

**BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES: Segment 9**

**Homosexuality, Part 4: A Commentary  
by Ildefonso J. Rubrico**

Good evening!

We are now on our third commentary on the topic of homosexuality. In our last segment, we examined the churches' stance on homosexuality, which, on the whole, pronounced it to be morally wrong and therefore, *prohibited*. We also examined the scriptural basis for their saying so, and in particular citing the larger framework of the Bible upon which such prohibitions are made - namely, the biblical story of creation, fall and redemption. We are indebted to Oxford biblical scholar Ben Witherington III who first proposed such a useful framework. We will now continue his analysis.<sup>1</sup>

**What Jesus and the NT Writers Said about Homosexuality**

Our next stop is the Gospels. While it is true that Jesus never condemns homosexual behavior, it does not mean that he affirms it either! Since both sides use this "argument from silence" of Jesus vis-à-vis homosexuality, the rules of debate must needs constrain us *not* to use Jesus' silence as an argument in our own favor, unlike what a certain liberal-minded seminary dean is typically doing.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Jesus' *explicit* words about marriage and singleness (or, the state of being unmarried) in first-century Palestine are quite pertinent to the issue of homosexual sex today.

## **Marriage and Matthew 19:1-12**

In the New Testament, whenever the subject of sexuality comes up, the heterosexual norm of marriage is always upheld.

To just review our material, in Genesis 1:27b-28 we are told that one purpose in creating the two sexes was procreative – through the sexual union of male and female we could reproduce the race. In addition to procreation, there is a unitive function of sexuality that has to do with fulfilling our need for companionship: "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him' (Gen. 2:18). These two functions -procreative and unitive - are then sealed by Jesus in Matt. 19:6 as the famous wedding-ceremony rejoinder, "therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate." These two chapters, Genesis 1 and 2 teach us spiritual truths concerning God's intended order for His creation.

In Matthew 19:1-12, Jesus spelled out two options in regard to sexual behavior--either, (a) be faithful in marriage, or,(b) be celibate if unmarried. He suggests that divorce was not God's original intent for human beings, and that he was now reinforcing the original creational intent for men and women to be together in holy wedlock, as expressed in Genesis 2:24 that says that "man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

He then suggests in v.11-12 that anyone who cannot handle fidelity in marriage should either become (or remain) a eunuch, or stay celibate for the sake of the kingdom of God. The implication of absolutely *no sexual sharing outside of marriage, whether of a heterosexual or homosexual sort*, is very clear. And

marriage, for Jesus, is the "joining" of man and woman as of "one flesh." Homosexual, or same-sex marriages are simply not recognized in the Bible under this strict definition. Neither are "civil unions," which is a legal euphemism for same-sex marriage recognized in the State of Vermont, USA. Jesus is indeed asking for celibacy in singleness, whatever one's sexual predilections might be.

For those of us who have seen many Hollywood movies, the "eunuch" that Jesus meant was not the stereotyped large man (typically, a turbaned Arab) who had been caponized to guard the king's harem. Rather, a eunuch that Jesus cited was a sexually-celibate individual. The New Bible Commentary had this to say:<sup>3</sup>

"'Renounced marriage' is the NIV's paraphrase for 'made themselves eunuchs'; it rightly assumes that Jesus did not mean the phrase to be taken literally."

### **Romans 1:18-28**

We turn now to Romans 1:18-28, and here we have the most complete and clear discussion of the matter. Verse 27b could hardly be clearer: "Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their sin." Consider the following points:

**Homosexual behavior is both immoral and idolatrous.** Paul used homosexual and lesbian sin as illustrations of the more general problem of the effects of the fall. Paul, following the tradition of Jewish writers,<sup>4</sup> seizes on the homosexual behavior of the Gentiles of his day as perhaps the

clearest example of how flouting sexual distinctions is ultimately a rejection of the Creator, who made such distinctions. In other words, it is not just immorality, it is idolatry. Contrast this to the published comments of Loren L. Johns, academic dean of a religious seminary in the U.S., to wit:<sup>5</sup>

"Paul apparently knew nothing about the complexity of homosexuality and the multiple causes of it and nowhere does Paul show awareness of a loving mutual homosexual relationship that is not exploitative or abusive. We should refrain from imposing Paul's statements about homosexuality directly on our situation today without taking this into account."

