

# A Life Together At The Foot of the Cross

*A Four Study Series on Discerning the Will of God  
for Inclusion of LGBTQ Brothers and Sisters in Christ in Christian  
Ministry*

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*Presented at First Presbyterian Church, Saint Petersburg, Florida*

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The title of this work conjoins of the title of Dietrick Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* (Bonhoeffer  
1996) with the concept of returning daily to the foot of the Cross in prayer espoused in Karl  
Barth's, *Introduction to Evangelical Theology* (Barth 1979, c1963)

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## A Life Together at the Foot of the Cross

*A Four Study Series on Discerning the will of God*

### Study 1 - Prayer for Understanding and the Metanarrative of Scripture

#### Study 1.1: Prayer for Understanding

##### **Introduction**

In preparation for this study series, I have prepared four studies to assist us in our discerning the Lord's leading in accepting our LGBTQ brothers and sisters in Christ. The first Study will be on prayer and a survey of what the Bible teaches about grace and salvation, the metanarrative of the Bible. The second study will examine aspects scriptural interpretation. The third study will be a survey of New Testament Scripture on same gender relationships and the fourth will survey Old Testament Scripture on the same subject.

The purpose of these studies is to provide a framework for discerning the will of God in our lives together as Christians. In my own life of prayer and discernment, I have come to understand that in Christ all people, including people who are LGBTQ, are in Christ's unrestricted and unqualified grace, love, and forgiveness. I invite you to enter into a similar journey of discernment - not seeking our will, but Christ's alone. We will use these studies to guide our prayer, reflect on grace, interpret Scripture, and discuss the same gender relationship passages in the Bible as members of the Body of Christ.

In writing these studies, I am sharing my personal spiritual journey. I am not trying to prove anyone right or wrong. I am merely attempting to be faithful in sharing what I understand the scriptures to say. I would ask, that the focus of our discussions be the scriptures and that perspectives shared be grounded on Scripture and Scripture alone. *Sola Scriptura*, "only Scripture" was the position of Martin Luther during the debates at the Diet of Worms and I encourage us to have a conversation from that perspective as we work together to discern God's will for our lives and the lives of those among us with same gender relationships.

##### **Study 1: Prayer**

Prayer is how we have a relationship with God. Through prayer we come into the presence of God and seek a conversation. It is a two-way communication. It is the ultimate dialogue. There are many examples of prayer in the Bible. The Psalms, for example, are considered the prayer book of Christ. Praying the Psalms is a practice that is as old as the scriptures themselves. On the cross, Jesus quoted Psalm 22 when he cried in anguish "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" Here we see the death-throe plea of one suffering for the sins of humanity, paying the price for that sin so we can stand before God. Christ prayed continually in the stories of the Gospels. Like Christ, we are to enter quiet places and talk with God, and in this conversation the will of God is discerned.

For much of my life my prayer life has been inadequate or did not exist. It is only recently, after reading Anthony Bloom's *Beginning to Pray* (Bloom 1970) that I learned my error. It talked too

much. I prayed to get what I wanted. I was the only one talking, and I certainly did not take time to listen for an answer. I was dismayed by the silence. Archbishop Bloom showed me that I was praying to myself. When I pray and I am the only one talking, I usually am asking for specific results that I want, that I need, that I expect. That is not a relationship. That is a cafeteria.

Archbishop Bloom showed me a more sure way to communicate with God.

I would like to illustrate one way this is done. At the end of this example, I am going to ask you to pray this kind of prayer.

### **Scriptural Reflection in preparation for prayer.**

What follows is a group of short passages that I would ask you to read and reflect upon prior to praying the prayer that follows. I use the New American Standard version of the Bible, cited below.

Initially it will not be clear why you are reading and reflecting on these passages, but trust me, you will see how they tie together in the prayer immediately thereafter.

Now read and reflect upon the following passages.

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*Genesis 1:1a, 26a*

Read Genesis 1:1a (the “a” means the first clause) and 26a.

“1a **In the Beginning**, God created...26a...and said God let us make man (*adam*) in our image (*besalmenu*) according to our likeness...” (NASB®)

Reflect on the word *besalmenu* = in Our image

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*John 1:1-3*

Read John 1:1-3.

1 **In the beginning** was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (NASB®)

Reflect on the sentence “**In the Beginning** was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.”

Now reflect on the verse 3 translated in “wooden” Greek, “All things through Him emerged and without Him emerged *not even one [thing].*”

“nothing”: *oude* = not even + *hen* = one [thing]

“without Him...”

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*Romans 8:28-30*

Now read Romans 8:28-30

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He **foreknew**, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (NASB®)

Reflect on the word “foreknew”: *proginosko* - *pro* = before, *ginosko* = knowledge of.

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*Luke 18:9-14*

Read the story of the Pharisee and the Publican (tax collector).

