

The Bible and Homosexuality

Annotated bibliography by Jonathan Tallon

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The following is a selection of resources, of differing viewpoints, scholarly status, popularity and quality. It is not comprehensive, but does give a flavour of the variety of views in this area.

A Reader: Writings to Resource Conversations, Grace and Disagreement: Shared Conversations on Scripture, Mission and Human Sexuality. London: The Archbishops' Council, 2014.

These essays were provided as resources for the Shared Conversations process within the Church of England. The two essays by Ian Paul and Loveday Alexander deal most directly with the Bible. Ian Paul's essay is essentially a shorter version of his Grove Booklet. He provides a fairly traditional interpretation of the seven key biblical texts (recognising the limited applicability of Genesis 19 and Judges 19), but also refers to Jonathan and David, and the gospels. Loveday Alexander is more concerned with an appropriate hermeneutic, focusing on the acceptance of the gentiles as an analogy which suggests attending to the present context seriously, and that the ancient world had a vastly different context and assumptions. Both are in effect relatively brief summaries of positions. They are of interest as showing the evidence considered and presented in the debates within the Church of England.

Banister, Jamie A. "Ὁμοίως and the Use of Parallelism in Romans 1:26-27." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3 (2009): 569-90.

Banister argues that 'likewise' in Romans 1:26-27 refers to the type of activity (unnatural) rather than a parallel between female-female and male-male. In other words, Paul may not have been referring to female same-sex activity.

Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

The book that started it all off. It explores Christianity and homosexuality up to the fourteenth century. Every study since interacts in at least some ways with Boswell. One of the first to argue that *arsenokoitai* referred to prostitutes, and that Romans targeted heterosexual people acting against their nature rather than referring to homosexuals. Hugely influential.

Brooten, Bernadette J. *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism.*

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Brooten aims to show that early Christian attitudes to female homo-eroticism were similar to that of Greco-Roman society (which was generally against it). She uses a variety of sources (magic spells, charms etc.) to uncover a broader picture of the practice and rhetoric in the ancient world. In particular, one chapter is devoted to Romans 1. She interacts with Miller (1995) in an extended footnote. Brooten argues that Paul thought female same-sex activity was wrong, but that in turn Paul was wrong to condemn it. This is a major study, and most scholars since interact with Brooten.

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

Brownson aims to grapple with the moral logic lying behind gender and sexuality in Biblical texts. He aims to present both sides of the argument fairly, but by focusing on the moral logic to help move beyond existing debates at the time. He argues that although the Bible assumes one-flesh unions are male-female, faithfulness to the Biblical witness does not require this.

de Bruyn, Theodore. "Ambrosiaster's Interpretations of Romans 1:26-27." *Vigiliae Christianae* 65, no. 5 (2011): 463-83.

De Bruyn points out how Ambrosiaster (fourth century writer) changed his interpretation of Romans 1:26-28 over different recensions, initially understanding Romans 1:26 to be about unnatural sex between women and men. De Bruyn uses this as evidence of a wider change in interpretation over the early church period.

Cornwall, Susannah. *Theology and Sexuality*, SCM Core Text. London: SCM Press, 2013.

This is, as an SCM Core Text, a study guide to help thinking and reflection over sexuality. It therefore covers issues around gender (including transgender and intersex), celibacy, virginity, marriage, sex outside marriage including prostitution, and same-sex relationships. Throughout there are thoughtful questions for the reader to reflect upon.

Countryman, L. William. *Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*, SCM Classics. London: SCM Press, 2001.

An influential study (first published in 1988) on sexual ethics, looking through the lens of purity (influenced by Mary Douglas) and property. Among many points of interest, he argues that Romans 1 indicates that same-sex activity is unclean, but not necessarily therefore sinful. The particular angle he uses sheds fresh light on a range of passages.

Thought provoking, whether or not you agree with his conclusions.

Davison, Richard. *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2007.

Covers Old Testament sexuality, from a 'traditional' standpoint. Davison tries to argue that the commandment about Levirate marriage didn't mean polygamy, and that the Old Testament overall supports monogamy - I'm not sure how successfully.

Duffield, Ian K. "The Clear Teaching of the Bible? A Contribution to the Debate About Homosexuality and the Church of England." *The Expository Times* 115 (2004): 109-15.

Ian Duffield presents brief arguments over the key verses, arguing that the biblical texts are not appropriate for today's different context or debate (faithful, Christian homosexuals).

Gagnon, Robert A. J. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001.

