



Queer and Christian

Mapping a Theological Discussion on Same-Sex Relations

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And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. - Hebrews 10:24-25

I could fill a page with names of people that I am grateful for, and that have supported me in this endeavour. Yet, two names are at the top of the list and they deserve all of the celebration that I can muster in Times New Roman.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

It is interesting to consider what topics would be addressed if the Bible were re-written in 2021. I am not suggesting that the Bible should be, or needs to be re-written, but given that New Testament writers addressed specific concerns and problems that were represented in their context and culture, I think it would be safe to assume that Bible 2021 would cover some of the difficult themes that fill our news headlines today. Topics such as racism, slavery, nationalism, abortion, and divorce would likely occupy a substantial amount of space in the modern Bible, not to mention a sexual ethic that would certainly address topics of queer, same-sex, inter-sex, non-binary, trans, etc. The question is, what would Bible 2021 say concerning these topics? Would Bible 2021 have a more conservative, or liberal slant? With that said, “conservative” Christians would likely argue that the Bible we have now is more than sufficient in addressing our cultural challenges, while “liberal” Christians would salivate at the idea of Bible 2021. Perhaps this is where the challenge begins.

One of the more challenging theological topics that theologians and church leaders have faced in the last twenty to thirty years is the topic of same-sex relations. The topic has caused such extensive turmoil and division that has left some churches leaving their denominational affiliations in search of a new denominational alliance that is more in line with their theological beliefs and ideals. Following the 2015 United States Supreme Court Decision to legalize same-sex marriage, the highly-regarded polling agency Pew Research Center conducted a study that revealed that the theological rift caused by this decision has not been relegated to individual churches, but entire denominations are found debating the question of queer and Christian.¹ A good example, and probably one of the more prolific

¹ Pew Research, “Where Christian churches, other religions stand on gay marriage;” available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/21/where-christian-churches-stand-on-gay-marriage/> site accessed 10 March, 2021.

cases is the Methodist Church, who at the time of my writing is currently facing a significant amendment to a statement that has been upheld for nearly five decades.²

The natural progression of theology and philosophy beckons the question ‘why?’ When we begin asking this dangerous question, the foundational pillars can suddenly shift and we can suddenly find ourselves asking why we believe what we believe. The results of this questioning can be scary, it can be offensive, it can be revelatory; simply said, it can create a great deal of movement. The questioning of our theological sexual ethic has required theologians to give definition to aspects of theology that have previously been either unspoken, assumed, or “given” theological perceptions.³ The product of theological research and discovery into what the bible says about ‘queer and Christian’ has created two distinct groups which hold differing perspectives on the topic. These two groups have developed theological arguments that support and fortify their perspectives for the purpose of a common cause: to protect what they believe to be true.

1.1. Research Question

The goal of my research is to discover and analyze the theological and biblical interpretations and perceptions of same-sex relations. Thus, my research question is as follows:

What are the biblical and theological arguments that support the condemnation, or endorsement, of same-sex relations? In a comparison of Linn Tonstad and Preston Sprinkle, what are the similarities and differences of their theological perspectives?

1.2. Methodology

My research is focused on the analysis of biblical and theological interpretations on same-sex relations. Therefore, the research is required to go beyond the limits of biblical interpretation in order to create a more comprehensive picture of the theological discussion on same-sex relations. For the purpose of creating a more balanced, nuanced, and comprehensive theological perspective of same-sex relations, special attention will be given to the discussion of queer theology. The inclusion of queer theology into this research is of paramount

² United Methodist Church, “What is the Church’s position on homosexuality;” available at <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-the-churchs-position-on-homosexuality> site accessed 10 March, 2021.

³ Heather White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 3.

importance as it shows the value of alternate theological interpretations and broadens the philosophical parameters for different perspectives on same-sex relations. In other words, to exclude queer theology from this research would have resulted in an incomplete picture of this discussion.

In order to create clear points of departure, Linn Tonstad and Preston Sprinkle will be the representatives of the two theological perspectives concerning same-sex relations with Tonstad representing the affirming perspective and Sprinkle representing the nonaffirming perspective. The reason for choosing Tonstad and Sprinkle as representatives is primarily based upon their high level of competency for the subject, and a genuine respect for humanity. Both Tonstad and Sprinkle are highly respected within their field of research and have shown that they possess the ability to see the blind spots in the theological claims of their colleagues.

Even though a straight-forward comparison of the two and their theological insight is not possible as they address the topic from different fields of study, the inclusion of Linn Tonstad and Preston Sprinkle is intended to present a balanced and comprehensive picture of theological interpretation. Preston Sprinkle is a New Testament scholar and has received his PhD in New Testament and Judaism from the University of Aberdeen in 2007.⁴ Sprinkle's 2015 book, *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality is not just an Issue*⁵ will be a primary source for my research and has been considered a significant contribution to the conversation on homosexuality and the church. Throughout his book, Sprinkle addresses and critiques biblical and theological interpretations of both, affirming and nonaffirming scholars.

Linn Tonstad is an Associate Professor of Theology, Religion and Sexuality at Yale Divinity School. She is a constructive theologian working in the crossroads of systematic theology and feminist/queer theory.⁶ In her second book, and what will be a primary resource for my research, *Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics*⁷, Tonstad takes a firm, yet fair approach to queer theology while confronting the polarization of the discussion. Since Tonstad and Sprinkle operate in different theological fields of study, I have enlisted the help of James Brownson to represent the affirming perspective in the field of biblical

⁴ Preston Sprinkle, "About;" available at <https://www.prestonsprinkle.com/about> site accessed 15, February 2021.

⁵ Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality is not just an issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015)

⁶ Yale Divinity School, "Linn Tonstad;" available at <https://divinity.yale.edu/faculty-and-research/yds-faculty/linn-tonstad> site accessed 16, February 2021.

⁷ Linn Tonstad, *Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics* (Eugene: Cascade, 2018).

interpretation. Brownson is a New Testament professor at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. His book, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*⁸ is lauded by Preston Sprinkle as being the most comprehensive defense of the affirming perspective.⁹

In the second chapter, Linn Tonstad will provide an overview for queer theology. The aim of this chapter is to present a concise, yet intentional, analysis of queer theology and its supporting ideology and philosophies. Theological aspects of dignity, and the topics of contemporary interpretations of Greco-Roman and Jewish perspectives on same-sex relations will provide context and points of comparison in the following chapters. The third chapter will focus on Old Testament texts that Sprinkle highlights in his book *People to be Loved*. Kevin DeYoung, is the Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary,¹⁰ and author of *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?*¹¹ which will supplement the nonaffirming perspective by using alternative interpretational strategies than Sprinkle. In addition, Saul Olyan is the Professor of Judaic Studies and the Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University¹² and his article concerning the Leviticus texts will challenge nonaffirming interpretations while presenting a balanced Biblical interpretation. The fourth chapter will focus on New Testament texts as highlighted by Sprinkle and Tonstad. The Acts 8 study (Subsection 4.1.) will be supplemented primarily by Anna Solevåg and her article *No Nuts? No Problem!*¹³ The fifth and final chapter will present my conclusion and suggestions for further research.

Throughout the different sources and scholars utilized in this research, a number of translations will be found. I have chosen to use the *New American Standard Bible*¹⁴ translation throughout my research for the sake of clarity and continuity, while utilizing the abbreviation

⁸ James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013).

⁹ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 195.

¹⁰ Reformed Theological Seminary, "Faculty;" available at <https://rts.edu/people/dr-kevin-l-deyoung/> site accessed 7, July 2021.

¹¹ Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015).

¹² Brown University, "Saul Olyan;" available at <https://www.brown.edu/academics/early-cultures/people/affiliated-faculty/saul-olyan> site accessed 7, July 2021.

¹³ Anna Rebecca Solevåg, "No Nuts? No Problem!: Disability, Stigman, and the Baptized Eunuch in Acts 8:26-40," *Biblical Interpretation* 24 (2016): 81-99.

¹⁴ Spiros Zodhiates et al., *New American Standard Bible: Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2008).

NASB. Brief summaries will provide an insight to my perspective on the topics covered. The goal is not only to discover the theological perspectives of affirming and nonaffirming scholars, but to also present *why* the given theological perspectives are held. Throughout the research, considerations for the historical context and culture must be applied to both biblical and theological interpretations. This will require addressing the associated themes that are sourced from the related historical context. Furthermore, this research will aim to maintain a high ethical standard in regard to the portrayal of the books, articles, and authors utilized. My goal is to present authors in a way that is authentic and transparent, removed from my own bias, in as much as possible. Naturally, it is impossible to completely remove my natural perspective from research, but in as much as it is possible, I aim to allow the scholars to speak for themselves. With that said, certain texts and theological concepts/ideas will be utilized and developed more thoroughly with deeper supplementation than others while others will be omitted entirely due to the limitations and scope of this research. Yet, that is the nature of dialogue and research, and not a reflection of favoritism in my own research.

1.3. Definitions

There is a myriad of terminology surrounding the research question. Unfortunately, no matter what set of vocabulary that I use throughout this research, it will eventually be a clear timestamp that shows the level of evolutionary thought in 2021. Nevertheless, I have provided a brief vocabulary for the sake of congruence, as well as an explanation for why these terms were chosen.

1.3.1. Queer

Throughout this thesis, the term queer will be utilized most frequently, though homosexuality, same-sex, gay and lesbian, LGBTQI+ and other terms will also be utilized in their specific contexts. The intention with utilizing the term queer is its (nearly) all-inclusive nature. Patrick Cheng is the Assistant Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.¹⁵ In his book, *Radical Love*, Cheng defines queer in three ways, first, Cheng says the term queer acts as an umbrella that is synonymous with the ever-expanding LGBTQI+ acronym. Queer as an umbrella includes trans, inter-sex, questioning and beyond, but also includes “allies”, individuals who are not queer, yet stand in

¹⁵ Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 162.

solidarity with those who do identify as queer.¹⁶ The second form that the term queer takes is in the act of reclaiming the term from the negative connotations that have historically enveloped it. Cheng says that queer is, “...a self-conscious embrace of all that is transgressive of societal norms, particularly in the context of sexuality and gender identity.”¹⁷ Cheng shares that the act of “queering” something is to question and interrupt the current and existing conditions. Cheng says that “...to ‘queer’ something is to turn convention and authority on its head. It is about seeing things in a different light and reclaiming voices and sources that previously had been ignored, silenced, or discarded.”¹⁸ Cheng argues that,

Christian theology itself is a fundamentally queer enterprise because it also challenges and deconstructs—through radical love—all kinds of binary categories that on the surface seem fixed and unchangeable (such as life vs. death, or divine vs. human), but that ultimately are fluid and malleable.¹⁹

The third and final mode of understanding the term queer is as removing, or deconstructing the parameters in which we understand and perceive sexuality and gender. Cheng says, “As such, categories of sexuality are ultimately social constructions. Furthermore, the fact that sexualities are traditionally reduced to the binaries of ‘homosexuality’ vs. ‘heterosexuality’ ignores the more complicated notion that sexuality occurs across a spectrum.”²⁰

While giving definition to the term “queer”, it is also important to provide some parameters to the terms “sexuality” and “gender”. Cheng posits that sexuality is the way we understand emotional and physical attraction. This attraction applies to the opposite sex (heterosexuality), to the same sex (lesbian and gay), and to both sexes (bisexual). In terms of gender, Cheng explains that, “gender identity refers to the ways in which people self-identify with respect to their genders (‘female’ or ‘male’), regardless of the sex that they were assigned at birth.”²¹ Therefore, individuals that identify as a different sex than what was assigned to them at birth are “transgender” according to Cheng, while “cisgender” people are those who identify with the gender that was assigned to them at birth. According to Tonstad, these terms come from ancient Rome, where the geographic distinction of trans-alpine Gaul

¹⁶ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

being located on one side of the Alps, while cis-alpine Gaul was located on the other side of the Alps.²² Furthermore, people who do not identify with either (male or female) gender are considered “gender queer” and Cheng identifies that “...people who are born with ambiguous genitalia or geni-talia of both sexes are ‘intersex.’”²³

Cheng stresses that the difference between sexuality and gender is very important. Cheng goes on to explain that a transgender woman (an individual that self-identifies as female while assigned male sexual organs at birth) can be a lesbian (sexually attracted to female-identified people), heterosexual (sexually attracted to male-identified people), or bisexual (sexually attracted to both). This is why the term “queer” and its “umbrella” applicability is so important to this research.²⁴

The purpose of my research is not to discuss the complexities of gender and sexuality, but as these concepts (to varying degrees) inform our theology, it is important to clearly define the different perspectives. Thus, Sprinkle provides a slightly different definition that will provide insight for us to better understand his perspective moving forward. Sprinkle differentiates three specific forms of same-sex expression: “same-sex attraction, same-sex orientation, and same-sex behavior.”²⁵ Same-sex attraction refers to the continual attraction to, and the relational bonds to individuals of the same sex according to Sprinkle. He goes on to explain that these feelings of attraction are not chosen, saying that, “Whether or not this attraction was shaped by nurture or produced by nature doesn’t change the fact that when the person first experiences such attractions, they do not consciously choose them.”²⁶ Same-sex orientation on the other hand expresses a stronger and more settled attraction. Sprinkle says, “In other words, someone could experience some level of same-sex attraction while not being same-sex oriented, but everyone who is same-sex oriented experiences same-sex attraction.”²⁷ Lastly, same-sex behavior refers to the pursuance, and/or the act of sex between two people of the same sex. Sprinkle makes the important clarification that (according to his perspective) the Bible only speaks to and prohibits same-sex behavior.²⁸ Through this research, the terminology of same-sex relations will be used in place of same-sex behavior as I find that it

²² Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 2.

²³ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁵ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 133.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

is more direct, requiring less clarification, and removes the negative connotations implied with “behavior.” With that said, it is worth noting that Sprinkle and Cheng seem to agree, to some extent, on the different definitions of same-sex expressions. Cheng says “sexuality occurs across a spectrum”²⁹ and Sprinkle defines sexuality in a sort of linear progression.

1.3.2. *Queer Theology*

Chapter two will discuss queer theology in more detail, but it is important to first develop the parameters for what we are referring to with queer theology. Cheng defines queer theology as, “Simply put, if theology is defined as ‘talk about God’ (that is, *theos* [God] + *logos* [word]), then queer theology can be understood as *queer talk about God*.”³⁰ Cheng expounds upon the framework of queer theology with three supplemental definitions. The first definition follows that which is given above, “queer talk about God.” According to Cheng, Queer theology is queer people “talking about God.” Queer theology is thus a theology “that is done by and for LGBT people.”³¹ Tonstad seems to agree with Cheng’s notions of a theology for and by queer people by saying that,

“Much of what gets called queer theology in Christianity is theology that in some way is *about* queer people - that is, people who identify and understand themselves either as persons whose sexuality is not wholly heterosexual, or whose gender is not the one assigned by medical authorities at birth, or of course both.”³²

The second definition of queer theology that Cheng gives is a theology that is “self-consciously transgressive.”³³ This definition of queer theology is understood through the parameters of liberation theology, a theological discipline that came to life when theologians proposed that God was not neutral in society, yet favored the downcast individuals in our society.³⁴ Cheng says, “In particular, this theology seeks to unearth silenced voices or hidden perspectives.”³⁵ Lastly, Cheng defines queer theology as a theology that questions, challenges and reconstructs the over-simplistic binaries of heteronormative reality. Cheng suggests that it is the process of redrawing the lines of reality and deconstructing what was seemingly

²⁹ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³² Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 1.

³³ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

immovable in order to reveal a fluid reality instead of fixed binaries.³⁶ Cheng recognizes four unique sources that give definition to queer theology; scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Cheng says that,

This multiplicity of sources is important because, on the one hand, theology has never been simply about reading the Bible literally (that is, scripture) nor simply about what the church authorities have taught (that is, tradition). On the other hand, theology has never been simply a matter of drawing upon philosophy (that is, reason) nor has it simply been equated with the human experience of the divine (that is, experience).³⁷

Cheng suggests that these sources must work together in harmony and balance in order for them to work at all. Cheng acknowledges that the different denominations apply different values on sources, creating different theologies and different goals.³⁸

1.3.3. Affirming and Nonaffirming

There are a variety of different terms for the two theological perspectives in circulation today, each with their own problems. Brownson admits that it is difficult to find the right vocabulary for these two groups as a person could be considered theologically conservative while being open to the bible not condemning queer people. Brownson chooses to use the terminology “traditionalists” and “revisionists”³⁹, yet throughout this research I have chosen to use the same terminology as Preston Sprinkle to differentiate the two theological perspectives/groups. Sprinkle suggests (and I concur) that, the terms affirming and nonaffirming provide clear distinctions to the groups while avoiding overly-negative connotations. According to Sprinkle, the term affirming is applied to those “who believe that consensual, monogamous, same-sex sexual relations can be sanctioned by God.”⁴⁰ Sprinkle notes that those who identify as nonaffirming, believe that only heterosexual relations are sanctioned by God. I agree with Sprinkle when he says that the term nonaffirming carries with it a negative stigma. Unintentionally mirroring the words of Brownson, Sprinkle says that, “There are many things that nonaffirming people may affirm about gay people: their humanity, their love, their desire

³⁶ Ibid., 10.

³⁷ Ibid., 11.

³⁸ Ibid., 11.

³⁹ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 3-4.

⁴⁰ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 24.

and need for relationships.”⁴¹ Nonaffirming could be interpreted as dismissive and/or “dehumanizing” as Sprinkle says, yet it is the best term available.