9 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’

13 “But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘**God, be merciful to me, the sinner!**’

14 “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (NASB®)

Reflect on the prayer of the Publican. “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

*Kyrie* = Lord                      *eleison* = have mercy  
*Chirste* = Christ                *eleison*  
*Pneuma* = Spirit                *eleison*

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## *The Prayer*

Now, go to a room where you can be alone. Sit comfortably. Dim the lights or turn them off when you are ready. Close your eyes.

Repeat the following - *kyrie eleison* - until you feel your mind clear of all other thoughts, so that you can calm your thoughts and open yourself to the possibility of a conversation. This is when we are able to be fully present in the moment with Christ. This may take a repetition of *kyrie eleison* three or four times or it may take 10 or 15 times, the number is irrelevant - the clearing of your mind is everything. **Note:** I recommend long pauses in-between each phrase. The pauses are where the clutter of our thoughts get swept clean.

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*Kyrie eleison... Christe eleison... Pneuma eleison... Lord, have mercy... Christ, have mercy... Spirit, have mercy...*

Now say to yourself, Lord

“before the beginning, you were...” pause and wait  
“you were with God...” pause and wait  
“you are God...” pause and wait  
“no one thing was made but by you...” pause and wait  
“you had knowledge of me before I was...” pause and wait  
“I am made in your image...” pause and wait  
“You created humanity...” pause and wait  
“No one thing was created without You...” pause and wait  
“You knew all of us before the beginning...” pause and wait

*Kyrie eleison... Christe eleison... Pneuma eleison... Lord, have mercy...Christ, have mercy... Spirit, have mercy...*

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Now I invite you to pray for one another, but perhaps in a way you have not prayed before. Try to see each person below in your mind as you pray these “bite size” prayers below:

“Lord, you knew *the person to my right* before she ever was...” pause and wait  
“Christ, you knew *the person to my left* before he ever was...” pause and wait  
“Spirit, you knew *my best friend* before she ever was...” pause and wait  
“Lord, you knew *my worst enemy* before ever he was...” pause and wait

“forgive me, for all my resentment...”

“forgive me, for all my revenge...”  
“forgive me, for all my judgments...”  
“forgive me, for all my hate...”

“teach me to understand...”  
“teach me to accept...”  
“teach me to respect...”  
“teach me to love...”

Now pause and wait,...allow your mind to be still...reflect on what just occurred.

Then think about this question,

“If God knew me before the beginning, did God put me here for a particular purpose?”

Amen.

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## Study 1.2: The Metanarrative of Scriptural Interpretation

### **Introduction**

There is a story, the metanarrative, that binds all Scripture as a cohesive whole. In its simplest form:

God created humanity in God's image and humanity lived in full relationship with God. Humanity chose to live as if there was no God, and chose to sin. God mercifully lived among humanity as a human, and died on the Cross to pay the penalty for our sin. This act reconciled all creation with God.

When we interpret scripture, this over arching story, this metanarrative, of Christ returning humanity to relationship with God, is the focal point of all scriptural understanding. This is known as a Christological interpretation of scripture.

Today many Christians teach a moralistic interpretation of Scripture rather than a Christ centered, Christological interpretation, though they often do not realize it. This perspective leads to hyper-emphasis on passages of scripture in isolation. Rather than seeing Christ in the metanarrative, these Christians see following Christ as obeying a set of rules. This was the error of the Pharisees in the time of Jesus, and is the error of many Christians today.

The moralistic perspective leads to interpretations of scripture that are exclusionist. They limit the salvation of God to only those who profess belief and obey the rules. This turns Christianity into an exclusive subset of humanity. The world becomes a set of those who are in salvation and those who are outside of salvation, often called "the saved" and "the lost." If people do not conform to these rules, openly confess belief to "activate" salvation, and, for some believers, secure salvation by submersion under water, there is no hope of salvation, only the risk of being damned to hell.

Christ did not die imperfectly, but rather he died to reconcile all creation unto God. The way to Salvation is not by obeying a set of rules, or saying set of words, or being submerged or sprinkled with water, it is only by Christ crucified and resurrected, resulting in salvation freely given to all.

What follows is my statement of faith. I contains my understanding of the metanarrative. I invite you to read it and reflect those parts where you might disagree. I do not offer this as a standard by which to measure your faith, but rather I invite you into my faith journey as a conversation partner for your own.

## A Statement of Faith

I believe...

That before the Beginning, there was nothing, that God is the God of Nothingness<sup>1</sup>, and with God was Jesus, the salvific nature of God, the Son, who was with God and was God, who knew me and every living thing to be created before we ever were...

That in the Beginning God, through the power of His word and active agency of His *wruach*, the Spirit of God, created,...and all that is, became...

That the humanity of God's creation was made, *besalmenu, Imago Dei*, in the image of God, and dwelt in intimate relationship with God, desiring only to be with and to serve God, in utter dependence upon God, and humanity knew nothing of good or evil, only doing the will of God...