This argument involves an amazing anachronism. That is, those saying this are attempting to place a very recent twentieth century understanding of homosexuality back into the first century mindset of Paul. People in the first century did not think in terms of "sexual orientation." It is inconceivable for Paul to have even attempted to make a psychological differentiation such as this.

By depicting the apostle Paul as nothing more than a first-century Jew-turned-Christian who was ignorant about modern psychology and science, this liberal pastor and others of his ilk trivializes 2,000 years of church teaching to push forward their 50-yr. old post-modern agenda. Post-modernism is a philosophical concept that rejects Absolute Truth (like the bible) in favor of relative Truth (or Relativism, which is another way of saying that "your truth is as good as mine.")

**Homosexual behavior is a form of rebellion against God.** Much of what Paul says could apply to any sort of sinner, for all sin is ultimately rebellion

against God. But verses 26-27 illustrate how this rebellion plays itself out by taking the example of lesbian and homosexual sexual activity. Says Paul:

"Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion."

**Paul describes homosexual behavior as unnatural.** At verse 26, Paul introduces the concept of nature into the discussion. The verse says literally "they have exchanged the natural use for that which is contrary to nature." Here Paul is using language frequently used in antiquity which knew no such terms as homosexual or lesbian, to refer to homosexual (unnatural) and heterosexual (natural) sexual behavior. One can not say that Paul, no biologist, failed to realize that to some persons it seems "natural" to be attracted to those of the same gender. Paul is well aware of how sin becomes *ingrained* in human nature, to such an extent that it comes to seem perfectly natural. No, Paul is contrasting the creation order as originally given, versus various manifestations of human fallenness.

It should be noted that the phrase "against nature" was used in connection with homosexual intercourse by both ancient Philo and Josephus, contemporaries of Paul.<sup>6</sup>

**Homosexuality is just like any other sin.** For any who might dismiss Paul as just another homophobic (from "homophobia" - fear, dislike or hatred of

homosexuals<sup>7</sup>) early Jew picking on an oppressed minority, Paul says at the end of Romans 1 that sinfulness that God condemns is also manifested by covetousness, malice, envy, murder, slander, insolence, rebellion against parents, ruthlessness, deceit, pride and the like. He is then able to say in Romans 2:1 "Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you that judge are doing the very same sort of sinful things."

*In other words, all of us have fallen and can't get up without the grace of God.* This means there must be *no singling out* of homosexual sin as somehow more heinous sin than the sins heterosexuals commit, as Evangelist Billy Graham once pointed out.<sup>8</sup> Homophobia or heterosexual sexual activity outside marriage is a sin just as surely as same-sex sexual activity is. We all are sinners before God.

## **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**

We turn now to 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Here Paul is trotting out a vice list of certain kinds of behaviors which will keep a person out of the final Kingdom of God. It is a general list that does *not* single out homosexual behavior but includes it along with fornicators, idolators, adulterers, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers and robbers. At the time Paul wrote his letters there was no word in classical, biblical, or patristic Greek which corresponded with our English term "homosexual." Instead, homosexual behavior was described (e.g., Rom. 1:26-27).

**Malakoi and Arsenokoitai.** The two terms in question are the Greek *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. The former term literally means "something like effeminate or soft," and refers to the passive partner in a homosexual tryst. The term is variously translated in English as follows:

'Malakoi'

1. abusers of themselves w/ mankind - KJV;
2. sodomites - NKJV;
3. homosexual offenders - NIV;
4. sodomites - NAB (Catholic);
5. homosexual - CEV;
6. sexual perverts - RSV;
7. sexual perverts - GNB.

The other term, *arsenokoitai*, is not found in Greek literature prior to Paul, and may even have been coined by Paul. It means literally a male copulator, someone who copulates with a male. It is also translated variously as:

'Arsenokoitai'

1. effeminate - King James Version (KJV);
2. homosexual - New King James Version (NKJV);
3. male prostitute - New Intl. Version (NIV);
4. homosexual - New American Bible (NAB, Catholic);
5. perverts - Contemporary English Version (CEV)
6. adulterers - Revised Standard Version (RSV);
7. adulterers - Good News Bible (GNB).

