

Sexuality: Same-sex relationships, Transgender

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Introduction and Background

I wrote a paper in 1997 that tried to look honestly at outlining what a biblical perspective on homosexuality was. The conclusion I reached in that paper was what might be termed a 'traditional' perspective: namely that marriage was between one man and one woman, that same-sex orientation and attraction was in no different category than hetero-sexual orientation and attraction; but that a same-sex sexually-active relationship was outside of a biblical boundary for sexual expression.

I wrote it affirming the reality of, and the acceptance of, same-sex attraction, with the only option for someone of same-sex attraction being that of celibacy. I hope I wrote the paper without being too critical and at the close of it I suggested that a review of the biblical material (as far as same-sex practice) would be necessitated when there was evidence that the Spirit was present within such a setting. Story does not, by itself, have an authority to change theology, but our reading of the Bible has to be challenged by story, and hence our theology also has to be reviewed and if necessary changed. That admission of 'review' was in glad response to the methodology that we see in Acts 15.¹ Those present were immersed in the biblical material, they had also been shaped by their traditions, but they **first** submitted themselves to the stories of what the Spirit was doing and then, **and only then**, they referred to their holy writings. The stories challenged their traditions and their former reading of their authoritative writings.

An important interlude. As probably can be picked up from the first-two paragraphs this paper will move beyond that effort of 24 years ago, and not simply beyond but in a different direction. I was asked some months back if I was having a 'Peter conversion moment' (as per Peter's vision on the roof-top). I replied 'yes, and if I go where I think I am headed then I cannot do so in private but have to be public, with any accompanying apology that is appropriate'. If anyone who reads this paper and read the former one and through that paper I caused offence, I present **my apology** here. I appreciate that writing those previous few words is hardly sufficient, but I have to start somewhere.

¹ Acts 15 is a record of the Council in Jerusalem where they debated on what basis Gentiles were to be included as members of the body of Christ.

Story is important, and over the years since writing that paper I have encountered stories that have caused me to re-think. Initially I had dialogue with people who were same-sex orientation and wished to dialogue with me regarding what I had written. As I listened I could hear their stories, and within a short period of time I no longer made the paper available, as I could hear the pain that a number of them had experienced through their marginalisation. Then came reading of books, listening to those who were both affirming of (monogamous) same-sex relationships and the grace that was on them left me convinced that the Spirit was indeed present with and for them.

Within the Judaeo-Christian tradition what one does with the body is important. The biblical teaching about the body is ***theological, ethical and also eschatological***.² The Incarnation is a major 'vote' given to the importance of bodily existence, likewise the resurrection of the body (both in terms of Jesus and the original Easter Event, and also the future hope for the believer) marks out how important the body is. This 'use' of the body must include sexual activity... and yet, we can make too much of sexual activity, for from an eschatological perspective, there will be 'no more marriage'. Humans are in the image of God, but there are two aspects that we humans experience that God does not. In God there is no death and there is no sex! We should not fall into the trap of listing 'sex' as **the** major criterion for holiness; there are many other vices that vie for the 'top' spot, vices that are often whitewashed as not being too serious. And once we total up the possible texts that could be critiquing same-sex expression statistically we come to something like 0.0001% of the entire Bible.³ Statistics, of course, do not necessarily prove anything but that figure should at least make us a little cautionary in drawing our conclusions.

In putting my thoughts into print I acknowledge there are those who are better equipped, having greater understanding and wider relationships than I have. What is in this paper is simply a contribution.

For some time I have considered that the future will indeed be more 'messy' than the past with respectful disagreement among those who sincerely seek to interpret the Scriptures and observe (in order to learn from) society. Honest people will come to different conclusions and so dialogue will be necessary between them, the space between occupied relationally rather than being an empty space across which polemic voices can sound.

Slavery, women and...

Thankfully the Christian tradition (now) is that slavery and the slave trade are incompatible with the Gospel message. Although there is still, in some quarters, a divide between male

² In contrast to many areas of (Western) society where the emphasis is on health, beauty and fitness, so the 'body beautiful' is desired. In some quarters there is also the added element of a freedom to do with my body (sexually) as I please.

³ Number of verses that are purported to directly condemn same-sex activity in proportion to the total number in the Scriptures.

and female roles that is defended and as a result certain leadership roles are barred from women, there has been a great move toward a view advocating egalitarianism. With both examples of slavery and women there are 'difficult Scriptures' that anyone moving in an egalitarian direction faces. In the former situation (slavery) those Scriptures are effectively ignored;⁴ and with the male / female situation there is such a strong internal critique and dialogue (disagreement?) that for writers, such as myself, there is an overwhelming movement toward an egalitarian position. Yes there are challenging Scriptures, ones that can be explained by the historical context and culture, but in reality **those Scriptures are simply not relevant to us today**. They were for 'then' and 'there' not 'now' and 'here'. I am very happy to accept that the Bible is patriarchally biased, and that we do not need to submit to that bias, indeed we have to reject that bias... and do so to be faithful to the 'story' that is being told.⁵

Slavery → narratives that do not condemn slavery, laws that regulate but do not condemn etc... **But:** slave-traders critiqued; Onesimus to be viewed as a brother; and the overall message from Creation through Redemption was of the equal status of all human beings; ownership of another was not sustainable.

Women → many Scriptures place their position in society / home as being at a subservient level; Paul's 'household codes' seemed to give 'leadership' priority to the husband. **But:** there was an underlying egalitarian basis to the Gospel (Gal. 3:28 being central to this); all the household codes can be seen as apologetic in nature rather than representing an eternal order; all of Paul / Pauline texts that seem to restrict women can be understood in a way that brings them into line with egalitarianism - by looking at the cultural background; and finally whatever might be claimed to be representing a subservience of women from creation becomes irrelevant as eschatological humanity in Christ (not humanity in Adam) has to be the basis for any understanding.

But same-sex relationships? The above two examples seek to track with a trajectory in Scripture and also seek to pick up on the intra-canonical debate / dialogue where there might be conflicting messages. Is that present in this third example? It seems not.