That humanity dwelt in joy in a garden, Eden, and in the center of this garden, there were two trees, the Tree of Life, the eating of the fruit of which was not forbidden, and the Tree of the Knowledge of *tov* and *ra*, good and evil, the eating of the fruit of which was forbidden, and in the eating would come death...

That since there was no evil with which to tempt, a serpent tempted humanity with an invitation to greater piety, asserting they would not surely die if the fruit was eaten, but rather would gain full knowledge of God, the knowledge of *tov* and *ra*, the knowledge to be *Sicut Deus, As God*...

That so they took and ate and died...to God...for in the eating, they took God's place in the center of the garden and perceived themselves to be *As God*, but they were *No-God*, and were ashamed, naked, an idol unto themselves, and so they hid, from God...

That God, through a grace humanity does not deserve, chose to extend His salvific nature and began the process of reconciliation, banning humanity from access to the Tree of Life, the source of life eternal that would fix the separation of humanity from God forever, and opened the earth and life upon it to toil and pain and death, cultivating among thorns and weeds fruit from a vine and wheat from the field...

That through the Chosen, God showed humanity what it means to be in relationship with Him, the nature of holiness, the definitions of sin, the abominations of idolatry, the futility of sacrifice, the purification of power, and humanity's inability to live *Imago Dei*, to choose a relationship with God on self directed terms, and the devastation of living in a *Sicut Deus* driven world, for all that is gained in a life lived for itself is lost in death, and all that is deserved in death is nothingness...

That through Abraham's descendents as promised and foretold by the Prophets, the way to salvation was measured out in the line of David toward the Tree of Life which we know as the Cross...

That in the fullness of God's time, and through the faithfulness of Jesus, He came, born of God's seed through Mary, living both human and divine, who as God, lived the Edenic human life, showing humanity the way back to life *Imago Dei* and to the Cross...

That on the night of His betrayal, Jesus took wine from the fruit of a vine and bread from the wheat of the field grown among the thorns that were soon upon His head, for which humanity toiled in futility to live *As God*. He blessed it, and commanded that all should take, and eat, and live, for in the eating we remember the return of life with God through the blood He was about to shed and the flesh the *Sicut Deus* world was about to kill, providing the perfect sacrifice, paying the perfect price for the sin of humanity, for living *As God*...

That humanity, represented by the twelve, dwelt in sorrow in the garden, Gethsemane, as Jesus prayed knowing there was no other way but walking the *via della rosa* to trial, scorn, scourge, and nail, suffocating for our sins upon the tree, that we might be delivered from our *Sicut Deus* self and have the chance to choose the life *Imago Dei*...

That upon His death, Jesus, in His faithfulness to God the Creator, as God the Savior, as God the Son, passed into nothingness, that which was before the beginning, that which humanity deserves for the sin of choosing to be *As God*...and then He rose...

That the death and resurrection of Jesus was perfect and complete, reconciling all creation to God, without exception, without condition, for all...

That now humanity can choose between living the *Sicut Deus* life and the life *Imago Dei*, but this has nothing to do with salvation - the return to life eternal with God - that has been paid for and freely given back...

That some are called by the Holy Spirit of God and given sufficient faith in the reconciling work of Jesus, the Christ, to live and work in the Kingdom of God, they are given the ability to believe, and in their belief, they strive to understand, *credō ut intelleigam*<sup>2</sup> striving imperfectly to live the life *Imago Dei*, and to witness to those living the *Sicut Deus* life...

That the life *Imago Dei* seeks to do the will of God, not to determine what is good or evil, *tov* or *ra*, but rather, to do the will of God, and is a *kenosis*<sup>3</sup>, a pouring out of ourselves into others, in the body of believers we call church, and the community of those living the *Sicut Deus* life, witnessing to the *euangelion*, the Gospel, the Good News, that Jesus has reconciled all creation unto God...

That the life *Imago Dei* fills us with the desire to be in daily relationship with God in prayer, study, fellowship, and communion, praying not with petitions for gifts or to do what is wanted, but rather to spend time with God without expectation of result other than to receive and do His will and to live in utter dependence upon Him...

That there will come a day, which cannot be determined, when Christ will come again and gather all of creation into final and eternal relationship with God under the Tree of Life...

credō hoc...this, I believe

## **Conclusion**

The metanarrative we use in reading Scripture informs our understanding, especially when interpretation and translation are made. The lens through which we view Scripture, together with its context of the verses contemplated, determines the way we decide what passages mean.

Now that we have engaged in prayer for understanding, reviewed the metanarrative of scripture, we will, in our next study, review Scriptural interpretations that contradict the metanarrative.

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Study 2: Reflections on Scriptural Interpretation

**Introduction**

Have you ever found a passage of scripture troubling? Have you ever found a passage of scripture that seem to contradict another? Have you ever found a passages scripture that you know is no longer followed? Do you know why it is no longer followed? Have you ever found a passage of scripture that you could never follow?

