

**Paul's view of *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) as
applied to Romans 1**

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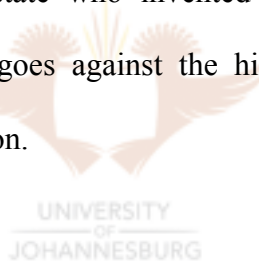
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SUMMARY

Several issues relating to homosexuality are being fervently debated in most denominations and in several newspapers in South Africa. Much of what the church is seeking to find is whether or not homosexual conduct is a sin. Within the church there are currently definite disagreements as to whether or not self-affirming homosexuals can be married in the church, ordained as ministers, teach Sunday School or be small group leaders.

In recent times organisations such as the South African Christian Leadership Assembly (SACLA), and the Marriage Alliance of South Africa (MASA) had been formed to serve the church and society as a platform in the current debate on whether or not there needs to be a re-definition of marriage. The reason why these organisations are becoming involved in state business is because they believe that there is no law or state who invented marriage. It is the view of these organisations that same- sex marriage goes against the historic heterosexual understanding of marriage which is recognised from creation.



In view of these matters this study seeks to actively take part in the present discussion concerning homosexuality and the Bible. It has been suggested that at the exegetical level Romans 1:26-27 contains little ambiguity in relation to the Bible and homosexuality, in that in Romans 1:26-27 Paul condemns homosexual conduct. However recent scholarly work done on this passage has indicated that perhaps on an exegetical level not enough research had been done on this passage to come to such a conclusion. At the heart of the matter are issues concerning the audience that Paul addresses and specific terms (*para physin*) Paul uses in Romans 1:26-27. In relation to the audience questions are being asked about the extensiveness of Paul's knowledge on the social customs of the ancient Greek and Roman world. It is believed that Paul was in fact not addressing true homosexuals, those who are born such, but that he was condemning heterosexuals acting as homosexuals. As we will see within the resulting discussion of this study, a good understanding of

the audience is integral to the interpretive process. In relation to the terms that Paul uses, and more specifically the term *para physin*, often interpreted ‘against nature’, it would seem that conventional understanding is that Paul states that homosexual conduct is that which goes against God’s given order. However in view of recent scholarly work there are suggestions which challenge the more conventional or conservative interpretations of the phrase *para physin*. This study will therefore delve into matters concerning ancient sexuality and in conjunction with this do a literal analysis of the text in question.

As this study will also reveal there are several issues at stake within the current debate. Of these issues the most pertinent concerns the authority of the Bible and the difficult task of the church responding to modern culture. If Paul in Romans 1:26-27 indeed condemns homosexual conduct then where does it leave those who are in reality struggling with the nature of their orientation. Some would suggest that Paul is simply out-of date and that his comments are irrelevant to the modern situation. It has also been suggested that perhaps the concept of biblical authority be abandoned and replace with the idea of the Bible as “foundational document”. Although these issues are not dealt with at length in this paper they certainly serve as an addendum to this study. This paper seeks to merely take part in the present discussion for the purpose of findings God’s will in this matter.

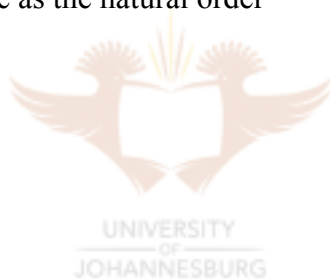
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1.1. Motivation for the Title

The main thrust and purpose of this study is to investigate Paul's meaning of *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) - usually interpreted as against nature, contrary to nature - in relation to the modern debate concerning the portrayal of homosexuality in the Bible. The scripture verse, which to a large extent seemed to have put to rest the issue about homosexuality from a biblical perspective had been Romans 1:26-27:

“For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural *φύσιν* (*para physin*), and in the same way *ὁμοίως* (*homoiōs*), also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error” (NRSV). “Men giving up natural relations with women, burn with lust for one another” (Revised English Bible).

More recent scholarly work done on this passage has indicated that this passage, and several others mentioned within the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Deuteronomy 23:17) and the New Testament (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:8-11), which have ‘alleged’ to mention homosexuality, “certainly poses significant interpretive difficulties” (Smith, 1996:224). It is the view of Jeremy Townsley (1998:2) that 1 Co. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:9-10, within the English translations, gives us the impression that homosexuality is a sin. He states that the word *μαλακός* (*mal-ak-os'*) is translated in numerous ways: effeminate, male prostitute, catamite (a boy kept by a child molester). “In fact, the literal translation of this word is soft and we have no idea what it means in this context. It could just as easily have been translated malleable, coward, sickly, lacking self-control or morally weak, none of which have specific homosexual connotation.(see Herodotus, Histories 7.153 and 13.51, Aristophanes Wasps 1455, Plutus 488)” (Townsley, 1998:2).

Secondly for Townsley (1998:2), the word *ἀρσενοκοίτης* (*arsenokoitēs*), translated in the NIV as ‘homosexual offenders’, is actually best translated as sexual aggressor (with the connotations of a rapist of slave trader), or male prostitute. He explains further that this word *ἀρσενοκοίτης* (*arsenokoitēs*) is found in no extant Greek literature prior to Paul’s use here, which, according to him complicates our understanding of the word. In fact for Townsley (1998:2) the literal translation of this compound word is (*arsenos*) male-bedders (*koites*), which could easily mean a man who sleeps around. He also states that he rejects the application of the Old Testament to the issue of homosexuality because “they are either found contiguously with verses we would not think of following anymore (abstaining from sex with a women while she is menstruating), or they refer specifically to temple prostitution (1 Kings 14:24, 15:12 – newer translations are now translating these Hebrew words as “temple prostitute”, not homosexual) (Townsley, 1998:1). To his own admission, it is Romans 1:26-27 that poses the most difficulty on this issue. If these scripture verses relating to homosexuality rest in the area of uncertainty, then, to the admission of several scholars, Romans 1 has been the area of difficulty.



Writing on the topic of homosexuality and the meaning of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, Hays (1996: 382) states the following:

“...‘*malakoin*’ is not a technical term meaning ‘homosexuals’ (no such term existed either in Greek or in Hebrew) but it appears often in Hellenistic Greek as pejorative slang to describe the passive partners-often young boys- in homosexual activity. The other word, *arsenokoitai*, is not found in any extant Greek text earlier than 1 Corinthians. Some scholars have suggested that its meaning is uncertain, but Robin Scroggs has shown that the word is a translation of the Hebrew *mishkav zakur* (lying with a male), derived directly from Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and used in rabbinic text to refer to homosexual intercourse” (Hays, 1996: 382).

The different views on these particular scripture verses, as stated above, are an indication of where the ongoing debate concerning homosexuality and the Bible is at. As much as lies within the scope of this paper we will also analyse and investigate some of the more recent comments made on this controversial passage. Some of these proposals (as done above) will be analyzed, critiqued and integrated into the discussion of this paper.

There is an argument which states that homosexuality was an accepted part of the social custom in the Greek and Roman world, and therefore in view of this Paul must have been imposing his Jewish custom on his readers in Romans 1:26-27. In support of this view it is argued that Paul's knowledge of Greek homosexuality was less than extensive. It is stated that what Paul knew probably originated from the rumour mills of the day, particularly perhaps from Jewish suspicions about Gentile activities. Therefore in view of this, are we to believe that in Romans 1:26-27 Paul was simply imposing his Jewish custom on his readers? Or, how extensive was Paul's knowledge on Greek sexuality? The response to these types of arguments is that Paul in fact demonstrated extensive awareness of Greek culture, having been born in Tarsus in the region of Cilicia, one of the three centres of Greek culture in his day (Acts 21:39). Therefore it is argued that Paul was hardly an 'isolated Jew in a Greek world' (Malick, 1993:329). This however is not to state that our conclusions in these matters are conclusive. In the ensuing chapters we will inquire in more-depth into matters concerning ancient sexuality and Paul's knowledge on it.