1.4. Biblical Interpretation

In Richard Hays’ book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*,⁴² the Duke University, New Testament Professor provides four “tasks” that are beneficial to interpreting the Bible. The first task that Hays provides is the “Descriptive Task” which is an exegetical reading of the text. This task focuses on the individual writers and themes to construct an ethical framework that is intentionally removed from the larger canonical context of scripture. Hays suggests that when we accomplish this task, we illuminate the ideals and goals of the individual writers while paying special attention to their contextual and cultural concerns.⁴³ The next task is what Hays refers to as the “Synthetic Task” which works in an opposite way than the previous task in order to find, and create a synthesis among individual writers and themes. Hays notes that although this task is difficult, it is both necessary and possible. Hays goes on to suggest that if we fail to synthesize a New Testament ethic across different writers from different cultures and contexts then we must “give up talking about ‘New Testament ethics’ and concentrate instead on the ethos and practices of the individual communities represented by the New Testament documents.”⁴⁴

The third task that Hays discusses is the “Hermeneutical Task”, which focuses on harmonizing the “Synthetic Task” with the “temporal and cultural distance between ourselves and the text.”⁴⁵ Hays goes on to pose an eloquent question, “How do we appropriate the New Testament’s message as a word addressed to us?”⁴⁶ Hays’ suggests that the answer to this question is in the outworking of the hermeneutical task. The final task that Hays presents is the “Pragmatic Task” which is the “embodying” of the word of God in the life of the believer today. Hays notes that the difference between the hermeneutical and pragmatic tasks is not easy to differentiate but suggests that, “the hermeneutical task is the cognitive or conceptual application of the New Testament’s message to our situation, and the pragmatic task is the enacted application of the New Testament’s message in our situation.”⁴⁷ Under Hays’

⁴¹ Ibid., 24.

⁴² Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001).

⁴³ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 3-4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

interpretational framework, the pragmatic task deals with the difficult theological questions of our day, including the question of same-sex relations. It is important to note that the pragmatic task deals with an interpretation that is applicable into our current context, which means that to a certain extent, our context informs our theology.

In addition to Hays' interpretational "tasks", it is important to note that each scholar approaches the biblical text differently. Sprinkle notes that, "To be clear, I don't believe the Bible is our only authority, but our ultimate authority."⁴⁸ Sprinkle goes on to explain that our interpretation of the biblical text is one that is not without fault as our human experiences, culture, context, etc. must be factored into our interpretation. A good example of Sprinkle's mode of Biblical interpretation is when he says, "Did the same God who breathed out Genesis 1 also breathe out Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13?"⁴⁹ A critique of this statement would challenge the ability to compare these two texts as they are very different in nature, yet this statement shows that Sprinkle contends that God is the fundamental source of the biblical text. Sprinkle suggests that biblical interpretation, when outworked alongside other individuals, in correlation with tradition, by the leading of the Holy Spirit can result in the truth that the Bible intended.⁵⁰

Brownson opens his book with a significant portion devoted to the value and importance of biblical interpretation. Brownson comments that the debate over same-sex relations is not based about what the Bible "says", but what the Bible "means", in reference to the different methods of biblical interpretation.⁵¹ Brownson seems to approach the authority of Scripture in a similar way to Sprinkle saying that, "My core Reformed commitment to the centrality of Scripture had not changed; but I needed to confront the equally Reformed conviction that the church must always be reforming itself according to the Word of God."⁵² Brownson is clear that his desire through biblical interpretation is not to replace the Bible, or overrule the Bible, but to read it with a new, fresh perspective.

As noted in section 1.3.1, Patrick Cheng notes that queer theology is primarily formulated by four different sources; Bible, tradition, reason, experience.⁵³ Cheng goes on to clarify, "First, queer theology draws upon scripture—that is, the Hebrew and Christian

⁴⁸ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 193.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 193-194.

⁵¹ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 5.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵³ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 11.

scriptures (also known as the First and Second Testaments)—in creative ways.”⁵⁴ Cheng acknowledges that there have historically been a number of biblical texts that have been used to subjugate the queer community. Sprinkle refers to these texts as the “clobber passages” because of the many Christians who have taken these texts out of their biblical and historical context to suit their own means.⁵⁵ Cheng notes that these texts are now being interpreted by queer theologians through a new lens which has allowed these texts to have a positive influence. I believe the primary difference between Sprinkle and Cheng (the given representative for queer theology for this section) is in the language that they use. Sprinkle speaks about the authority of scripture where Cheng speaks about queer theology “drawing” from scripture. To reference back to Cheng’s the four different sources that inform theology, it seems as though it would be fair to say that since scripture is valued in a different way, the biblical interpretation that will follow them will be significantly different.

It is important to note that when discussing the differences in biblical and theological interpretation, it is not possible to evaluate these differences on a scale of wrong or right, nor should it be the goal to do so. These differences provide framework(s) for how we approach a topic in order to determine how to best outwork a hermeneutical application. Both Sprinkle and Brownson explain why it is important that this type of polarization should be avoided. It prohibits the ability to interpret through any other lens than the one that is preferred, and it refuses to join the conversation, the valuable conversation that understands that our differences in interpretation provide a stronger perspective.⁵⁶

1.5. Motivation

Considering the controversial and socially sensitive nature of this topic and my research question, I believe that it is merited to share my personal motivation. I grew up in the Southern States of the United States of America, in what many consider to be the “Bible Belt.” The culture was marked with high degrees of Christianity intertwined with legalism where the use of alcohol and tobacco products were the social taboos that sent people to hell on a daily basis in the eyes of church attendees. Like most of my friends and family, I was raised in church which we attended every Sunday and most Wednesday nights. In addition, my parents were involved in various degrees of church leadership including

⁵⁴ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 12.

⁵⁵ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 41.

⁵⁶ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 3-4. and Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 15-17.

teaching/preaching, which means that my childhood context was in large part removed and shielded from “secular” influences.

When I was 23 years old I enrolled in a large, international Bible College. I studied there for two years, and during that time I became very close friends with a person that I shared a house with named John.⁵⁷ One of the proudest moments in my life was one day when John trusted me with an aspect of his life that he hadn’t shared with many others, certainly not anyone in our circle of friends. In a moment of pain and fear, he told me about certain homosexual acts that he had engaged in. At that time, John was engaged to a girl that he worked together with at a large Christian organization. After we talked together and cried together for several hours, he invited his fiancé to our house so he could break the news to her. After they talked for a long time, she asked to speak with me; in her devastation and frustration she asked me “what do I do now?” John was expelled from Bible College due to his breach in the code of conduct and soon after he invited his parents and brother to the school to explain the situation in-person. Again, I received the question “what do I do now?” Except this time, the question came from John’s brother, a man who had just learned something very significant about a person that he had known his whole life.

Fast-forward to my late-twenties, living in North America and working as a Pastor in a non-denominational church with my wife. While sharing a beer with a friend, he began tearfully reminiscing the moment that he told his pastor, a person that he had grown up respecting and listening to every Sunday, that he was gay. His pastor reluctantly informed my friend that he would no longer be welcomed inside the church due to his sexuality. As his friend, and a pastor from the same community, I apologized sincerely with everything that I could muster only to hear my friend admit that he has never stepped foot back inside a church and has no intention to do so in the future.

These events have shaped in me an awareness that I could, and wanted to be a safe person, a person that was loving, compassionate, and understanding despite the “cultural Christianity” that I was raised in. Even though I have held a conservative theological perspective on this topic, I have simultaneously been proud to stand in these positions throughout my life. Not only so that I could stand in opposition to the “cultural Christianity” that I grew up in, but also so that I could stand for a Christian response that I believed in. It

⁵⁷ Though I do have consent to share his story, his true name and identity will remain anonymous.

has been a relief to not be characterized by the legalistic or judgmental tendencies of my childhood Christian culture, but I could be seen and received as loving and safe, regardless of the conservative nature of my theology.

My motivation for this research has been shaped in large part by my past experiences, starting with childhood and following through my life to present-day. As Preston Sprinkle said so eloquently, "...homosexuality is not about an issue. It is about people."⁵⁸ In the examples above, not once have I been asked about my theological perspective on the topic, yet, what all of the individuals that I have discussed have in common is their assurance of the love and support that I have for them. My motivation for this research is that I could better understand the theological perceptions of both sides of the conversation. I greatly appreciate Preston Sprinkle's sentiments when he says, "Shallow answers to complex questions are offensive to our God-given minds and they fail to shape our hearts into being more like Jesus'."⁵⁹ Thus, my motivation is to develop a better answer to the question that is continually being asked of the church: What does it mean to be Queer and Christian?

⁵⁸ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 19.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

Chapter Two

THE QUEERING OF CHRISTIANITY

This chapter will focus primarily upon Tonstad's book *Queer Theology* and what she defines as the foundational building blocks of queer theology. Attention should be given to Tonstad's utilization of the biblical text, especially in her examination of dignity. This chapter will provide some contextual considerations that are important for our development of theological interpretation. As we will see, queer theology is defined and informed by factors that we should be mindful of, and utilize in our theological formulations.

2.1. Queering Culture

The process of defining nature and culture is no easy task according to Tonstad. She asserts that it is the binary distinctions such as "male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, good/evil, reason/emotion, white/black, and so on."⁶⁰ that have been crucial in defining culture. Tonstad says that, "These binary distinctions seek to organize reality and categorize it according to whether it is *this* or *that*."⁶¹ With that said, Tonstad contests that the distinctions between nature and culture are differentiated through a cultural lens. She gives examples of the traditional generalizations of sex in order to show that even if men are 'physically and sexually-charged beings' that are genetically wired to impregnate as many females as possible, it is still culture that informs their behavior, not their nature.⁶² Tonstad says that, "Heterosexuality is natural, while homosexuality is a perversion of nature, some think. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are both natural, while repressing sexuality is a perversion of nature, others might argue."⁶³

Tonstad expands this discussion with what sex and gender theorists refer to as the process of naturalization.⁶⁴ She says that, "...the way our organizing categories seem

⁶⁰ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 53.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 51-52.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

transparent to (what we call) nature, expressive simply of the way things are, not culturally determined. It is *natural* that humans are divided into men and women, and that social and sexual life reflects that division, we assume.”⁶⁵ Tonstad argues that there are certain limitations on naturalization and its inability to envelop reality which leaves these binaries crumbling under their own pressure. Thus, these ‘natural’ binaries are in constant need of maintenance, support, etc. according to Tonstad.⁶⁶ Acknowledging the frailty of these binaries and their inability to capture the fullness of reality is the beginning stages of denaturalization according to Tonstad. The process of denaturalization is the process of revealing the organizational structures that our binaries create in order to revoke their authority to inform.⁶⁷ Tonstad says,

Denaturalization is part of the process of destabilizing, in order to change, binary and hierarchical distinctions between men and women, straight and gay, cisgender and transgender. For many theorists of sex and gender, denaturalization is a fundamental form of *queering*. Showing that binary categories are unstable and incomplete loosens their hold on us, it is hoped.⁶⁸

The question that Tonstad is revealing through this process is ‘how do we define gender?’ Tonstad enlists the help of philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler in defining gender.⁶⁹ *Gender Trouble* is a book that is over thirty years old, yet still relevant today. In the book, Butler defines gender as “a stylized repetition of acts.”⁷⁰ Tonstad goes on to explain that gender is not the process of living out our innermost identity, nor is it the anatomically defined self. Rather, Tonstad explains, “We understand gender because we have seen others *do* gender, and we ourselves learn to *do* gender in the same way.”⁷¹ Tonstad goes on to say that heterosexuality, in the way that we understand it, through the lens of naturalization, identifies (only) two sexes who find their sexual identity through anatomy and/or genetic design. These two genders are naturally drawn to each other, both sexually and romantically, with a desire for marriage and procreation according to Tonstad. She goes on to challenge such notions by explaining that heteronormativity is a cultural system that imposes

⁶⁵ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 55-56.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁹ Britannica, “Judith Butler;” available at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Judith-Butler>; site accessed 1 June 2021.

⁷⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 191. in Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 58.

⁷¹ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 58.

heterosexuality.⁷² Tonstad suggests that denaturalization shows that even though things are the way that they are, doesn't necessarily mean that they have to be that way. In other words, speaking in the context of queer and heteronormative binaries, the act of denaturalization shows that there is potential for alternative realities. Yet, in order for denaturalization to bring about change, our realization in the possibility and capacity for change must reorder or demolish the (heteronormative) realities of life.⁷³

2.2. Dignity Diminished

In the book *Queer Theology*, Tonstad uses a significant amount of space in situating and organizing queer realities. She begins by stating what is obvious to many; that queer, trans, non-binary, etc. individuals are often found outside of the social structures that comfortably support heteronormativity.⁷⁴ Tonstad, speaking from the perspective of the United States, uses marriage as an example of a social system that has for a long time deprived queer individuals from any form of dignity. It is important to note that the research question has intentionally avoided the topic of same-sex marriage due to the size constraints of the thesis and in order to focus attention on the research question. With that being said, Tonstad utilizes the issue of marriage to present queerness and queer theology in a valuable way. Similarly, nonaffirming perspectives on same-sex marriage will be discussed as it pertains to same-sex relations and not same-sex marriage.

As stated before, Tonstad is writing from the context of the United States and thus, refers to Supreme Court Justice, Anthony Kennedy's opinions on same-sex unions. Justice Kennedy said, "no union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family."⁷⁵ Justice Kennedy goes on to lament that the refusal of marriage for same-sex couples is condemning them to a life of loneliness and depriving them of the same dignity granted to heteronormative couples. Tonstad says that "The fulfillment of one's inmost self takes place in marriage; those who seek to marry someone of the 'same' sex seek only to be allowed into the already-existing institution of marriage rather than to change it in any way."⁷⁶ Tonstad contests that marriage is the "context

⁷² Ibid., 58.

⁷³ Ibid., 70-71.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁵ Supreme Court, "*Obergefell v. Hodges*," available at https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf; in Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 60.

⁷⁶ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 61.

of care for children”⁷⁷ and it is within this context that children avoid the stigmatization of a familial construct that is “other-than”. Tonstad is alluding to the fact that when same-sex couples are not allowed to be married, the children in these families fall into “broken” and “incomplete” categorizations because they are being measured to the more “natural/normal” hetero family structures. Thus, Tonstad recognizes the “normalizing” aspect of marriage and its ability to seamlessly blend what is potentially queer into the fabric of society.

Tonstad contrasts ideas of “normalizing” queer by explaining that “Queer sets itself against state distribution of rights and recognition; instead, it seeks transformation of the very social, political, and economic structures *within which state distribution of rights and recognition appears to be the goal of political action.*”⁷⁸ Author and scholar David Halperin⁷⁹ explains that queer is less about identity and more about the relation to power.⁸⁰ Tonstad goes on to argue that theologians and ethicists have been intentional with producing normative ideas and pictures of humanity, the same pictures and ideas that exclude queer people. Tonstad notes the hypocrisy of theologians that exclude queer people with continuing to propose heteronormative visions of society yet simultaneously suggesting that all humans have an inherent dignity as created in the image of God.

Coming back to the topic of marriage, Tonstad suggests that the authorization of same-sex marriage occurs within parameters of heteronormative ideology. Meaning that the heteronormative production of reality is the same space that decides and holds the authority to either condone or condemn same-sex marriage. Again, queer is the relationship to power, not necessarily identity according to Halperin. Thus, Tonstad argues,

But investing in normative visions of humanity inevitably means distinguishing between the dignified, rights-having, loving individual, and the undignified, rights-violating, unloving individual who threatens the social, political, or theological order within which the former individual gains recognition.⁸¹

Tonstad suggests that when we discuss ideas such as dignity and rights, we are denying dignity and rights to those who do not fit into our normative ideas for humanity. Tonstad says,

⁷⁷ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁷⁹ University of Michigan, “David Halperin;” available at <https://lsa.umich.edu/classics/people/affiliated-faculty/halperin.html>; site accessed 1 June 2021.

⁸⁰ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 68.

⁸¹ Ibid., 69.

“Human beings have an inalienable dignity that should be respected and fostered, because they are made in the image of God.”⁸² This is an obvious reference to Genesis 1:27 (NASB), “And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created; male and female He created them.”⁸³ If humans have an inherent dignity as created in the image of God, the act of depriving dignity could and should be considered ‘non-theological’ according to Tonstad.

It is important to note that Tonstad’s perspective on human dignity is based upon sexual orientation being, “an inborn, unchanging, lifelong orientation exclusively toward one sex.”⁸⁴ This is an important distinction as some in the nonaffirming camp consider same-sex attraction to be a choice made by the individual instead of a sexual orientation that is inborn. For example, Sprinkle references Genesis 1:27 and says, “Single or married, widowed or divorced, fertile or infertile, every single person bears God’s image.”⁸⁵ Sprinkle’s comment here is interesting, because while mentioning a number of groups that have historically been overlooked or neglected by the church, he doesn’t actually mention queer people. It is difficult to deduce what Sprinkle intends to say here, while he has mentioned various groups and “every single person”, he avoids mentioning the one group of people that his book is focused on. The topic of dignity is closely tied to the interpretation of Imago Dei as stated above. Imago Dei is a broad topic that will not be addressed in full, however it is important to understand the perspective that Tonstad and other scholars are approaching theology from. It is possible to disagree theologically, or to disagree on the interpretation of a biblical text, yet I tend to agree with Tonsad; the act of denying dignity is not biblical, and not theological.

One of the foundations that Tonstad builds her argument on is the refusal of same-sex marriages as a denial of dignity. What this theory does not account for is its non-universal perspective on marriage throughout various contexts and cultures. To say that, “no union is more profound than marriage”⁸⁶ is perhaps an American construct of marriage, and I would argue, an over-inflated one at that. To believe that marriage is the fulfillment of the ideal relationship is one that has little-to-no basis in reality. To use Norway as an example, the laws for same-sex marriage were changed in 2008 to allow for same-sex marriage, that is seven

⁸² Ibid., 68-69.

⁸³ Zodiates, *NASB*, 2.

⁸⁴ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 21.

⁸⁵ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 28.

⁸⁶ *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 556 US 2015. https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf in Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 60.

years prior to the United States.⁸⁷ Yet, there are a considerable amount of couples, both heterosexual and same-sex couples that cohabit without entering into a legal marriage union. I must be careful to not find myself in a position of speaking for people or groups of people that I have no capacity to represent, however, I believe that we need to be more realistic when we consider the implications of marriage.

2.3. Contemporary Interpretations of Greco-Roman Perspectives on Same-Sex Relations

Understanding the context in which the Bible was written should inform our interpretation. Recreating the biblical context, or attempting to create the “whole picture” when all we have are picture fragments, quickly becomes problematic. These issues are what scholars typically refer to as historical distance; the understanding that the “distance”, or difference between the historical context and our current context is quite significant. Therefore, concepts of sexuality and gender in antiquity become increasingly difficult for us to comprehend when we fail to repress our modern, contextual understanding of these topics. James Brownson provides an example of this when he quotes Deuteronomy 22:28-29, the law regarding a man who rapes a virgin that is not yet promised to marriage. The man would have been required to pay the father a certain sum of money and thereafter would be married to the female that he had defiled.⁸⁸ This is only one of many examples that Brownson provides, but the point is made, it is important that we understand that the sexual ethic in antiquity was significantly different from how we understand sexual ethics today. Brownson says, “Over and over, we confront the historical distance between the world of the text and our own, and the difficulty of directly applying biblical teaching on sexual issues to contemporary life.”⁸⁹ It is therefore highly important that we take time to outline the Greco-Roman and Jewish perspectives on same-sex relations.