So often we pick and choose the passages we want to hold most dear. They are comforting. They fit our world view. They are consistent with the morality we embrace. But so often these passages are understood in isolation. They are not understood by the metanarrative of scripture that first and foremost must be understood in the context of Christ and God's reconciliation of creation through his death and resurrection. By taking the narrow view, our understanding of who God is and how God works with and among us becomes limited. This view often leads to conclusions about God and God's people that are simply not accurate. Indeed, the narrow view leads to some of the most intolerant behaviors in Christianity.

Before we study Scripture relating to LGBTQ people, it is important to re-examine the perspective we bring to scriptural interpretation, and reflect upon how it should be approached and interpreted.

**Slavery**

Read Psalms 123:2; Ephesians 6:5-6, 9; Colossians 3:22, 4:1; Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18; Philemon 1:17-20

In some of the most intolerant days of Christianity, slave masters, who believed their interpretation of Scripture to be true with all of the depth of conviction and sincerity that we hold today for our interpretations, read these passages to their African-American slaves to keep them in line. They used God to bind people to submissive slavery.

Ephesians 6:5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;...(NASB®)

These slaveholder's interpretation of Scripture is now known as invalid, yet this understanding was widely accepted by the slaveholding elite as being an absolute commandment from God. Paul, when he wrote these passages, was speaking to a persecuted church where slavery was the order of the day. It could be interpreted that Paul believed the imposition of slavery was not to be challenged. However another interpretation is that Paul was attempting to preserve life, because a

slave revolt would cause wholesale slaughter. In Philemon 1:17-20, Paul encourages Philemon to free Onesimus, a runaway slave Paul is sending back.

Regardless, abolitionists and black ministers throughout this country seized on themes of liberation in the Exodus story where the children of Israel were freed from slavery to counter the pernicious uses of Paul's epistles. The same Bible that was used to enslave people was later used to free them.

### **Women in positions of authority**

Read 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

This passage has been used recently in the church to argue against the ordination of women as teaching and ruling elders.

1 Timothy 2:12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. (NASB®)

A narrow interpretation of this scripture results in the banning women from leadership in the church. This is an interpretation held as true today in many denominations. A broad reading of scripture shows that women played significant leadership roles throughout biblical history including Diana, a judge of Israel, Ruth, a Moabitess whose faith instructed Israel for centuries, Esther, the queen of Babylon whose faith suppressed an anti-semitic uprising, and Lydia, the founder of the church of Philippi. It is also important to note that it was two women who brought the message to the world of Christ's resurrection.

### **Divorce**

The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapters 5-7 has passages that if interpreted literally, would cause Taliban-like repression of people. For example, read Mark 5:31-32.

31 It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; 32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (NASB®)

Look closely at 32d. (Remember a verse number followed by letters is a reference to the clauses. The "d" in a citation for fourth to the last clause.) "... and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." How many divorced people do you know? How many divorced people do you know that re-married? What do we do to people in the church who by this passage have committed adultery?... But don't worry,... a closer view of scripture makes the situation worse.

Read Leviticus 20:10.

10 If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. (NASB®)

The penalty for adultery his death. This punishment applies to males and females. Jesus says divorce and remarriage, except when there is unchastity involved, is adultery. So do we apply Leviticus 20:10 to people who are divorced and remarried?

We obviously don't follow this passage. Why?

## **Saving Faith**

Read Galatians 3:19-29

19 Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. 20 Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. 21 Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. 22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise *by faith in Jesus Christ* might be given to those who believe.

23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. 24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. 26 For you are all sons of God *through faith in Christ Jesus*. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 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. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. (NASB®)

This passage has great significance in understanding the relationship between the Old and the New Testament, and the role of the law of the Old Testament in relationship to the message of salvation in the New Testament. For now, I would like to focus on verses 22 and 26.

Galatians 3:22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise *by faith in Jesus Christ* might be given to those who believe.

Galatians 3:26 For you are all sons of God *through faith in Christ Jesus*. (NASB®)

Look at the words translated in verse 22 "the promise *by faith in Jesus Christ*" and in verse 26 "*through faith in Jesus Christ*". In the Greek, "faith in Jesus Christ" is *ek pisteos Iesou Chrisou*.

*Pisteos* can be translated, “faith in” or “faithfulness of” because it is in the genitive case. This case is used to establish a relationship between faith and Jesus. Most translations are “faith in Jesus Christ” because of traditional theological interpretations that faith must be activated by a verbal or mental affirmation of belief. Looking at the metanarrative story of the Bible, one can interpret this passage as we being saved by “*the faithfulness of Jesus.*”<sup>4</sup>

Most academic scholars today believe the correct translation to be “faithfulness of Jesus Christ.” The reason for this is that God in Christ, through the active agency of God the Holy Spirit is the perfecter of our salvation and it has nothing to do with what we do ourselves.