A new approach to understanding Romans 1 has been to understand the meaning of 'nature' in vv 26-27. It is argued that Paul does not refer to those whose own nature or primary orientation is homosexual. Hence Paul condemns heterosexuals acting as homosexuals (perverts) in a context of idolatry and lust; he does not condemn true homosexuals, homosexuals born such (inverts), for practicing homosexuality (DeYoung, 1988:429). Much of the current debate hinges on the

understanding of the modern concept of ‘nature’ in relation to how ‘nature’ is used in Romans 1:26-27. It is also the main purpose of this paper to enquire into Paul’s meaning of ‘nature’ as used in Romans 1:26-27.

Several other suggestions are that the only references of Paul to homosexuality can be found in the lists of vices. The implication for scholars such as Craddock are that the list deals with acts rather than states of mind or conditions of being, indicating caution about using these references in a discussion of homosexuality as a human condition. The implications are that the vices listed are acts of choices for which those involved are responsible. According to Craddock the lack of “discussion of homosexual behaviour within New Testament churches leaves room for speculation, did such behaviour exist in the churches? Was it considered part of the past” (Craddock, 1979:197). Proposals such as these have been assessed critically in the sense that it is suggested that homosexuality as a biological state, as known today, was a concept foreign to Paul. What this argument suggests is that in certain areas of this debate certain scholars have been guilty of importing modern ideas into an ancient text. These matters, and similar ones, will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

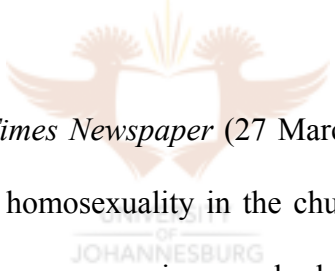
It is true that up to this point, great magisterial work has been completed on this topic. Is there therefore anything more to be said about homosexuality and the Bible within this study? On the contrary, many Christian denominations are still struggling with the issue in one way or the other, and it would seem as if the future promises no reprieve. This study then forms part of an ongoing debate on a sensitive issue concerning homosexuality.

This paper seeks not necessarily to impose one view over another, but seeks to positively add, and lift the current discourse to a higher level, and therefore help us to have a better

understanding of the current matter. This is not to state that the writer does not already bring his own subjectivity to the topic. However as much as lies within his power to be objective, the focus of the study will be to do a literal analysis of the text and in conjunction to also consider ancient sexuality for the purpose of elevating our knowledge on the cultural attitudes and assumptions that characterized the world of the first Christians and influenced the writings of the New Testament.

1.2. Problem Statement

The task of interpretation seems to be no easy one. This is a task that preachers face on a weekly basis, and for some proves to be more challenging especially with the absence of the necessary ‘tools’ needed for the task of proper exegesis. But the task of the preacher does not stop here, in that the ancient text also has to be contextualised. And certainly in relation to this topic it is the belief of this study that the challenge of the text is both exegetical and hermeneutical.



In an article in the *Sunday Times Newspaper* (27 March 2005:17), the archbishop of Cape Town was asked about the issue of homosexuality in the church. The newspaper questioned him about the squabbling in the church over gay marriages and relationships. The archbishop said, “The issue is interpretation. There are those of us from the evangelical sector who says the Bible is quite clear on this issue, and it’s prohibited.” The archbishop continued to explain that the church, in his opinion, is urged to be a people of the person of Jesus, not a group that just follows a book. Finally the archbishop states that he believes that “the Bible is not a moral code.” He believes that it is useful as a primary source but that several things have to be interpreted pastorally according to the local situation.

Similarly, a recent article in the *Star Newspaper* further demonstrates the reality of the challenges faced by the biblical exegete and interpreter, whether it is layman, priest or theologian. Dr Laura Schelessinger, a US radio personality, was in deep water recently after saying that she

believed homosexuality is an abomination according to Leviticus 18:22, and cannot be condoned under any circumstances. Her comment was replied to by the following e-mail. “Dear Dr Laura: Thank You for doing so much to educate people regarding God’s law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him or her that Leviticus 18:22 clearly state it to be an abomination. End of debate. I do need some advice from you however regarding some of the other specific laws and how to follow them. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord (Leviticus 1:9). The problem is my neighbours. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them, should I smite them... My uncle has a farm. He violates Leviticus 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread. He also tends to curse or blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them (Leviticus 24:10-16). Couldn’t we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws (Leviticus 20:14)” (*The Star*, 2004:12). Although intended to be to be humorous, it does present the challenges faced by the biblical interpreter in the twenty first Century.

As stated before, the challenge that the modern interpreter also has is to integrate the ancient text into the twenty first century. Robin Scroggs (1983:35) in his book, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, states the following: “ If Paul knew only the model of pederasty, his words in Romans 1 can only be interpreted as a proscription on that ancient practice, not as a condemnation of mutually, adult homosexual relationships such as are widely publicized in modern American culture” (Scroggs, 1983: ch. 18:34-35). For Scroggs the text in Romans, as well as other alleged New Testament references to homosexual activity, speaks to the condition of a culture far removed from our own and is therefore irrelevant to the modern debate. It should be evident that such a statement has far reaching implications for the interpretive process on a whole. In question is the

concept of biblical authority on the topic of homosexuality, to which certain scholars have suggested that the concept of biblical authority be abandoned altogether and replaced with the idea of the Bible as ‘foundational document’.

James E Miller, in a recent article (in reference to Romans 1:27) says,

“The raw material shows that the intended referents of Romans 1:26-27 are alternative heterosexual practices and pederasty. Finally, all churches, even the most Bible-based, regardless of theories of Bible authority, regularly choose to ignore certain biblical injunctions that they find inappropriate or impossible to enforce. Biblical scholars can provide their churches with the raw data of textual exegesis, but what the churches make of the material is another issue entirely” (Miller, 2001:5).

Are we perhaps then at a point where Christian teaching on sexual behaviour should be revised? Daniel A Helminiak is under the conviction that through the centuries regardless of clear biblical teaching Christians have revised their ethical assessments especially in relation to usury, slavery, divorce and female subservience. His conviction (2001:857) is that Christian teaching on sexual behaviours should also be revised in that the more recent instances did not mean the same thing as the ancient.

This is certainly a credible point in relation to biblical scholarship. There are passages in Corinthians 1 which shows clearly that women should keep quiet in the church. However, it is our understanding that women did teach in the early church, and still continue to do so today. Our approach to this passage had been that there was something going on there that we today don’t understand (Townsend, 1998:3). Primarily in this study we will be asking, what was going on there

that we don't understand in relation to homosexuality? And in trying to answer this question we will inquire into the possibilities of revising the Christian teaching on sexual behaviours.

1.3. Purpose

We duly acknowledge that already great commanding work has been done on this subject by authors such as: John Boswell *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, Victor P Furnish, *The moral teaching of Paul*, and Kenneth Dover's, *Greek Homosexuality*. The necessity of this study however, lies in the wake of what has been said by some of the more influential, scholarly works published on the subject. For example who has the final say on the interpretation of Romans 1? Scroggs, in his conclusion upon studying the homosexual practices of the ancient world believes that the only model of homosexual practices in existence in the Greco-Roman world was pederasty, "literally a love for boys" (Scroggs, 1983: ch 18:34-35). Yet Scroggs' historical research has been critically assessed in such a way as to suggest that there was more than just pederasty going on in Paul's day. Boswell, in his study, ultimately believes that the persons Paul condemns are manifestly not homosexual, and that what he derogates are homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons (1980:109). The implication of Boswell's statement is that within Romans 1:26-27 we are to understand that Paul was in actual fact not addressing individuals who were living in a healthy homosexual relationship. But this is not to state that Boswell's contribution to this topic is conclusive. We will argue in the ensuing chapters of this paper, whether it is plausible for us to accept that Paul was in actual fact only speaking to a particular group of people.