In many ways, antiquity understood sex through the lens of power, which is quite similar to Halperin’s ideas of sexuality and power as discussed in the previous section.⁹⁰ The one who penetrated, or the “active” partner would be the one in the position of power over the

⁸⁷ Den Norske Kirken, “Ekteskap av personer med samme kjønn;” available at <https://kirken.no/nb-NO/fellesrad/stjordalkirken/bryllup/samkjonnet-ekteskap/>; site accessed 16 August 2021.

⁸⁸ Brownson, *Bible, Sexuality, Gender*, 45.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁹⁰ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 68.

other individual according to Sprinkle. Sprinkle notes that women, men, slaves, a conquered army, etc. could become the “passive” partner as long as they were not social equals. If a man were to penetrate another man of equal social status, there would be significant consequences, yet the “active” and “passive” roles in sex were generally accepted regardless of gender, as long as social status was respected.⁹¹ This means that females would have never occupied a position of power (sexually speaking, yet this reality translated into social roles as well) as they did not possess the ability to penetrate and would therefore be the “dominated” (terminology borrowed from Sprinkle)⁹², and subjugated role in sexual intercourse. The terminology and ideology of active and passive is of course far removed to the way that we understand power and sex in our present-day. With that said, affirming scholars including Tonstad utilize this terminology in order to clarify sexual roles as perceived through the lens of power.⁹³

Without much debate, many scholars acknowledge that the most prominent form of same-sex relations that existed during this time would have been pederasty according to Sprinkle. Pederasty, meaning “the love of boys”, were the sexual relationships between teenagers around the ages of thirteen to seventeen and a male mentor figure according to Sprinkle. To be clear, the relationship involved more than sex as the mentor would be involved in the various aspects of the teenagers life including scholastic education.⁹⁴ Tonstad notes that the mentor, likely in his early twenties, would mentor the younger men who did not yet have full beards and it would not have been considered socially taboo.⁹⁵ Sprinkle says, “To be sure, the most common form of same-sex relations occurred between men and boys; or more specifically, between men and male teenagers between the ages of thirteen and seventeen.”⁹⁶

Another aspect that is important in order to understand same-sex perceptions in antiquity is that people thought in terms of gender identity, not sexual identity according to Sprinkle.⁹⁷ Tonstad says that, “The apologist will typically point out that the notion we currently have, of homosexuality as an inborn, unchanging, lifelong orientation exclusively

⁹¹ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 55-56.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 56.

⁹³ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 22.

⁹⁴ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 62.

⁹⁵ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 22.

⁹⁶ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 61-62.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

toward one sex did not exist in the Greco-Roman, or Jewish, thought-worlds within which Paul was writing.”⁹⁸ Throughout the Greco-Roman period (500 BC-AD 400), a period that was overtly sexualized, Sprinkle notes that there was a significant amount of influence on masculinity and femininity. It would have been through the concepts of masculinity and femininity that perspectives of gender would have been informed.⁹⁹ Furthermore, if a man had sex with his male slave, or a male prostitute that was a teenager, he would not have been considered “gay” or “effeminate” according to Sprinkle. Yet, if the same man were to be seen wearing soft clothes and using perfume, he would have been considered effeminate.

When it comes to same-sex orientation in antiquity, Sprinkle and Tonstad have very different ideas. Sprinkle says, “Does this mean gay people (that is, same-sex attracted) didn’t exist in the ancient world? No, of course they did. What it means is that they were not classified in terms of their sexual identity.”¹⁰⁰ Obversely, Tonstad writes concerning the period in which Paul would have been actively writing (specifically, Tonstad is referring to 1 Corinthians 6:9-10/1 Timothy 1:9-10),

Since no conception of homosexuality as an orientation, or even of *sexuality* as a person-constituting aspect of human existence, would have existed for either Paul or his pseudonymous imitator, he simply *cannot* be thinking about sex between gay men, since such a concept doesn’t exist in his context.

Brownson agrees with Tonstad by acknowledging that there is a significant difference between sexual orientation and sexual behavior. Brownson says, “This distinction is, of course, a modern one that would make little sense in the ancient world, where the notion of sexual orientation was absent.”¹⁰¹ To be fair, Sprinkle agrees that there is a difference between sexual orientation and sexual behavior as his perspectives are clearly outlined in section 1.4.2. So then we must ask the question: why does Sprinkle insist that there existed a sexual orientation in the Greco-Roman period?

Sprinkle begins by acknowledging that, “Most same-sex erotic relations in the Greco-Roman world exhibited some sort of power differential.”¹⁰² Yet, at the same time, Sprinkle challenges the idea that we can generalize all same-sex encounters under this

⁹⁸ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 21.

⁹⁹ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 57.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰¹ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 170.

¹⁰² Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 61.

umbrella. Sprinkle contends that even though consensual same-sex relations were more common during the Greek period than the Roman period, the influence of Greek culture during the Roman period should not be easily dismissed. Sprinkle argues that it is wrong to think that Greek culture could be whitewashed away during the Roman period because we still see the influence of Greek culture in our modern-day due to attention garnered to various Greek philosophers.¹⁰³ Sprinkle says, “I think it’s wrong to say that since same-sex peer relations existed a few hundred years before Christ they made no difference for understanding the background of the New Testament.”¹⁰⁴

Sprinkle notes that there were many Greek philosophers who acknowledged that there existed same-sex orientation.¹⁰⁵ He specifically mentions the Greek physician Soranus, who lived during the time of Paul. Soranus believed that homoerotic desire came from nature, not nurture, meaning that Soranus believed that there existed an inborn homoerotic desire in some men.¹⁰⁶ Sprinkle goes on to talk about the Roman period, mentioning that there were a significant number of novels that spoke about consensual, committed, same-sex relationships that point to the possibility of a culture that experienced the same. Sprinkle takes special interest in the record of female-female marriage during the Roman period and suggests that these marriages represented consensual unions since female-female relationships could not have been perceived within typical power structures.¹⁰⁷

So what should we do with this information? Again, Tonstad and Sprinkle are standing at opposite sides of the room and the question being asked is significant beyond measure. Sprinkle suggests that while same-sex oriented individuals were possibly not on the radars of Paul and other New Testament writers, it is possible that they were aware that this existed.¹⁰⁸ After all, we need to remember that lines of communication during this time were slower than those we enjoy today. Sprinkle also notes that while the examples of consensual same-sex relationships that he provides should not be exaggerated, he clearly believes that during the time of Paul, there existed consensual same-sex relationships.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 59-62.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

The significance of what Sprinkle is suggesting cannot be understated. Sprinkle says, “We cannot assume therefore that Paul only had nonconsensual, unhealthy, exploitative same-sex relations in view when he wrote about same-sex relations.”¹¹⁰ If this is true, this means that to a certain extent, the bible speaks to same-sex relationships in the way that we understand them today. With that said, it must be acknowledged that the examples of consensual same-sex relationships that Sprinkle provides are anything but concrete and are lacking the type of verification that is typically desired. This is largely due to the challenge of historical distance and that these topics did not historically occupy a significant amount of space and attention. However, what is on the line is very important, thus there should be a high level of certainty in the way we process information.

Both Tonstad and Brownson are resoundingly clear and certain that the bible does not speak of consensual same-sex relations because they didn’t exist during this time. Brownson says, “This immediately raises a further question: If the Bible does not speak directly and explicitly to contemporary committed and loving same-sex unions, how are we to construct a distinctively Christian approach to such unions?”¹¹¹ However, we are indebted to pose the question, if sexual attraction is inborn, is it *not* possible that consensual same-sex relationships existed throughout the Greco-Roman time? Are we to assume that these inborn sexualities developed at a later time simply because sex was understood and defined by gender and not sexuality? I believe that the support of these notions is based upon what is not mentioned, which, in a similar way, lacks the same verification of Sprinkles’ claims.

2.4. Contemporary Interpretations of Jewish Perspectives on Same-Sex Relations

Sprinkle contends that the understanding of Jewish perspectives on same-sex relations is a crucial element to the debate today. He bases this upon the fact that Christianity has evolved out of Judaism and throughout that process has continued to hold similar ethical perspectives.¹¹² Josephus and Philo were first century Jewish writers that wrote on the topic of homosexuality (amongst other topics). Sprinkle provides two references from the writers, the first is from Josephus and is concerning marriage. Josephus writes that marriage should be

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 64.

¹¹¹ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 45.

¹¹² Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 64.

upheld by “natural” parameters, which alludes to heteronormative sexual relations according to Sprinkle. Sprinkle suggests that Josephus’ writing was primarily informed by Leviticus 18 and 20 readings which seems plausible as Josephus was Jewish. The other reference Sprinkle mentions is from Philo, which provides his interpretation of the Genesis 19 account of Sodom and Gomorrah. Philo understands the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as problematic with men desiring to have sex with other men according to Sprinkle. Again, this reference is similar to Josephus’ reference in that it deems same-sex relations as unnatural.¹¹³

It is interesting to note that Philo’s interpretations of Sodom and Gomorrah (which will be covered in greater detail in the following chapter), interpreted God’s wrath against Sodom and Gomorrah as judgement on their same-sex desires. As we will see, Sprinkle argues somewhat adamantly that God’s judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah was due to their attempted gang-rape of Lot’s angelic visitors amongst other infringements. It is therefore very interesting that Sprinkle would use argumentation to support a claim that he clearly disagrees with, yet it is valuable to show that a first-century Jew condemned same-sex relations.

Sprinkle references other Jewish writers that condemned same-sex relations and acknowledges that there were many more than could be included into the conversation. Yet, according to Sprinkle, “I’ve never heard of anyone who has tried to argue that some ancient Jews affirmed same-sex relations.”¹¹⁴ With that said, Sprinkle provides two points of clarification regarding Jewish perspectives on same-sex relations. First, Sprinkle suggests that even though pederasty is most commonly the reference point to Jewish scholarship on same-sex relations, the problem that Jewish writers would have expressed was not based upon the significant age gap between two males according to Sprinkle. Sprinkle posits that since the age that Jewish females would get married was approximately the same age of the younger male in a pederastic relationship, the problem that Jewish writers had with pederasty was not the age difference, but the fact that they were both males.¹¹⁵

The other clarification that Sprinkle provides is concerning the Jewish perspective on procreation. Sprinkle notes that Jewish writers considered sexual activity as utilitarian (procreation), not for the sake of pleasure. This means that same-sex relations were sinful

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

from a Jewish perspective based upon their inability to procreate.¹¹⁶ Brownson says that, “It may also be the case that, since the ancient world assumed that men held the ‘seed’ for future generations, that male-male sex was rejected because of its nonprocreative character, and that female-female sex was left out because there was no ‘seed’ involved.”¹¹⁷ The topic of procreation will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, but it is sufficient to say that the Jewish perspective of same-sex relations was certainly not affirming. However, we must consider to what extent should Jewish perspectives influence Christian theology? To what degree were Christian ethics formulated by Jewish perspectives in the first and second centuries and, if first century Christian ethics were highly informed by Jewish perspectives, does that mean that they should remain influential today?

2.5. Queer Theology and Radical Love

In this final subsection, Patrick Cheng brings to light his perception of sin, a topic that Cheng suggests has long been problematic for queer people. Cheng says, “This approach is what I call the legalistic approach to sin: if you break God’s biblical or natural law, then you will be punished for it.”¹¹⁸ Cheng challenges what he refers to as the “legalistic approach to sin” by saying that God *is* radical love, a love that is so intense that it breaks all types of boundaries. Cheng goes on to say that if God *is* radical love, then sin is anything that contradicts God, or in other words, sin is anything that contradicts radical love.¹¹⁹

Tonstad approaches the topic by discussing it through the lens of binaries. The topic of binaries has been discussed in sections 1.4.2 and 2.1, but Tonstad gives a clear definition of binaries by saying, “Binaries are organizing categories of social existence in many cultural contexts. Binaries divide reality into categories of this-or-that, or this-not-that.”¹²⁰ Tonstad, echoing the language of Patrick Cheng, comments that “Christianity is about a message of radical, boundary-destroying love. Christianity, rightly understood, is about the transgression of boundaries. Christians believe in a God whose love undoes every binary.”¹²¹

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹¹⁷ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 272.

¹¹⁸ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 70.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹²⁰ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 31-32.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

Tonstad says that at the center of the radical love strategy is Galatians 3:28 (NASB) that says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”¹²² Tonstad comments that “Heterosexual/homosexual belongs to the list of binaries destroyed or transgressed by Christianity, the argument runs, following the Christian irrelevance of the distinction between male and female.”¹²³ Tonstad adds that Jesus himself “transgresses” life and death through His death and resurrection. Jesus also “transgresses” the boundary of God and man as He is both God and human.¹²⁴

Tonstad also speaks on the topic of sin by asserting that, “All persons *are*, I believe, sinners. Arguing that gays *aren't* may participate in the production of hierarchies of sinners, where some people are only sort of sinners (but really good) and others are really sinners (so really bad).”¹²⁵ Toward the end of *Queer Theology*, Tonstad provides three case studies that “use queer theory to illuminate or generate Christian doctrine.”¹²⁶ In the second case study titled: “Original sin”, Tonstad agrees in large part with the concept of sin that Cheng alludes to. Tonstad says that the term “sin” has been relegated to be used to describe either nonaffirming churches/theologies, or individuals who are refusing to live authentically their sexuality/gender. Since sin has become so problematic, Tonstad suggests that “ethics” and “justice” are far better in their ability to determine and judge actions. Tonstad says, “Ethics appears to be about acting rightly rather than wrongly, while justice respects the claims of the other.”¹²⁷ Tonstad goes on to explain that individuals who focus on ethics and justice have the potential to live ethically and justly, while individuals who focus on “sin” as a term and concept are “oriented toward stigmatizing others.”¹²⁸

To say that God’s “Radical Love” is a love that surpasses and defies boundaries is a theological concept that I find very interesting. Yet, the boundary defying love of God seems to be a theological formulation that is only applied to the question of sexuality. Would not the true test of a theological concept be the applicability and universality of the concept to be (potentially) applied to other theological and/or biblical questions? Perhaps this is only the

¹²² Zodiates, *NASB*, 1555.

¹²³ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 32.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

start of a theological trend that will eventually sweep over other theological concerns, yet, at the moment, it seems that the “radical love” theory is a form-fitted response to the theological question of same-sex relations.

Tonstad notes that God transgresses the binaries of life and death through the work of the cross. Yet, was not the work of the cross based upon the sin of humanity in connection with the love of God? If there would have been no “sin” would there have been a necessary situation to send Christ to the Cross? Furthermore, the replacement of sin with ethics and justice is an alarming theological proposition that needs to be carefully considered. If we omit the doctrine of sin in our theology and replace it with ethics and justice, will humanity continue to be dependent upon the grace of God? If we omit sin from the regulatory systems of sanctification, is there need for repentance? If we turn to ethics and justice as our standard for Christian living, then instead of going to church on Sunday, can we not instead go to the courthouse and read law journals? These are extreme conclusions, and my tone here has a hint of hyperbole to it, but the suggestion of sin being replaced with ethics and justice seems equally extreme to me. Can we formulate theology based around a singular aspect of God’s nature and character? Or, do we formulate theology by a number of different sources in order to balance our theology and our understanding of God?

Chapter Three

OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS

The content of this chapter will focus on various Old Testament texts that Preston Sprinkle highlights in his book *People to be Loved*. These texts are examined through the lens of Sprinkle with the help of Kevin DeYoung and his book *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* and Sam Allberry's book *Is God anti-gay*¹²⁹ as supplemental nonaffirming voices. James Brownson's book *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* will provide the primary response from the affirming perspective with supplemental support from Tonstad and Saul Olyan. These texts must be understood through their appropriate contexts while paying close attention to linguistics and the different genres represented. Perhaps an important question that must be in the background as we research these texts is: "are the Old Testament scriptures authoritative for us today?" While posing this question, the tendency is perhaps to assume that they are no longer authoritative. As we will see, Preston Sprinkle advocates that they are authoritative for us today and provides reasons why they are.

3.1. Genesis 1-2

Pastor and theologian Kevin DeYoung argues that "If God wanted to establish a world in which the normative marital and sexual relationship is that between persons of the opposite sex, Genesis 1-2 fits perfectly."¹³⁰ Though the conversation is not as simple as DeYoung presumes, nonaffirming theologians predominantly draw upon two key verses in Genesis which they claim establish a sexual ethic. In the quest for theological truth, it is behoving to start in the beginning. We should remember that Tonstad has already provided her interpretation on Genesis 1:27 (subsection 2.2.) that we should keep in mind when studying these texts. As we will see, Preston Sprinkle's examination of *kenegdo* adds an interesting and valuable dimension to the conversation.

¹²⁹ Sam Allberry, *Is God anti-gay?: And other questions about homosexuality, the Bible and same-sex attraction*. (Surrey: The Good Book Company, 2018).

¹³⁰ DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*, 26.

3.1.1. *Suitable Helper*

We will begin by first examining the text and context of Genesis 2:18-20 (NASB).

Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.' And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.¹³¹

In this scene, God tasks Adam with the naming of all the animals, and throughout the process, there was not a "suitable helper" found for Adam. Sprinkle, using a deductive method, suggests that since the 'helper' that was being sought was not found, the 'helper' could not have been an animal.¹³² Certainly there would have been a number of helpers for Adam to fulfil his duty on the earth. Yet, Sprinkle is suggesting that since immediately following this sequence, Eve was created, the 'suitability' of the helper was not possibly fulfilled by an animal which is a point that both affirming and nonaffirming scholars agree on.

