christ, as Paul explained to the Corinthians, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18; cf. also Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10).

Consequently, all thoughts, desires, affections, words, and actions must be assessed in the light of Jesus Christ. Anything found which does not conform to him and his creative and re-creative purposes cannot be left in peace. In conformity to Paul, the Christian can never justify thinking, "I was just born with these feelings," "I didn't choose this," or "I am simply a product of this fallen world."⁴⁴ There is a

⁴¹ It is disappointing to read this kind of self-identification used even by writers like Wesley Hill, who comes highly recommended by numerous conservative theologians. While Hill rejects homosexuality as a sin contrary to God's revelation in creation and in Scripture, he nonetheless openly states, "I also refer to myself as a 'gay Christian'" (*Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 21).

⁴² Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 146.

⁴³ As Murray again states, "Nothing is more relevant to progressive sanctification than the reckoning of ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 6:22)," (John Murray, "The Pattern of Sanctification," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1944], 2:311).

⁴⁴ For example Hill states, "There was nothing, it felt, chosen or intentional about my being gay. It seemed more like noticing the blueness of my eyes than deciding I would take up skiing. There was never an option" (*Washed and Waiting*, 29).

sense in which all of these are true to some degree, but they are not the whole truth. The believer must always conclude, “But I was made alive in Christ, and now I am being transformed into his image.”

This is so important in a context where an increasing number of Christians are thinking that the temptations of same-sex attraction and transgenderism are foes the gospel simply cannot defeat. Some resort to just enduring the pain until glorification comes. Others resort to describing such desires as similar to a physical disability—a terrible consequence of the Fall, something which God does have the power to heal, but something which he usually allows to remain for the purpose of some other good in this life. But the Christian life according to the apostle Paul is all about progressive transformation of the mind, will, and affections. Believers are not just washed and waiting. They are washed, waiting, and transforming.

3.3 The Lordship of Christ over All Areas of Life Is the Essence of Christianity

Third, Paul asserted that the concept of “lordship” was central for understanding the Christian life. Paul contended that the Christian *was not his own*. The “self” did not belong to the believer, nor was “self-expression” a fundamental right.

The popular Christian literature today on LGBTQ issues brims with anecdotal illustrations about the quest for belonging, the need to find self-fulfillment, and the importance of living authentically. Self-denial is out. Happiness and personal flourishing are in. The pursuit of Christian contentment is now defined as learning to be “comfortable in your own skin.” In all of this literature there is a dearth of references to Paul’s doctrine on the lordship of Christ.

But Paul was not ambiguous on the subject. For Paul, the all-important question for the Christian is not “What do I feel?” but “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10). This lordship extends over all areas of the believer’s existence.

For one, Paul contended that Christ rules over the physical *body*. To the Corinthians he stated, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19–20; cf. also Rom. 6:12–14; Rom. 12:1). Christ also extended full authority over *feelings* and *desires*. Paul reminded the Galatians that those who were owned by Christ “have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24). Third, Paul described Christ’s rule as extending over *thoughts* and *intentions*: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

In other words, no aspect of existence—beginning with the body and extending to the innermost thoughts—could be conceived by Paul as remaining under the personal jurisdiction of the self, or even in some kind of morally neutral territory. As Abraham Kuyper famously stated, “Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermeneutically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole

domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!"⁴⁵

This is crucial for understanding the nature of sexual thoughts and the longings of one to be the opposite gender. Some argue that it is the *intensity* of desire which determines whether it is amoral or immoral. If the thoughts and longings do not rise to the level of infatuation or obsession or physical action, they can be considered amoral and no repentance and mortification is necessary. But this is unhelpful, as there is no objective way in which to measure such intensity. Others argue it is the *chosen-ness* of a desire that decides the issue. A person's sexual desires towards a person of the same-sex (or of the opposite sex outside of marriage) are only sinful if deliberately chosen and cultivated. But this, too, is largely unhelpful, for it fails to take into account the culpability of neglect—the failure to dwell proactively and passionately on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, and worthy of praise (Phil. 4:8).

A better way to assess the nature of such desires is to identify the *object* upon which they are placed and the *motivation* by which they are produced and consider whether together they conform to the lordship of Christ. Do they esteem his lordship as demonstrated by their conformity to his creation ordinances? Do they exalt his lordship as demonstrated by their conformity to his new creation principles? If not, then *change* is in order, and if Christ is indeed sovereign, then change is possible, as difficult as it may be.

This approach most fully recognizes the claim of Christ upon every square inch, including desires, imaginations, values, and preferences, and seeks to live out intentionally the full extent of this dominion. True human flourishing will be found only here, not in asserting self-fulfillment. As Paul says to the Romans, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts" (Rom. 13:14).

Conclusion

The preamble to the recently-crafted *Nashville Statement* on biblical sexuality captures well the concern of the hour:

This secular spirit of our age presents a great challenge to the Christian church. Will the church of the Lord Jesus Christ lose her biblical conviction, clarity, and courage, and blend into the spirit of the age? Or will she hold fast to the word of life, draw courage from Jesus, and unashamedly proclaim his way as the way of life? Will she maintain her clear, counter-cultural witness to a world that seems bent on ruin?⁴⁶

The answer, in large part, depends on the church's understanding and affirmation of the anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology of Paul. When impurities are

⁴⁵ Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

⁴⁶ <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/>

introduced into the gospel, they usually come through the neglect in these three areas. Conversely, the key to success in remaining pure in conviction, courageous in proclamation, and effective in the Great Commission will be found largely in standing steadfast on Paul's teaching on the nature of man, sin, and salvation.