Richard B Hays in his response to the work of John Boswell, states the following: "A careful exegesis of the passage (Romans1:26-27) shows that Paul unambiguously describes homosexual behaviour as a violation of God's intention for humankind" (Hays, 1986:1). Hays

(1986) is under the conviction that Boswell reads his own agenda into the text and is guilty of performing eisegesis as apposed to exegesis. Smith (2001:227) in his response to the work of Scroggs ultimately believes that Scroggs does not adequately or accurately present the cultural climate of which Paul was a part and which formed the basis of what Paul knew and rejected. Smith's analysis (2001:227) is that he believes that the historical evidence indicates that within Paul's time there was a variety of homosexual activity, similar to what we are experiencing within the twenty first century.

One can almost believe the impact such discussions might have for the ordinary layman. In other words, whose exegetical work most accurately brings to light the truth of the ancient writings? It should be duly noted that the works of Hays and Smith have also received criticism, in the sense that it is believed that their work is considered to have a theological bias. Helminiak, in his response to the work of Hays and Smith, states firstly:

“Hays’ attention only to same-sex acts parallels Smith’s and sheds light on the matter. At stake is the Evangelical understanding of sin, influenced by Calvinist predestination theory and emphasis on the total depravity of fallen humanity. On this understanding, congenial with the Hebrew Testament’s purity ethic, one sin by performing specific acts forbidden by God’s law, and considerations of freedom, knowledge, intention, and circumstance are all deemed irrelevant” (Helminiak, 2001:857).

Helminiak certainly takes the argument to another level in his proposal that at stake is also the “evangelical understanding of sin”. This is a point that then leads to further areas of discussion which notably should be taken into consideration. For Helminiak (1997:857) contemporary historical-critical method requires determination of the original meaning of a text apart from subsequent theology. Within this paper it will be our responsibility to take into consideration

several of the points, as stated above, before coming to a conclusion about Paul's meaning of *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) in Romans 1:26-27.

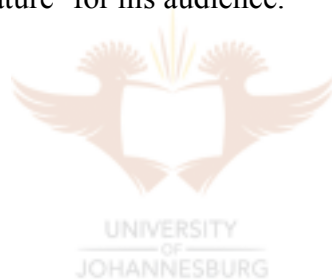
1.4. Method and Structure

Chapter 2:

According to Cotterell it is Linguistics that make us more aware of what we are looking for in general—"how text or spoken utterances mean something" (Cotterell, 1989: 32). Therefore our initial efforts will be placed into doing a literary analysis of the phrase *para physin* in the context of Romans chapter 1. For this purpose we will use the comparative and theological method. And more specifically with the text we will take into consideration the results of this discourse analysis method. Taking into consideration the fact, that it is ultimately the interpreter who has to put all the relevant evidence together—linguistic-semantic, cultural and historical—in coming to a conclusion about the meaning of a text.

This will be especially important to us in our analysis of firstly *παρά (para)*. It is argued that within Pauline usage *παρά (para)* normally means "more than" or "in excess of" as apposed to against, KJV, or "unnatural" RSV. If within the exegetical process we are more inclined to interpret *παρά (para)*- within Romans 1:26-27- as "more than" as apposed to "against", then we are to understand that it certainly gives us a different take on the text. However we can also state that such an analysis of *παρά (para)* depends on our conviction of whether a better interpretation of *παρά (para)* would be to consider that *παρά (para)* in Romans 1:26-27 forms a part of a common stock phrase, *παρά φύσιν (para physin)*. This matter will be discussed and analysed in more detail in chapter two.

Indeed, also general Pauline usage would indicate that ‘nature’ (*physis*) should be understood to refer not to an abstract, universal moral order. Therefore, are we to believe that in Romans 1:26-27 Paul’s use of ‘nature’ is a reference to the created order? What is it that the Apostle Paul really meant by ‘nature’? Can we clearly state that Paul identifies ‘nature’ with the created order? Our task in this area is made more difficult especially when we consider that often the ancient writers did not give explanations of certain words or phrases which they used. It is our understanding that the biblical authors often would assume that the original readers would understand special concepts without any accompanying explanation. If Paul, therefore, also did not need to explain his use of ‘nature’, are we to assume that the audience knew exactly what he was talking about? In chapter two our main objective will be to investigate several lexicons and New Testament Dictionaries to give us a general overview of *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*), with the intent of discovering Paul’s meaning of ‘nature’ for his audience.



Chapter 3:

Mark D Smith (1996:224) notes that the specific passage in question is not devoted to ethical admonition, for Paul’s point is primarily theological. However, according to Smith, the ethical standards implicit in 1:18-32 are nonetheless Paul’s and not a mere rhetorical flourish, as he makes explicit in 2:1: ‘the person who is inclined to judge the sinners of ch.1 is guilty of doing the very same things’ (NRSV)” (Smith, 1996:224). Yet, how are we to understand what can be considered right or wrong practices in relation to the morality of homosexual practices both in society and in the church? Did the Apostle Paul ever try to offer his communities a manual of discipline? The view is that Paul nowhere sets forth a systematic presentation of Christian Ethics, nor does he offer his communities a ‘manual of discipline’, a comprehensive summary of community organization and duties (Hays: 1996:17). The understanding is that primarily Paul’s ethical teachings are rooted in his theological thought. Therefore in order for us to understand the

ethical implications that Paul makes in Romans 1:26-27 we would firstly have delve into the theological motives of Paul in Romans 1. In chapter three we would want to consider briefly how the ethics of Paul fit into his theological framework. In conjunction with this, we want to consider the possibilities of how Paul used other sources (including those where the phrase *para physin* is to be found) as a part of his theological framework.

Chapter 4:

If the New Testament was written to make sense to people in the first century, then we must surely try to put ourselves into their places in order to determine what the writers of the New Testament intended their readers to understand. In relation to our study, are we able to adequately and accurately present the cultural climate of which Paul was a part, which formed the basis of what Paul knew and rejected. How can we with all certainty ascertain what Paul knew? Peter Cotterell (1989:32) is under the conviction that the process of establishing the meaning of a text is certainly a complex task, for which there are no shortcuts, and, in the end, all too few absolute certainties. Yet however complex this task may be, it still remains invaluable within the exegetical process. As Tate correctly states: “ Historical and socio-cultural research is not just an addendum to literary considerations, but it is both an intellectual and practical necessity, because conscious or unconscious ignorance of the historical and cultural *Sitz im Leben* of a text most often results in vague and convoluted interpretation” (Tate, 1991:30).

As much as lies within the scope of this paper to recreate the cultural setting in which Paul found himself, we would want to answer the following question. What did the Apostle Paul really know about the sexual practices of the Greco-Roman world? The argument is that Paul could only condemn that which he was familiar with. In considering and recreating certain aspects of sexuality

in the ancient world, much of our dependence will be on several historians that have done authoritative work in this area.

Chapter 5:

Within the final chapter we would hope that the proceeding chapters would give us a platform to do a general exegesis of Romans 1, and to make a few closing statements.