The Hebrew word *kenegdo*, translated "suitable" in various translations, is found only twice in the Old Testament.¹³³ Sprinkle adds that, "*Kenegdo* is somewhat difficult to translate into English, since it is a compound word made up of *ke*, which means 'as' or 'like,' and *neged*, which means 'opposite,' 'against,' or 'in front of.' Together, the word means something like 'as opposite him' or 'like against him.'"¹³⁴ In Genesis 1, God created light and dark, land and sea, sun and moon, earth and sky to show an elaborate, binary system of pairs. In her commentary on Genesis, Clare Amos points out that Adam was originally paired with the ground in Genesis 2, yet after the creation of the woman, the man is then paired to the woman in Genesis 2-3.¹³⁵ These pairings show the complementary nature of these binaries, when applied to Adam and Eve, creates a theological context where *kenegdo* has more than ideological significance. When understanding the binaries of land and sea, light and dark, and the roles of male and female in God's system of pairing, one must ask if there is a sexual ethic established throughout the creation account in Genesis 1-3.

¹³¹ Zohiathes, *NASB*, 4-5.

¹³² Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 32.

¹³³ Sprinkle uses NIV and I have chosen to use NASB. Both translations use "suitable" and both uses of the word are framed in the same section of scripture, 2:18 and 2:20.

¹³⁴ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 32.

¹³⁵ Clare Amos, "Genesis," in "*Global Bible Commentary*" (Daniel Patte, et. al.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 1-16, 4.

Sprinkle notes that it is important to understand that the term ‘helper’ does not have subjective inference. Sprinkle points out that the same word that is translated ‘helper’ is also used to describe God’s role in relation to Israel throughout the Old Testament.¹³⁶ Therefore, if Eve’s helper status is one of lower status to her male counterpart, in the same way, God’s status would also need to be lower than Israel’s. It should be noted that feminist readings of *kenegdo* contradict Sprinkle’s interpretation. It is no secret that Eve’s ‘helper’ status has historically been used as a biblical justification for the subjugation of women.

Sprinkle suggests that the usage of *kenegdo* insists that it was not only Eve’s humanity that made her the ‘suitable helper’. Sprinkle says, “If it were simply Eve’s humanness that made her a helper, then the word *ke* (‘like’) would have been just fine.”¹³⁷ Instead, the word *kenegdo* was used to signify that Adam and Eve were both human, yet different. According to Sprinkle, “Three things seem to be necessary for marriage according to Genesis 2: (1) both partners need to be human, (2) both partners come from different families (2:24), and-if I’m right about *kenegdo*-(3) both partners display sexual difference.”¹³⁸

In the appendix of *People to be Loved*, Preston Sprinkle credits James Brownson with providing the most comprehensive affirming apologetic in his book *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*. Sprinkle goes on to admit that Brownson does not address or provide a defense for *kenegdo* other than to say that difference is necessary for a lasting relationship.¹³⁹ With that said, it must be understood that Brownson is writing a defense for gender complementarity outlined by Robert Gagnon in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*.¹⁴⁰

I find the argument for *kenegdo* to be very convincing, however, there are two points that make *kenegdo* difficult to build upon. First, as we will see in later sections, compound words do not always translate in the same way that we think they should. When we base significant assumptions on modern translations of compound words, we are often left with unreliable translations of words. Second, *kenegdo* is used only twice in the Old Testament and both occurrences are found in Genesis 2. Sprinkle does not provide, or mention that there are any additional extra-biblical references of *kenegdo* to verify his translation of the word. Thus,

¹³⁶ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 31.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁴⁰ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 23-26.

it is not possible to see *kenegdo* in use outside of this text to see if Sprinkle’s translation is accurate. With that being said, Sprinkle does not stand alone in his interpretation, Sam Allberry says, “She is like him in the right way (*made of the same stuff*) and unlike him in the right way (*woman, rather than man*).”¹⁴¹ Similarly, Kevin DeYoung says, “The text has sameness and difference in view. Adam delights that the woman is not another animal *and* not another man. She is exactly what the man needs: a suitable helper, equal to the man but also his opposite.”¹⁴²

Furthermore, Sprinkle uses the word “marriage” to describe the union between Adam and Eve, language that many scholars could find problematic since there were no marital/familial parameters given until Genesis 3. Sprinkle acknowledges that Genesis 2 does not specifically speak about marriage, yet comments that both Paul and Jesus reference Genesis 2 when speaking about marriage. Sprinkle goes on to explain that marriage is implied throughout Genesis 1 and 2 given that God’s directive towards Adam and Eve is to procreate.¹⁴³

3.1.2. *One Flesh*

Another Genesis text that some nonaffirming theologians employ is Genesis 2:24 that says, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”¹⁴⁴ The concept of “one flesh” is quite clearly a sexual reference according to Sprinkle as he references 1 Corinthians 6:16 where Paul uses the imagery of Genesis 2:24 and “one flesh” to confront the church in Corinth and their sexual relationships with prostitutes. Yet not all nonaffirming theologians, Sprinkle included, agree that the term actually denotes or requires heterosexuality. Sprinkle also uses the reference in 1 Corinthians to substantiate his perspective claiming that if Paul would have been confronting the church for having sex with male prostitutes, the term “one flesh” would have still applied.¹⁴⁵

Sprinkle contends that the word “flesh” deserves extended theological clarification stating that several texts utilize the term “flesh” while referring to familial bond, and not

¹⁴¹ Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 16.

¹⁴² DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality*, 27.

¹⁴³ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 28-29.

¹⁴⁴ Zodhiates, *NASB*, 5.

¹⁴⁵ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 30.

heterosexual relationships. Sprinkle provides examples such as Laban and Jacob (Genesis 29:14), Abimelek and the citizens in Shechem (Judges 9:2), and David and the elders of Judah (2 Samuel 19:12) are all example of the term *flesh* being used to describe familial relationships and not male-female sex. It is with this in mind that Sprinkle alleges that “one flesh” is about the formation of a new family and not about a sexual union.¹⁴⁶ Sprinkle takes a similar approach in the use of the word “united” in Genesis 2:24 stating that it does not denote a sexual relationship, but a familial relationship.¹⁴⁷ The meaning of these two words should not be understated. If Sprinkle is correct in his assessment of *flesh* and *united*, and the words are intended to denote a family bond or union, then the verse cannot be used for a theological justification of the nonaffirming perspective.

As previously mentioned, not all nonaffirming theologians agree on the meaning of “one flesh.” Kevin DeYoung contests that the first two chapters in Genesis defend a nonaffirming perspective. Similar to Sprinkle, DeYoung utilizes Paul’s reference to Genesis 2 when he confronts the church in Corinth concerning prostitutes to show that “one flesh” carries with it a sexual connotation. Yet in contradiction to Sprinkle, he states that, “...the nature of the one-flesh union presupposes two persons of the opposite sex.”¹⁴⁸ DeYoung says, “The act of sexual intercourse brings a man and a woman together as one relationally and organically.”¹⁴⁹ He goes on to clarify that same-sex intercourse is unable conjoin two individuals in the same way.

DeYoung’s claim that two individuals of the opposite sex is ‘presupposed’ deserves critical examination. DeYoung bases his statement upon the fact that since Eve was taken from Adam, her role was therefore complementary in nature to Adam. DeYoung says, “The *ish* and the *ishah* can become one flesh because theirs is not just a sexual union but a *reunion*, the bringing together of two differentiated beings, with one made *from* and both made *for* the other.”¹⁵⁰ Another area of DeYoung’s argument that needs further clarification is his differentiation of the ‘relational and organic’ nature of heterosexual relations as opposed to homosexual relations. According to DeYoung, the biological function of hetero sex, procreation, delineates hetero sex as ‘relational and organic’ and same-sex relations as not.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹⁴⁷ NIV uses the word *united* in place of the word *cleave* utilized by the NASB.

¹⁴⁸ DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*, 27.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 27-28.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 28.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 28.

DeYoung is basing this off of his interpretation of ‘one flesh’ as outlined above. DeYoung also acknowledges the variance in usage of the word ‘flesh’ as exemplified in the same sources as Sprinkle (Jacob/Laban in addition to David and the tribes of Israel).¹⁵²

DeYoung further justifies this position theologically with referencing Genesis 1:28, “And God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”¹⁵³ Apologist and Pastor Sam Allberry in his book *Is God anti-gay?* agrees that the concepts of ‘one-flesh’ and procreation are inextricably intertwined. Allberry references Malachi 2:15¹⁵⁴ stating that, “From this union flows the possibility of new life-for children to result from it.”¹⁵⁵

Sprinkle acknowledges that just because the first marriage was between a man and woman, does not mean that every other subsequent marriage should be hetero defined as well.¹⁵⁶ With that said, Sprinkle brings to light that Jesus referred to Genesis 2:24 and “one flesh” in order to define the immutable nature of marriage in Mark 10:7-8 (NASB). Jesus says, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh.”¹⁵⁷ Again, Sprinkle acknowledges that this text does not exclude same-same marriages, however in the previous verse (Mark 10:6), Jesus quotes Genesis 1:27 (NASB), “But from the beginning of creation, *God* made them male and female.”¹⁵⁸ Sprinkle acknowledges that the context here is concerning the topic of divorce, not homosexuality, therefore theological interpretation should not take liberties here. However, Sprinkle contends that in order for Jesus to comment on the binding nature of marriage, Genesis 2:24 and “one flesh” would have been sufficient. Sprinkle suggests that Genesis 1:27 would have not been required in defining the parameters for marriage other than to suggest the importance of gender difference.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² Ibid., 26.

¹⁵³ Zoghiates, *NASB*, 2-3.

¹⁵⁴ “But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then, to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.” (Zoghiates, *NASB*, 1254.)

¹⁵⁵ Allberry, *Is God anti-gay?*, 22.

¹⁵⁶ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 27.

¹⁵⁷ Zoghiates, *NASB*, 1330.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 1330.

¹⁵⁹ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 35.

Sprinkle suggests that the interpretation of Jesus not intending to illuminate gender difference but to support female worth as image-bearers of God in Mark 10:6, is a legitimate claim. Sprinkle acknowledges that within the context that Jesus was speaking, the act of divorce would be degrading and supporting a patriarchal hierarchical perspective that subjugated women. Thus, when Jesus quotes Genesis 1:27, Sprinkle agrees that it was because Jesus was suggesting a form of egalitarianism. Sprinkle notes that the problem with this interpretation is that the biblical account in Mark shows that Jesus omits the first half of 1:27 and only mentions gender difference. Jesus never actually referred to the section concerning women (or men for that matter) being created in the image of God, yet solely focuses on gender difference. Sprinkle says, “If Jesus only wanted to show that women are equal to men, then why did he leave out the part about women being equal to men?”¹⁶⁰

3.1.3. *Cling*

In his book *Bible, Gender, Sexuality* affirming scholar James Brownson examines the “one flesh” theme while focusing on the Hebrew word *dabaq* and the Greek word *kollaō* meaning “cling”.¹⁶¹ According to Brownson, of the fifty-four times *dabaq* is used in the Hebrew bible, not once does it carry any type of sexual connotation, however, Brownson goes on to show that Paul’s usage of the word *kollaō* in 1 Corinthians 6:16 has clear sexual implications. “Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body *with her*? For He says, ‘The two will become one flesh’”¹⁶² Paul’s reference to sexual intercourse (*kollaō*) with a prostitute in the text, is closely related to the word *proskollaō* which is the Greek translation of the Genesis 2:24 word “cling” found in the Septuagint. Brownson says, “So the ‘clinging’ of Genesis 2:24 can be understood to include sexual intercourse, but it does not refer solely to sexual intercourse.”¹⁶³ Brownson is careful to not define “clinging” and “one flesh” as synonymous, and is also affirming of Sprinkle’s understanding of “one flesh” as kinship. Instead, Brownson suggests that the act of “clinging” is the pathway to becoming “one flesh”.¹⁶⁴ Brownson says, “The joining of bodies cannot be separated from the joining of lives.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 36.

¹⁶¹ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 87.

¹⁶² 1 Corinthians 6:16, Zodhiates, *NASB*, 1513.

¹⁶³ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 87.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 87.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 88.

Brownson's interpretation of "cling" is valuable, but it is important to determine how and/or if it relates to the research question. I believe that there are two points that Brownson is illuminating here. First, Brownson acknowledges that throughout the discussion of "one flesh", there is no mention of procreation. The parameters of normative sexuality are not defined by the ability to procreate, therefore same-sex relations could be defined within the parameters "one flesh" in a similar fashion to opposite-sex relations. Brownson notes that, "The creation of the woman is not narrated, first of all, as a means for humankind's achieving 'fruitfulness,' but rather as an antidote to the problem of aloneness."¹⁶⁶ Brownson makes it clear that the concept of "one flesh" was not dependent upon children in any way.

The second point that Brownson makes further broadens our understanding and interpretation of "clinging." Brownson acknowledges that "clinging" can include sexual desire, but certainly is not limited to it and often stretches beyond it. Ruth 1:14 (NASB) says, "And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her."¹⁶⁷ Ruth's act of clinging to her mother-in-law following the death of her husband is not sexual, but the desire for fellowship, community, and intimacy according to Brownson. Brownson suggests that the reason that Ruth clings to Naomi is because she understood the value of the relationship and it was one that was too valuable to abandon. Ruth had no further obligations to the family after the death of her husband, yet she "clung" to avoid aloneness. With that said, Tonstad adds, "Ruth swears an oath to Naomi that where Naomi goes, Ruth will follow, thus creating at least an antecedent for a vowed lesbian relationship, some think."¹⁶⁸ Though not explicitly clear, it seems as though the point that Brownson is attempting to make is that the parameters of "cling" and "one flesh" are to show that committed relationships are not promiscuous, regardless of sexual typology. Brownson says that the "...vision for the link between sex and kinship bonds provides the basic moral logic underlying the Bible's consistent rejection of sexual promiscuity."¹⁶⁹

I find that the difference between Sprinkle and Brownson's interpretations of "one flesh" is reading what is, and what is not written. Sprinkle suggesting that Mark 10:6-8 shows that God designed marriage for opposite-sex relationships based upon the omission of half of Genesis 1:27 is an interesting interpretation. I would argue that this interpretation is reading

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 89.

¹⁶⁷ Zodhiates, *NASB*, 363.

¹⁶⁸ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 24.

¹⁶⁹ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 88.

into these texts what is not necessarily defined by the text. Similarly, Brownson suggesting that since “one flesh” was not intrinsically tied to procreation in the text, that same-sex relations are therefore within the parameters of Genesis 2:24. Again, this is an interesting observation, but it fails to account for the context of Adam and Eve and their biological ability to procreate. Thus, even though procreation was not mentioned here, their ability to procreate must be an “assumed” aspect of interpretation. I find Sprinkle’s argument of “one flesh” to be the formulation of a new family to be helpful and sufficient.

3.2. Sodom and Gomorrah

Having examined some of the different interpretations of Genesis 1-3, we now turn to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah has historically been interpreted as synonymous with God’s judgement on sexual sin, more specifically, same-sex relations. The anger of God is visualized through fire and sulfur, a consuming entity designed to rid the world of their despicable behavior. However, it is important to understand that not all scholars agree that the subject of God’s wrath was focused on same-sex relations as we will see. This section will focus on the interpretive work of Kevin DeYoung and Preston Sprinkle. DeYoung holds a traditional perspective of the Sodom and Gomorrah account and fortifies his perspective using three points that we will examine. Sprinkle takes a non-traditional reading of the Sodom and Gomorrah story and posits that the traditional interpretation is lacking.

According to the story, Lot receives two guests that arrived under the guise of male, but later revealed themselves to be angels. Sprinkle, (reading the story from a traditional perspective) says that these two individuals garnered the attention of the entire city who surrounded the house demanding them to come out so that they could have sex with them.¹⁷⁰ The city of Sodom was referenced several times in the Old Testament as a physical and literal example of the embodiment of sin in a geographical location according to DeYoung.¹⁷¹ One of the verses that is used frequently as a tool of clarification is Ezekiel 16:49 (NASB) which says, “Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy.”¹⁷² DeYoung

¹⁷⁰ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 42.

¹⁷¹ DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*, 33.

¹⁷² Zodhiates, *NASB*, 1100.

contends that the immediate verses surrounding Ezekiel 16:49 are perhaps more indicting by showing that in the following verse (Ezekiel 16:50), the prophet uses the word “abominations”¹⁷³ or *tow`ebah* which is the same word used in Leviticus 18 and 20 to describe same-sex relations. The word *tow`ebah* is defined in *AMG’s Annotated Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary Of the Old Testament* as:

A feminine noun meaning an abomination. This word is primarily understood in the context of the Law. It identifies unclean food (Dt 14:3); the activity of the idolater (Isa 41:24); the practice of child sacrifice (Dt 12:31); intermarriage by the Israelites (Mal 2:11); the religious activities of the wicked (Pr 21:27); and homosexual behaviour (Le 18:22). In a broader sense, the word is used to identify anything offensive.¹⁷⁴

According to this definition, the word abomination can mean a great number of things. The significance of the same word being used in Ezekiel 16:50 and Leviticus 18:22 in reference and condemnation to same-sex relations is correlated and considered identical to the same word being used in Ezekiel 16:50 to define same-sex relations and the directive in Deuteronomy 14:3 to not eat food considered to be unclean. Therefore, the significance that DeYoung is pointing out with the correlated use of *tow`ebah* in Ezekiel and Leviticus is perhaps not that significant as the definition provides, “the word is used to identify anything offensive.”¹⁷⁵

DeYoung also looks at three extra-biblical sources from Second Temple Judaism to discover what others said about the citizens of Sodom. In these three sources (*Testament of Naphtali*, *Testament of Benjamin*, and *Jubilees*), Sodom’s promiscuity is recorded in detail, but not once are same-sex relations clearly defined. DeYoung says, “It makes more sense, therefore, for the sin in question to be homosexual activity rather than sex with angels. Surely, the former was more of a real possibility in the surrounding culture than the latter.”¹⁷⁶ While this statement might be true, the question is not if same-sex relations is more likely than an angelic sexual encounter, the question is if there is indisputable proof that there was homosexual activity in the city of Sodom. DeYoung acknowledges that the indisputable proof of homosexual behavior in the city of Sodom is missing from the equation when he says that

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1100

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 2064.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 2064.

¹⁷⁶ DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*, 37.

“The city was a byword for sexual sin, and likely for homosexual sin.”¹⁷⁷ Special attention should be given to the word “likely”, as if to mean, not verifiable and not exactly sure.