With respect to same-sex activity we do not have that same internal dialogue and that was a factor for me when I wrote that former paper. Without that internal dialogue / disagreement we accept the witness of Scripture as giving the final word, but... any final word also has to include a trajectory that would take us beyond the pages of Scripture. Any such trajectory would not be in disagreement to the story line, but could be seen to disagree with specific texts.⁶

⁴ With an effective response of 'that was then in that culture, but we now know that there is something wrong at the core of slavery, of owning people'. Effectively those Scriptures that can be advanced to defend slavery are given no weight.

⁵ By accepting that the Scriptures have a patriarchal bias is not to take away its authority, but to push us beyond the various texts. The authority of Scripture is in the story being told, and in its unique witness to the revelation of God that was Personal in and through Jesus.

⁶ Beyond Scripture does not mean we can assume an authority to continue to add books to our canon, but that there is a very real sense in which the story being told is unfinished. There is a gap between the end of the New Testament and the *parousia*. We are not authorised to write what fits in this gap but it is important that the gap is filled through followers of Jesus who live out faithfully in line with what has gone before. Perhaps those Christian traditions that emphasise the tradition of the church have grasped something that those such as myself have not, but I note that too often those

Usury... charging of interest (an important aside)

In later society 'usury' came to mean the action or practice of lending money at unreasonably high rates of interest, but in many historical societies including ancient Christian, Jewish, and Islamic societies, usury meant **the charging of interest of any kind**, and this was considered wrong, and even in some situations it was made illegal. The texts of the Old Testament are clear:

If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them (Exod. 22:25).

If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens. Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear your God; let them live with you (Leviticus 25:36–37).

You shall not charge interest on loans to another Israelite, interest on money, interest on provisions, interest on anything that is lent. On loans to a foreigner you may charge interest, but on loans to another Israelite you may not charge interest, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings in the land that you are about to enter and possess (Deut. 23:19–20).

O Lord, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?
... who do not lend money at interest (Ps. 15:1, 5).

If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right... does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not take advance or accrued interest... such a one is righteous; he shall surely live, says the Lord God (Ezek. 18:5-9; see also 18:13, 17 and 22:12; apologies for the male language, such was the culture and the language of the day).

Interest was not allowed among the covenant community, which allowed space for Jews to loan money in a later period when they were dispersed throughout Europe. They became the money-lenders, to the Gentiles.

This prohibition to charge interest continued to carry weight within the Christian community. The most recent and relatively complete papal discussion of usury occurred in Pope Benedict XIV's encyclical of 1745,

The nature of the sin called usury has its proper place and origin in a loan contract ... [which] demands, by its very nature, that one return to another only as much as he has received. The sin rests on the fact that sometimes the creditor desires more than he has given..., but any gain which exceeds the amount he gave is illicit and usurious.

One cannot condone the sin of usury by arguing that the gain is not great or

traditions do not simply inform but restrict any new path being discovered.

excessive, but rather moderate or small; neither can it be condoned by arguing that the borrower is rich; nor even by arguing that the money borrowed is not left idle, but is spent usefully...

As can be read in this encyclical there is a ban on interest, with the only legitimate return being that of receiving back as much as was loaned.

If we apply the law, what we read in the texts on usury, as being the guideline for us in our society we could argue the following:

- A. Money lending that charges interest is wrong.
- B. Mortgages that enable a person to buy a property fit the above criterion of money lending.
- C. (Therefore) mortgages are evil and are to be condemned, and anyone with a mortgage is in defiance of God's law.

That would indeed be a-not-inappropriate application of the law, but one that would condemn many who seek to follow Jesus! We have an appropriate application of the law **if B and A are in the same category; if the prohibition of A also includes what is listed in B.** Understandably the prohibitions against charging of interest came to be understood as a restriction on exorbitant rates of interest, or of using money to oppress those who could resort to no other option but to borrow money.⁷ The understanding of the money-lending prohibitions went beyond a literal reading of the text resulting in the texts not being applied to **every** money-lending scenario.

I suggest in the sub-title of this section that the consideration of money-lending was an 'important aside' within the discussion of same-sex expression. The clear texts prohibiting money lending seem no longer to apply as they formerly did. One could push back against the direction I am implicitly proposing, with the point that usury is commented on within the OT, but there is a lack of NT texts on the matter and that this is unlike the same-sex situation where we have Scriptures suggesting a prohibition in both testaments. I acknowledge this to be the case but the early church writers understood the continuance of the principle, the 'prohibitive law' against usury. These include: Apollonius, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and John Chrysostom. In addition, the Apostolic Canons, dating in their final form to around 380, in their 44th canon prohibit the taking of usury by the clergy, as do the Council of Arles in 314 (12th canon) and the First Council of Nicaea in 325 (17th canon), while the Council of Elvira, 305 or 306, the First Council of Carthage in 345 (12th canon) and the Council of Aix in 789 (36th canon) prohibit it to the laity also.

Law ends with Jesus, for Torah law was what was given to the people of Israel, but none of the principles within the law are simply cancelled. They all are nailed to the cross as law, but that which continues as 'Jesus shaped principle' remains, often in intensified form ('adultery' is re-defined as 'lust'; 'murder' as 'anger').

Helpfully, tradition has helped us to see the ongoing principle of the prohibition against

⁷ Such an understanding should carry redemptive weight into our economic structures, where money makes money, often simply enriching those who already have resources and enslaving those who lack resources.

money-lending with interest as being a restriction against unbridled use of money in a money-lending context, of money being used to make money through **oppression** and **excessive** interest rates.

It appears that it was John Calvin who pushed back against a blanket restriction on charging interest. (Martin Luther condemned charging interest, and if it was found that a Christian had been involved in charging interest they were not given a 'Christian' burial.) Calvin replied in a letter to a question posed to him asking if it was ever right to charge interest and pushed back against the text as being the final word, arguing that the **context** of the biblical texts and the **context** of the 16th Century were different; he argued that the purpose of the text was to prohibit that which was oppressive, and had to be read in that light. Perhaps the letter did not become public until after Calvin's death as it was so explosive?