Our faith follows the faithfulness of Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

These are but a few challenges faced in our attempts to interpret Scripture faithfully. Indeed there are many challenges such as these. The lesson to be learned is that we must humble ourselves before God as we interpret the text. We should be careful. Strident interpretations of Scripture are not as clear as some purport. We must always consider the metanarrative in Scriptural interpretation - the thread of God’s grace that is woven from Genesis to Revelation, a grace that is ultimately independent of human action. Interpretations of scripture that cause us to exclude and be intolerant of others must be filtered through this understanding of Grace. The metanarrative requires the answer to this question, “Is my interpretation of this passage in keeping with the magnanimous and inexplicable grace of God?”

Kyrie eleison

Amen

Now that we have engaged in prayer for understanding, reviewed the metanarrative of scripture, and studied Scriptural interpretations of the past that contradict the metanarrative, in our next study we will review the New Testament passages that reference same gender relationships.

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Study 3: Understanding the Scriptures that reference same gender relationships -  
The New Testament Passages

## **Introduction**

All references to same gender relationships in the Bible are set in the context of unbridled lust, not committed loving relationships. In the Old Testament, same gender relationships are included with long lists of other behavior, which are deemed abhorrent. In the New Testament, every reference to same gender relationships is part of a list of human behaviors that others are judging or are not part of being a healthy church or a loving committed couple. The act of judging is only proper for God and not for any other being. The all human behavior after Genesis 2, is subject to God's judgement. It is Christ's atoning death and resurrection that reconciles us with God so we can return to a relationship with God.

## **Scripture and Analysis**

Let's start with two verses in Romans that are frequently cited as unequivocal evidence of Biblical condemnation of same gender relationships.

### **Romans**

Consider *Romans 1:26-27*

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 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. (NASB®)

Standing alone, this passage has been used to exclude same gender relationships in the church. If that logic is followed, however, we would also have to exclude bad parents, gossips, anyone who tells a lie or says something bad about another person. Verses 26-27 cannot be take out of context. This is a passage condemning the church in Rome for judging too harshly the behavior of it's members.

In order to understand the context of this passage, you need to begin reading at verse 20. Interestingly, we start with a reference to the fall in Genesis 2 and the point of creation in Genesis 1.

Reading before 1:26-27 *Romans 1:20-23*

20 **For since the creation of the world** His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (NASB®)

This is the predicate to the list of sinful behavior that follows. It's a direct reference to the fall in Genesis 2. We, humanity, chose to live as if there was no God. We live *Sicut Deus, As God*.

Just before 1:26-27 we find the fall of Genesis *Romans 1:24-25*

24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and **worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator**, (*this is the Genesis 2 reference*) who is blessed forever. Amen. (NASB®)

What follows is a list of human behavior that is a list of lusts which include both definitions of lust, which is dual defined as sexual excess, and unbridled enthusiasm.

Now putting 1:26-27 in context, read *Romans 1:26-32*

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 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.

28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are **gossips**, 30 **slanderers**, haters of God, insolent, **arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents**, 31 without understanding, **untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful**; 32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (NASB®)

Romans 26-27 can't be read independently from 28-32. "They" in verse 28 is a reference to verse 21 down. The plural pronoun is for all human behavior in verses 26-32. In this context, Paul is not talking about committed loving partners in verses 26-27 who are brothers and sisters in Christ. Indeed, Romans 2 condemns anyone who judges others, which is the whole point in this section of the letter.

The condemnation of judging others comes in *Romans 2:1-3*

2:1 Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. 3 But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? (NASB®)

The point of this passage is the act of judging, the sin is a given. Only God judges. Every time humans judge, it is sin. Paul is saying in chapter 2 that humans judging others is a sin. Paul's emphasis is not to presenting a list of sins. His focus is on those compiling the list of sins that the church in Rome is using to judge others. The nature of judgement as human sin is a given. We all sin. We all live as if there is no God. The list includes gossips. If we judge others we condemn ourselves. We limit God's grace. We don't have that right under scripture. The result is a moral code that determines who's in and who's out and somehow the rule keepers are always in. This was the error of the group of people during the time of Jesus we call the Pharisees.

As I see it, there are two kinds of judging or judgment. The first is determining which decision will have the most suitable outcome. The second is determining the outcome. We can summarize these concepts with the secular antonyms of "crime and punishment", "risk/reward", "risk/calamity", "truth or consequences". We make decisions all the time and we understand that there can be an upside or a down side. We make a judgment and receive a judgment.

But there is a divine aspect to judging and judgment as well. The theological definition is often made manifest in the concepts of "heaven" and "hell". We make a decision, it turns out to be bad, we get judged and don't go to heaven or are going to hell. Much of what we see in Paul is his attempt to keep the judging in God's hands. The Law of the Old Testament convicts us of our sin under Genesis 2. The Cross of Christ frees us from that judgment. The judgment has been made, we are guilty, and Jesus paid the price, so we are free. That message, however, is not often heard and the church becomes the judge.

When we categorize people and judge them, we are worshiping our own rules. The most significant sins of the leaders of the churches in Rome and Ephesus, are their judgement of their members. The fact is, we all deserve condemnation because of Genesis 2, but we are saved by the Cross.