DeYoung’s final point is a reference to the city of Sodom found in the book of Jude. Jude 1:7 (NASB) says, “Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.”¹⁷⁸ DeYoung devotes special attention is given to the phrases “gross immorality” and “strange flesh”, but yet again, these terms do not present a clear connection between the sexual sin that has been presented throughout the bible (and extra-biblical sources) and homosexuality. DeYoung acknowledges that the term “strange flesh” could point to the angelic nature of Lot’s visitors, yet comments that “This interpretation is possible, but it’s better to take ‘other flesh’ as a reference to men lying with a male instead of a female (as per the Mosaic law in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13).”¹⁷⁹ One must ask if the reference to DeYoung’s statement “better”, is based upon textual interpretation or upon DeYoung’s theological persuasion.

Sprinkle writes about the Sodom and Gomorrah story from a very different perspective. Sprinkle begins by importantly stating that, “But people are not abominations. We are image bearers of Creator God.”¹⁸⁰ Sprinkle makes an important distinction between the action and the individual, and notes that regardless of theological interpretation, people are people and not abominations. With that said, Sprinkle refers to Ezekiel 16:49 and points out that there is no direct reference to homosexual sex in the prophet’s judgement of Sodom. According to Sprinkle, Sodom is referenced in Isaiah 1:10-17, Isaiah 3:9, Jeremiah 23:14, Lamentations 4:6, and Jesus in Matthew 10:5-10 and there is not a single reference to homosexual sex amongst them. Sprinkle says eloquently, “Sodom was not fried because of gay pride. They were fried for many other sins, including attempted gang rape.”¹⁸¹

Another aspect that is important to discuss is the interpretation of the Hebrew word *yadah*. A number of translations have interpreted *yadah* to mean “know”, thus there is some discrepancy in determining if the intention of the citizens of Sodom is to be acquainted with

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 37

¹⁷⁸ Zodiates, *NASB*, 1669.

¹⁷⁹ DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*, 38.

¹⁸⁰ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 42.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 44.

the unknown visitors.¹⁸² John Boswell received his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1975 and began his teaching career at Yale in the same year and has since been considered a pioneer for people who identify as queer and Christian.¹⁸³ In his book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*¹⁸⁴, Boswell provides more clarity by pointing out that Lot was not a citizen of Sodom, but only passing through. Therefore, Lot would not have known some of the cultural expectations of the city, such as permission to receive unknown guests by the city elders. Thus, for the citizens of the city to ask the unknown men to come out so that they would “know” them, seems plausible.¹⁸⁵ If Lot infringed upon the cultural expectations of the city by letting these guests into the city without permission, it would make sense that the citizens would have demanded to be acquainted with them and would also justify their seemingly militant disposition that the text seems to infer. Furthermore, Patrick Cheng contests that even though the story of Sodom and Gomorrah has historically been interpreted as clear condemnation of queer people, there were serious, “life or death consequences in the harsh desert environment of the biblical world.”¹⁸⁶ Thus, Cheng references Ezekiel 16:49 (NASB) as well which says, ““but she did not help the poor and needy,””¹⁸⁷ showing that inhospitality was the problem, not same-sex relations.

This interpretation of *yadah* is not without challenge as Sprinkle shows that the term *yadah* is also used in Genesis 19:8 (NASB) to describe the virginity of Lot’s daughters. ““Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof.””¹⁸⁸ The term “had relations” is the NASB translation of *Yadah*¹⁸⁹ which clearly provides sexual implications that not only clarify the meaning of the word on an exegetical basis, but also gives insight to the intention of the citizens of Sodom toward Lot’s guests. According to Sprinkle, ““Since ‘know’ refers to sex in 19:8, it probably means the same thing in 19:5.””¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, the treatment of Lot’s daughters provides insight to the kyriarchal culture and context of this time. Even though Lot

¹⁸² Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 43.

¹⁸³ William & Mary, “About John Boswell;” available at <https://www.wm.edu/as/dean/boswell/about/index.php> site accessed July 21, 2021.

¹⁸⁴ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)

¹⁸⁵ Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 93-94.

¹⁸⁶ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 12.

¹⁸⁷ Zodhiates, *NASB*, 1100.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 1885.

¹⁹⁰ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 43.

would have been responsible for the safety of his guests, his willingness for his virgin daughters to be sexually abused by a group of men makes it hard to defend any type of egalitarian system of power in the Old Testament.

It seems to me that Sprinkle's interpretation of the Sodom and Gomorrah story is logical. Sprinkle has pointed out, if the text doesn't specifically mention something, we must be careful in drawing conclusions from between the lines. I believe that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah has been historically interpreted with assumptions and reading our context into the text. It is important that we continue to challenge our interpretations. I appreciate what Sprinkle says, "If the Bible is our ultimate authority, and if tradition is subject to error, then we all should eagerly drag our traditions to the foot of Scripture and mandate a re-evaluation."¹⁹¹ Regardless of whether the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is God condemning inhospitality, same-sex relations, or gang rape, one thing is clear, this text is in no way referencing consensual, monogamous same-sex relations according to Sprinkle.

3.3. Leviticus 18 & 20

The previous sections have covered what Sprinkle considered to be the important texts concerning same-sex relations in Genesis. This section will discuss two texts that are often discussed as a pair in the book of Leviticus. According to Saul Olyan, in his article "*And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman*"¹⁹², these two texts fall within what has historically been understood as the "Holiness Code", a collection of legal work utilized for training priests. Yet, academic developments have shown that the legal material that was intended for priestly education stretches beyond the traditional confines of Leviticus 17-26.¹⁹³

The book of Leviticus is filled with commands that point to a context that is far-removed from the realities of our life in the modern world. From food laws to laws concerning attire and most things in-between; it seems as though the vastness and contextually bound realities explored throughout Leviticus deserves only cursory considerations in modern-day theology. Tonstad posits that the book of Leviticus is concerned primarily with maintaining the boundaries between things that are clean and pure, and those

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁹² Saul M. Olyan, "And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman': On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1994): 179-206.

¹⁹³ Olyan, *And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman*, 179.

that are not.¹⁹⁴ Kevin DeYoung poignantly says, “The word *holy* or *holiness* occurs eighty-seven times in Leviticus. Holiness is the book’s overarching theme.”¹⁹⁵ The important question that will be raised in this section is, ‘To what extent the Old Testament deserves to inform our New Testament theology?’ Sprinkle and other nonaffirming scholars suggest that the two Leviticus texts concerning same-sex relations are highly valuable to the conversation. As we will see, this subchapter evolves the conversation from beyond the theoretical and philosophical sequences and poses one of the crucial questions: If the bible talks about homosexuality, what kind of homosexuality is it talking about? It is important to remember that the Holiness code falls within a specific context that must remain central to the study in order to maintain proper perspective. In other words, when Leviticus 18:22 (NASB) says that “‘You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.’”¹⁹⁶ we must consider the historical context to which this verse adheres to.

3.3.1. *Gender-Power Differences*

The patriarchal context in which the Old Testament was written placed significant value on masculinity. This was a context where women were not valued, seen as insignificant, and the Levitical law was a constant reminder of this with its subjugative punishments.¹⁹⁷ In her book *Rhetoric and Ethic*,¹⁹⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza coined the term *kyriarchy*, a term that would aim to define patriarchy and its implications in greater detail. Kyriarchy is, “Derived from the Greek term *lord*, this coinage underscores that domination is not simply a matter of patriarchal, gender-based dualism but of more comprehensive, interlocking, hierarchically ordered structures of discrimination.”¹⁹⁹ A clear example of the linguistic implications of kyriarchy is found in Matthew 14. Above verse 13 in the NASB is the headline, “Five Thousand Fed”²⁰⁰, yet verse 21 says “And there were about five thousand men who ate, aside from women and children.”²⁰¹ The women and children were not counted because in antiquity their worth was minimal in comparison to their male counterparts.

¹⁹⁴ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 20.

¹⁹⁵ DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*, 40.

¹⁹⁶ Zodhiates, *NASB*, 162.

¹⁹⁷ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 20-21.

¹⁹⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999)

¹⁹⁹ Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, ix.

²⁰⁰ Zodhiates, *NASB*, 1284.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1284.

There is little debating that when Leviticus 18:22 says that men should not have sexual intercourse with another man in the same way as you would with a female, that it is not a reference to same-sex relations. However, many scholars suggest that the reason same-sex relations between men were condemned is because the act of penetrating another man would emasculate the other man. Tonstad says,

Being like a woman, or allowing oneself to be treated like a woman, suggests that one is not enough of a man. Forbidding sex between men is not, then, really about sex between men, but about maintaining the boundaries of masculinity, just like making women unclean for two weeks rather than one after giving birth to a girl is a religious and cultural way to maintain the greater value of boys over girls.²⁰²

Tonstad is not arguing that sexual intercourse subjugates the ‘passive’ individual (regardless of hetero or homosexual activity), yet in the kyriarchal context, the passive individual was perceived as the weaker and submissive person. Therefore, according to Tonstad, the abomination that Leviticus is referring to is the ‘feminization’ of the passive male as a result of same-sex relations.

Tonstad points out that the subjugation of women is not just a past experience by saying, “As in many surrounding cultures-and this has not necessarily changed much in the interim!-one of the reasons sexual relations between men might be worrisome was that feminization of any kind is taken to dishonor men.”²⁰³ Sprinkle argues that the Leviticus directive does not present a subjective view of women. According to Sprinkle, the text supports gender difference, and values the concepts of masculinity and femininity while not assuming a subjugated view of women.²⁰⁴ Sprinkle goes on to challenge the kyriarchal interpretation by referencing Genesis 1:27 (NASB), “...in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”²⁰⁵ Not only were men created in God’s image, but females as well, thus, Sprinkle suggests that to assume that the bible portrays a subjective view of women is false. However, the point raised by Tonstad is not if the *text* assumes a particular view of women, but whether the *context* in which Leviticus was written was one dictated by kyriarchal rule. Yet, for Sprinkle to assume that just because one aspect of the context is not

²⁰² Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 21.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁰⁴ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 47.

²⁰⁵ Zodhiates, *NASB*, 2.

spelled-out throughout the text, that the text was not informed by the context is an interesting claim.

Sprinkle's perspectives on the power-gender difference in the Old Testament are also echoed in his perspectives on Pauline literature. Sprinkle acknowledges about Paul, "Yes, his fellow Greco-Roman and even Jewish writers believed some pretty awful things about women."²⁰⁶ Yet, in Sprinkle's estimations, Pauline writing suggests a non-subjugative view of women, contrary to his Greco-Roman culture.²⁰⁷ Sprinkle gives many examples of Pauline literature that supports his claim, yet if we are being fair, we have to also acknowledge that Sprinkle needed to overlook certain sections of Pauline literature to fortify his claim. In *Queer Theology*, Tonstad has an entire section titled "Jesus was good, Paul was bad"²⁰⁸, a section that acknowledges that an apologetic strategy of queer and feminist theology is dependent upon the destruction of Paul. Tonstad admits that, "First, there is no Christianity without Paul."²⁰⁹ Tonstad goes on to readily defend Paul and his significant contributions, specifically in extending Christianity beyond its Jewish boundaries. At the same time, Tonstad does not mix her words when she compares Paul to Jesus saying, "Paul, on the other hand, was sex-negative, misogynistic, and terrified of the rightly ordered body of Christ dissolving into chaos if women were allowed to speak, much less prophesy."²¹⁰

Sprinkle's points of reference in the Old and New Testaments are concerning the masculine/feminine paradigm. I don't believe that Sprinkle is suggesting that the culture that the bible was written in was somehow egalitarian, but it seems as though the claim he is making is that the bible is written with a form of egalitarianism in mind. Again, if Sprinkle is correct in his view, this would mean that the theological condemnation of same-sex relations based upon the feminization of the passive role is theological unfounded. Therefore, the importance of masculinity as an interpretational lens should not be underestimated. However, to suggest that the culture did not inform the perspectives of biblical authors is difficult to rectify. These hierarchical power structures were not an aspect of life, they were the order of life. In order to suggest that Paul was a sort of egalitarian, liberator of women, you must first

²⁰⁶ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 95.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

²⁰⁸ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 27.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

justify a number of things that Paul said that would clearly contradict the Greco-Roman context.

3.3.2. *Applicability of Leviticus 18 & 20*

In the previous section, two questions were asked: 1.) What type of sex is being discussed (exploitative or consensual) and, 2.) Is Leviticus still binding on Christians today? The same two point format will be utilized to answer the questions of applicability of Leviticus 18 & 20. Namely, what is the applicability of laws related to same-sex relations (are the laws referring to specific or general forms of same-sex relations), and what is the applicability of the Leviticus directives for Christians today?

To begin, Leviticus 20:13 (NASB) says, “If *there is* a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.”²¹¹ Sprinkle suggests that all qualifiers for active and passive sexual roles are removed in Leviticus 20:13, which would suggest that both would be guilty of wrong. Brownson makes the same assessment of Leviticus 20:13 saying that, “no moral distinction is made between the active partner and the passive partner; indeed, both are subject to the death penalty (20:13)”²¹² Sprinkle says, “The commands appear to include same-sex acts that are mutual and consensual; both partners are deemed guilty.”²¹³ It is important to note that this means that the condemnation of same-sex relations in Leviticus 20:13 would also apply to our modern-day interpretation of consensual, loving, and amicable same-sex relationships according to Sprinkle.

With that said, the applicability of these texts in our modern-day theology still present a significant theological issue that must be addressed. DeYoung boldly states that “No disciple of Jesus should start with the presumption that the Mosaic commands are largely irrelevant.”²¹⁴ DeYoung goes on to quote Matthew 5:17 (NASB) and the fact that Jesus said that He did not come to “abolish the Law, but to fulfill.”²¹⁵ Yet, couldn’t an argument be made that since the law is fulfilled in Christ, it is no longer binding on New Testament believers?

²¹¹ Zodhiates, *NASB*, 165.

²¹² Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 209.

²¹³ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 45.

²¹⁴ DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*, 43.

²¹⁵ Zodhiates, *NASB*, 1265.

Sprinkle takes a different angle with three distinctive points that outline his perspective on whether Leviticus 18-20 is binding on Christians today.

First, Sprinkle points out that Leviticus 18-20 is a singular literary unit. Throughout this section of scripture, many commands are given and Sprinkle claims that nearly every law given to the Israelites in Leviticus 18-20 is still applicable to Christians today. Sprinkle makes the argument that there are more laws that are binding and relevant, than laws that are not. From incest (18:6-18), to seeing mediums (19:31), the laws found in this portion of scripture are unquestionably issues that most, if not all, bible-believing Christians would deem sinful today according to Sprinkle. With that said, Sprinkle admits that there are several laws that are undoubtedly fulfilled in Christ and provides three examples: offering and atonement laws (19:21-22), wearing different types of fabric (19:19), trimming the edges of beards (19:27).²¹⁶ Sprinkle argues that just because certain “outdated” and “contextually-bound” laws are mentioned in this section that there is a tendency to paint the entire section as outdated and irrelevant. With that said, it is important to see that Jesus quoted Leviticus 19:18 “Love your neighbor as yourself”²¹⁷, more often than any other Old Testament text according to DeYoung.²¹⁸

Second, Leviticus 18-20 provides a great number of laws, many of them are pertaining to the topic of sex. Sprinkle makes the case that the sex laws that are mentioned are still authoritative for Christians today (he refrains from including verses 18:22; and 20:13 laws concerning male-male sex here). With that said, Sprinkle acknowledges that while there are many scholars that say Leviticus 18:19 and the laws against intercourse with a woman during menstruation are likely no longer binding on Christians, Sprinkle suggests that these arguments are lacking.²¹⁹ DeYoung contests that the sex laws in Leviticus 18-20 follow a linear progression from minimally deviant to increasingly deviant. Sexual intercourse during menstruation, according to DeYoung, is minimally deviant on the deviance scale. DeYoung goes on to make an important point, “Menstruation was not a sin (no sacrifice was required to atone for it). It was a matter of ritual uncleanness.”²²⁰ When Christ established a new Covenant, ritualistic cleanliness/uncleanliness was then transformed into a God-ordained

²¹⁶ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 50.

²¹⁷ Zodhiates, *NASB*, 163.

²¹⁸ DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*, 43.

²¹⁹ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 51.

²²⁰ DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*, 45.

standard of morals, purity and righteousness. This would have superseded ritual, because it would have been fulfilled in Christ. With that said, we must ask if this means that since not all the sexual laws are still applicable, none of them are?

This point brings us to a crossroads, either there is “cherry picking” of the Mosaic Law in order to justify a theological position, or there is a theological justification due to logical interpretation. If menstruation was considered unclean under the law due to ritual impurity, which DeYoung makes a compelling case considering no sacrificial offering needed to be made, this would mean that *all* sex laws in Leviticus 18-20 are still binding on Christians today. Coming back to the male-male sex laws, if all the other laws are still binding, it would seem as though there is a logical explanation that male-male sex laws are valid and binding as well. With that said, there is a gaping hole in DeYoung’s argument when he says, “Having sex during a woman’s menstrual uncleanness is the lowest rung of the ladder in chapter 18 and not part of the progression at all in chapter 20.”²²¹ Yet, the problem is, Leviticus 20:18 certainly does speak directly to sexual intercourse during menstruation and it is situated in the very middle of verses 10-21 which concern the sex laws. What does this mean for DeYoung’s theory concerning the linear progression of sexual delinquency? This does not reject DeYoung’s point concerning ritual uncleanness, but it does challenge his perspective concerning the seriousness of the menstrual law.

The third, and the final point in determining if Leviticus 18-20 is applicable on Christians today is also the most important according to Sprinkle. Sprinkle utilizes a method of New Testament validation for Old Testament laws saying that, “The most fail-proof test to see if an Old Testament law is still valid for Christians is if it’s repeated in the New.”²²² The dietary laws of Leviticus are fulfilled in Christ, yet issues of adultery, stealing, cheating, murder, etc. are repeated in the New Testament and thus validated in our Old Testament interpretation. DeYoung adds that even cultural practice of polygamy is refuted in the New Testament.²²³ We will explore the applicability of Sprinkle’s theory further in the following chapter on New Testament texts. Suffice it to say that Sprinkle holds firmly that the New Testament speaks clearly concerning the topic. Furthermore, it must be noted that this form of

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

²²² Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 51.

²²³ DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*, 46.

validation is certainly not accepted by all, yet communicates one form of biblical interpretation.