When we come to the texts that we have to consider on same-sex expression⁸ we need to approach them with some caution if we seek to learn from the above example.

- A. The Bible condemns money lending that charges interest / the Bible condemns homosexuality.
- B. Mortgages are money lending examples that charge interest / same-sex committed relationships are an example of homosexual practice.
- C. Mortgages are evil and all who have them are to be condemned / all those...

The important area is whether B & A are referring to the same; that there is a direct 1-1 relationship between the two examples. In the case of the money-lending / mortgages the consensus of opinion is that they are not; that we are not comparing like with like. This scrutiny regarding the texts on homosexuality has to be applied to them in the same way; we have to consider if we are comparing like with like.

None of what has been written thus far is presented as a conclusive argument, but the various principles that proceed should caution us somewhat as we come to look at some of the pertinent texts.

There is an **overarching story** that we live under. That story is from Creation through Redemption to New Creation. We cannot simply take texts and force them to be applicable to any and every situation, regardless of culture and context. This overarching story will enable us to understand the word of God but we cannot reduce the word of God to a text, or even a combination of texts; ultimately the truths of God are not simply textual or propositional but revealed in and through the Person of Jesus.

Any understanding of Scripture will be informed by the stories that people bring, those stories will involve God's activity and acceptance with the stories often coming from the marginalised whose voice has been previously silenced.

⁸ I will use the term 'homosexuality' in the sentences that follow, but it is important to acknowledge that our current understanding of homosexuality is not that which was understood in the biblical period, nor indeed for centuries thereafter.

Our understanding of Scripture will be challenged in the same way as the prohibition on money-lending has been challenged. We will have to ask **what** is being addressed in the Scriptures, what practices are being **forbidden** and how do we **apply** them into our culture. The money-lending example illustrated those principles that will be important for us.

Creation: male and female

In the two creation narratives we encounter exactly that, namely narrative. We do not encounter a set of commands and prohibitions. The central question that we have to answer is whether these accounts are **prescriptive or descriptive**. Regarding the sexual bond that we read of in those narratives there is a limit that restricts such a bond to hetero-examples. If, however, we were to make these texts prescriptive we would then run into all kinds of issues.

Be fruitful: but what about couples that are childless (indeed in some Jewish commentaries a husband was obliged to divorce his wife if they were childless after 10 years - NB the patriarchal perspective, with the husband able to divorce the wife!)? The 'be fruitful' mandate also hits a huge barrier of application to those who are single. If the narrative is to be understood in a prescriptive manner we hit those immediate issues.

Better to take it as **descriptive**. God created humanity;⁹ humanity carrying the image of God. If we were tempted to suggest that there is in the text a binary definition of humanity (either male or female) we immediately run into difficulty with the language within these passages regarding other aspects of creation, for in the wider context we read God that created night and day... this does not imply that s/he¹⁰ only created night and day, and that dusk and dawn owe an origin to another source other than God! This use of two contrasting examples we also use in English: 'I searched high and low' does not imply that I would have found the lost item if only I had searched at a level other than high or other than low. High and low mark the two ends and include everything in between. This is what is termed a *merism*.¹¹

God blesses those who marry and move out from their parents and have children, but God can, and does, **also bless those who don't fit that particular pattern**. There might be a norm (in the sense of majority experience) but to suggest a norm does not imply something that does not fit the 'majority-norm' is therefore automatically an aberration, nor to suggest 'less in the image of God'. The creation narratives are better taken as being descriptive, and we would push them too far to use them to restrict expressions that do not fit with the 'norm'.

⁹ We could say that a person is 'created' by the sexual intercourse between the parents, and I am not using the term 'God created' in the sense of creationism vs. evolution, but that God is intimately involved with each person. Neither am I using the term 'created' to suggest that the origins of humanity were across a spectrum from male to female, but that humanity, in the image of God, is across a spectrum, and that humanity cannot be neatly restricted to a binary expression. An individual can appear anywhere on the spectrum and that where they 'sit' on that spectrum does not increase or decrease how they reflect that image.

¹⁰ I use s/he as in a paper on sexuality it seems more sensitive, God being non-sexual (both in terms of 'biology' and gender).

¹¹ Other examples are God / Jesus as 'the alpha and omega', the 'first and the last'.

Sodom and Gomorrah: Genesis 18, 19

The story is fairly well known. Two angels arrive on a mission to the city of Sodom. Lot, Abraham's nephew lives there and he welcomes them, persuading them to stay the night and so he offers them hospitality. News gets out that they have arrived and are staying with Lot, and the men of the city come out saying:

Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them (Gen. 19:5).

It is all but universally accepted that the reference to knowing the men (angels) is a euphemism for sexual intercourse.

The situation is resolved by the angels intervening and the inhabitants being struck blind. (A strange side-note is that Lot had sought to resolve the situation by offering his (virgin) daughters to satisfy the men.)

There is clearly a major reference to the desire of these male inhabitants to have sex with these men, but it is interesting how other biblical texts refer to this situation. There are a few texts that refer to Sodom and the main one in the OT is **Ezekiel 16** with central verses being vs. 49 and 50.

This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it.

There might be a reference to sexual sin in the phrase 'abominable things' but this is certainly not the central focus of the critique. At the centre is the **injustice** and **oppression of the poor**.

There are some clear parallels with Judges 19 where we read of the demand for sex was met by the gang-raping of the Levite's concubine. Both texts are horrendous, and the issue in both situations is that of gang-rape. From the texts it is not possible to suggest that the homosexual element adds anything to the judgement, and as mentioned that aspect is not picked up by the other texts.

In Matt. 10:14-15 and Luke 10:10-12 we have a reference to Sodom and that the judgement on the **cities that did not offer hospitality to the disciples** (those sent on a mission) will be stronger than the judgement on Sodom.

If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town (Matt. 10:14-15).