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## 1 Corinthians

Before we begin the 1 Corinthians chapter 6 passage, let me admit that this is for me the most difficult passage to resolve with clarity. Part of the difficulty is due to Paul's method of building arguments, part the use of 21st century English to explain 1st century Greek concepts, and the last is seeing through centuries of commentary that view Paul's words with a lens of centuries old western European morality.

Before we read the passage, let me lay out what I see as the points Paul is making.

### *Structure of Paul's argument*

**Theme:** Definition of what makes a healthy church

**Problem Statement:** Members of the church in Corinth are suing each other

**Short-Term Solution:** A. Don't. B. Either turn the other cheek or resolve the disputes among yourselves

**Long-Term Solution:** Be a healthy church living as the body of Christ

---

Here is the structure of the chapter, as I see it.

6:1-4, 6: Problem Statement - Lawsuits are being filed in civil courts to resolve issues among the church members

6:5: Short-Term Solution A - Don't do it. Resolve the issues among yourselves

6:7 Short-Term Solution B - Turn the other cheek, or resolve the disputes among yourselves.

6:8-19 Symptoms of an unhealthy church

A. 6:9-10 **List of unhealthy behavior for church members**

B. 6:12-18 Metaphor of the Body

1. 6:13 Metaphor of Food

2. 6:15-16 Metaphor of Prostitution

3. 6:18-19 Metaphor of the Body as the Temple of the Holy Spirit

6:11-12, 14, 17, 19-20 Subtext: Yet all of you are covered by grace

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Our focus for this discussion is on 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - the List of unhealthy behavior. Note, this is not an exhaustive list.

Read *1 Corinthians 6:9-11*

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you;...(NASB®)

This passage is where some of my difficulty comes into play as I work through the logic of the argument. At first, there seems to be a nexus between 6:9-10 and the civil suits alluded to in 6:1-4, but the list does not contain private rights of action that would be taken by individuals to a court of law. If anything, they reflect morality laws that might be considered possible actions to be brought by the state. So what is this list?

The real nexus, to me is the theme of the chapter, defining what constitutes a healthy church. This list is one of unhealthy behavior that by Paul's admission had been committed by some members of the church. The list contains three types of behavior.

1. **Unbridled lust:** fornication, adulterers, “effeminate and homosexuals” [textual analysis to follow below], and idolatry (lust after another god)
2. **Violations against property:** physical theft, mental theft (covetous), and swindlers
3. **Excessive self indulgence:** drunkenness and revilers

To understand the Unbridled lust behaviors in the list, we need to do a textual analysis of the words translated “effeminate” and “homosexuals” by the NASB translators.

### *Use of 21st century English to explain 1st century Greek concepts*

To some, the analysis that follows will seem forced. But I challenge each of us to engage the text at a level of analysis most parishioners do not often use. This discussion ties to Study 3's analysis of scriptural interpretation and the problems caused by too limited a view of the context of a passage.

The following are translations of the Greek words translated in the NASB as “effeminate” and “homosexual” in the NRSV, ESV, and NIV for comparison.

NASB “effeminate” and “homosexual” (NASB®)  
NRSV “male prostitute” and “sodomites” (NRSV®)

NIV and ESV “nor men who practice homosexuality” with the footnote “The two Greek terms translated by this phrase refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts” (NIV®, ESV®) (Bible Hub)

The differences in English translations are rather extensive. The NIV and ESV conflate two Greek terms with different meanings into one broad interpretation, while the NRSV and NASB translate the words separately as two different types of same male behavior.

Going deeper, the two words in Greek are *malakos* and *arsenokites* (Kurt Aland 1983, 589).

*malakos* (Danker 2000, 613) literally means “soft” or “soft to the touch”. It is metaphorically used as “effeminate” to describe a catamite. Catamitus (in the Greek Ganymede) was a boy kept by Zeus for pederasty - sex with young boys by an older male. The practice of pederasty had been in wide use by the Greeks since the 9th century BCE practiced by the elite of Greece in symposia, or drinking halls<sup>5</sup>. Going further metaphorically, the NRSV translators understood *malakos* to be a euphemism for “male prostitute”.

*arsenokites* (Danker 2000, 135) is the combination of two Greek words *arsen* which means “male” and *koite* which means “bed”. *koite* has sexual overtones in the same way we say “going to bed together.” It is also the root work for the English “coitus”. Combined, the “wooden” Greek would be “two males having sex in bed”, but this is too broad an interpretation and inconsistent with the other activity identified by Paul in the list, “fornicators” and “adulterers”. This is why the NRSV translators opted for “sodomite”, extreme lustful behavior akin to Genesis 19.