Tonstad makes a significant theological contribution concerning the applicability of Old Testament texts in our modern theology. Considering that we wouldn't think twice before wearing a polyester blend or a cotton blend garment, how should our theology be informed with the implementation of certain Old Testament texts and the omission of others? Tonstad argues this very point when she comments on the various laws and their implementation into our modern theology saying, "Mixing cotton and linen doesn't worry us, so why should lying with a man as if with a woman bother us? The same general principle regarding the importance of purity and the threat of pollution underlies both worries; thus if one is disregarded, the other may be also."²²⁴ When theology consciously goes out of its way to "cherry pick" the laws and texts that it deems admissible into its New Testament theology, its theology as a whole, is thereby diluted. On a similar note, Brownson contests that due to the work of Christ, and the subsequent ushering in of the new covenant, we are no longer bound to the Old Testament laws.²²⁵

Tonstad takes her argument further when discussing the issues of food and circumcision. To begin, Tonstad notes that on several occasions, Paul becomes frustrated over the division between believers who were circumcised and those who were not.²²⁶ In the end, Paul notes that our new identity cannot be and should not be defined by a physical mark on our bodies. Tonstad says, "Insisting that Gentile believers in Christ be circumcised is an irrelevant distraction. What matters is faith working through love."²²⁷ Tonstad goes on to discuss the issue of food by stating that, "The analogy between food and sex runs throughout much of the biblical text."²²⁸ Tonstad claims that Paul discusses food customs more than sexual ethics and that food and circumcision are the determining factors for those who are the "religious insider and outsider in the biblical text."²²⁹ Tonstad mentions Peter on the roof of Cornelius being told by God to eat things that were unclean. Tonstad goes on to say that "Romans 14 makes clear that while Paul believes 'everything is indeed clean' (v.20, NRSV),

²²⁴ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 20.

²²⁵ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 6.

²²⁶ Tonstad mentions Galatians 5:6; 6:15 and Colosians 3:11

²²⁷ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 36.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

if someone believes that something is unclean, then it is, *for that person*.²³⁰ Tonstad concludes the section by reiterating that the conversation on sexual morality in Christian circles should stop, as individuals should be allowed the right to their own conscience to be the deciding factor for what is acceptable.²³¹

Saul Olyan argues that there are translating discrepancies in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 that present significant challenges to a traditional (nonaffirming) interpretation. Olyan's literal translation of Leviticus 18:22 is: "And with a male you shall not lie the lying down of a woman; it is to`eba."²³² Through his in-depth examination of the texts, Saul Olyan says that, "The idiom 'to lie with' means to copulate in other legal and nonlegal contexts, so I think it very likely that it has such a meaning in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 as well, except in this case, anal intercourse is meant."²³³ Olyan goes on to explain how the idiom "to lie with" is used in other legal contexts to establish sexual parameters for men, therefore Olyan suggests that only the active role is punished under the Levitical code. Olyan adds that the masculine singular use of "you" shows that only the active role is condemnable under the Levitical code.²³⁴

Olyan states very clearly that he believes Leviticus 18:22 condemns only the active role as I have shown above, but what about Leviticus 20:13? Olyan acknowledges that Leviticus 20:13 condemns both active and passive roles, yet suggests that the text has undergone "editorial recasting."²³⁵ Olyan references Leviticus 20:10, a verse concerning adultery to show that the man who commits adultery is condemned at first, then the text adds that both the man and woman who commits adultery are condemned under the Levitical code. Olyan suggests that the law formerly only referred to a singular party, but was awkwardly rewritten, or amended to condemn both parties. Olyan says, "In the case of Lev. 20:10, the law originally applied to the adulterer alone; in the case of Lev. 20:13 (as in 18:22), to the insertive partner in a male-male coupling."²³⁶ Olyan goes on to say that if his theory about editorial reworking is correct, then only the active role²³⁷ would have been condemned by the Levitical law in both 18:22 and 20:13 texts.

²³⁰ Ibid., 38.

²³¹ Ibid., 38.

²³² Olyan, *And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman*, 180.

²³³ Ibid., 186.

²³⁴ Ibid., 186.

²³⁵ Ibid., 187.

²³⁶ Ibid., 187.

²³⁷ Olyan utilizes the terminology "insertive" and "receptive" in the place of active and passive as used by Sprinkle.

This chapter has discussed several biblical texts and the corresponding variance of perspectives. Sprinkle's discussion on *kenegdo* is very compelling, but the absence of the term outside of this text does make a reliable translation difficult to ascertain. Conversely, I find it hard to believe that an interpretation of *kenegdo* that reduces Eve's qualification of "suitable" as simply human and not the "same but different" interpretation that Sprinkle employs is lacking. It does follow a similar contextual logic that Sprinkle applies (the naming of the animals), but it does not take seriously the fullness of the word. Moving on to the Sodom and Gomorrah account, I agree with Sprinkle that an accusation cannot be made on something that isn't directly mentioned as is the case. Theology based on conjecture and silence is irresponsible; Boswell's interpretation of *yadah* seems similarly irresponsible as it does not take into consideration its use to describe the virginity of Lot's daughters. Furthermore, Tonstad's suggestion that since everything is permissible according to the New Covenant in Christ, Christians should have the liberty to decide what is appropriate or not. This is an interesting theory, but one that I believe should be handled with extreme caution. I trust humanity, but I still lock my door at night, meaning, I believe that people have the capacity to make the right decisions, unfortunately, that means that they also have the capacity to make the wrong decisions.

Even though Saul Olyan presents a persuasive case on the Leviticus texts, I find the suggestion that Leviticus 20:13 was edited based on the clumsy wording of Leviticus 20:10 is not very convincing. It is clear that while Leviticus 18:22 does condemn the active role only, Leviticus 20:13 removes any type of qualificatory adjustments. The question here is whether this text should fit into a new covenant theology. Sprinkle uses a methodology that validates the Levitical texts by finding mirroring texts in the New Testament. While this is an interesting interpretational strategy, it would be interesting to see if this same strategy was used to validate other Old Testament texts other than the Levitical directives or if this theory was tailor-made for the sake of this conversation.

Chapter Four

NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS

Transitioning to the New Testament is more than just turning the page of a book, but it represents a theology that was written to a Jesus-believing church. This distinction is highly significant and means that the New Testament texts concerning same-sex relations should be handled with care. With the exemption of Acts 8 and the Ethiopian Eunuch as highlighted in *Queer Theology*, this chapter will focus on the New Testament texts that Preston Sprinkle utilized in his book *People to be Loved*. Sprinkle argues that these texts help provide a framework for a sexual ethic that is applicable to the church today, given that these texts were given to inform the first church. It is important to keep in mind the content of chapter two while discussing these texts to maintain a balanced perspective. Furthermore, interpreting these texts must be done through the lens of a Greco-Roman context and culture as discussed in section 2.3.

4.1. The Ethiopian Eunuch

The book of Acts represents the period of time where the church began to build upon its identity. After Jesus left the earth, the task of proselytization and the leadership of the small church was now the responsibility of humans with the help of the Holy Spirit. In the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, we find an individual that Luke identifies both as a “man” and a “eunuch”. The eunuch was reading a text from the book of Isaiah when Phillip approaches him, explains the text and thereafter baptizes the eunuch.²³⁸ Anna Solevåg, a professor at VID Specialized University in Stavanger, Norway²³⁹ posits that the significance of the story is best understood through what she refers to as a “crip reading” in her article titled *No Nuts, No Problem!*²⁴⁰ Solevåg comments that “crip” (slang terminology for crippled) has been reclaimed by people with disabilities in the same way that that the LGBTIQ+ community has

²³⁸ Solevåg, *No Nuts? No Problem!*, 82.

²³⁹ VID, “Employees;” available at <https://www.vid.no/en/employees/anna-rebecca-solevag/> site accessed 23, August 2021

²⁴⁰ Solevåg, *No Nuts? No Problem!*, 81.

reclaimed “queer” as normative language. Solevåg interjects that the simple binaries of heterosexuality and able-bodied are dependent upon their opposite binaries for definition.²⁴¹

Solevåg also utilizes Erving Goffman’s work on “stigma” when recreating the Ethiopian eunuch as an historical figure.²⁴² Goffman notes that Greek culture, where the term stigma originated, relied heavily upon visual aids. Thus, stigma according to the ancient Greeks was a reference to physical blemish inflicted upon an individual to signify a moral depravity in the individual. An individual that carried a stigma would be outcasted and considered a social pariah.²⁴³ Solevåg points out that there were “three main categories of eunuch within the Greco-Roman world: externally-inflicted eunuchs (i.e., enslaved eunuchs), self-made eunuchs, and congenitally ascribed eunuchs.”²⁴⁴ Solevåg refers to Sean Burke’s work in *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch*²⁴⁵ and why ancient rulers saw fit to employ the work of eunuchs. Burke notes that the castrated eunuch was easily subjugated and would therefore pose no threat to the hierarchical power structures in antiquity. Marianne B. Kartzow and Halvor Moxnes noted in their article titled *Complex Identities: Ethnicity, Gender and Religion in the Story of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)*, that men who were castrated were considered trust-worthy servants for women in power as they did not possess the ability to sexually penetrate or to procreate.²⁴⁶

According to Solevåg, of the three different groups of eunuchs mentioned earlier, the most prevalent group in the Roman Empire was the slave eunuch. Acts 8:27 (NASB) says, “And he arose and went; and behold, there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship.”²⁴⁷ Seeing that the eunuch was a “court official of Candace”, it therefore seems likely that both the qualifiers outlined by Burke, and those by Kurtzow and Moxnes would apply to the Ethiopian eunuch. Solevåg adds that his title of “court official”, as

²⁴¹ Ibid., 84-85.

²⁴² Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

²⁴³ Goffman, *Stigma*, 131.

²⁴⁴ Solevåg, “No Nuts? No Problem!,” 86.

²⁴⁵ Sean D. Burke, *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch: Strategies of Ambiguity in Acts* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2013).

²⁴⁶ Marianne B. Kartzow and Halvor Moxnes, “Complex Identities: Ethnicity, Gender, and Religion in the Story of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40),” *Religion & Theology* 17 (2010): 194.

²⁴⁷ Zodhiates, *NASB*, 1448.

well as other indicators such as sitting in the carriage (v.28) and reading a scroll indicate his rank and position over other slaves.²⁴⁸

The topic of gender and identity are crucial in recreating the Ethiopian eunuch as an historical figure. Solevåg says, “Eunuchs were sometimes described as a third gender, or something in between male and female.”²⁴⁹ According to Solevåg, due to varying ages and means of castration, not only was the gender of the eunuch (speaking in general terms) ambiguous, but also the body of the eunuch was considered ambiguous. Solevåg says, “A eunuch was perceived as an ambiguous character, floating between child and adult, between male and female in bodily characteristics and in sexual roles.”²⁵⁰ If Solevåg is correct in thinking that the Ethiopian eunuch was castrated by force, it is also likely that he was castrated pre-puberty, meaning that he never achieved sexual maturation.²⁵¹ Thus, the Ethiopian eunuch we find in Acts 8:26-40 is one that has no gender (or is a third gender as ascribed by Solevåg), and no real identity that he can claim as his own.

The claim that is being made by Solevåg and other scholars is that the baptism of the eunuch justifies his queer identity. Tonstad says, “He is perhaps the first Gentile convert to the way of Jesus. Based on this story, it is simply absurd to have debates about whether trans* and gender-nonconforming people can be included in the church.”²⁵² I certainly agree that all queer people should have a place in the church, but I believe what Tonstad, Solevåg and the other scholars are suggesting could easily be considered a generous “reading between the lines.” The reason I say this, is that I believe that there is a significant difference between those that identify as queer and pre-pubescent individuals who were castrated in order to lock them into a lifelong androgynistic/sexually-ambiguous existence. To be clear, I can appreciate the parallel that these scholars are making; that both the eunuch and queer individuals are not given a choice in their sexuality. However, are we simultaneously disregarding the difference in one being inborn (queer) and the other being forced genitalia mutilation (eunuch)? Is this a story of affirming the sexuality of an individual, or is it the story of comfort, love and acceptance of an individual?

²⁴⁸ Solevåg, “No Nuts? No Problem!,” 90.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 90; 87.

²⁵² Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 26.

With that being said, I believe that what we can learn from this story is how the body of Christ should respond to individuals who identify as non-heteronormative. I believe that this story is the golden standard to how the church should respond to those who identify as queer. Chances are, the identity of the eunuch would have not been disguised, the eunuch's identity would have likely been obvious to some extent. Yet, Peter approached the individual without fear or reservation and met the individual with respect. At no point in the story is there any reason to believe that the eunuch was demeaned or seen as lesser than. This is important. Thereafter, the eunuch received help with the Bible and was baptized, in the same way that a heteronormative individual would be welcomed into church fellowship. To take it one step further, Phillip was seemingly led directly to the eunuch which suggests that God is actively interested in the salvation of humanity regardless of their sexuality. Thus, I certainly agree with Tonstad, queer people should certainly have a place in the church.

I believe that if we are going to consider the usefulness of Acts 8 into this discussion, we must first rectify the significantly different origins of the eunuch and queer people as outlined above. Furthermore, it is difficult to draw any conclusion on the matter as we don't know anything about the eunuch's sexual life following baptism/transformation. Certainly, this eunuch had a great deal of autonomy, so we have to ask if it would have been permissible for the eunuch to abstain from different types of sexual activity (non-hetero) following conversion? We are left to assume the post-conversion life of the eunuch as there are no further records of the individual. With that said, I can appreciate the argument that the eunuch would have been unable to live a heteronormative life as the Bible makes no mention of a physical transformation. Yet, even though the eunuch's sexual identity post-conversion must be classified as queer, I would argue that sexual identity and sexual activity are not synonymous.

4.2. Female Eroticism Condemned?

According to Sprinkle, the first chapter of Romans is likely the most important portion of scripture in the conversation about homosexuality for two primary reasons. First, same-sex relations are adequately outlined in Romans 1 and, two, this is the only place in the entirety of the bible where female homoeroticism is considered. Sprinkle acknowledges the significance of the broader context of Romans 1 which stretches to chapter three. Sprinkle comments that the first section (1:18-32) is judgement toward the Gentiles, the second section (2:1-29) is

equalized judgement for the Jews and the final section (3:1-20) concedes that we are all under sin and in the need of a Savior.²⁵³ Sprinkle provides three observations on Romans 1 that are beneficial for examination. The first two observations fall under this subsection as they are related to female eroticism and gender difference, the third observation is part of a larger discussion that will be further developed in the next subsection.

First, Romans 1:27 (NASB) says, “and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.”²⁵⁴ Sprinkle suggests that the parallelistic language of verse 26 and verse 27 shows that Paul condemned female same-sex relations in the same way that male same-sex relations are condemned. As previously mentioned, female homosexual relations were considered consensual in the ancient world since the social structures for females were not built around pederasty or power differences. Therefore, since verse 26 included judgement for consensual same-sex relations, according to Sprinkle, the parallel of verses 26 and 27 should also consider consensual relationships in the judgment as well. Sprinkle notes that there are no qualifiers in Paul’s language that would bring limitation for the type of same-sex relations that were condemned.²⁵⁵

Second, Sprinkle advocates that Paul is intentional about gender difference in the language he uses. Sprinkle says, “Paul is not just talking about people having illicit sex with people, but females having illicit sex with females, and males with males.”²⁵⁶ Sprinkle contends that the language Paul uses in Romans 1 is a shadow of the language used in Genesis 1. Paul’s employment of creation vocabulary to legitimize his theological perspective shows a departure from God’s original design regarding gender difference in Romans 1:26-27 according to Sprinkle.²⁵⁷ Sprinkle adds that the strong reference to Genesis elevates the words in Romans 1 beyond their immediate contextual boundaries. Sprinkle says that, “If Paul situates the same-sex relations (Romans 1:26-27) in the context of departing from the Creator’s intention, then this suggests that Paul’s words are not limited to some cultural way of behaving.”²⁵⁸ It seems as though Sprinkle is hinting that since Paul was able to apply the

²⁵³ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 87-89.

²⁵⁴ Zodiates, *NASB*, 1487.

²⁵⁵ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 91.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

Genesis account to his Greco-Roman context, there should be nothing prohibiting us from doing the same with our context.

James Brownson interprets Romans 1:26 through the lens of an honor-shame culture. Romans 1:26 (NASB) says, “For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,”²⁵⁹ Brownson suggests that the problem Paul has rests not on the sexual acts of the women, but because “their women” reveals that the women in question were married. Brownson suggests that it was the marital unfaithfulness that the females were engaging in that brought shame to their husbands and writes, “In an honor-shame culture, just about any kind of sexual impropriety on the part of females would be considered shaming the male head of household.”²⁶⁰ Brownson goes on to say that, “such shame is clearly what the writer has in mind here, particularly when we note that there is not a parallel reference to ‘their men’ in the following verse.”²⁶¹

Brownson provides an interesting point of view, however, is the possessive language that Paul uses in Romans 1:26 telling? For Paul to use possessive language in reference to females would have been contextually acceptable, but would it have also been acceptable to use the same possessive language in reference to males? Granted, one could make the claim that Paul used egalitarian type language on occasion, however, those references were generally within the context of the household ethic when Paul was attempting to put order into the home. Since the context of Romans 1 is not directed toward a household ethic, can we assume that Paul is writing about a problem with the Roman sexual ethic?

Another interesting point that I believe merits further attention is the parallelistic language used to describe female and male same-sex relations. If Paul was condemning female eroticism based upon the shame that it would have brought to their households; is it possible that the similarity of language that Paul utilizes in verses 26-27 indicate on some level that there was some form of consensual same-sex relations in the time that Paul was writing? Again, since women were not subject to the designated active and passive sexual roles, it would not have been possible for them to be involved in pederasty or an emasculation

²⁵⁹ Zodiates, *NASB*, 1486-1487.

²⁶⁰ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 207.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

off their passive partner. According to Brownson, a “lesbian reading” of Romans 1:26 was virtually inexistant in the first three centuries of the church with many church fathers interpreting this text to condemn nonprocreative sex.²⁶² According to Brownson, this means that this text could not be referring to consensual female eroticism. Yet, does that mean that just because commentators and early church fathers did not interpret this text through this lens that Paul wasn’t speaking to something obscure, but particular? Since women were written out of the Bible according to many feminist theologians, is it possible that the feminine same-sex relationships were not discussed because they were not seen as significant by their male counterparts, ie. the writers of the texts?