Hospitality was an expected cultural norm of the middle east, and it is this aspect that Jesus drew out from the Sodom and Gomorrah situation. They not only did not offer a welcome to those who visited but they sought to abuse them.

If we narrow in on the homosexual aspect of Sodom and Gomorrah we are centring on

something that the rest of Scripture does not focus on. Injustice, oppression of the poor and a refusal to open their hearts with hospitality are at the centre. The sexual sin that was threatened was likewise an oppression, that of threatened **gang rape**, the powerful against the powerless.

In **Jude 6, 7** it says that Sodom pursued sex with 'unnatural flesh'. In the immediate context this is compared to angels having sex with women (Gen. 6) and as the book of Jude is heavily dependent on the book of Enoch that elaborates the strange myth that we read of in Genesis as being a story of 200 angels who took humans as wives, so the reference to strange flesh is probably not a reference to something homosexual but to desiring sex with angels. The context and background suggests that we are reading of a condemnation against Sodom and Gomorrah for attempting to have intercourse with angels, just as angels were condemned for having intercourse with humans.

Sodom and Gomorrah then is a critique (along with injustice) to imposed, forced sex, to rape and in the situation to gang rape, and to extend it beyond that is to go beyond the biblical testimony.

Leviticus (18:12; 20:13)

There are two verses from Leviticus that figure in the debates over the Bible and homosexuality. First, Leviticus 18:22, which says:

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

The wider context (Lev. 17-26) for both texts is often called the holiness code where stipulations are given with regard to holiness, on being pure. That section includes what one eats (Lev. 20:25), tattoos (Lev. 19:28), and wearing clothes from mixed fibres (Lev. 19:19). That concept of holiness brings us into a strange world.

Holiness, as defined in this wider passage is essentially ensuring that Israel will be distinct from the wider world, her pagan worshipping neighbours. To be different, set apart, pure, Israel must not assimilate to the surrounding cultures.

Sexual prohibitions are also included in this 'holiness' section, and given a) the importance of the body and b) the repeated warnings regarding sexual sin in the NT, we cannot simply ignore them in the same way that we ignore prohibitions regarding food, tattoos and clothing. Although we do not ignore the sexual prohibitions, a strong case can be made to suggest that there is an element of false worship that sits as the background, so that we are not simply reading prohibitions against certain sexual practices but against sexual practices tied to religious worship. The opening context of verse 3 places the prohibitions against the background of the other nations:

You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes.

This pagan cultic background could well indicate that the prohibition is aimed at the situation

where male shrine prostitutes were an intrinsic part of worship to pagan gods and goddesses. There is repeated rhetoric against these shrine prostitutes at different parts of the OT (see Deut. 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24 (linked with abomination), 15:12, 22:46, 23:7).

A further point is to look more closely at the chapter where the prohibition against lying with a male is placed at the end of a series of prohibitions regarding incestuous relationships. It is possible that the male / male is continuing the theme of sexual relationships within the family.¹²

The second text in Leviticus is in 20:13

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.

We again have the two contexts of foreign worship practices and of incestuous sexual relationships. The context cautions us from suggesting that these verses are a blanket prohibition against all same-sex relationships.

In the Hebrew text we have perhaps an interesting aspect. For we read if a man (*ish*) lies with a male (*zkr*). This has (and with the context being of prohibitions against familial sexual relationships) suggested to some that the term 'male' could be translated here as 'male family member'. It is certainly interesting that we do not have the parallels of either *ish / ish* nor *zkr / zkr*; either parallel would imply a general situation of two (equally defined) males being together; the non parallel usage suggests something different. We can further comment that there does not seem to be an inference to the creation narrative as there (Gen. 1:27... created 'male and female') we have *ish* (male) and *ne.qe.vah* (female) whereas here, in Leviticus, we do not have 'female' (as per Genesis) but 'woman' (*ish.shah*). With no inference to creation and no parallel structure in the sentence we should not read that what is being condemned has any connection with God creating them as 'male and female'.

Leviticus 20 does not seem therefore to be written against a creation background, but a **cultural, cultic and familial** setting. It would be pushing the text (and the one in Leviticus 18) too far to suggest that the prohibition applies to all same-sex relationships. In a similar way to the money-lending / mortgage example suggested that those are not in the same category so I suggest that we have to allow these texts to be approached in the same way. Abusive interest rates and mortgages / other loans are not in the same category, hence the prohibition against money lending cannot be used to become a blanket prohibition against all money lending; and in the same way the prohibitions here cannot automatically become a blanket prohibition against all same-sex relationship.

¹² There are other arguments advanced, including one that suggests what is being prohibited is two males having intercourse with a woman. Joanna Töyräänvuori argues for this ("Homosexuality, the Holiness Code, and Ritual Pollution: A Case of Mistaken Identity." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45, no. 2 (2020): 236-67). The spectrum of interpretations (and that spectrum, of course, includes a blanket prohibition against all same-sex relationships) should caution us from making our interpretation as the right one.

New Testament: Pauline texts

One of our great challenges when we read any ancient document is understanding the historical and cultural context being addressed. It is as if we are standing on one side of a glass door that has writing on the other side. We can work hard to get the text turned the right way round (in our heads) so that at least we can read what is on it, but we are still on the other side of the door! If only we could get to the other side we would then be able to see the text in that context, and perhaps we would discover that what is on the 'door' could have a context that would help us understand **why** the writing was there.

The letters that Paul wrote are contingent. Although this does not mean we cannot simply dismiss them as 'not for us, but for the (e.g.) Corinthians', but we also cannot simply say **'for them, therefore all applies to us'**. 'Pay your taxes' (Paul in Romans) is not as simple as a once-and-for-all verse to be quoted, but was written into a situation where there were major revolts against the unjust and increasing tax burden in Rome. All of that came to a head in the later 50s with major riots - just a year or so after Paul wrote this directive. This was the contextual situation that Paul was writing into, so we can legitimately ask if Paul was simply suggesting that 'pay your taxes so that you do not get caught up in the imminent conflict and violence that will inevitably come' or if he was giving a universal directive regardless of context. These are the difficulties when seeking to honestly read the Pauline texts.