Anti-gay. It can feel like he's shouting at you. Often quoted/used as a reference point (eg by EA). Disliked by many because of his comments/attitudes as well as being accused of poor scholarship, particularly on the modern science. BUT he has read nearly everything, argues his case strongly, and this is one of the texts that everyone interacts with.

———. "Are There Universally Valid Sex Precepts? A Critique of Walter Wink's Views on the Bible and Homosexuality." *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24 (2002): 72-125.

A response to Walter Wink (2002). Part of a debate between the two.

Glancy, Jennifer A. "The Sexual Use of Slaves: A Response to Kyle Harper on Jewish and Christian *porneia*." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134, no. 1 (2015): 215-29.

Glancy takes issue with Harper's view on what was seen as appropriate for Jewish males, and argues that *porneia* may not have been seen to include sex with one's own slaves (in other words, sex with your slaves would not be seen as immoral).

Goddard, Andrew, and Dan Horrocks. *Resources for Church Leaders: Biblical and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality*, Resources for Church Leaders. London: Evangelical Alliance, 2012.

Covers the whole issue (not just biblical) from Evangelical Alliance perspective. Doesn't seem to note serious arguments against seeing 1:26 as being female-female, and dismisses temple context.

Grenz, Stanley J. *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990.

Grenz argues that sexuality differences are an essential part of what it means to be human. He argues for a 'traditional' viewpoint. The sections on the Bible are relatively brief.

Haller, Tobias Stanislaus. *Reasonable and Holy: Engaging Same-Sexuality*. New York: Seabury Books, 2009.

Haller argues in favour of the church supporting and blessing same-sex marriage. His approach is to tackle the objections one by one. As this is a popular book, he doesn't interact much with modern scholarship directly (eg by name), but argues mainly from primary sources (he does interact with Brooten and Miller, in support of Miller, on Romans 1:26, and he also interacts with Gagnon on the meaning of *porneia*). Deceptively rich and thought-provoking.

Harper, Kyle. "Porneia: The Making of a Christian Sexual Norm." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 2 (2012): 363-83.

Harper traces how the term *porneia* developed in early Christian thought and before in Hellenistic Judaism. He notes its relationships with *moicheia* (violation of a respectable woman). He argues that the term developed to encompass diverse sexual practices that were widely accepted by others. In classical Greek, *porneia* meant selling oneself for sex. Judaism, through using *porneia* as a translation for *zanah*, broadened this to fall into sexual shame, and closely linked this with idolatry. It then developed into meaning any illicit sexual conduct, including (for Jewish males) prostitution (and so unlike the surrounding culture).

Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.

Sets out the argument against homosexuality based on his reading of Romans 1. Martin interacts with this argument in his book and article.

Hensman, Savitri. "Journey Towards Acceptance: Theologians and Same-Sex Love." *Ekklesia*, Retrieved 25th January 2013, http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/files/journey_towards_acceptance_oct_2012_0.pdf.

Charts a range of theologians in a range of denominations who have moved to or are accepting of same-sex relationships.

John, Jeffrey. *Permanent, Faithful, Stable: Christian Same-Sex Marriage*. New ed. London: Darton,

Longman & Todd Ltd, 2012.

Jeffrey John looks at scriptural and moral arguments over same-sex marriage. This is a brief, popular book, so the scriptural arguments are short. In brief, he argues that the ancient world saw homosexual behaviour as being prostitution or pederasty, and so not relevant to today's arguments where neither of those apply.

Karras, Ruth Mazo. "Active/Passive, Acts/Passions: Greek and Roman Sexualities." *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 4 (2000): 1250-65.

Reviews books on ancient sexuality. This reinforces that the ancient construction of sexuality was complex and very different from ours; the emphasis on role played (active passive) was important, in contrast to gender or orientation.

Loader, William. *Sexuality in the New Testament: Understanding the Key Texts*. London: SPCK, 2010.

This is a shorter, more popular version of his 2012 work (itself part of a broader range of studies he has conducted on sexuality in the ancient world). He is in favour of same-sex marriage, but still understands Paul as being against all forms of same-sex activity.

———. *The New Testament on Sexuality, Attitudes Towards Sexuality in Judaism and Christianity in the Hellenistic Greco-Roman Era*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012.

Does what it says on the tin.

Malick, David E. "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993): 479-92.

Argues that *malakos* and *arsenokoites* refer to all homosexual behaviour. Mainly engages the argument about pederasty.

———. "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993): 327-40.

Argues that it condemns homosexual activity of all kinds, against Scroggs and others.

Mann, Rachel. *Dazzling Darkness: Gender, Sexuality, Illness and God*. Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2012.