4.3. Contrary to Nature

The third and the final observation from Sprinkle concerning Romans 1 is concerning the Greek phrase *para physin*, found in Romans 1:26, which Sprinkle translates as “unnatural” or “contrary to nature”.²⁶³ Sprinkle lays out what he considers to be the two primary interpretations from affirming scholars concerning *para physin*. First is the interpretation that Paul considers same-sex intercourse to be wrong (unnatural) based on the inability to procreate. Sprinkle suggests that this would mean that any type of contraceptive device or surgery would also fall into the *para physin* discussion, not only same-sex intercourse. According to Sprinkle, Paul never mentions procreation in his writings, therefore to apply this interpretation to this specific text is misleading. According to Sprinkle, Paul even goes to such great lengths to suggest sexual intercourse for the sake of pacifying sexual urges in 1 Corinthians, thus to suggest that intercourse should be limited to procreation is difficult to rectify.²⁶⁴ The other affirming interpretation that Sprinkle confronts is that *para physin* is ‘contrary to culture’ because it emasculates the passive sexual partner.²⁶⁵ It is important to understand that Sprinkle considers Paul’s writings to represent a perspective that was contrary to the male-hierarchical perspective of his context. As we have discussed earlier, Sprinkle contends that since Paul elevates women to a position of status, thus *para physin* cannot be used to suggest that there was condemnation due to the passive role being emasculated in same-sex relations.

²⁶² *ibid.*, 207.

²⁶³ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 94.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁶⁵ Sprinkle’s perspective on masculinity is covered in greater detail in section 2.3.1

According to Sprinkle, the translation of *para physin* is complicated and deserves exploration. Sprinkle shows that *para physin* is also used in Romans 11 when Paul explains the ‘unnatural’ nature of Gentiles being grafted into the covenant promises of God.²⁶⁶ In order to bring clarity to *para physin*, Sprinkle enlists the help of ancient writers to examine how they used the term. Sprinkle summarizes that these ancient writers believed that nonprocreative sex was wrong, but not ‘wrong enough’ to justify the use of *para physin*.²⁶⁷ Sprinkle adds, “As far as I can tell, the phrase *para physin* is never used to speak of immoral forms of heterosexual sex.”²⁶⁸ The suggestion that Sprinkle is making is that same-sex relations were *para physin* not only because of the type of sin, but because of the value of the sin since the ancient writers did not consider other sexual sins on similar level of severity as same-sex relations.

Brownson devotes a considerable amount of space in his book *Bible, Gender, Sexuality* to the interpretation of Romans 1:26-27. He begins by suggesting that the use of the word “exchange” makes it clear that what he is referring to carries negative connotations. Yet, Brownson says, “We have not yet discerned *why* the sexual behavior described in these verses is wrong - what, more precisely, makes such behavior ‘unnatural.’”²⁶⁹ Brownson provides several different interpretations to *para physin* including Boswell’s interpretation. According to Brownson, Boswell suggests that Paul’s use of *para physin* was in reference to heterosexual individuals who were engaging in homosexual activity. Thus, this homosexual activity trespassed the “natural” sexual nature of these heterosexual individuals. According to Boswell, since these people were heterosexuals engaging in homosexual relations, this verse does not apply to those who are “naturally” (God-given) attracted to the same sex.²⁷⁰ Another interpretation provided by Brownson is one that understands the word “nature” through the problematic lens of historical distance. “Nature” was then the way that sex and sexuality had been understood and perceived throughout history. This means that *para physin*, through this interpretation, could suggest that it wasn’t necessarily wrong to go against nature, since what was “nature” was simply the historical perception of sex and sexuality.²⁷¹

²⁶⁶ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 94.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 96-97; 211.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁶⁹ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 224.

²⁷⁰ Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 107 in Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 43.

²⁷¹ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 43.

Tonstad understands and interprets the meaning of *para physin* through a different lens.²⁷² Using Eugene Rogers' work in *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God*,²⁷³ Tonstad recognizes the need for a more nuanced interpretation of *para physin* using the Matthew 1 genealogy of Jesus as a basis. Tonstad shows that,

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus includes Tamar, who dressed up like a sex worker in order to get pregnant by her father-in-law, Judah; Rahab, a Canaanite sex worker; Ruth, a Moabite woman (so, in biblical logic, descended from the sexual intercourse or rape of a drunken and insensible Lot by his older daughter); and the unnamed Bathsheba, Uriah's wife stolen by king David after he spied on (stalked?) her bathing.²⁷⁴

The point that Tonstad is making is that Jesus' genealogy is not one that is neat and tidy, but one that could be defined as 'outside the natural designations'. Tonstad points to Romans 9-11 where Paul explains that the nature of Gentile inclusion into the covenant of Abraham was something that could certainly be considered "contrary" or "against" nature. Romans 11:24 (NASB) says, "For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree?"²⁷⁵ Tonstad says, "Gentile Christians deny God's action beyond or against nature to their peril, since it is only on that condition that they themselves get into the divine covenant at all."²⁷⁶

To summarize *para physin* is no easy task. I find Brownson's arguments that interprets "nature" as a sexual expression and an historical understanding of sex that was commonly accepted by Paul and his readers to be logical. This argument seems to be very likely, and one that fits into Paul's linguistic and theological mode of communication, but is it possible that Sprinkle's contribution to the discussion on *para physin* is far short of spectacular which is similar to Tonstad's, highly theoretical without much relevance. I do find his critique of different affirming interpretations to be insightful and agree with Sprinkle that it is unlikely that Paul's *para physin* reference was regarding procreation. The point of this research is

²⁷² There is a slight discrepancy in interpretation of *para physin* as "In excess of nature" is Tonstad's own, and "beyond nature" is a reference to the vernacular Rogers' employed, yet the meaning is mirrored with both Tonstad and Sprinkle.

²⁷³ Eugene F. Rogers Jr., *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God. Challenges in Contemporary Theology*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999)

²⁷⁴ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 39-40.

²⁷⁵ Zodiates, *NASB*, 1500.

²⁷⁶ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 39.

4.4. Excessive Lust

Romans 1:24 (NASB) says, “Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them.”²⁷⁷ In a journal article titled *Paul and Homosexual Behavior: A Critical Evaluation of the Excessive-Lust Interpretation of Romans 1:26-27*²⁷⁸, Sprinkle discusses and critiques the excessive-lust reading of Romans 1:26-27 as presented by Brownson and other affirming scholars. According to Sprinkle, the excessive-lust theory holds that Paul condemns same-sex relations in Romans 1:26-27, yet only a particular form of same-sex behavior. Sprinkle says, “Paul critiques a specific type of homoerotism that is marked by excessive lust, lack of self-control, and overindulgence.”²⁷⁹ Sprinkle contends that the perception that same-sex relations were the product of excessive lust was common in antiquity. Sprinkle provides several examples from different sources that support this claim including the Greek physicians Soranus, Dio Chysostom, and Plato. Brownson says that,

“...whenever same-sex eroticism is viewed negatively, particularly in sources contemporaneous with Paul, it is regarded as a particular manifestation of self-centered lust, one that is not content with women alone but is driven to ever-more exotic and unnatural forms of stimulation in the pursuit of pleasure. It represents the pinnacle of wanton self-indulgence at the expense of others.”²⁸⁰

In addition to the historical evidence of the theory, Sprinkle shows that Paul’s language throughout Romans 1 supports the excessive-lust theory. Sprinkle goes on to show that verse twenty-four uses the language “the lusts of their hearts” where verses twenty-six and twenty-seven refer to “passion(s)”.²⁸¹ Those who support the excessive-lust theory suggest that in addition to the stoic language that Paul uses, since same-sex orientation as a construct was missing during Paul’s time and context, the excessive-lust theory could have certainly been what Paul was referring to.²⁸²

Sprinkle’s defense of the excessive-lust theory is five-fold. First, Sprinkle suggests that even though many ancient writers support the excessive-lust theory, the support is not

²⁷⁷ Zodhiates, *NASB*, 1486.

²⁷⁸ Preston Sprinkle, “Paul and Homosexual Behavior: A Critical Evaluation of the Excessive-Lust Interpretation of Romans 1:26-27,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 25 (2015) : 497-517.

²⁷⁹ Sprinkle, *Paul and Homosexual Behavior*, 498.

²⁸⁰ Brownson, *Bible. Gender, Sexuality*, 156. in Sprinkle, *Paul and Homosexual Behavior*, 499.

²⁸¹ Sprinkle, *Paul and Homosexual Behavior*, 500.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 500.

unanimous and goes so far to say that Brownson and other affirming scholars only mention the ancient writers that support their theory. Second, Sprinkle says that “...there is plenty of evidence that the ancients did explore the biological influence on same-sex desires.”²⁸³ While Sprinkle goes on to admit that our modern-day understanding of sexual orientation would have been somewhat foreign to ancient readers, Sprinkle suggests that there are significant similarities that are often overlooked. Third, Sprinkle points out that Paul’s mention of female homoeroticism in Romans 1:26 quickly put to rest the excessive-lust theory as female homoeroticism was perceived in a very different way than male homoeroticism.²⁸⁴ (This point is discussed further in subsection 4.2.) Fourth, Sprinkle contests that Paul’s inclusion of the Genesis account refutes the excessive-lust theory. (This point is also discussed in subsection 4.2.) Lastly, Sprinkle says that Paul’s language and condemnation of same-sex relations is far too extensive to be limited to a particular and specific critique of excessive lust.²⁸⁵

The excessive-lust theory provides an interesting perspective on Romans 1. Yet, I find that the arguments used to support the theory are utilized to draw attention away from what Paul was condemning in these verses. The Bible, on several occasions teaches us that it is not wrong to be tempted, but it is what we do in response to the temptation that is what condemns us. For example, if an individual were convicted of murder and they accepted the charge but stated that the reason they murdered was because they were overcome with anger. This individual would not be acquitted based upon their reasoning. To be clear, I am not suggesting that there is any sort of comparison between murder and same-sex relations, but I am comparing the logic of these two ideas. The reasoning behind our sin and what leads us to sin is important, but it does not excuse our sin.

4.5. Malakoi and Arsenokoites

Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth is the second longest letter written behind the book of Romans. Pauline authorship is generally not contested and New Testament Professor Stanley Porter in his book *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters*²⁸⁶ suggests that the first letter to the church in Corinth was written from Ephesus between 53-55 C.E. According to Porter, the city of Corinth was a center-point in the ancient world for everything from

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 501.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 506.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 501.

²⁸⁶ Stanley E. Porter, *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016).

commerce and trade to religion and entertainment.²⁸⁷ To begin, we must first look at 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NASB), the text that includes both *malakoi* and *arsenokoites*.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.²⁸⁸

According to Sprinkle, *malakoi* (the plural of *malakos*) can be translated as “soft” or “delicate” as it is similarly used in Matthew 11:8 to describe a garment. Here in 1 Corinthians 6:9, the NASB translates *malakoi* as “effeminate.” Sprinkle says that the use of *malakoi* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 is used to describe a type of person, and given the immediate context of the text, it is clear that there is sinful action connected to the *malakoi*. Sprinkle acknowledges that 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 situates the *malakoi* amongst other types of sin in, and Paul’s intended audience would have acknowledged fornicators, thieves, covetors, etc. as sinful individuals without much question. With that said, Sprinkle also notes that Paul never uses the term *malakos* outside of 1 Corinthians, so verification of what Paul was saying using other examples is not possible. Therefore, Sprinkle examines the usage of *malakoi* by other writers within the Greco-Roman context to ascertain the meaning of the word.²⁸⁹

According to Sprinkle, the term *malakoi* was used to describe individuals that appeared to be women. Sprinkle says, “I am talking about men who fundamentally confused gender distinctions. They acted like women or talked like women, perhaps smelled like women, or they had sex like women; that is, they received sex from other men.”²⁹⁰ Sprinkle goes on to clarify that *malakoi* “...does not in itself mean ‘the passive partner in male homosexual intercourse.’ The word is much broader than that.”²⁹¹ Sprinkle provides the example that individuals that shaved the hair off of their chest were generally understood to be *malakos*. Thus, since chest hair was a visible sign of masculinity, the removal of chest hair would be a social sign of effeminacy. Sprinkle clarifies to say that men who removed their body hair also played the passive role in intercourse with other men.²⁹² Suffice it to say that Sprinkle believes that *Malakos* generally described men who were effeminate, yet there was

²⁸⁷ Porter, *The Apostle Paul*, 244-249.

²⁸⁸ Zodiates, *NASB*, 1513.

²⁸⁹ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 106.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 107.

an assumption that they were also the passive partner in sexual intercourse. Sprinkle says very clearly, “Put differently, not every person accused of being a *malakos* necessarily engaged in sex with other men, but every man who played the passive role in homosexual sex could be called *malakos*.”²⁹³ Additionally, Tonstad makes an important observation that the softness suggested with *malakoi* is likely more pertaining to gender boundaries than it is pertaining to sexuality.²⁹⁴

Sprinkle concludes the section on *malakoi* by acknowledging that the word is used without further clarification. Sprinkle avoids a definitive clarification by saying that, “...it probably refers to effeminacy in the Roman sense; that is, a man who is trying to be a woman.”²⁹⁵ However, it is important to note that the term is culturally conditioned according to Sprinkle. In the additional notes in the back of *People to be Loved*, Sprinkle acknowledges that the way in which the Roman culture would have understood ideas of masculinity and effeminacy in a much different way than we do today. Therefore, according to Sprinkle, the term *malakos* cannot be interjected or transfused into modern notions of homosexuality.²⁹⁶

Moving on to *arsenokoites*, Sprinkle is quick to acknowledge that for him, this is where the heart of the debate lies. He says, “Again, figuring out the meaning of *arsenokoites* is crucial for understanding what the New Testament says about homosexuality.”²⁹⁷ With that said, Sprinkle shows that there are challenges associated with the translation of *arsenokoites*. Sprinkle tells the story of how in 2008, an attorney from Michigan sued Zondervan Publishing House for their translation of the Greek word *arsenokoites* to “homosexual offenders.”²⁹⁸ Sprinkle suggests that the word “offenders” is far-too vague, leaving much room for the questioning of ‘who’ or ‘what’ is the subject of the offence. Additionally, “homosexual” indicates same-sex attraction, not sexual intercourse, thus Sprinkle comments that this translation is incomplete and in need of replacement.

²⁹³ Ibid., 107.

²⁹⁴ Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, in Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 22.

²⁹⁵ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 107.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 214.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 112.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 103.

Daniel Helminiak suggests that no one person knows what *arsenokoites* means, therefore the use of them against homosexuals is wrong.²⁹⁹ In a similar tone, Yale scholar Dale Martin said in an article that, “I am not claiming to know what *arsenokoites* meant. I am claiming that no one knows what it meant.”³⁰⁰ Sprinkle acknowledges that even though many interpreters claim that this word is impossible to translate, it has not prohibited them from having their own interpretations printed and published. The difference in interpretation is best understood through the difference of the affirming and nonaffirming camps. Sprinkle notes that affirming scholars interpret *arsenokoites* in terms of sexual exploitation which would leave the bible verses that contain these verses insignificant to our modern day understanding of same-sex relationships. On the other hand, Sprinkle says that nonaffirming scholars tend to interpret these words as the active (*arsenokoites*) and the passive (*malakoi*) partners in same-sex intercourse.³⁰¹

To provide some context to the complications of translation, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 is the first time that this word is ever used in the entirety of Greek literature that we have.³⁰² Brownson says that, “The word *arsenokoitēs*, for example, does not occur in any extrabiblical Greek texts that are prior to or contemporaneous with the biblical writings, so it is difficult to ascertain its precise meaning via comparison with other contemporary or earlier texts.”³⁰³ Another challenge that Sprinkle notes is that, similar to *malakoi*, *arsenokoites* is used in 1 Corinthians 6 alongside a number of other transgressions. There are no qualificatory or clarifying statements ascribed to what an *arsenokoites* is, simply that they are sinful in the eyes of Paul. Given these complications, Sprinkle provides four points that contributed to developing his translation of *arsenokoites*.³⁰⁴

First, Sprinkle provides that *arsenokoites* is a compound word consisting of two Greek words, *arsen* and *koite*. Sprinkle contests that *arsen* should be translated “male”, even though other translations utilize the word “man” which would suggest that an *arsen* was an adult. Sprinkle holds that *arsen* could be a male of any age. Sprinkle continues on to say that *koite*

²⁹⁹ Daniel Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* (New Mexico: Alamo Square Press, 2000), 107. in Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 105

³⁰⁰ Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 43. in Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 105.

³⁰¹ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 105-106.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁰³ Brownston, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 42.

³⁰⁴ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 108.

simply means “bed”, yet it can also translate with sexual connotations such as “to sleep with.” Sprinkle suggests that other compound words that include *koite* are often sexually suggestive. Sprinkle provides the two examples; *doulokoites* is an individual who sleeps with slaves, and *metrokoites* is a person who sleeps with their mother.³⁰⁵ In the reference section of *People to be Loved*, Sprinkle incorporates the important work of David Wright, who shows that the words cannot be switched around to create a different translation. Wright contests that the first part of the compound is the object, while the second part provides definition to the object. Thus, *arsen* (the object) *koite* (the clarifier), can define someone who sleeps with men, but it cannot define a man who engages in casual sex with a number of people according to Wright.³⁰⁶ Before moving on to Sprinkle’s other points, Dale Martin suggests that one must be very careful in determining the meaning of a word based upon its individual parts.³⁰⁷ This doesn’t mean that *arsenokoites* cannot describe a male who has sex with other males, but Martin’s cautioning shows that further proof is required in order to produce a translation of *arsenokoites*.

The second point that Sprinkle highlights is the use of *arsenokoites* in the Old Testament. Sprinkle acknowledges that the term *arsenokoites* is not used throughout the Hebrew Old Testament, yet most New Testament writers read the “Septuagint” (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament). Thus, in the Septuagint, Sprinkle notes that the words *arsen* and *koite* are used in near proximity in the only two verses in the Old Testament that speak directly on the theme of same-sex relations. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 have been covered in subsection 3.3., but their usage of “*arsenos*” and “*koiten*” are of particular interest to Sprinkle.³⁰⁸ Sprinkle posits the question,

Put differently, is it possible that Paul uses a compound word *arsenokoites*, the parts of which can conceivably mean ‘one who sleeps with males,’ and does not have Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 in view - the only two verses in the entire Old Testament that talk about men sleeping with males?³⁰⁹

Sprinkle goes on to suggest that it is possible that Paul was not considering Leviticus when he uses (or possibly creates) the word *arsenokoites*, but he finds it unlikely.³¹⁰ James

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 108.

