

Paul on Homosexuality

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Tubi Publishing, LLC

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Preface

Homosexuality is one of the most hotly debated religious issues of our time. The debate is consuming a lot of time, energy, and money. It is even ripping longstanding denominations apart. Yet, there is only one unequivocal reference to homosexuality in the Greek New Testament, and that is in Romans 1. Ironically, this reference to homosexuality is contained within a Biblical passage that has befuddled theologians for the last 2,000 years, since the very birth of the Christian faith.

One of today's great Biblical scholars, Dr. Richard N. Longenecker, describes the issue this way: "The interpretation of Romans 1:18-3:20 has been notoriously difficult for almost every commentator.... Earlier interpreters such as Origen, Jerome, Augustine, and Erasmus wrestled with this issue, and it continues to plague commentators today." Why is Romans 1:18-3:20 such a mystery? Dr. Longenecker explains, "No one being able to be declared righteous by observing the law (Romans 3:20) is clear, [yet] there are four texts in Romans 2 that seem to espouse a theology of salvation by works or by obedience to the Mosaic Law."

Over the last two millennia, various theories have been offered to reconcile Romans 1:18-3:20 (the only passage that contains an unequivocal reference to homosexuality). Yet no one, literally no one, had been able to explain Paul's message in a way that accounts for every sentence in the passage. Every theory proposed has contradicted at least one part of the passage. For example, Romans 2:13 basically says that only those who keep the entire Law will be vindicated before God. John Calvin, the founder of Baptist doctrine, hypothesized that Paul meant that no one can be found who has kept the entire Law. The

problem is that, in the very next sentence (Romans 2:14), Paul gives an example of those who keep the entire Law and are justified before God for doing so. Calvin joined the long list of commentators who were unable to reconcile every sentence of this mysterious passage.

As a cryptographer, I love unsolvable puzzles. I have been blessed in my lifetime to have solved a number of previously unsolved puzzles in a variety of fields: in cryptography (by designing one of the only unbreakable codes in existence today); in data communications (by building an artificial intelligence system that accurately deduces how an entire world-wide network is physically wired together); in neurology (by making a system that monitors the real-time activity of the nervous system branch that is responsible for all recuperative and healing functions); etc. Each of these successes was based upon first resolving a previously unsolved issue. Each issue had befuddled those in the respective fields for a very long time. So it was only natural that I applied the same discipline to the Romans 1:18-3:20 issue that I was so deeply familiar with.

Having grown up in an evangelical Christian household as a PK (Preacher's Kid), I literally fell in love with the Bible. I even memorized Paul's letter to the Romans word for word. I knew the Romans 1:18-3:20 paradox quite intimately. A few years ago, I had the good fortune of totally and completely solving the paradox. I had discovered a single explanation that accounts for every sentence in the passage. This was the first time in 2,000 years that this had been accomplished. I published the solution in *The Jesus Secret*. The discovery served as the basis of my later work, *Breaking the Romans Code*.

The historic resolution of the paradox has tremendous implications. No longer are multiple "theologies" acceptable. There is only one solution to the paradox. Any theology that doesn't resolve the paradox isn't a viable alternative; it is simply wrong. The resolution of the paradox inherently proves what Paul's message was in Romans 1:18-3:20. The 2000-year-old question has been answered. The theological game is over.

While I revealed the full answer to the paradox in *The Jesus Secret* and *Breaking the Romans Code*, I didn't spend a great amount

of time dealing with the implications of this discovery as it relates to homosexuality, an integral part of the passage. The present work, *Paul on Homosexuality*, has been written to rectify this. The solution to the 2000-year-old mystery incidentally reveals the historical Paul's view of homosexual relationships. Quite surprisingly, the resolution of the paradox proves that traditional Christianity's misunderstanding of Romans 1:18-3:20 resulted in a misunderstanding of Paul's view on homosexual relationships. Now, with the definitive solution to the paradox, this is about to change.

To those who want to know what the historical Paul actually taught about homosexual relationships: Welcome.

Michael Wood

October 2011

Chapter 1

Bipolar Disorder

On May 10, 2011, the Presbyterian Church (USA) became the fourth major Protestant denomination to accept the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy.¹ To conservative Presbyterians, this move signaled that their Church had completely abandoned Biblical principles. The Bible seemed to have no authoritative weight anymore. So conservatives are now leaving the denomination in droves. They are separating over what seem to be irreconcilable differences.

But are the differences truly irreconcilable? When all is said and done, the primary obstacle to unity comes down to a difference in opinions regarding one man: the apostle Paul. From the conservative perspective, Paul unequivocally declared that no homosexual shall enter the kingdom of God. If liberals can reject clear, unambiguous scriptures, then the Bible must not matter to them at all.