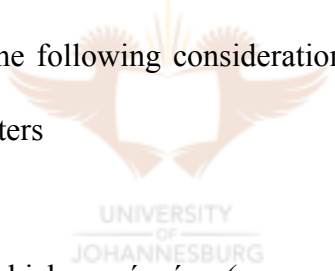


CHAPTER TWO

Survey of *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) in general

Introduction:

The main emphasis of this chapter will be to do a general observation of *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) by consulting various New Testament dictionaries and Greek Lexicons. Although, in this chapter, these words will be discussed separately, it remains the strong conviction of this study that the true meaning of the words comes to light when we consider it as the phrase *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*). In conjunction with analyzing the words and doing a discourse analysis, we also want to consider if the phrase *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) (as found in Romans 1:26-27) is an original concept created by Paul or if, as certain scholars have indicated, it has a Hellenistic, Stoic and Early Judaic background (a fuller discussion of the influences on Pauline theology will be done in chapter 3). Before we undertake this process, the following considerations will be taken into account in this chapter, and also in the ensuing chapters



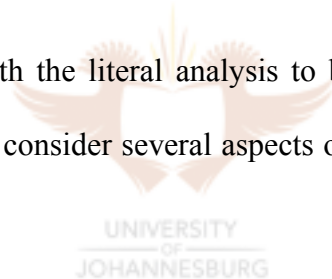
Firstly, does the context in which *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) stands, have any influence on the outcome of how we interpret these words? Should we consider that the context, in which *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) finds itself, to a large extent, determines the meaning of these words or this phrase? Hays (1986:199) argues that within the context we can observe that sexual acts, “contrary to nature” are given a negative moral evaluation” (Hays, 1986:199). Similarly, apart from its context can we conclude that “the phrase does not by itself mean immoral” (Hays, 1986:199). According to Hays, it is the context which shapes the meaning of this phrase. On this point Townsley (2000:3-4) argues, “It is instructive to note that Paul didn’t see an inherent evil contained in the phrase *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) (as the modern reader might), for we later see him describing God as acting *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) by grafting Gentiles into God’s stereological

tree (Romans 11:23-24)” (Townesley, 2000:3-4). The point that Townesley makes helps us to see that it is exactly the context which shapes the meaning of this phrase.

The conviction of this paper is that we surely cannot dismiss the importance of considering the context in which certain words or phrases find themselves. This, as we will discuss, does not only include the literal context but also the historical context. Cotterell states:

“Whereas most words are polysemous, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that this should not be taken to mean that a word is normally capable of a full range of meanings in its use in any one utterance. The context of the utterance usually singles out (and perhaps modulates) the one sense, which is intended, from amongst the various senses of which the word is potentially capable” (Cotterell, 1989:175).

Therefore in conjunction with the literal analysis to be done in this paper we will in the resulting chapters to a large degree consider several aspects of the context in which the passage in question finds itself.



Secondly, in relation to this study, much criticism has been received in the form of scholars not avoiding an anachronistic interpretation of Romans 1:26-27. With anachronism we mean the explanation of biblical meanings in terms of senses which only developed later. Therefore, to the best of our abilities we should not import our modern concepts (persons, things, events) into the ancient text. This is certainly relevant in our approach to *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*), especially in relation to the term ‘nature’. Much controversy has centred on the meaning of “nature” within Romans 1. And in respect to ‘nature’, we can ask, what modern concept or understanding of this word do we import into this context? Within importing modern ideas into the ancient text there is the danger of doing eisegesis as opposed to exegesis. Our task in this study will be to draw out of a text what it means, in contrast to importing modern concepts and ideas into the ancient text. This is

certainly a complex task, since we bring to a text not only a cultural bias but also a theological bias. We have our cultural and theological persuasions and presuppositions which certainly influence our way of thinking and, in turn, influences the way in which we interpret a certain text. The challenge of the exegete is to try to the best of his/her ability to divorce him/herself from his/her bias, and to stay as objective as possible. In taking the points, as stated above, into consideration, the resulting and ensuing chapters will all form a part of the exegetical process

2.1. παρά (para)

The linguistic setting of παρά (para):

Osborne in his discussion on the development of prepositions from the classical Greek to the Koine period believes that prepositions are exceedingly important exegetical tools with far reaching theological implications. (Osborne, 1991:58). A statement very true for this study, and for the current debate on the Bible and homosexuality. Therefore for the purpose of this study, we will follow some of the steps mentioned by Osborne as stated by Fee, in order to help us make the correct grammatical decisions. Fee mentions four steps in making grammatical decisions: a) be aware of the options; b) consult the grammars; c) check out the authors usage elsewhere; d) determine which options makes best sense in context – this includes both the literal and historical context (Osbourne, 1991:62). It should be noted that only several of these steps will be discussed at length in this chapter. Much more emphasis on the context will be done in the resulting chapters.

2.1.1. Be aware of options

The *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Balz & Schneider, 1982: 12) gives the following options for the interpretation of *para*: “...with the genitive the options are: of, from; with the dative the options are: by, in the opinion of; with the accusative the options are: at, along, alongside of, in comparison to against. *παρά (para)* is used without distinction in response to the

question ‘where’ and ‘to where’. Consistent with its generally less frequent usage, *παρά* (*para*) does not appear in all NT writings. It originally designated proximity, especially in the special sense, but also in derived senses. According to Balz and Schneider it designates, according to case, movement away from proximity (gen), position in proximity (dat), and movement into proximity (acc) (Balz & Schneider, 1982:12). For the purpose of this study the usage of *παρά* (*para*) with the accusative case in the NT, and more specifically in Pauline usage specifically affects our study.

2.1.2. With the Accusative

Of *παρά* (*para*) it is stated, “...a preposition indicating close proximity, with various modifications corresponding to the various cases with which it is joined” (Thayer, 1961: 476). Therefore, for a good reading of the New Testament it is imperative that there is a good understanding of how the cases work. (Black, 1998: 45).



With the Accusative in the:

a. local sense the following options for *παρά* (*para*) are:

by, at, next to, on the edge of, toward, by, along”; Matt. 4:18 “alongside the sea” 13:1 “by the sea”; Matt 15:29 “along the Sea of Galilee; Acts 16:13 “to the river”; Matt. 20:30 “by(the side) the road”; Matt 13:4 par: “on the path” or “alongside the path/by the path; Mark 4:15: “on the path”; Heb. 11:12 “on the seashore” (Balz & Schneider, 1982: 13).

b. Comparative: in comparison to, (more) than, (different) from, in the place of, instead of:

Luke 13:2: *ἀμαρτωλοί παρά πάντας τούς Γαλιίους*, “more sinful than/in comparison to all other Galileans”; Romans 14:5: *χρίνει ἡμέραν παρά ἡμέραν*, “he values one day more than other days”; 12:3: *μή ὑπερφρονεῖν παρά ὁ δεῖ φρονεῖν*, “not to think beyond that which one ought to think”; Luke 3:13: *πλέον παρά τό διατεταγ μένον*, “more than what is required”; Heb 3:3: *παρά Μωϋσῆν*, “compared to Moses”; 1Cor. 3:11: *θεμέλιον ἄλλον παρά τόν χείμενον*, “another

foundation than that which has already been laid”; Gal 1:8: *παρά ὃ εὐηγγελισμεθα ὑμῖν*, “different from the gospel that we proclaimed to you”; v 9 “different from what you have received”; Romans 1:25: *ἐλάτρευσαν τῆ χτίσει παρά τον χτίσατα*, “they worshiped the creature instead of the Creator” ; Luke 18:14: *χατέβη οὗτος δεδιχαιωμένος εἰς τόν οἶχον αὐτοῦ παρά ἐχείνον*, “he rather than the other went home justified” (Balz & Schneider, 1982: 13). “...beyond hope” ; Romans 9:24; “ other than, different from; Hebrews 1:9 “ above, beyond”; Romans 12:3 “more than”; (Thayer,1961: 478).