³⁰⁶ David Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes?: The Meaning of *Arsenokoitai* (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10),” VC38 (1984): 125-153. in Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 215.

³⁰⁷ Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 39. in Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 109.

³⁰⁸ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 110.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 110.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 110.

Brownson expresses that this line of thinking lacks substantial and concrete evidence. Brownson also adds that there is a more overarching problem with assuming that the Levitical directive is concerning biological gender difference seeing that there is not a correlating directive for female-female relations in Leviticus.³¹¹ Brownson acknowledges that female-female relations were not widely discussed in antiquity, yet if both males and females were commanded to refrain from sexual activity with animals (mentioned in both Leviticus 18:23 and 20:15-16), then why is there no prohibition against female-female relations? Brownson says, “There is even scant evidence of bestiality in the ancient world than there is of same-sex erotic relationships; yet the rarity of the case does not prevent the author of Leviticus from forbidding both male and female sex with animals.”³¹²

Sprinkle’s third point considers the use of *arsenokoites* in later Jewish literature. To begin, Sprinkle looks at the use of *arsenokoites* by a Greek-speaking Jew that wrote about a hundred years after the time of Paul. Sprinkle contends that this individual would not have found *arsenokoites* in the Corinthian letter given that the individual was a Jew. Sprinkle suggests that it is possible that this individual borrowed the translation from the Leviticus texts in a similar way that Paul did, but this is only speculation. The actual usage of the word by this individual does not give any clarification to the potential meaning of *arsenokoites*, yet Sprinkle notes that it is important to highlight that there was another Jew that used the Greek word aside from Paul.³¹³

Sprinkle also takes time to recognize that there were many Jewish writers that used the Hebrew equivalent (*mishkab zakur*) to the Greek word *arsenokoites*. According to Sprinkle, *mishkab zakur* (“lying with a male”) reflects Leviticus 18 and 20 original vocabulary and was commonly used throughout Judaism to define same-sex relations.³¹⁴ Sprinkle goes on to explain that *mishkab zakur* was in use around the same time as Paul, or shortly after. He says that, “It’s quite possible that Paul’s seemingly rare use of *arsenokoites* is simply a Greek version of a Hebrew phrase that was already in use; namely, *mishkab zakur*.”³¹⁵ Sprinkle argues that this is highly significant because of the similarity of the two phrases and their connection to Leviticus. This in correlation to the fact that Paul was bilingual, fluent in both

³¹¹ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 271.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 272.

³¹³ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 111.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

Greek and Hebrew, leaves room for us to consider that Paul created a Greek word from a commonly used Hebrew phrase used to describe same-sex relations.³¹⁶

Before moving on to Sprinkle's final point, some comments must be made about Sprinkle's use of *mishkab zakur*. If it is true that Paul "borrowed" from the Hebrew phrase *mishkab zakur* in order to create *arsenokoites*, would that not mean that Paul is forcibly interjecting a Judaic term and ideology on same-sex relations into a New Testament and non-Jewish audience/context? There are a number of complex questions that must be answered following this line of introspection, such as, 'is it possible to transplant a phrase while simultaneously disconnecting its ideology from its meaning?' If one is unable to disconnect meaning from ideology, one must also apply Judaic ideology into a New Testament sexual ethic. This becomes very problematic for nonaffirming scholars as it would certainly nullify the applicability of *arsenokoites* in Pauline literature. Such questions will not be fully developed in this place, yet it is interesting that Sprinkle would go to such great lengths to connect *arsenokoites* to Judaic terminology.

Furthermore, Sprinkle's inclusion of the Greek-speaking Jew that also used the word *arsenokoites* some time after Paul needs further clarification. Sprinkle contends that this individual would not have found this word from a 1 Corinthians reading because the individual was Jewish. We must question this assumption based upon its failed logic. If this Jewish individual was Greek speaking, what would be the difference between them and Paul? It seems plausible that this individual could have potentially been a follower of Paul. If the individual was Greek speaking, how can we differentiate this individual from Paul other than from their scope of influence? Paul was obviously far more influential seeing that Sprinkle does not even provide the name of the other individual. It seems that it would be very difficult, if not impossible to be sure that this other individual did not read the letter to the church in Corinth and adopted *arsenokoites* into their vocabulary.

Sprinkle's final point takes an introspective look at other later uses of *arsenokoites* in order to provide definition to the word. Sprinkle notes that these uses would have been unknown to Paul seeing as they were pinned at a later time, thus they cannot be used in clarifying or determining what Paul understood by *arsenokoites*. Yet, these usages provide an

³¹⁶ Ibid., 111-112.

understanding to how other authors perceived *arsenokoites*.³¹⁷ The earliest reference of *arsenokoites* is from an early church theologian named Hippolytus (AD 170-235) who wrote:

The serpent (*Naas* from Hebrew *naas*, “snake”) approached Eve and after deceiving her committed adultery with her, which is contrary to the law; and he also approached Adam and possessed him like a boy, which is also itself contrary to the law. From that time on, adultery and *arsenokoitia* have come into being.³¹⁸

Sprinkle posits that the use of *arsenokoitia* here provides clarification to how other theologians and authors would have understood Paul’s vocabulary in 1 Corinthians 6. The phrase “possessed him like a boy” is potentially problematic as it could be interpreted as pederasty, yet Sprinkle points out that Adam was a man, not a boy, thus such translations do not fit into *arsenokoitia*. In addition, there was a common term used for pederasty, so there would be no need for suggestive language.³¹⁹ Sprinkle continues on with two more examples from various early church fathers in addition to Latin, Coptic, and Syriac translations of the bible to show that they as well support the interpretation of *arsenokoites* to define men that have sexual intercourse with other men.³²⁰

I find that of Sprinkle’s four points, the first two present a logical explanation that requires little stretching and morphing in order to provide some foundational parameters for defining *arsenokoites*. It seems to me that the compound word is a clear reference to males who have sex with other males. Furthermore, it is certainly possible that Paul formulated the term *arsenokoites* following the Levitical directive. The final two points that Sprinkle discusses become more problematic as they require so much to find validation. I have already critiqued Sprinkle’s third point and I find that his final point is loose and requires further explanation. Sprinkle concludes this section by commenting that the defining clarifications that he provides are not sufficient to conclude a definition for *arsenokoites* when considered in singularity, yet there is good evidence when considering all four clarifications simultaneously.³²¹

³¹⁷ Ibid., 112.

³¹⁸ *Refutation of All Heresies* 5.26.22-23 in Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 112-113.

³¹⁹ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 113.

³²⁰ Ibid., 113-115.

³²¹ Ibid., 116.

We should keep in mind that Paul utilized two separate words in order to communicate what he was intending to communicate. James Brownson makes an important observation saying,

But the most important thing to recognize is that there are two words, not just one. Most scholars recognize that the presence of these two words reflects widespread assumptions throughout the ancient world about male-male homosexual activity: almost all the documents discussing male same-sex eroticism assume a distinction between active older men (commonly referred to in Greek as *erastai*) and passive younger males (commonly referred to as *erōmenoi*)- in other words, the practice of pederasty.³²²

Brownson points out that the list of transgressions in 1 Corinthians 6 does not discuss same-sex relations with a singular word, yet uses the two words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*.³²³ Using this vein of interpretation, it seems possible that Paul was referring to pederastic sexual relations. If this is the case, 1 Corinthians 6 cannot be used to inform our modern-day sexual ethic in regards to same-sex relations as pederasty is in no way reflected in monogamous, committed, and amicable same-sex relationships. The argumentation for pederasty is a significant stumbling block for nonaffirming scholars as it relegates the use of *arsenokoites* to a context that is far removed from our modern context. However, as briefly mentioned earlier, Sprinkle argues that if Paul was referring to pederasty (which would have certainly been considered transgressional as well according to Sprinkle), he could have used the common vocabulary for pederasty. Sprinkle says, “For instance, the Greek word *paiderastes* was widely used to refer to ‘the love of boys,’ as was *paidophthoros* (‘corruptor of boys’) or *paidophthoreo* (‘seducer of boys’).”³²⁴ Paul also uses *arsenokoites* as well in 1 Timothy 1:10 (NASB).

But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching,³²⁵

In this text, Paul utilizes *arsenokoites* without *malakoi* while referencing the Mosaic Law. According to Sprinkle, Paul follows the chronological order of the Ten Commandments

³²² Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 274.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 273.

³²⁴ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 116.

³²⁵ 1 Timothy 1:8-10, Zodiates, *NASB*, 1513.

while showing the application of the Mosaic Law in the new Covenant. Sprinkle says, “The Ten Commandments, however, were believed to be the fountainhead for all other laws that come after it.”³²⁶ With this in mind, Sprinkle posits that *arsenokoites* is in line, and flows from the seventh commandment regarding adultery. Sprinkle admits that the usage of *arsenokoites* in 1 Timothy 1:10 is very similar to its usage in 1 Corinthians 6; there appears no additional clarification or definition to the meaning of the word, only that it is sinful according to Paul.³²⁷

One could argue that the difference between the usage of *arsenokoites* in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians is that *malakoi* is not included into the list of transgressions. Could this be Paul utilizing *arsenokoites* as a singular word describing same-sex relations? If it is not to be understood as a singular word that describes same-sex relations, can it be understood as the active role of same-sex relations? Furthermore, using Brownson’s argument, can *arsenokoites* be used to describe pederasty if it is not used alongside *malakoi* in the same way as in 1 Corinthians? Seeing that Paul used the word *arsenokoites* only two times in his writing, if he was referring to pederasty in 1 Corinthians as Brownson suggests, shouldn’t 1 Timothy also include *malakoi* if pederasty was what Paul was writing about? Sprinkle stops short in his discussion on 1 Timothy 1:10 and fails to make this connection, but it seems as though the absence of *malakoi* is problematic for those who would say that Paul is referring to pederasty and pederasty alone.

Brownson interprets *arsenokoites* by inspecting the terminology before and after *arsenokoites* as interpretive guides. Brownson suggest that when Paul says, “immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers”³²⁸ the three words are intentionally used in union to reference an ancient sex trade. Brownson says that *andropodistes* (translated in the NASB as “kidnappers”), shows that there were specific individuals that stole younger boys.³²⁹ Brownson goes on to explain how the three terms work in correlation to one another,

Many scholars believe that the three terms belong together in this list: that is, we see kidnappers or slave dealers (*andropodistai*) acting as “pimps” for their captured and castrated boys (the *pornoi*, or male prostitutes), servicing the *arsenokoitai*, the men who make use of these boy prostitutes.³³⁰

³²⁶ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 118.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

³²⁸ Zodhiates, *NASB*, 1513.

³²⁹ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 43.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 274.

If Paul was writing in reference to an ancient sex trade in 1 Timothy, then our understanding of *arsenokoitai* must reflect this fact. Meaning that, we cannot use 1 Timothy as an interpretive tool for understanding what Paul intended. It does seem like a logical argument seeing that the three words are used in sequence, however, it is peculiar that Paul would single out the sex trade specifically in the midst of naming all of the other transgressions in 1 Timothy 1:10. Also, it is interesting that before Paul moves on to giving thanks, he concludes this section by saying, “and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.”³³¹ Why would Paul use inclusive and general language to conclude what he was saying when he was also speaking in reference to something very specific simultaneously? Again, Sprinkle contends that Paul is following the Ten Commandments in his list of transgressions. This also seems like a logical conclusion, yet similar to Brownson’s theory, it is not without problems. Sprinkle suggests that Paul was following the ordering of the Ten Commandments which connects Leviticus 18 and 20 interpretations of *arsenokoites*.³³² Yet, can we be sure that Paul was intentionally drawing from the Ten Commandments as he was writing 1 Timothy? Is it possible that the ordering of transgressions in 1 Timothy followed a similar pattern of the Ten Commandments was not intentional, but only by chance?

Before moving forward, Brownson reminds us that

In the ancient world, if a ceased engaging in same-sex erotic behavior, or ceased engaging in prostitution, or no longer was involved in cultic activity, or simply avoided sexual vice (depending on one’s specific interpretation of the relevant terms), he was no longer a *malakos* or an *arsenokoitēs*.³³³

However, as Brownson points out, if a queer individual in the modern time refrains from non-hetero sexual intercourse, they are still considered (and would likely still consider themselves to be) queer. This shows the importance and value of our perception of sexual orientation and same-sex attraction because of their ability to influence our understanding of these ancient terms.

As we have seen in this section, the interpretation of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* are crucial to the conversation of queer and Christian, yet these terms remain without an indisputable interpretation. I believe that the compound of *arsen* and *koite* certainly reveals

³³¹ Zodiates, *NASB*, 1513.

³³² Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 118.

³³³ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 172.

that Paul was referring to males who were having sex with males, but is this understanding sufficient to assume that Paul was condemning our modern day understanding of committed, monogamous, same-sex relationships? It would be illogical to think that Paul was writing in reference to something that either did not exist at this time, or was such a cultural oddity that virtually no one spoke of it. I find it highly likely that Paul was writing in reference to pederasty in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. With that said, it does seem like Paul was writing to establish a sexual ethic in the New Testament church of a very high standard.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

5.1. Conclusion

One of the reasons I decided to pursue a master's degree is because I wanted to devote a significant amount of time to answer the question, "*What are the biblical and theological arguments that support the condemnation, or endorsement, of same-sex relations?*" Over the course of my research, I have read books and articles that have provided convincing argumentation in one direction, only to read different books that convinced me in another direction. This is, in part, due to the wise counsel that I received from my supervisor encouraging me to not begin my research with a conclusion in mind.

In conclusion, I am reminded of what Sprinkle says so eloquently, "Shallow answers to complex questions are offensive to our God-given minds and they fail to shape our hearts into being more like Jesus'."³³⁴ Thus, my aim has been to provide an answer to my research question that is honest and truthful to my research material while not shying away from the contemptuous society and culture that I live in. As I have shown, the biblical and theological arguments on the condemning or endorsement of same-sex relations are nuanced and complex. However, these arguments are also logically grounded and are constructed along a linear path that is reasonable. I believe that the difference in the affirming and nonaffirming arguments is in their different methods of theological formulation. The difference in theological perspectives on same-sex relations is crucially dependent upon the interpretational framework you begin with. Taking into consideration Cheng's sources for defining queer theology (Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience),³³⁵ and Hays' four tasks for biblical interpretation, it is clear that the points of emphasis that one applies will be the responsible facet for the development of theological formulation. Whether one purposefully evaluates their method for theological formulation beforehand (for example, deciding what 'source' will

³³⁴ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 24.

³³⁵ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 11.

take precedent in theological formulation), or one allows the theological formulation to occur in an “organic” manner (unconsciously formulating theology), everyone will formulate theology differently. Again, I believe that the difference between affirming and nonaffirming perspectives is due to the variance of theological formation, not a matter of right or wrong. An empirical response of right or wrong is lacking reflection on the subject and often leads to further polarization of theological differences. The question is, is there a method of theological formulation that is empirically better than the other?

I am a pastor in Pinsebevegelsen (Pentecostal movement in Norway), and was raised as a conservative Christian, however, I now appreciate the affirming position in a new and honest way. I can certainly understand and appreciate affirming perceptions and the challenges of historical distance, the diminished dignity endured by queer individuals, problems with *hapax legomenon*³³⁶, etc. At the same time, I can appreciate nonaffirming perceptions and their respective arguments that have been presented throughout this research.

To answer the question, *In a comparison of Linn Tonstad and Preston Sprinkle, what are the similarities and differences of their theological perspectives?* We must first begin by understanding that Sprinkle and Tonstad are scholars within two very different fields of research. Sprinkle’s book (*People to be Loved*) provides various apologetic strategies, while Tonstad suggests that queer theology should have no place in apologetic strategies and that people should be governed by their own conscious in relation to God.³³⁷ Thus, their differences are in the formation of their theology. With that said, I believe that there are many similarities between Tonstad and Sprinkle. I believe that they both show respect toward those who express different perspectives, thus avoiding increased polarization of the subject. I believe that they both value the biblical text and strive to find answers to difficult questions. Finally, I believe both Sprinkle and Tonstad have a genuine love for humanity.

5.2. Recommendations for Further Research

One of the first things that stood out to me through reading *Queer Theology* by Tonstad is the importance of human sexuality. I believe it to be true that when sexuality is perceived and

³³⁶ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 21. (Words that were only used once in the Bible therefore have no further clarification than their singular source.)

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

comprehended only through the lens of heteronormativity, there is potential to overlook its significance, as is certainly my case. I have based a significant portion of my decisions on my sexuality without even thinking twice about it. Therefore, I believe that nonaffirming theology has created certain ecumenical measures without considering the significance of sexuality. James Brownson challenges the modern church approach to queer individuals by saying, "...it claims to welcome gay and lesbian persons who experience same-sex attraction, but it simply refuses to affirm same-sex erotic behavior. Such a posture, however, may not be as welcoming as it seems."³³⁸

The ecumenical response to queer individuals who desire to be included into the church that I am most familiar with is critiqued by Brownson above. It has been a response that says, 'you are welcome in the door, but don't expect any leadership responsibility.' This nonaffirming response allows the church to slide into ambiguity without dealing with the challenge. However, how long will this response be sufficient? Is it sufficient now? I would argue that it is not and needs work.

Another challenge raised by affirming scholars is the topic of radical love covered in subsection 2.5. In this subsection there was discussion on sin, ethics, and justice as future theological concepts that Tonstad suggested. I believe that there should be a nonaffirming challenge to this that highlights the doctrines of grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Generally speaking, if there is to be a theological effort to omit the term "sin" and replace it with the terms "ethics and justice", there should be an examination of what this means for our doctrine of salvation.

Furthermore, there were many topics that were not covered in this thesis due to scope of the paper and a commitment to answer the research question in the best way possible. Therefore, there are three topics that deserve further attention. First) Jewish perceptions on procreation and gender, second) symbols (modern day and ancient symbols pertaining to gender and sexuality) and third) a nonaffirming response to Sprinkle's interpretation of *kenegdo*.

³³⁸ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 172.

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