This doesn't interact directly with the biblical passages. It is an autobiography of someone who is a lesbian, transgender priest with a disability. Thoughtful on God, theology, gender, identity, disability and ministry.

Martin, Dale B. "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32." *Biblical Interpretation* 3, no. 3 (1995): 332-55.

Critiques Richard Hays' interpretation of Romans 1 as an example of 'heterosexism'. Aims to point out that 'plain, objective' readings of texts can import ideology (for example, through universalising Romans 1 to represent humanity's fallen state, rather than being specific to idolatrous gentiles).

———. "Arsenokoités and Malakos: Meanings and Consequences." In *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, edited by Robert L. Brawley. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

Martin argues that 'objective' reading of 1 Cor. 6:9 & 1 Tim. 1:10 are driven more by ideology than by historical criticism. He aims to challenge the idea that an 'objective' reading to provide a foundation for ethical reflection is even possible. Thought-provoking. Interacts (in the notes) with Wright.

———. *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006.

Argues that Paul's categories very different from ours; 'against nature' is excessive nature.

Miller, James E. "The Practices of Romans 1:26: Homosexual or Heterosexual." *Novum Testamentum* 37, no. 1 (1995): 1-11.

Argues that most likely reading of Romans 1:26 is unnatural heterosexual intercourse rather than female homosexuality.

———. "Response: Pederasty and Romans 1:27: A Response to Mark Smith." *American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 4 (1997): 861-66.

Argues that Smith (1996) was wrong, and that pederasty remained common and acceptable in the period. Miller also reaffirms heterosexual behaviour for Romans 1:26.

Mock, Steven E., and Richard P. Eibach. "Stability and Change in Sexual Orientation Identity over a 10-Year Period in Adulthood." *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* 41, no. 3 (2012): 641-48.

This study looks at sexual orientation over time, to explore how fluid orientation is.

Nanos. "Paul's Reversal of Jews Calling Gentiles 'Dogs' (Philippians 3:2): 1600 Years of an Ideological Tale Wagging an Exegetical Dog?" *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009): 448-82.

Nanos, exploring Phil. 3:2, argues that there is scant evidence that Jews regularly called

gentiles 'dogs'. However, this interpretation has led to Christians naming Jews as 'dogs'. Alternative referents for Paul include worshippers of the goddess cults, and Cynic philosophers.

Paul, Ian. *Same-Sex Unions: The Key Biblical Texts*, Grove Biblical. Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 2014.

A short booklet, giving a brief flavour of the arguments on both sides for the key biblical texts. Usually, Paul comes down in favour of the 'traditional' side in each case.

Petersen, William L. "Can Ἄρσενικοῖται Be Translated by "Homosexuals"?" *Vigiliae Christianae* 40 (1986): 187-91.

Petersen was an early critic of using 'homosexual' as a suitable category for the ancient world, arguing that it only really emerges as a category in 1869 with a Hungarian doctor called Benkert who first used the term for those oriented towards their own sex. In contrast, the ancient world was unconcerned generally with orientation, and concentrated on acts. Translation of *arsenokoitai* as homosexuals thus incorrectly includes the celibate; incorrectly excludes heterosexuals engaging in same-sex activity; and incorrectly includes female homosexuals.

Sanders, A. R., E. R. Martin, G. W. Beecham, S. Guo, K. Dawood, G. Rieger, J. A. Badner, E. S. Gershon, R. S. Krishnappa, A. B. Kolundzija, J. Duan, P. V. Gejman, and J. M. Bailey. "Genome-Wide Scan Demonstrates Significant Linkage for Male Sexual Orientation." *Psychological Medicine* 45, no. 07 (2015): 1379-88.

Scientific paper, indicating there may be some linkage between certain genes and male sexual orientation.

Scroggs, Robin. *The New Testament and Homosexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983.

An influential book, with which most subsequent scholars interact. Scroggs argues that biblical statements about sexuality have to be understood and read within the understanding of the ancient world, whereas (when he was writing) many commentators equated homosexuality now with behaviour then. He emphasises that most same-sex behaviour was pederasty. Thus, when Philo, for example, writes about Lev. 18:22 or 20:13, he does so with pederasty in mind. Thus, the passages in the Bible about same-sex activity refer to a completely different situation, and are irrelevant today.

Shaw, Ed. *The Plausibility Problem: The Church and Same-Sex Attraction*. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015.