Additionally, 1Timothy 1:10 employs that Greek word 'arsenokoitai' that is variously translated as follows:

1. them that defile themselves w/ mankind - KJV;
2. sodomites - NKJV;
3. perverts - NIV;
4. sodomites - NAB (Catholic);
5. homosexuals - CEV;

6. sodomites - RSV;
7. sexual perverts - GNB.

It has been further argued that 'malakos' actually meant 'soft' or 'fine,' citing Matt.11:8 and Luke 7:25 as examples (as in: 'he was clothed in soft garments/fine raiment'), thereby implying that St. Paul (or the person before him) erroneously employed the word to persons who were *only* effeminate - i.e., sensitive, someone endowed with some fine or feminine qualities - and *not* a sexual pervert as homophiliacs or homosexual haters pictured them to be. However, the use of 'malakos' must of necessity be contextual, and what was clearly condemned by Paul in 1 Cor. 6:9 were nothing more than the practice of homosexual acts.

### **Was homosexuality an ancient cultural practice?**

In the cultural milieu that Paul lived in, Greek men of some social standing would normally keep young boys for homosexual sex until they were old enough for marriage themselves. These young boys were known as "catamites."

However, K.J. Dover<sup>9</sup> points out that such relationships did not replace marriage between man and woman, but occurred before and beside it. A mature man would never have a mature male mate, but he would be the *erastes* (lover) to a young *eromenos* (loved one). In this relationship it was considered improper for the eromenos to feel desire, as that would not be masculine. Driven by desire and admiration, the erastes would devote himself unselfishly to providing all the education his eromenos required to thrive in society.

The Romans initially copied the practice but later frowned on it and called those who practiced it as

"effeminate." In fact, later Roman law strictly prohibited this "Greek Curse" and severely punished the practice.

On the other hand, some modern historians and human sexuality theorists who have embraced the Michael Foucault's 19<sup>th</sup> century theory on "Social Constructions," have asserted that various human cultures had many socially-constructed practices that were hidden but have only emerged until now when such practices began to be scientifically categorized. Similar claims about so-called homosexuality in ancient Greece are also being made; that behaviors that appear to be homosexual in modern Western societies may have been understood by ancient Greeks in entirely different ways.<sup>10</sup>

### **Conflicting beliefs and views.**

Whom should we now believe - Paul who actually *witnessed* and wrote about the homosexual practices of those around him in First Corinthians; or, our modern social theorists? Should we now allow anyone with a fancy or modern-sounding theory in psychology, sociology or biology to "deconstruct" many of society's core beliefs? This, to me, is a dangerous precedent.

In writing about homosexuality, Paul not only reminds his largely-gentile Christian audience that some of them had practiced one or another of these vices, but points out that some seemed to be still persisting in them.

The witness of the Bible is univocal about same sex sexual activity. That is, Scriptures speak as *one voice*. *It is always rejected as sinful*. And, lest we be complacent, there is *no* distinction made between homosexual behavior that is part of the consensual

acts of adults and other forms of such behavior (such as adultery and promiscuity). Indeed most ancients were more likely to condemn consensual adult homosexual behavior than pederasty, or pedophilia -- just the opposite of the situation today. We see such a condemnation in antiquity as early as the Greek philosopher Plato and as late as Jewish historian Josephus and beyond.

### **Are we being Complacent?**

But people are not as condemnatory nowadays. Last September 24, 2004, the Philippine Daily Inquirer bannered in its Entertainment Section the title: "Ai-Ai Ends Affair with Director for her Kids' Sake."<sup>11</sup> According to the storywriter, Queen of Comedy Ai Ai de las Alas admitted that she recently ended her almost three-year affair with a woman director from the giant media network ABS-CBN for her children's sake and because she wanted "to turn a new leaf." "I'm turning 40 soon, and I feel I'm at a crossroads of my life," Ai Ai said last week. She said she realized how much her children loved her, and that they didn't say anything against the [lesbian]relationship with her ex-lover. "They speak only now because it's already over." She confessed to feeling bad about breaking her ex-lover's heart. "..I have no regrets about getting into a relationship with her..although I hurt her, I know she'll forgive me. We're still friends."

