

Conclusion to 7.2: same-sex sex may have very deep roots in nature and nurture by development over generations, and it thus may be humanly impossible to overcome; still, those who practice it do so with full moral responsibility and come under God's condemning judgment, as is clear in Romans 1:18-32 and 1 Corinthians 6.9-11.¹

7.3 The break with sin by grace [February, 17, 2013]

Thankfully, the indictments of Scripture regarding our radical bondage in sin are not the end of the story, but premises of the good news of freedom from bondage by union with Christ applied by God's effectual call.

A. Set free by union with Christ

No Scripture connects freedom from bondage directly to enslavement in same-sex sin. However, such connection is implicit in Paul's letters in his treatment of redemption. By union with Christ *in His death and resurrection*, sinners (dead bond slaves in sin) are made alive and set free from sin; they are redeemed, literally released from slavery. In this context, we should take special note regarding when union with Christ in His death and resurrection occurs. First, it occurs in the historical past when Christ died (**our old self was crucified with him**, Rom 6.6) and when He arose from the dead (**For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his**, Rom 6.5²). Second, it occurs in the experience of those who died with Him in their transition from wrath to grace in their personal histories (Rom 6.7: **For one who has died has been set free from sin**). Having died with Christ in His death in the past, you who have become Christians have been **set free from sin** in your walk before God. Third, union with Christ will certainly occur in the resurrection of the body at Christ's return (1 Cor 15.22-23: **For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ**). It is crucial to the Pauline teaching to understand that the resurrection of Christ and the future bodily resurrection of those who belong to Him "form the beginning and end of the same harvest."³ The resurrection life of believers is both now and not yet. Our future resurrection has already begun in the resurrection of Christ with whom we were united *when He died and arose from the dead*. Its outworking in the time between His comings includes our resurrection from death in sin to newness of life.

Therefore, in our former state without spiritual life (Rom 6:13), and unable to submit ourselves to God (Rom 8:7), we presented our very bodies in obedience to sin unto death: **you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness** (Rom 6.19; v. 21, **the end...is death**). The former presentation of the members of the body as slaves to *impurity* is "a rubric that Paul used earlier in the letter to refer to same-sex intercourse as a prime instance of sinful sexual practices (1.24, 26-27)."⁴ Accordingly, same-sex sex is a lawless use of the members of the body and contrary to holiness.⁵ So, by contrast to this former bondage, those who have been raised to newness of life (Rom 6.4) are no longer enslaved to this sin, or any other sin, because they have died with Christ in His death on the cross, were raised with Him in His ascent from the tomb, and having been raised to newness of life they have been **set free from sin** (6.7) and therefore set free from bondage to the sin of homoerotic sexual activity.

B. Set free by God's effectual call

The deep-rootedness of our enslavement is underscored by what is required for freedom, namely, union with Christ in His death and resurrection that is *applied by God with efficacious power*. This saving act is the basic truth of

¹The working assumptions of this paper are a) Scripture is clear in denouncing all same-sex sex as sin, and b) marriage texts clearly teach that opposite-sex sex is God's design for sexual intimacy. So Gagnon, "Every narrative, law, proverb, exhortation, metaphor, and poetry that has any thing to say about sexual relations at least implicitly presupposes a male-female requirement...it is a core value of biblical sexual ethics" ("Scriptural Perspective on Homosexuality and Sexual Identity" in *JPC*, 2005, Vol. 24, No. 4, 297).

²Verse 5 confirms the point of v. 4. The underlying thought is again the inseparable conjunction of Christ's death and resurrection, and the inference drawn from this conjunction is that if we are united with Christ in his death we must be also in his resurrection. Disjunction in our case is as impossible as disjunction in his" (Murray, *Romans*, I, 218). *So, when He died and was raised so were we*.

³Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 61

⁴Gagnon, Perspectives, *JPC* (2005, Vol 24, No. 4) 296. Although all the relevant terms of 1.18-32 (lust, impurity, dishonor, unnatural, shameless, debased) may have ethically neutral uses, here in Romans 1, they are all examples of ungodliness and unrighteousness (1.18), things that ought not to be done (1.28), and they are all actions that merit death (1.32; 2.5; 2.8). Therefore, both forms of homosexuality in Romans 1.26-27 are sinful acts that contradict sexual purity. As unrighteous acts, they drive the suppression of the truth given in both natural and special revelation and that merits God's wrath. Suppressing the truth and excusing sin here in Romans 1 are sober reminders of the deceitfulness of sin. Therefore we have a reminder of our need to be fully armed for spiritual battle with all sin, and to go to war with an army of saints helping one another by mutual love (Heb 3.13).