Reverend Wheeler explains the conservative perspective:

St. Paul makes an explicit statement condemning homosexual practice in his letter to the Romans:

God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural

¹ New York Times, May 10, 2011.

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.—*Romans 1:24-27*

There are lists of disobedient types of people, including homosexuals, that are condemned in St. Paul's other letters, specifically I Corinthians and I Timothy:

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 (also trans.: sexual pervers), nor thieves, nor [the] covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.—*1 Corinthians 6:9-10*

The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites [homosexuals], kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.—*1 Timothy 1:9-10*

There is no scriptural reference that can be found to support the purported morality of homosexuality. So, the testimony of Scripture is irrefutable in its prohibition of homosexuality and emphatic in its condemnation of those who practice it. There is no honest way around this issue, as inconvenient as it may be to people of the present day who revel in the dark pleasures of homosexual intercourse, and enable others to do the same.²—Reverend Wheeler (Pastor of Holy Cross Church)

From the conservative perspective, Paul wrote *three times* that homosexuality is a despicable abomination which absolutely prohibits a person from entering the kingdom of God. With such clear, repeated condemnation, what more needs to be said?

So how do liberals respond to this? Herbert W. Chilstrom explains:

To use the Bible to condemn homosexual persons and committed faithful same-sex relationships is, we believe, to bear false witness against the Bible.

We also want to assure you that we are against all sin whether it is

² “The Abomination of Homosexuality in the Episcopal Church” by Fr. Lawrence B. “Chip” Wheeler, January 9, 2010

homosexual, heterosexual, or nonsexual. We understand sin in light of Christ-centered texts such as this passage from the apostle Paul:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:8-10)

We understand that written word of Scripture in light of Jesus who is the living Word. Christ, who is Lord of all, is also Lord of the Bible.³—Herbert W. Chilstrom (the first ELCA bishop)

Here is the dilemma. Conservatives believe that Paul wrote *three times* that homosexuals cannot enter the kingdom of God, while liberals believe that Paul wrote *three times* that loving our neighbors as ourselves (bearing the burdens of others) is the sum total of God’s moral and ethical requirements:

Don’t owe anything to anyone beyond loving one another because he who loves others has fulfilled the Law, because “don’t commit adultery,” “don’t murder,” “don’t steal,” “don’t covet,” and if there is any other commandment it is summed up in these words: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”⁴—Paul

* * *

The whole Law is fulfilled in one precept: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”⁵—Paul

* * *

Bear one another’s burdens and thereby fulfill the Law of Christ.⁶—Paul

From the liberal perspective, marrying someone of the same sex doesn’t violate “Love your neighbor as yourself.” A married gay couple can bear the burdens of others and thereby fulfill the entirety of Jesus’ requirements. Therefore, it’s impossible for homosexuality to

3 *Sexual Fulfillment for Single and Married, Straight and Gay, Young and Old*, by Herbert W. Chilstrom, Lowell O. Erdahl, pp. 122-123, Augsburg Books, 2001

4 Romans 13:8-10

5 Galatians 5:13-14 as translated by Dr. William Berg

6 Galatians 6:2 as translated by Dr. William Berg

be against God's Law.

Atheists, meanwhile, simply shake their heads. They can't understand why liberals and conservatives fight over a man whom the Bible portrays as suffering from a split personality disorder. To them, Paul is a self-contradictory loon who touts loving your neighbor as the entire Law on the one hand, while condemning homosexuality on the other. They view the Bible as one of the most self-contradictory books on the planet, and it boggles their minds that anyone would ever consider taking it seriously.

So did Paul really teach that loving your neighbor as yourself is the entire Law, only to take it back when it came to homosexuals? Did he really go back and forth *three times*? Was he really that bipolar?

As an internationally acclaimed cryptographer, I was intrigued by the puzzle. It seemed impossible that any sane man would have taken two opposing views of his God's requirements. It seemed that there must have been something else going on that got lost in modern translation. Therefore, after consulting with Dr. William Berg (who holds a PhD in Classical Studies from Princeton University), I was able to finally put the historical pieces together. It turns out that there is a single, unified reason why Paul wrote what he did about loving our neighbor and sexuality. In fact, it turns out that Paul's teachings are two sides of the same coin.

So who was the apostle Paul? Did he believe that Jesus' Golden Rule is the entirety of Christian obligation, as the liberals assert? Or did he believe that the entirety of Moses' moral code (the one that prohibits homosexuality) is still in force as the conservatives assert? Setting aside religiously motivated theological arguments, who was the *historical* Paul? What did the actual man of history believe?