The highly-publicized story of de las Alas gives us a romanticized version of a lesbian relationship that has turned sour, for her. The fact is, we are not even sure that De las Alas has really repented ("no regrets," according to her). As to her feelings if someday her daughter also gets into a lesbian relationship, she simply says, "I give my kids everything so that they won't make a mistake" as she admits she once did. The gullible and adoring

public who assiduously follow the life and loves of movie and TV personalities like de las Alas perhaps fail to realize the transitory nature of lesbian relationships. Intoned de las Alas, who denies the rumor that she will reconcile with the father of her two children, singer Miguel Vera: "I will take a rest from falling in love for one or two years. I really want change after two years of a [lesbian] relationship."

Nowadays lesbian couples have been attracting attention by others, in relation to feminism, sexual relationships, marriage and parenting, and other areas.

Notable lesbian couples in U.S. television include Tara Maclay and Willow Rosenberg in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Lindsay Peterson and Melanie Marcus in *Queer as Folk* and Dr. Kerry Weaver and Sandy Lopez in *ER*. *The L Word* has an all-lesbian cast.<sup>12</sup>

Prominent personalities who are lesbians or gays are being lionized by the public, it would seem.

On the other hand, manifestations of moral bankruptcy are all around us. The Philippine Daily Inquirer on 23 September 2004 ran a front-page story on the rising incidence of pedophilia in the Philippines.<sup>13</sup> According to Sr. Supt. Rodolfo Mendoza, deputy chief of the PNP-CIDG, "pedophilia, or sexual desire in an adult for a child, is now prevalent among Filipinos." He was testifying at a Senate hearing on the effect of the proliferation of pedophile materials to the increased exploitation of minors. Mendoza said it was possible that a "crime ring" was involved in the worsening problem. Senator Jamby Madrigal, who chaired the committee, commented that the Philippine Alliance Against Pornography (PAP) also testified that noontime TV shows were exploiting children by making them dress like

"japayukis," Filipino women working as entertainers in Japan.

## **Closing**

The words of Dr. Ben Witherington III are appropriate for closing this session. He declares: "For those who indeed intend to continue to recognize the Bible as the normative rule, not only for faith but for ethical practice in the church or the synagogue, we cannot be about the business of making anyone comfortable in their sin, whether a heterosexual or a homosexual person. Equally, however, the way of Jesus in treating such situations is that balance of justice and mercy that says on the one hand 'Neither do I condemn you' and on the other 'Go and sin no more.'" (Luke 7:50).

As we have covered the essentials of the moral and ethical aspects of homosexuality, we shall end our discussions here. We will concern ourselves next with the health and medical aspects of homosexuality in our next segment.

Thank you once again for bearing with me on this difficult topic. We hope we are giving you a fair and balanced picture of homosexuality in this program.

This is your host, Nene Rubrico, bidding you a pleasant good evening once more, and leaving you with a fitting reminder that:

"Where there is no vision, the people perish."

God bless!

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[www.biblical-perspectives.org](http://www.biblical-perspectives.org)

## Notes and References:

- <sup>1</sup> [http://www.beliefnet.com/story/128/story\\_12885\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/128/story_12885_1.html)
- <sup>2</sup> Loren L. Johns, "Homosexuality and the Bible," <http://www.ambs.edu/LJohns/Homosexuality.htm>
- <sup>3</sup> D.A. Carson, et. al., *New Bible Commentary*, 21<sup>st</sup> Ed.(England:InterVarsity Press,1994), 929.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1123.
- <sup>5</sup> Loren L. Johns, *op. cit.*
- <sup>6</sup> Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3.39; Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.273.
- <sup>7</sup> June M. Reinisch, dir., *The Kinsey Institute New Report on Sex* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 147.
- <sup>8</sup> "I think that the Bible teaches that homosexuality is a sin, but the Bible also teaches that pride is a sin, jealousy is a sin, and hate is a sin, evil thoughts are a sin, and so I don't think that homosexuality should be chosen as the overwhelming sin that we are doing today." Billy Graham, 20/20 program, 1997-MAY-2.
- <sup>9</sup> K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*(London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, 1979).
- <sup>10</sup> Sell, Randall L. (Dec 1997). Defining and measuring sexual orientation: a review. *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 26(6) 643-658.(excerpt <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/assault/context/defining.html>). From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)
- <sup>12</sup> "Ai Ai Ends Affair with Director for her Kids' Sake," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 24 September 2004. Article by Jocelyn Valle.
- <sup>12</sup> <http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Lesbian>
- <sup>13</sup> "Child sex now prevalent in RP, cop tells senators," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 23 September 2004. By Michael Lim Ubac.