c. Adversative:

The meaning beside also forms the background for the adversative sense: against, contrary to (opposite to *kata* with acc. = “according to”). Rom. 1:26: *παρά φύσιν, para physin*, “contrary to nature/unnatural” (Balz & Schneider, 1982:13). “Romans 16:17: *παρά τήν διδαχήν*, “contradicting/against the teaching”; 2 Corinthians 8:3: *παρά ἀναμιν*, “beyond their ability; Acts 18:13: *παρά τόν νόμον* “against the law” (Balz & Schneider, 1982:13). Extremely important in our analysis *παρά* is the mention by Balz and Schneider that opposite to *kata* with the accusative *para* would be contrary to. This is an important aspect to take into consideration in relation to the grammar of the text.

d. Casual: because of: 1 Corinthians 12:15f: “...not because of this not/nevertheless because of this”.

e. Subtracting minus: 2 Corinthians 11:24: “forty less one”.

f. Fixed expressions: Luke 5:7: “...up to something” (Balz & Schneider, 1982: 13).

At this point we can that our reference to Balz & Schneider: 1982 has formed the basis of the various options we have considered for *para*. However within the next section, when we consider

the author's usage elsewhere, we will to a larger extent also consider several other lexicons and New Testament dictionaries which will also give us the various options for *para*.

2.1.3. The author's usage elsewhere

If we were to investigate the author's usage elsewhere (as stated above), it is evident that in many cases the option of, "more than", "beyond", "different from" is used in more instances than "contrary to". This point is also taken up by Boswell (1980:111-112), in which he states that *παρά* (*para*) in the New Testament usually means 'more than', 'in excess of'. What Boswell therefore suggests is that "*para physin*" could be understood to mean "beyond nature" rather than "against nature". This is certainly a contentious point for biblical scholarship and biblical interpretation.

At this point we can ask the following question: what parameter exactly leads the interpreter to choose one interpretation over another. In this case is it plausible to accept that because in most instances *παρά* (*para*) means "beyond" that we can also consider it to mean the same in Romans 1:26-27. The theological implications in this text are that if we were to choose 'beyond nature' as opposed to 'against nature', we could state, as the argument in this area goes, that Paul's reference is to an abuse of that which was naturally practiced and accepted. In other words, that which Paul condemned in Romans 1:26-27 was a practice that went beyond that which was naturally practiced.

As indicated above there are a smaller amount of cases where *παρά* (*para*) does mean contrary to. Rom 16:17 "contradicting/ against the teaching"; 2 Corinthians 8:3 "beyond their ability"; Acts 18:13 "against the law." And according to Balz and Schneider, also Romans 1:26: *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*), 'contrary to nature/unnatural (Balz & Schneider, 1982: 13).

Frederick William Danker (1957:757-758), places *παρά* (*para*) (specifically in Pauline usage) under the following headings: “more than”, “beyond”, and “against” or “contrary to”.

1. Marker of comparative advantage, in comparison to, more than, beyond.

Romans 1:25: *λάτρεύειν τή κτίσει παρά τόν κτίσαντα*, “serve the creation rather than the Creator”; 12:3: *μή ὑπερφρονεῖν παρά ό δει φρονεῖν*, “not to think beyond that which one ought to think”; Romans 14:5: *χρίνει ημέραν παρά ημέραν*, “he values one day more than other days; 2 Corinthians 8:3: *παρά άναμιν*, “beyond their ability”; 1 Corinthians 3:11: *θεμέλιον άλλον παρά τόν χείμενον*, (Danker, 1957:757).

2. Marker of that which does not correspond to what is expected, “against”, “contrary to”.

Romans 16:17: *παρά τήν διδαχήν*, “contradicting/against the teaching; Romans 1:26; 11:24, *παρά φύσιν, para physin*. Acts 18:13: *παρ ό*, contrary to that which Gal 1:8f (Danker, 1957:758).

Joseph Henry Thayer (1901) similar to that of Danker also interprets *para physin* as “contrary to nature”. “...παρ ό, contrary to that which, i.e. at variance with that which, Gal. 1:8; *para physin* Rom. 1:26.” Yet also similarly in his evaluation of *παρά* (*para*) we are able to observe that *παρά* (*para*) as, “more than” appears in several more instances in Pauline usage.

G Friedrich (1967) also places *para physin* within the adversative. For Friedrich the sense of “beside”, “beyond” is also the point of departure for the adversative sense: “without regard for”, “in spite of” and “against”. Therefore specifically in relation to Rom 1:26 “*para physin* means ‘against nature’, partly of the forbidden acts of men” (Friedrich, 1967: 736). Of the lexicons and theological dictionaries we have investigated up to this point, the overwhelming conviction is that *para* as used in Romans 1:26-27 means ‘against’ or ‘contrary to.’ The most significant point brought up from the

above investigation is the mention of Balz and Scheider that opposite to *kata* with the accusative *para* would be contrary to.

2.1.4. Which options make best sense in the context?

At this point of the study we will not discuss extensively matters pertaining to the context. Much more emphasis on the context will be done in the resulting chapters. However at this point brief comments, concerning matters pertaining to the context, will be made. Firstly as we have pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, it is the strong conviction of this study that the context does not merely help us understand meaning, it virtually makes meaning. Of the context, Black (1998:45) basically confirms that we should understand that Greek grammar is at best secondary to the context, both literary and historical, in the interpretation of any passage of scripture. Therefore in response to Boswell we would have to state, just because *para* in most instances means “beyond”, we cannot just come to the same conclusion for its usage in Romans 1:26-27. But this is also not to state that Boswell is correct in his analysis of *para*, as most lexicons and New Testament dictionaries that has been consulted in this study in any case interprets *para* to mean ‘against’ or ‘contrary to.’

Conclusion

Within the general observations that have been done of *παρά* (*para*) we are at this point able to state the following: Firstly, from the sources cited above the tendency is to place *para physin*, as found in Romans 1:26, within the Adversative as apposed to the comparative. The interpretation for *παρά* (*para*) is then understood to be ‘against’, or ‘contrary to’. Secondly, Hays has pointed out that a glance at Liddle and Scott will point out that in common Greek phrases, *παρά* (*para*) is interpreted as contrary to: “*para to diakaion* (contrary to what is just), *para elpida* (contrary to what is just), *para elpida* (contrary to what was hoped), *para doxan* (contrary to expectation/opinion) and of course *para physin*” (Hays, 1988:198). Hays also indicates that in a footnote (Boswell 1980:111-

12), “Boswell acknowledges that in certain stock phrases such as *para doxan* ‘contrary to’ may be the best rendering of *παρά (para)* with the accusative” (Hays, 1988:198). The task of the interpreter is to decide on whether or not *para physin* is exactly such a stock phrase. Helminiak (2000:79), similarly to Boswell, states that in a handful of stock phrases, *παρά (para)* can also mean ‘contrary to’, so *para physin* could be translated ‘contrary to nature. However according to Helminiak (2000:79) when we consider Paul’s own usage of these terms it will become clear that the sense is not “in opposition to the laws of nature”, but rather “unexpectedly” or “in an “unusual way.” As we will discuss in the ensuing chapters, it would seem that the points made by both Boswell and Helminiak can only be considered credible if we accept the fact that Paul could have been addressing a particular group of individuals.