To illustrate the challenge taking one of Paul's passages that mentions homosexuality (Rom. 1) a very able scholar Douglas Campbell¹³ offers a convincing argument for this section to be what is termed *prosopopoeia*. That term refers to when a writer quotes someone else's view so that it can be refuted. If that be the case then we would simply have Paul quoting his opponents false teaching, and what was being expressed would certainly not be Paul's view! This argument has force if there is enough in the context, enough quotes and inferences that the hearers clearly recognise the language and arguments used by this other person. Campbell believes there is.

I quote Campbell above simply to illustrate the challenge that lies before anyone seeking to honestly engage with the text. Now it is my turn!¹⁴

Romans 1:18-32 (with 26, 27 being central to the debate)

I put the whole passage below with certain emphases added so that the structure can be better seen.

¹³ The Deliverance of God (2013).

¹⁴ In turning to the NT we enter the wider world of the Graeco-Roman culture. A summary of attitudes and responses to homosexuality in that setting can be helpfully read: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality_in_ancient_Rome.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and **they exchanged** the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because **they exchanged** the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

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

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them up** to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

Here is a table drawing out what I see as the structure:

They exchanged	glory of the immortal God	for idols
God gave them up		
They exchanged	the truth of God	for a lie
God gave them up		
Their women exchanged	natural intercourse	for unnatural

Likewise the men	natural intercourse with women	consumed with passion for one another
God gave them up		

The critique that Paul is advancing is against the ‘pagan’ Greco-Roman world with arguments from what is plain (from nature)¹⁵ and the structure shows Paul is arguing that the Gentiles **exchanged** some aspect that would have acted as a boundary for an action that broke that boundary and as they did so there was a consequence. That consequence is not the judgement of God but the result of their behaviour (‘God gave them up’); it is that behaviour that puts them under the judgement of God.¹⁶

The ancient non-Jewish world saw sexuality differently from how the modern Western world. The categories of ‘heterosexual’ or ‘homosexual’ were not used. Sexual practice was used as a way of describing what took place, but not sexual orientation. In that society status (with terms such as honour / shame) mattered more than gender, and in order to maintain status a freeborn male had to be the dominant, active partner in any encounter.¹⁷ In contrast a woman always had a lower status in society, and it was appropriate that she should be the submissive partner. Thus a high status person had to be the dominant partner; a low status person or someone with no status should be the submissive partner. It was into this that the honour / shame evaluation of situations and behaviour fitted. And in this passage we have statements such as ‘degrading of their bodies’ (1:24, lit. dishonouring), ‘degrading passions’ (1:26) and ‘shameless acts’ (1:27).

Adultery was a shameful act as it dishonoured another marital relationship (and it was sex with another married person that was termed adultery), but if a freeborn man was the active partner, it was socially acceptable to have intercourse with:

- his own wife.

¹⁵ ‘Nature’ could conceivably be a reference to creation, and so there are those who argue that what Paul critiques is ‘against a creation order’. However, he is writing here with regard to the Gentiles and in that context he is not appealing to Scripture. Using language typical of the contextual ‘Stoic’ philosophies, and also comparing how he uses the word ‘nature’ elsewhere, it seems to be an argument about what was considered ‘natural’. What was considered ‘natural’ was not even a restriction.

¹⁶ The Gentiles (without the law) have not lived by the revelation of God that is present in the world - though Paul later seems to acknowledge that there are Gentiles who live by the ‘law’ (2:14, by law he does not mean Torah) - will be judged; as chapter 2 begins it is the Jew (with the law, in the sense of Torah) who will be judged. The style then in the opening section of Romans is rhetorical, exaggerated language, taking the extreme and making it sound as if the critique applies to everyone. As we read this we should also realise that though salvation is individual Paul’s concern is salvation of the world, for salvation is ‘to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek’ (1:16); likewise judgement will come in the form of ‘anguish and distress for everyone who does evil,’ and that will be to ‘the Jew first and also the Greek,’ but for those who respond to grace will experience ‘glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.’ Paul’s concern is the world, and salvation is for all, regardless of the relationship to the law, ‘for God shows no partiality’ (2:9-11).

¹⁷ Julius Caesar was criticised not for having sex with king Nicomedes of Bythia, but for taking the ‘passive’ role in the affair.

- boys (in Greek culture they could be freeborn; Rome restricted this to slaves).
- slaves (male or female) as they had no honour.
- prostitutes, male or female as they had no honour.
- actors and bar staff, because they also had no honour in that culture.

The social landscape allowed for a man to sleep around, provided he took the active role and if he did his sexual behaviour was not classed as adultery.

Paul's Jewish world strongly linked prostitution with idolatry, and so prostitution was condemned and sex with young boys was seen to have a similar connection to idolatry, and was likewise condemned. The Judaism of the time also frowned upon any type of intercourse that was non-procreative – basically, anything that couldn't result in a pregnancy. In contrast, the Greco-Roman world generally accepted such practices as anal intercourse.

Judaism and early Christianity not only condemned sex with young boys but listed it as a separate category. Here are a select set of early Christian texts setting 'corruption of children' as a separate sexual vice from adultery and immorality:

You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not corrupt children (*paidophthorēseis*); you shall not be sexually immoral; you shall not steal...
(Didache 2.2 (a teaching manual from about the beginning of the second century)).

You shall not be sexually immoral; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not corrupt children (*paidophthorēseis*).
(Barnabas 19.4 (a second century letter)).

...how much more shall all the nations appear to be under a curse who practise idolatry, who corrupt children (*paidophthorounta*), and commit other crimes?
(Justin Martyr, Dial. Trypho 95 (second century)).

You shall not commit adultery. You shall not worship idols. You shall not corrupt children (*paidophthorēseis*). You shall not steal...
(Clement of Alexandria, Paedagogus 3.12 (early third century)).

Which is more beautiful? To confess the cross, or to attribute to those you call gods adultery and corruption of children (*paidophthorias*)?
(Athanasius, Vita Antonii 74 (early fourth century)).