A book aimed at traditional evangelical churches, asking for them to create contexts where same-sex attracted men and women can flourish whilst remaining celibate. At the back of the book the biblical arguments are briefly addressed, using a template of creation, fall, redemption and perfection. Another appendix addresses those who argue in favour of same-sex relationships, characterising them as implausible. Shaw's treatment doesn't address many of the arguments raised in recent scholarship (but, it is not really aimed at that audience).

Siker, Jeffrey S., ed. *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994.

Covers the debate from a number of angles, with contributors from both sides. The biblical material is covered by Hays and Furnish.

Smith, Mark D. "Ancient Bisexuality and the Interpretation of Romans 1:26-27." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 2 (1996): 223-56.

Argues that pederasty is not the context, and that Romans 1:26 is female-female. See the rebuttal by Miller (1997).

Song, Robert. *Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships*. London: SCM Press, 2014.

Song tries to get beyond the 'key verses' approach to the Bible. He tries to sketch out a big picture approach to the Bible, using (in part) the themes of creation and covenant to argue in favour of same-sex covenant relationships. He does address the 'key verses' (in a brief way), and is happy to accept, for the sake of argument, conventional readings of the texts (without saying that they must be read in this way). He argues that the coming of Christ changes what we should expect for human sexuality. In other words, that, as with slavery and women, there is a trajectory in scripture which allows for a fresh understanding of sexuality. The back of the book also gives a helpful list of further reading with comments on each suggestion.

Thatcher, Adrian. "The One Sex Theory and Why It Still Matters." In *Theology and Religion Seminar*. University of Exeter, 2012.

Thatcher argues that the ancient world conceived of humanity as being one sex (with a hierarchy from male to female) rather than two sexes, which is a modern idea. This has implications for how Genesis, for example, should be read, as well as offering new perspectives on intersex and transgender. He argues that the church should seek to redeem the one-sex approach rather than to baptise the two-sex approach.

———. “Redefining Marriage?” In *Centre for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality Annual Conference*. Birmingham, 2014.

Thatcher considers marriage, including the history of how it has been defined (which illustrates many changes along the way). Contemporary theological models of marriage (he outlines eight) are compatible with same-sex couples being married.

Townsley, Jeramy. “Paul, the Goddess Religions, and Queer Sects: Romans 1:23–28.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 4 (2011): 707–28.

Townsley argues that the contexts for Romans 1 are the Goddess cults, which explains all the phenomena mentioned. He argues against a female-female understanding of Romans 1:26. Future scholarship will need to take this article into account; to date, little scholarship has interacted with this argument.

———. “Queer Sects in Patristic Commentaries on Romans 1:26–27: Goddess Cults, Free Will, and “Sex Contrary to Nature?”” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (2012).

This is a companion piece to Townsley (2011), building upon his argument there. Townsley shows how the early Church interpreted Romans 1:26–27 as a reference to the sexual practices of goddess cults (relevant in a polytheistic environment), not homosexuality. Romans 1:26b was not interpreted to mean female-female sex until the fourth century.

Vines, Matthew. *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships*. Reprint ed. New York: Convergent Books, 2015.

Matthew Vines is prominent in the US as a supporter of gay Christians. This book presents a summary of arguments currently used regarding various issues (including biblical texts).

Walsh, Jerome T. “Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: Who Is Doing What to Whom?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120, no. 2 (2001): 201–09.

This is quite a technical article working out exactly what is implied by the Hebrew of the Levitical passages. He argues that specifically male-male anal intercourse is meant, where one participant is a free adult Israelite taking the passive role.

Williams, Rowan. *The Body’s Grace*. 2nd ed. London: LGCM/ISCS, 2002.

This is actually more of a pamphlet. It is a lecture given by Rowan Williams, exploring the relationship between sexual intimacy and grace. It has been called the ‘best 10 pages written about sexuality in the twentieth century’.

Wilson, Alan. *More Perfect Union: Understanding Same-Sex Christian Marriage*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2014.

Alan Wilson's book is a popular presentation in favour of same-sex marriage. The sections on the Bible are relatively brief.

Wink, Walter, and Robert A. J. Gagnon. "To Hell with Gays?" *Christian Century*, 2002, 32-44.

This is part of an exchange between Robert Gagnon and Walter Wink. Wink is not impressed with Gagnon's arguments.

Wright, David F. "Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of Ἀρσενοκοῖται (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10)." *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 125-53.

Wright is arguing with Boswell. Wright argues that the term *arsenokoitai* included homosexuality generally, not just pederasty (though ends with noting interchangeability with *paidophthoria*, then arguing that latter is included in former). He appeals in part to similarities with Levitical language in the Septuagint. See also Martin (1996) who criticises Wright's arguments.