Further discussions on *παρά (para)* and further considerations for the best interpretation within the context will be done in conjunction with *φύσιν (physin)*. Several scholars suggest that *παρά φύσιν (para physin)* was a common phrase throughout Hellenistic literature, and the relationship of the two words will to be considered as to investigate if it has an outcome on how we interpret *παρά (para)*. At this point we will note that the following has been stated of the phrase *para physin*, “in that in Romans 1:26 the noun *φύσις (physis)* occurs in a stereotyped phrase (*para physin*) within a block of material whose formulation is heavily conditioned by traditional language, the language of Hellenistic Jewish polemic against Gentiles, thus it would not be surprising to find terms used here in a sense not characteristically ‘Pauline’” (Hays, 1988:197).

2.2. φύσιν (*physin*)

Introduction

For our study of *φύσιν* (*physin*) a similar approach as undertaken for *παρά* (*para*) will also be undertaken here. Similarly as for *παρά* (*para*), the following steps for making grammatical decisions will be taken into consideration: a) be aware of the options; b) consult the grammars; c) check out the authors usage elsewhere; d) determine which options makes best sense in context. From our general observation of *φύσιν* (*physin*) we will consider whether it will be plausible to consider that *φύσιν* (*physin*) in Romans 1:26-27 occurs in the stereotyped phrase, *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*). In part we will consider that if *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) was not an original concept created by Paul then much of what we are to understand of the phrase, and *φύσιν* (*physin*), will require of us to analyze this phrase or noun within its historical context.

Brown (1971:658) points out that there is no Hebrew equivalent in the Old Testament for the word *φύσιν* (*physis*). The reason for this he states is that the Hebrews lacked the Greek conception of 'nature'. This he (1971: 658) believes is connected both with the fact that all existing things are referred to the creation or the Creator God, and also with the stronger historical thought of the Old Testament. James DeYoung (1988: 432) similarly states that there is no equivalent in the Old Testament for *φύσιν* (*physis*). For DeYoung (1988: 432) it is imperative to understand that the Jews referred all existing things to creation or to the Creator God, and the Old Testament is primarily concerned with history, not philosophy and speculation.

2.2.1. Current issues surrounding *φύσιν* (*physis*) in relation to homosexuality

James B DeYoung (1988:429) states that a new approach to understanding Romans 1 has been to understand the meaning of 'nature' in vv 26-27. It would seem that the modern debate hinges on the fact that there are those who believe that Paul was not condemning true homosexuals (inverts). It is believed that Paul was unaware of homosexuality as a biological state in his day, and

that his contribution to the recent debate is irrelevant or either incomplete. In support of this argument Boswell (1979:6) believes that when Paul referred to ‘nature’ he did not have in mind the notion of natural law. Boswell, on commenting on Romans 1:26-27, states the following concerning nature:

“Perhaps the most significant element of the passage is that it introduced into Christian thought the notion that homosexual relations were ‘against nature’. What Paul, however, seems to have meant was *unusual* not against natural law, as it is so often interpreted. The concept of natural law was not fully developed until almost 1,200 years later. All that Paul probably meant to say was that it was unusual that people should have this sort of sexual desire. This is made clear by the fact that in the same epistle in the 11th chapter, God Himself is in fact described as acting ‘against nature’ in saving the Gentiles. It is therefore inconceivable that this phrase connotes moral turpitude” (Boswell, 1979:6).

In a similar argument to that of Boswell, Helminiak (2000:79) is also under the conviction that for Paul, in Romans 1:26-27, the word ‘nature’ does not mean in accord with the universal laws. Helminiak (2000:79) rather believes that Paul’s use refers to what can be considered to be characteristic, consistent, ordinary, standard, expected and regular. Therefore in moving away from a more conventional understanding that ‘nature’ refers to the created order, he is more convinced that Paul was referring to the character of certain individuals.

James B De Young, (1988:438) in commenting on the idea that the interpretation of *φύσιν* (*physin*) is sometimes used to justify inversion or orientation, believes that the term does not have such a meaning in Greek literature or Biblical contexts. The conviction of DeYoung (1988:438) is that the interpretation of *φύσιν* (*physin*) cannot be interpreted to “mean what is natural to me” and that Paul’s reference is indeed not a reference to the characteristics of a group of people. In support of this DeYoung (1988:438) states that Plato who wrote in his last work (*Laws*) about Platonic

homosexuality and orientation gives no hint of this meaning. Rather he states that in Plato's *Laws* he makes it clear that homosexuality is something to be legislated as harmful to society and unnatural. Several more aspects of DeYoung's study will be analysed and integrated into the conclusion of this study.

Much of what we are seeking to determine then, is to enquire what Paul meant by 'nature' in Romans 1:26-27. Did Paul speak of 'nature' in the sense of the created order, or did he speak of nature as knowledge gained from empirical observation? Is there a possibility that Paul was aware of homosexuality as a biological state and that what he derogates in Romans 1:26-27 are homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons? As pointed out, much of the controversy surrounding 'nature' has also been the criticism on certain scholars for importing modern ideas into an ancient text, and therefore creating a case for eisegesis. The criticism on certain scholars for importing modern ideas into the ancient text is based on the fact that it is believed that "the ancient writers were operating without the vaguest conception of what we have learned to call sexual orientation" (Furnish, 1979:66). Also similarly, Derrick Sherwin Bailey states, "The Bible knows nothing of inversion as an inherited trait, or an inherent condition due to psychological or glandular causes..." (Hays, 1988:200-201). If these statements are correct are we then to believe that Paul was not interested in the developmental history of individuals and that this to a large extent sheds some light on the interpretation of the term 'nature.'

This is not to dismiss the modern concept of inversion that exists for many self-affirming homosexuals within the twenty first Century. Certainly there are those that have voiced that the nature of their orientation is perhaps not one they have chosen. And it would seem that it is certainly at this point where most difficulty is experienced. What then are we to understand of this concept as Paul used it? There are suggestions, that in this instance it is impossible for us to ignore the Stoic background of this phrase, "in that the influence of Stoic thought was pervasive in first-

century, popular moral philosophy, and its impact on Paul's conceptual categories is nowhere more apparent than in this passage" (Hays, 1988:196).

2.2.2. Be aware of the options

In considering the various options for *φύσις* (*physis*) we will see that the rare use in the New Testament text is striking (14 occurrences, 10 of those in Paul [7 in Romans, 1 in 1 Corinthians, 2 in Galatians], 1 in Ephesians, 2 in James, 1 in 2 Peter), considering the significant use of *φύσις* (*physis*) in the language of Hellenistic philosophy (Balz & Schneider, 1982:444).

The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Kittle,G &Friedrich,G ,1985) gives the following options for *physis*:

- a. From a root *bhū*, meaning to become, *physis* has the original sense of form or nature, but also budding, "growth, or "development," first in relation to plants, then animals and people.
- b. In Homer and Pindar it denotes "external form"
- c. The sense of "birth" or origin" occurs in pre-Socratic philosophy, and from this we have *physis* for physical descent.
- d. The later adjective *physikos* means natural

2. Nature and constitution

- a. The nature and qualities of people are often called *physis*, as is the inner nature of "manner" or character. In the absolute, *physis* also means creature, and among plants it has the sense of kind.
- b. The inner constitution of things is their *physis*. The *physis* of water or of a sickness or a person is its "proper nature". A person's temperament is also that person's *physis*. Aristotle defines the *physis* of a thing as the end product of its development.