One who approves of adulteries and corruption of children (*paidophthorias*)...
(Gregory of Nazianzen, Adv. Eunomianos (orat. 27) 6 (late fourth century)).

The separation of adultery, sexual immorality (sex with prostitutes, though perhaps a wider term than that) and pederasty / child corruption illustrates how common this practice was. Shocking as that is to us, it is present as an ever-present background within the culture of the non-Jewish world of the New Testament era.

In Romans 1 Paul is using a well known way of writing that is aimed ultimately at trapping the person who is in agreement with his argument. The person is nodding in agreement only to be stung with the:

Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in

passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things (2:1).

The Gentile is condemned in the verses in chapter 1 (the language is 'they', 'them' and 'theirs'), but the sting in the tail / tale is aimed at the Jew, so that eventually Paul can conclude that 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23), with the 'all' in context meaning 'both': those who are of the covenant and those not; those with the law and those without the law.

Those pagans, Paul lays out, worship created things rather than the creator: the cardinal sin of idolatry. The results of idolatry are awful and evil, and God judges those pagans. God gives them up to impurity, dishonourable passions and a debased mind.

The verses at the centre of the sexual lust critique begin with a comment on what took place with the women, who 'exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural'. It is possible to read this as being a critique of lesbian sex, naming it as 'unnatural', and when read as parallel to the critique that follows of males being consumed with passion for one another, it could be read as such, but...

If Paul is critiquing lesbian sex he is unique among ancient writers, and ***the early church writings of the first 300 years did not understand it this way***. He refers to these women as 'their wives' and a key is to understand what Paul meant by the phrase 'unnatural' (*para phusin*). It could be argued that he is presenting here a creational argument and that sex has to be between a male and a female, but elsewhere he uses 'nature' as a cultural marker (long hair in Corinth for the men, for example). Philo, a Jewish writer / philosopher, roughly contemporaneous to Paul, understood 'against nature' in a sexual context to be any sexual activity that could not lead to pregnancy. This would (and with material on pagan worship that I will add below) accord well with Paul's Jewish background and the thrust of this passage, against nature would then be something like excessive, unrestrained passion. If we add the honour / shame framework we suggest that these women are not taking the passive role of being available only to their husbands;¹⁸ they would be exchanging natural intercourse with their husbands and overriding all that was considered natural in pursuit of their degrading / dishonouring passions. Rather than understand this as a critique of lesbian sex it better fits the passage, and the language used, to see it as women being consumed by lust, and indulging in practices that Paul as a Jew found abhorrent, and even for Gentiles was 'against nature'.

Then he comes to the behaviour of the men, or as Paul says 'males'. It is unlikely that he is seeking to critique all forms of homosexual activity but that which is excessive, abusive and oppressive. The condemnation would certainly include pederasty and it is inconclusive if he is arguing beyond that in this passage.

Pagan worship: ritual sexual practices

We have from the early second Century this description of Cybele worship (the reference to Galli is to the male castrated priests):

¹⁸ The text calls them 'their' women, perhaps indicating a status as married women in view.

On appointed days, the crowd assembles at the sanctuary while many Galli and the holy men whom I have mentioned perform the rites. They cut their arms and beat one another on the back. Many stand about them playing flutes, while many others beat drums. Still others sing inspired and sacred songs. This ceremony takes place outside the temple and none of those who perform it enters the temple. On those days, too, men become Galli. For while the rest are playing flutes and performing the rites, frenzy comes upon many, and many who have come simply to watch subsequently perform this act. ... The youth for whom these things lie in store throws off his clothes, rushes to the center with a great shout and takes up a sword, which I believe has stood there for this purpose for many years. He grabs it and immediately castrates himself. Then he rushes through the city holding in his hands the parts he has cut off. He takes female clothing and women's adornment from whatever house he throws these parts into. This is what they do at the Castration. At death Galli do not receive a burial like other men. Instead, whenever a Gallus dies, his companions lift him up and carry him to the outskirts of the city. They set him down along with the bier with which they carried him. Then they pile up stones upon him and after completing this task they return home. They observe a period of seven days, then enter the sanctuary. If they enter before this time, they commit a sacrilege. In such matters they abide by the following customs: If anyone of them sees a corpse, he does not enter the sanctuary that day. On the following day, after purifying himself, he enters. When the corpse is that of a relative, they observe thirty days, shave their heads and then enter the temple. It is sacrilegious for them to enter sooner (Lucian, *De Dea Syria* 50-53).

This might be an exaggerated account, but even if so the style of rhetoric was to use such language, and such language is appropriate to Paul's style in Romans 1. In Rome the Cybele cult was part of the official calendar, embedded therefore into the culture.

The report of the worship of Cybele could well be something that lies behind the phrase 'received in their own persons the due penalty for their error' (castration); another possibility is an oblique reference to Caligula (emperor 37-41) who was stabbed to his death in his genitals and was renowned for his excessive sexual expressions, including adultery and incest.

In reading Romans 1, excessive (against nature) sexual practices were evidently a result of idolatry. The Jew listening to the case being built up against the Gentile would indeed be nodding in agreement! Wrong worship led to all kinds of evils. However, their turn was to come.

Paul, of course might condemn all forms of same-sex activity, but I do not think it is possible to use this chapter, as it stands, to critique all and every same-sex relationship.

We also have to remember that our current use of the word 'homosexual' to refer to orientation was not understood in the ancient world. This adds weight to whatever Paul is condemning is not what we understand by the word homosexual. (As per the usury / mortgage example, we are not comparing like with like.)

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

We read,

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes (*malakos*), sodomites (*arsenokoites*), thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.

There are two words that are difficult to ascertain their meaning, and a scan of various translations (not to mention commentaries) will reveal how uncertain the meaning of those words are. They are translated (NRSV above) as ‘male prostitutes’ (*malakoi*) and ‘sodomites’ (*arsenokoites*).