So now we ask a translation question, how could the English word “effeminate” or “soft to the touch” or “two men having sex in bed” be the equivalent of “adulterer” and “fornicator”? They are not. Nor is “homosexual”. The word homosexual with its 21st century meaning, includes committed loving relationships. This concept is not in the meanings of the 1st century Greek words discussed above. Those words describe sexual misbehavior in the same way that fornicators and adulterers convey heterosexual misbehavior. NRSV translation provides, in my opinion, the most accurate translation of the ones reviewed.

### *Seeing through with a lens of centuries old western European morality*

So this textual analysis begs the question, why would the translators of the NIV, and ESV use the conflated translation “men who practice homosexuality”? I think the answer illustrates the challenge we all have when engaging and understanding Scripture, we bring our preconceptions to the text and often see what we expect to see. I do it, and I think it’s fair to say we all do. Centuries of Christian commentary have seen Christ from a moral perspective rather than Christological. The Christ of Matthew 19:19, “love your neighbor as yourself” and Matthew 7:1-5, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged..” is a necessary part of the metanarrative that we should always carry to our reading of scripture as well as a healthy dose of humility.

Condemnation of others removes the forgiveness of Christ. It rejects the gift of salvation and replaces it with human condemnation. We are acting *As God*.

### *The Healthy Church*

So now the rest of our understanding flows. Paul is asking what is the healthiest path for a community of faith to take? He answers simply, we are sanctified through Christ's atoning death and resurrection. This understanding plays out in our understanding of who we are, and how we treat each other, and how we treat our bodies. Now we are united to Christ's body as parts of Jesus. This knowledge influences how the members of Jesus's body act under the grace he has extended. We have the ability to sue each other, but's it's unhealthy. We have the ability to sin, but it's unhealthy. We, the church are an active part of the body of Christ. The more we embrace that fact, the healthier we become.

Paul is telling the Corinthians first and foremost about the grace of God.

11b: "...but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." (NASB®)

Paul continues.

12 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. (NASB®)

He is working on improving the health of the church in Corinth.

And he closes.

20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (NASB®)

We've been forgiven by God, so we should forgive each other. That to me, is the point of this passage.

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### **Timothy**

Read *1 Timothy 1:8-11*

8 But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, 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 10 and immoral men and homosexuals (*arsenokites*) and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever

else is contrary to sound teaching, 11 according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. (NASB®)

This passage contains the same logic as Romans and 1 Corinthians. It's a list of behaviors, not normal committed, loving behavior. *arsenokites* is here again and can be reconciled in the same way we did in 1 Corinthians 6. Timothy who is serving as the pastor to the church in Ephesus is facing the first challenge to the development of Christian Orthodoxy, the imposition of Old Testament Law as a condition of becoming a Christian.

Now look at *1 Timothy 1:5-7*

5 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 6 For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, 7 **wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.** (NASB®)

The church in Ephesus is caught up in the turmoil often repeated in Christian history - arguing about being right and not focused on being loving.

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In the next study we will examine the Old Testament passages.

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A Life Together at the Foot of the Cross  
A Four Study Series on Discerning the will of God  
Robin Lyle

Study 4: Understanding the Scriptures that reference same gender relationships - The Old Testament Passages

This Study examines the Old Testament passages on same gender relationships.

**Genesis**

Let's start with *Genesis 19:4-10*

4 Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; 5 and they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them." 6 But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, 7 and said, "Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. 8 "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." 9 But they said, "Stand aside." Furthermore, they said, "This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them." So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door. 10 But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. (NASB®)

Is there anything in this passage that looks like love? Does it relate to two of God's creation making life commitments and profession of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior?

No, this is another uncontrolled lust passage.

Consider next *Genesis 19:30-38*

30 Lot went up from Zoar, and stayed in the mountains, and his two daughters with him; for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; and he stayed in a cave, he and his two daughters. 31 Then the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of the earth. 32 "Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him that we may preserve our family through our father." 33 So they made their father drink wine that night, and the firstborn went in and lay with her father; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. 34 On the following day, the firstborn said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink

wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve our family through our father." 35 So they made their father drink wine that night also, and the younger arose and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. 36 Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. 37 The firstborn bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. 38 As for the younger, she also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the sons of Ammon to this day. (NASB®)

I think it's fair to say this is not good behavior. In fact, I'm sure most people would condemn these individuals and drive them from the church. The Moabites and Ammonites become a major problem for the Israelites. And yet, in Jeremiah 48, the people who descended from these incestual unions will be preserved.

We find in grace for Moab in *Jeremiah 48*

46 "Woe to you, Moab!  
The people of Chemosh have perished;  
For your sons have been taken away captive  
And your daughters into captivity.

47 "Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab  
In the latter days," declares the LORD.  
Thus far the judgment on Moab. (NASB®)

And in *Jeremiah 49*, the descendants of Ammon will be preserved.

5 "Behold, I am going to bring terror upon you,"  
Declares the Lord GOD of hosts,  
"From all directions around you;  
And each of you will be driven out headlong,  
With no one to gather the fugitives together.

6 "But afterward I will restore  
The fortunes of the sons of Ammon,"  
Declares the LORD. (NASB®)

God's grace is greater than anything we might anticipate.