⁵In Gal 5.19, impurity is a work of the flesh associated with sexual immorality and sensuality. Contrastingly, the fruit of the Spirit is self control (5.23). By the Spirit, we crucify the flesh with its passions [and] desires (5.24). We are to know the deceitfulness of sexual sins and therefore, Paul says, we put to death sexual immorality, impurity, passion and evil desire (Col 2.5). More on this later.

Romans 8:30 that all who are called will be justified and glorified (**And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified**). Clearly, a general call or invitation is not in view since that call is rejected far and wide: many people who are confronted with God's general call in nature and in gospel preaching will not be justified or glorified. In view is a special call because everyone who is confronted with this call is saved by it; no one who receives this call will fail to arrive safely in glory.⁶

It is important to recognize the connection of God's saving call with 1 Corinthians 6.11 (**you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified**). It is immediately apparent that the break with a former sinful identity as a homosexual⁷ is not something that the former bond slave to sin did in fulfillment of an imperative. There is nothing here about a voluntary break with sin by the sinner; it is not something that he chooses since he is unable to do anything good including the good of turning away from sin in submission to Christ for in the flesh we cannot submit to God or His law (Rom 8.7).⁸ Rather, the break with homosexuality is something that *happened*: **And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified** (1 Cor 6.11). In context, same-sex sex is one of the sins by which some of the Corinthians were formerly identified, while others were marked and known by other sins (drunkenness, theft, other sexual sins, and so forth). Conversion for them meant that they were once people who practiced same-sex sex but who no longer do so: **such were some of you**. He says, you were among the unrighteous and you are not to be deceived: those who practice same-sex sex (characteristically as a way of life) will have no inheritance in the kingdom of God. Therefore, when converted, a person that practiced this sexual sin ceases to practice it; he or she is no longer known as such a person.

In a similar vein, Paul speaks of the church as sanctified in Christ and called to be saints, a holy and sanctified people: **To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints** (1.2). This call to be saints brought them out of a state of alienation in unholiness into fellowship and therefore to the new status of the sanctified: **God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord** (1.9). The effectual nature of God's call is strikingly put on a par with the creative command of God in creating light where formerly there was darkness and blindness: **In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ...⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ** (2 Cor 4.4, 6). Just as washing, sanctification, and justification of former homosexuals occur **by the Spirit of our God** (1 Cor 6.11), likewise, we can only acknowledge Jesus as Lord (in truth from the heart) by the Spirit (1 Cor 12.2). Before this effectual call, God was unknown to us as a stranger and alien, but by His creative command, He introduced us to Himself by calling us into fellowship.

In conclusion, a decisive break with the bondage of sin and with particular manifestations of sin (as those on the sin lists in 1 Cor 6 and 1 Tim 1) is a work performed by the sovereignty of God in spiritual renewal. With man it may be impossible, but with God all things are possible (Lk 18.27). Accordingly, this transition is effected by God's call that makes the change from unbelief to belief, from blindness to sight, from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to light, from alienation to fellowship, and from being a homosexual to being a saint.

Possession of the Spirit of resurrection life is God's promise and guarantee of the redemption of the body for the freedom of eternal glory (Rom 8.11, 21). Still, saints must travel from conversion to glorification over rough terrain with many pitfalls. Now able to live righteously, they are also still able to sin, but this ability to sin is not essential to the newly found freedom in Christ. Their ability to sin shows that they have freedom partially and not yet fully. It is not evidence that they are free; instead, it is evidence that their freedom is incomplete. Thus, the road to glory traverses a battlefield with sin. The war is real and serious on all fronts, and the battle with past and deeply rooted sinful patterns may be especially challenging. It is to the dynamics of this battle with sin that we turn next.

⁶Westminster Shorter Catechism gives this definition of effectual calling: "Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel" (31). In paraphrase: God's effectual call is His making Himself known to someone and by that self-revelation establishing a line of communication. When God is intent on fellowshiping with someone who does not notice Him, He will call out to that person, get his or her attention, make Himself known and thus establish conversation and fellowship.

⁷ Again, more precisely, one who formerly practiced same-sex sex, 6.9.

⁸ **For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.**