The list starts with **fornicators** which centred in on sex with prostitutes and this is followed by the term **idolators**, not a direct sexual word but as temple prostitution was an element within much pagan worship there is an implicit link. **Adulterers** referred to sex with another person’s partner. Jumping over the next two words we come to non-sexual sins, starting with **‘thieves’** and ending with **‘robbers’**. Dale Martin provides extra-biblical material that suggests that the ‘sodomite’ word (*arsenokoites*, the term immediately preceding these final words) had a range of meaning of ‘economic exploitation by some sexual means’.¹⁹ If such, there is a logic to progression in the list and this word acts as a bridge from the list of sexual sins to that of robbery.

Again it does not seem that Paul is using terms that we could broaden out to castigate all and every form of same-sex relationship. The term *malakoi* (NRSV male prostitutes) is fairly well attested, and does not always carry a sexual connotation, for example the clothing of John the Baptist is contrasted, by Jesus, to the ‘soft’ clothing of those who live in palaces (Matt. 11:8). It could be, by extension, ‘temple prostitutes’ as per the NRSV, or it could be referring to those who are not diligent at a work level and in their freedom pursue sexual satisfaction without boundaries. What exactly Paul intended the term to mean is beyond certainty for us.

I have already quoted Dale Martin’s perspective that the second term (*arsenokoites*) had an economic element within it. With this word it is even harder to ascertain what Paul meant, indeed it is possible that he created the word as this is the first example in ancient literature of the word being used. He could well have been influenced by Lev. 20:13 where the two words that make up Paul’s word here appear (in the LXX - the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was in common use). The words are ‘male’ and ‘bed’... a translation of the LXX reads:

Whoever shall bed a man as a woman...

It is possible that Paul has that Scripture in mind (one we looked at above) but that text was written into a wider context of familial incestuous relationships. We would be pushing beyond the clarity of the text to use it to condemn all forms of same-sex relationships.

¹⁹ Martin, D., *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*. Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John-Knox Press, 2006.

This word (*arsenokoites*) also appears in the later Pauline letter of 1 Timothy (in 1:8-11). There is occurs again in a list of vices, a list that starts with murder, then lists sexual sins, and then this word *arsenokoites*; and from there to 'slave traders', those who are exploiting others for financial gain. (Given that slave trade in young boys for sex in the ancient world took place the immediate link to 'slave traders' makes sense.) Whatever Paul intended the word to mean it serves on both occasions in the list as **a bridge from sexual sins to that of exploiting others either because one has economic power or to gain economic benefit**. Although unclear as to what is the intended meaning, the context within the passages and the historic / cultural context probably means that we should either limit it to cover pederasty, or sexual practices that involve oppression of the other person. To extend it beyond this limitation seems to go beyond what Paul was intending to mean. We do not seem to have a comment from Paul (or in either Testament) about same-sex committed relationships.

Conclusions

With regard to the term 'homosexuality', which by nature means 'same sex (attraction)' (including female/female), there is simply no evidence to support this term being in sight within the Scriptures. Leviticus does not seem to be universally prohibiting all male/male intercourse, but the prohibition fits the cultic background of pagan religion and probably narrows into incestuous relationships.

The same can be said of the NT writings, where Paul's use of a term that he may have coined does not seem to cover all and every situation of male/male nor female/female intercourse. The term probably points toward domination of others sexually and economically.

We are entering the ground I sought to lay out with the example of how we apply the money-lending prohibitions. Not all same-sex intercourse (and specifically same-sex committed relationships) are in the same category as what we read of in Scripture.

- A** the homosexuality condemned in Scripture, and
- B** same-sex committed relationships are not in the same category, so
- C** the Bible does not condemn same-sex committed relationships.

Beyond any theology / reading of the text we enter the challenging world of pastoral outworking. Navigating that world is far from simple, yet likewise responding to the conversion of the Gentiles was far from simple to the Jewish believers, and one might suggest that Paul's letter to the Romans was more aimed at the pastoral and practical issues of how Jewish and Gentile believers inter-related than it was a theological treatise. (it is of course both!) Generosity and grace had to be present in abundance, and will, as always, need to be so again.

Transgender

The world of hetero-sexuality is not monolithic, neither is the world of homo-sexuality, and we should not try and place transgender somehow under any 'homosexual' heading. Hence this paper has, in the title, the 'comma' between the two terms. In this section I will simply add a few comments, given that the Bible does not cover this area directly. Transgender is not a sub-section of 'gay', but in as much as it does not line up with the binary categories some of the principles of interpretation from the previous sections will also apply.

It is important to grasp the definitions that are in common use so that we can navigate what is being discussed with some measure of understanding.

Gender Identity: how I think of myself; my psychological sense of gender. **What I think.** (So much formed in the womb.)

Gender expression: how I live, how I behave, what I wear. **How I look and act.**

Biological sex: genitalia, body shape, hormones, chromosomes, brain structure. **What I have.**

A trans-woman:

- Assigned male gender at birth
- Biological sex gender at birth
- Gender identity is female
- Has transitioned to female expression, and **may** also have had physical surgery.

Likewise a **trans-man** is the reverse of the above description of a trans-woman.

Sexual Orientation - another element: to whom a person is attracted romantically and / or sexually (**and the attraction romantically and sexually might not be the same**). **Who I love.**

The table that follows indicates factors that seem to determine male / female.

	
XY Chromosomes	XX Chromosomes
Hormones: androgen, testosterone	Hormones: progesterone, oestrogen

Male genitalia, body shape	Female genitalia, body shape
Male Brain Structure	Female Brain Structure
Male Identity	Female Identity

Usually, all of these line up neatly. For example, someone with XY chromosomes gets hormones for male development in the womb, and then is born with male genitalia, and grows up through puberty into a typical male shape, with a male brain structure and who thinks of themselves as male. And vice versa for women. *(The brain structure is somewhat debated as to whether there is a clear difference, but it seems there is considerable weight of opinion that favours this distinction.)*

BUT NOT ALWAYS.

(There are cases of **Intersex...** where it is not clearly defined as above table shows. The biological markers not fitting the binary approach.)

