

343 More thoughts on gay marriage

As promised, I'm looking at that much-quoted passage, Romans 1²⁴⁻²⁷, but doing so within the context and purpose of the two chapters.

In his 2004 edition of the *Paul for Everyone* commentary Tom Wright dedicates more time and space to explaining some of those 61 verses than others. He writes about a few verses at a time, and so I counted the number of lines of text: it varies from 12 lines per verse to 46. Which section warrants the 46? Yes, it's about my thrilling, 'I am not ashamed' passage;^{1:14-17} where Tom challenges the traditional gospel-as-personal-salvation view, and I'm 150% behind him in his stance – it has transformed my faith!^[340,1]

Not surprisingly, the second most commented, at 33 lines per verse, is my much-quoted passage.^{1:24-27} Here, Tom puts forward the traditional interpretation, explaining from Genesis 1–3 that 'natural' and 'unnatural' refers to complementarity, a principle I happily accept as the ideal.

Now, I'm tremendously grateful to Tom for opening my eyes on all sorts of things, but in this case, having looked at the context of Romans 1+2,^[342] I see things differently. Paul was mainly focused on the range of terrible things that people do when they '*suppress the truth by their wickedness*'; he was not trying to explain *why* these were so awful, just stating them as a given – they were obviously wrong.

Yes, I realise that this passage, taken with others including Gen 1–3, form the basis for the traditional view on gay issues, but let's test that view of Rom 1^{26,27} by trying to apply the actual text to my two friends who seek to follow Jesus, but who are gay and who have fallen in love. They had to work out, from the Scriptures, whether intimately expressing their love for one another, within a faithful Christian marriage, would be wrong.

So, which of Paul's words that I quoted last time relate to the joy my friends share as they celebrate their love for one another: uncleanness, shameful desires, dishonour, natural... unnatural, inflamed with lust, shameless acts, received repayment?

Whatever it is that Paul is so angry about, it seems a world away from the attitudes and intentions of my two friends. The broader issues of fidelity, mutuality, support and, yes, deep love, are a world away from Paul's mind here, as he lists these clearly awful things.

My friends we will be judged by God – as we all will – for their attitudes and actions, but judged by God and *not by each other*, as Romans 1+2 makes clear.

The traditional line says that there is *only one way* of understanding how to apply Paul's writings in the 21st century, and that the church is allowing itself to be pressurised into changing its view.¹ Personally, I think that followers of Jesus should have a less dogmatic approach; Christians are too often negative and condemning.

Paul Bev. 2.8.24

¹ Compare that with the view of my vicar friend who says that the church has been drawn away from the Bible's teaching (esp. Gen 1–3) that only men should lead churches, cf. David Pawson's book, *Leadership is male*.