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## Leviticus

*Leviticus 18:22*

22'You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. (NASB®)

Leviticus 18 is the “abomination” passage. Note that everything else in chapter 18 is an abomination per verse 29, including: “uncovering the nakedness” of your father, mother, sister, aunt, granddaughter, and other combinations of relatives.

*Leviticus 20:13*

13 '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. (NASB®)

Others to be put to death included in this chapter are also are mediums and spiritists (27), anyone who curses their parents (9), adultery (10), a man's marriage to his father's wife (11) or daughter-in-law, a woman and her mother (14). If we strictly apply these passages, anyone today who utters the words represented by the acronym “SOB” or gets their palm read at the county fair or plays with a ouija board should be put to death.

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## **Conclusion**

In *Mark 7:1-7* we read of Godly men trying to live a life in compliance with the Law of the Old Testament. But according to Jesus, they confused faithfulness to the Law with faithfulness to God. God gave these precepts to maintain the covenant peoples' relationship with God. Over time, they lost sight of the spirit of the Law in their fidelity to the letter of the Law, as do we all. Their gaze lowered to the text and was not lifted to the God that was above the text. Therefore, these rules became “precepts of men” rather than the will of God.

1 The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 2 and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. 3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; 4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) 5 The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?”

6 And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS,  
BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.

7 ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME,

## TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' (NASB®)

Why doesn't following the Law achieve the return of our relationship to God? Paul answers this question in *Galatians 3*.

7 Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. 8 Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." 9 So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.10 **For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."**11 **Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith."** 12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person who does these things will live by them." 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (NASB®)

This is why we do not live under the judgement of these rules in the Old Testament and why we have no standing to judge others using them. Rules won't provide us a relationship with God. Only Jesus, the Christ, who has redeemed all creation can do this.

In closing this study, let us remember another encounter between the Pharisees and Jesus in *John 8:3-11*.

3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, sir," she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” (NASB®)

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The Church’s approach to these Old Testament passages over the centuries has been piecemeal at best, most of the time. In point of fact, Christianity has always favored the New Testament over the Old Testament in its functional use. In these studies I have attempted to convey the vital importance of either being faithful to the whole text or being honest with ourselves that we are faithful to none of it. We must either apply the Law with perfect accuracy before we exact judgment and cast the first stone, or, we must cry “Abba! Have mercy!” and fall upon the grace of God given to us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord have mercy! Christ have mercy! Spirit have mercy! Amen

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>(Bonhoeffer 1997, 31–32) Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German Theologian during the late 1920's until his death by execution in 1945 for being the spiritual leader for attempts on Adolf Hitler's life. In 1932-1933 he gave a series of lectures at the University of Berlin on Genesis Chapters 1-3. His students notes have been compiled into the book *Creation and Fall*. Much of my understanding of our faith that lead to the writing of this statement of faith was derived from this book. In particular, God as the God of Nothingness, the distinction between the life *Imago Dei* and the life *Sicut Deus*, the *salvific* nature of God, and the temptation as an act of piety are drawn from this work. For a life of Bonhoeffer, see (Bethge 2000).

<sup>2</sup>(Gaunilon and tr 1903) Anselm of Bec, later Archbishop of Cantebury (1033-1109) wrote the *Prologion* in 1077-1078. This has been characterized as an “ontological proof” of the existence of God. (Ontologic means the study of the nature of being.) The predicate for Anselm's “proof” is the divine gift of belief. This predicate is encapsulated in the oft quoted *credō ut intellegam*, “I believe that I might understand”. This gift of the infinite to the finite, or God to humanity, called by John Calvin (1509-1564), *Implanted Revelation* (Calvin and [McNeill] 1960, 43), Chapter 3.1 (Wendel 1997, c1963, 161–165), acknowledges the impossibility of a direct proof of God as evidenced in the 20th century logician Kurt Gödel (1906-1978) *Incompleteness Theorem*, that any finite system will always require information from outside itself to resolve all paradoxes and contradictions. Gödel later attempted his own *Ontological Proof* of the existence of a higher being but some logicians have challenged the underlying axioms (Goldstein 2005). Karl Barth (1886-1968), was a Swiss theologian of the first half of the 20th century and older contemporary of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote a deep analysis of Anselm's *Prologion* which informs my understanding of Humanity's relationship with God after the Fall (Barth 1960 (Reprint 1985), 18–21).

<sup>3</sup>The greek word *kenosis*, means “to empty” and has been used since the early church to refer to a pouring out of self into others. See Phillipians 2:5-7 where Paul speaks of Christ. “5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but **emptied Himself**, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.” (NASB®)

<sup>4</sup>See (de Boer 2011, 236, 242) for a discussion of this translation of this passage in Galatians 3:22 and 3:26 respectively.

<sup>5</sup>See (Fox 2006, 58) for a discussion of Greek upper class drinking and sexual behavior.