And some people have a deep-seated, permanent sense that their **gender identity is different from the one assigned at birth**. There might be many diverse factors in this, but there are in some cases at least some biological cause.

Is gender reassignment surgery necessary? Not all wish this. And it is **NOT** the same as surgery for (e.g.) cancer, as any surgery is related to identity and seeking to bring the 'felt' identity, the gender that is identified with and the biological sex in line. There are those who wish to suggest that the emotional identity should therefore be re-aligned (healing, therapy, counselling?). This can be argued for but a strong counterpoint is '**WHY should emotional realignment take priority over the physical?**' Rather than home in with a view that we have a situation of gender confusion we could be better involved in seeking to give support to the person who is actually seeking to correct any confusion!

Other notes:

Conservative Judaism

An influential body of rabbis of Conservative Judaism in the USA (less strict than the Orthodox wing of Judaism, is the second-largest denomination in America. The largest, the more liberal Reform movement, passed a similar resolution previous year, and the small Reconstructionist movement is similarly supportive) passed a resolution 2016 calling for synagogues to be 'explicitly welcoming' to transgender people.

The rabbis' resolution began by stating, 'Our Torah asserts that all humanity is created b'tzelem Elohim, in God's Divine Image.' It discusses historical evidence of 'non-binary gender expression' in Jewish texts dating back to the third-century Mishnah, and points out current-day discrimination against transgender Americans in employment, medical care and voting rights.²⁰

'Cross-dressing'?

In the Babylonian Talmud (Nazir 59a), the (Jewish) Sages argue that it is not plausible to read the verse in Deuteronomy literally, since wearing the clothes of another gender could not possibly be seen as an abomination. Instead, the Talmud understands the Torah prohibition this way: wearing clothes of another gender in order to falsify your identity, and infiltrate spaces reserved for the 'opposite' sex, is what is forbidden. The key point here seems to be that cross-dressing is only prohibited when there are ulterior motives involved—in this case, the violation of another person's space and therefore trust. When it comes to cross-dressing in and of itself, the Talmud is crystal clear: 'There is no abomination here!'

Deuteronomy 22:5 'A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this.' The word translated as 'clothing' here, *keli*, is translated elsewhere as 'armor', and the word translated as 'man', *geber*, normally means 'warrior'. This implies a prohibition against intent to deceive by pretending to be a warrior, or for a warrior to deceive by disguising himself as a woman.

²⁰

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/06/01/the-rabbis-of-conservative-judaism-pass-a-resolution-supporting-transgender-rights/>

Examples to consider

Jacob preferred to be with his mother at home, enjoyed cooking and was smooth-skinned, in contrast to his brother, who was hairy and preferred to hunt and be outdoors. (Genesis 25).

Joseph, Jacob's son, was given an 'ornate robe' by his father (Genesis 37:3); the Hebrew word used here for the robe (*ketonet passim*) is used elsewhere to mean 'the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore' (2 Samuel 13:18). This is the only other biblical example of this word.

Coat of many colours / long sleeves / or...

Gen. 37: 3

(ESV) Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors.

(NIV) Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him.

(NRSV) Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves.

2 Sam. 13:18

(ESV) Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves, for thus were the virgin daughters of the king dressed. So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her.

(NIV) So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing an ornate robe, for **this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore.**

(NRSV) Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is **how the virgin daughters of the king** were clothed in earlier times.

The Resurrected Jesus & Eschatology

A further question is not how these situations relate to Creation but what sign might be within them with regard to something eschatological. In the series of books 'Explorations in Theology' I suggest that the Incarnation is located in the very sharp end of human failure, the world of the male and the Jew, and that as a Jewish male Jesus died. His death is not to demonstrate Jewish male supremacy, but to nail those to the cross. If we follow that trajectory I posit that Jesus, not as Jew nor as male, but as the firstborn of all those who are to follow is raised; no longer Jewish... no longer male.

Perhaps spiritually (culturally, emotionally and inter-relationally) the insistence by the binary-only advocates and the insistence of the transgender advocates could be suggesting that we have a sign in the conflict that our world is pushing toward something that is not yet

visible, to a gender-free new age. If that be so, we focus on (as we always should) seeing each other no longer after the flesh, but in the light of a new creation. In order to live at peace with one another we would then need to give space for people to express themselves gender wise in the way that is most comfortable for them, in the temporary season before the *parousia* when (as I see it) gender and biological sex becomes something of the past.

Some pastoral / practical notes

In suggesting that the Bible does not condemn all forms of homosexual relationships, nor that of the transgender community, we should first be very careful about placing on anyone who identifies in some way within that community a burden that is too heavy to bear. Our first response should be one of acceptance and embrace.

In the same way that God does not approve of all heterosexual expression we do not assume that God approves of all homosexual expression. What is done sexually is important.

Although we can critique an agenda that some carry of pushing a freedom of experimentation, we also need to understand that this can be seen as a minority voice pushing back against what has been oppressed, where there was an implicit restriction and only one path (binary). Perhaps an over-reaction and one that carries an agenda... but that will always be a perspective held by the majority.

Damage can be done by a climate that pushes a direction where, for example, one undergoes surgery to regret it later; however, one has also to acknowledge that an insistence on 'therapy / deliverance will cure' can cause huge damage.

Given that the Bible can be made to (almost) say whatever we want it to say, we have to respect those who take a different view to ourselves. What cannot, though, be respected is any hate or dehumanisation.

There will always be a variety of personal stories. They help educate and can even persuade us of a position that might or might not change our previous perspective. However, we should not take a story that defends our position as therefore the only authentic story that can be universally applied to anyone whose (e.g.) sexual orientation was the same as the story-teller.

We probably have a tendency to want neat lines that can be drawn that gives us some simple principles to apply. Given the deep core identity issues that are within us when we explore sexuality along with the strong views and pressures that are within society, we have to readily accept that there will be situations that do not work out as easily as we would like. In those situations we are willing to journey with people and try to help find the most redemptive path forward. That path might differ from person to person.