- c. *Physis* may often be used for what is human a distinct from what is nonhuman. Within humanity the nature of the male is distinguished from that of the female. The term also expresses the limitation and vulnerability of human existence. Some deities are so by their true nature, others by human positing

3. True Nature and Universal Nature

- a. Philosophy considers ontological questions from the twofold standpoint of the true nature of things and the origin of all being. The pre-Socratics examine the true nature of things –not personified universal nature, but true being in distinction from appearance.
- b. Plato contest the validity of calling the material world *physis*, for *physis* is the primal origin of all things, then the soul is the *physis*. In general, however, Plato avoids the term for higher stages of being. By *physis* he means primarily the true being or idea of a thing.
- c. Aristotle tries to achieve a unified definition by discussing what is involved in the main senses of origin and constitution. His analysis leads him to the two concepts of essence and primal force.
- d. In Hellenism we find an equation of *physis* as universal nature with deity (cf. both Stoicism and Epicureanism). The supreme God creates *physis* by his word, and *Physis* plays a decisive role in creation. In the Gnostic sphere a distinction arises between two “natures” that of heaven, sun, light, or day on the one side, that of earth, moon, darkness, and night on the other.

3. Nature and Ethics.

- a. The antithesis of nature and law exerts a great influence of Greek thought. *Physis* has to do with natural constitution, *nomos* with environment. The Sophist stresses the utility of laws, although some younger Sophist rejects *nomos* in the name of nature, which has an element of the necessary as distinct from what is arbitrary.

- b. Among the pre-Socratics education combines with aptitude, but it is valued more highly than natural talent. Plato, however, does not build on *physis*, for what is right by nature may well be prejudicial to good education. Aristotle regards *physis* as the presupposition of ethical action but not its standard. Virtues do not arise by nature but as we act according to the understanding that is made possible by logos.
- c. *Physin echei* can have the weaker sense “it is natural” and we also find *kata physin* and *para physin* (according to or against nature). These phrases occur in the ethical sphere, especially with a reference to sexual matters (e.g. Pederasty)

5. Nature as a Cosmic and Vital Principle in Stoicism

- a. God, World, and Nature. Stoicism tries to overcome the antithesis of nature and reason. Nature is not just necessity but permeates the universe. It is both divine principle and primal matter. It is not apposed to *techne* but does all things artistically and purposefully.
- b. Humanity as logos and *physis*. The *telos* formula enables Stoicism to unite humanity with universal divine nature. Agreement with nature comes with appropriation of one’s own logos. We receive the logos by nature, and it belongs to our nature that we can get what is good only by contributing to the general good.
- c. *kata and para physin*. For the Stoics *kata physin* summarizes the telos formula. Action *kata physin* aims at the full development of the self and perfect insight into what is *kata physin* at the ethical level. The given order is often in fact the standard, thus it is *para physin* (against nature) to live with someone who is legally married to a third person.
- d. The older Stoics do not use the phrase “natural law”. Greek speaking Stoics find it hard to combine to two terms *physis* and *nomos*. Cicero, however uses *Lex naturae* or *naturalis*, and Philo uses *nomos physeos*. For the Greeks *physis* is a final court. Since it can be known only rationally, it is open to discussion, along with its norms, but since it forms a casual nexus, it rules out human freedom except as free concurrence with nature (as in Stoicism) or

as abandonment of the natural world (as in Gnosticism). Only the OT and NT belief in nature as God's creation can give significance to the concept of natural law (as the Christians apologist), for only in this context is there a relationship with both the divine Creator and the divine Lawgiver as the ultimate critical authority". (Kittel & Friedrich, 1985: 1283-1285).

Taking into consideration the various options for *φύσις* (*physis*) (as stated above), we will within the next section discuss the different ways in which Paul uses *φύσις* (*physis*). But before we undertake in this discussion we would at this point also want to consider DeYoung's (1988) analysis of *φύσις* (*physis*). DeYoung's contribution to this study is quite relevant in that he seeks to show that 'nature' in Romans 1:26-27 cannot be used to justify inversion or orientation.

For DeYoung (1988:431) the word has the following meanings: (1) origin, including birth and growth; (2) the natural form or constitution of a person, animal or thing, including nature or character of a person; (3) the regular order of nature; (4) philosophically, nature as an originating power (parallel to *theos* among the stoics), Nature personified, elementary substance (fire, water, air, earth), to concrete idea of creation; (5) creature or mankind; (6) kind, sort, species; (7) sex; (8) approximately equal to law (*nomos*). DeYoung's (1988:431) states that within the development of *φύσις* (*physis*), in the secular papyri at the time of the New Testament, there only occurs two senses of the word. The first being 'birth or physical origin' and the second being 'innate properties or powers' – what is derived from origin. In his response to *φύσις* (*physis*) referring to "what is natural to me" he states, that in all the Greek uses there is no suggestion that it has the meaning "what is natural to me" or "orientation". According to him, the closest category is "character, natural disposition, propensity", yet he states that this usage is never associated with homosexuality. According to him it points to what results from origin or growth and includes the instinct of animals. In support of his position he cites Koester who similarly states, "ones tendency, quality of

character is called *φύσις* (*physis*) because this nature is a given and not dependent on conscious direction or education” (DeYoung, 1988:431).

As the writings of both Philo and Josephus are also important to New Testament studies, we would at this point want to consider their contribution to the discussion of *φύσις* (*physis*). Philo adopts all of the earlier Greek usages of *φύσις* (*physis*), even using it of the creation. Philo makes a special contribution by combining the Greek (Stoic) concept of nature with the Jewish (Old Testament) understanding of God and the law. We note that for Philo the *nomos physeos* is always the Torah to which even God seems subject and that the phrases ‘contrary to nature’ and ‘according to nature’ occur frequently (De Young, 1988: 434).

Of Josephus’ use of *φύσις* (*physis*), we see that he uses *φύσις* (*physis*) very frequently and reflects all of the common usages of the first century A.D. Like Philo he speaks of the ‘law of nature’ and divine law. For Josephus marital intercourse and childbirth correspond to the order of nature (*kata physin*), but sexual deviation is *para physin* (De Young, 1988: 434). The task of the exegete is to decide on whether or not Paul was dependent upon the works of Philo and Josephus.

2.2.3. The author’s usage elsewhere

From the shades of meaning as discussed above, we would want at this point to consider the various ways in which Paul could have used *φύσις* (*physis*) in his letters. Brown (1971: 660) suggest that the use of the word in Galatians 2:15 *physei Ioudaioi*, ‘Jews by birth’, is like that of Philo and Josephus, meaning descent, extraction. Romans 2:27 also corresponds with this: *hē ek physeōs akrobystia*, Lit. ‘the circumcision by nature’, i.e. those who remain physically uncircumcised from birth. Of *physei* in Gal 2:15, Kittle and Friedrich (1985:1286) similarly states that ‘by nature’ can be interpreted by descent. Hays (1988:197) also states that *physei* in Galatians

2:15 might well be translated, as it is in the RSV, in accordance with the etymology of the word, “by birth”.

Of Romans 11:21 Kittel & Friedrich (1985:1286) states that *φύσιν* (*physin*) is used in the natural way. “God will not spare the wild olive shoot (the Gentile Christians) if he did not spare the branches which belonged to the rich olive tree *kata physin*, by nature, in the natural way. Of the parable of the wild olive shoot found in Romans 11:24, we see that Paul is following Hellenistic linguistic usage, such as we met in Philo and Josephus, with reference to the distinction between Jews and non Jews. ‘the wild olive shoot is cut from the wild olive tree’ to which it belongs *kata physin*, by nature, and grafted *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*), ‘contrary to nature’, into the cultivated olive tree. We can state that the interpretation of ‘nature’ here also leans toward that of descent.

According to Kittel & Friedrich (1985:1286) nature as used in 1 Corinthians 11:14 is personified as a teacher, it reminds us of what is seemly. According to Kittel & Friedrich (1985: 1286) in this instance there is no thought here of nature as a divine creator, and the example used is a common one in popular philosophy.

Of *φύσιν* (*physin*) in Romans 1:26 Brown states that, “*physis* stands further for the regular order of nature, which determines the distinction between the sexes. ‘God has given up the idolaters, so that they have exchanged natural (*physikēn*) sexual intercourse between man and woman for unnatural’ *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*), Rom 1:26)” (Brown, 1971:660).

Danker (1957:1069) states the following of the Pauline use of *φύσις* (*physis*), and places it under the following headings:

1. Condition or circumstance as determined by birth, natural endowment/ condition, nature, esp. as inherited from one's ancestor's in contrast to status or characteristics that are acquired after birth:

Galatians 2:15 says, “those who are Jews by birth”; Romans 2:27, *hē ek physeōs akrobystia*, Lit. “the circumcision by nature”; *ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς*, “we were, in our natural condition(as descendents of Adam)”; Romans 11:21 *οἱ κατὰ φύσιν κλάδοι*, “the natural branches”; 24c. *ἡ κατὰ φύσιν ἀγριελαιος*, “a tree which by nature is a wild olive” verse. 24a; opp. *Παρά φύσιν* “contrary to nature”, verse 24b.

2. The natural character of an entity, natural characteristics/disposition:

Galatians 4:8 Polytheist worship, *τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὐσιν θεοῖς* “beings that are by nature no gods at all”; Romans 2:14, when gentiles spontaneously (i.e. without extraneous legal instruction, cp. The prophetic ideal Jeremiah 31:32-34) fulfil the demands of the (Mosaic) law.

3. The regular or established order of things, nature:

Romans 1:26 *παρά φύσιν* “they exchanged the natural function for one contrary to nature”; Romans 2:14 when gentiles fulfil the law's demands by following the natural order of things (Danker, 1957: 1069-1070). Danker's analysis of *physis*, specifically as used in Rom 1:26-27, corresponds with that of Brown (1971:660) in that nature in Rom 1:26-27 refers to the established order of things.

Conclusion:

An observation of how Paul usually uses *φύσις* (*physis*) (as stated above) will indicate that Paul in several instances uses it to refer to the birth, or descent of a person or persons. In several instances we see that Paul also uses it to refer to the natural character of an entity. This is the line of argument that Helminiak (2000:79) takes up, in that he believes that Paul's use in Romans 1:26-27 refers to what can be considered to be characteristic, consistent, ordinary, standard, expected and regular. Are we therefore to assume, that in Romans 1:26-27, Paul uses 'nature' to refer either to the birth of persons, or to the natural character of an entity. Or are we to assume that Paul's use of *φύσις* (*physis*) in Romans 1:26-27 is a reference to the regular established order of nature, and that in this, Paul is aware of the fact that Philo combines the Greek (Stoic) concept of nature with the Jewish (Old Testament) understanding of God and the law natural. DeYoung (1988:438), in commenting on Paul's use of *φύσις* (*physis*) in Romans 1:26-27 states that in light of his study of the Greek terms, for both the noun (which occurs in an adverbial prepositional phrase, "changed the natural use into the [use] contrary to nature") and the adjective (used twice) the meaning is the same. Koester remarks: The stress on sexual faults corresponds to the so called Noahic commandments of rabbinic Judaism but in both tenor and formulation it is in every way Greek in Paul, the idea that of violation of the natural order" (DeYoung, 1988:438).

There is also the suggestion that for a proper understanding of 'nature' in Romans 1:26-27 one would have to consider that in Romans 1:26-27 the noun *φύσις* (*physis*) occurs in a stereotyped phrase (*para physin*). Hays (1988) in commenting on the phrase *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) in Romans 1:26, believes that the phrase cannot be interpreted without considering its Stoic connotations and the manner in which it has filtered through Jewish monotheism. If this is correct, are we then to assume that there is definitely some notion of ideal universal norms. At this point our deduction of the interpretation of *φύσις* (*physis*) cannot be considered to be conclusive. It remains the viewpoint of this study that the context in which *φύσιν* (*physin*) occurs will give us

more clarity on the interpretation of *φύσιν* (*physin*) within Roman 1:26-27. Several more aspects of the context will be dealt with in more depth in the ensuing chapters.

From the above study there are also several suggestions that *kata physin* and *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) occur within the ethical sphere, especially with reference to sexual matters. This is significant to consider especially in light of the fact that has been indicated that in Romans 1:26-27, Paul has no ethical intention in using this phrase. This however, demands further discussion. Brown (1971:660), similarly to Kittle, is under the conviction that of *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*), we are dealing with the typically Stoic thought of the moral law founded in nature, which was taken over by Judaism and applied to the Torah. This is significant as we will consider whether Paul was a bearer of this tradition. Similarly our purpose within the next chapter is to establish in which way, if at all, we are able to extract a Pauline ethic from Romans 1, if Paul is in any manner giving ethical instruction.



CHAPTER THREE

Pauline Theology as framework for παρά φύσιν (para physin)

Introduction:

Firstly it will become discernible in this chapter that a consideration of Pauline theology as framework for παρά φύσιν (*para physin*) to a large degree influences the interpretation of παρά φύσιν (*para physin*). Our purpose in this chapter is not to establish whether or not one is able to speak about a theology of Paul. This matter has already been dealt with in-depth by scholars such as Dunn (1998). Johnson (1997:9-10) has pointed out that Romans is demonstrably theological in that Paul's subject concerns God, and that his discourse begins with the human experience of God in the world. In considering several aspects of the theology of Paul in Romans, it is firstly recognisable that in Romans 1 (leading up to Romans 3:20) Paul's indictment is on all humanity. It is the conviction of this study that only in light of this insight can we correctly describe the theological relevance of this portion of Romans (1:18—3:20). Secondly, and primarily, for the purpose of this chapter we will enquire into whether it is possible for us to speak about a Pauline ethic. The suggestions, as stated below, are that Paul's ethical teachings are rooted in his theological thought. It is believed that the Apostle had his own ideas of what he considered to be right or wrong, but it is suggested that these were applied only to the specific problems he addressed in different churches. In conjunction with this, we will in this chapter also consider the possible sources Paul could have drawn from or used in his letters. In which way did Paul make use of these sources, and in which way did it have an influence on his theological motives?

Did Paul ever consider that his ethical teachings could ever cover the entire spectrum of the Christian era? And specifically in relation to Romans 1, can we state that Paul continued the tradition of παρά φύσιν (*para physin*) -as a proscription against homosexuality- as it is to be found in the writings of people such as Plato and Philo. Therefore, in considering Pauline theology as

framework for *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*), we will in this chapter to a large degree also consider the historical development of *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*), especially in relation to the topic of homosexuality.

3.1. A Pauline Ethic

It is the view of Hays that much of Western interpretation of Paul shares the unfortunate tendency, “to suppose that Paul (in Rom 1) is primarily concerned with developing a soteriological account of the fate of individuals before God” (Hays, 1988:200). The implication being that in Romans 1 Paul is not describing the individual life histories of pagan sinners. He further states,

“...modern commentators (see Furnish 1979:73-78; Kasemann, 1980:36-52; Cranfield, 1975:104-35) universally agree that the purpose of the passage (Romans 1) as a whole is to proclaim that the ‘wrath of God’ is now being revealed against all who do not acknowledge and honour God. Romans 1 is neither a general discussion of sexual ethics or an explicitly prescriptive admonition about the sexual behaviour appropriate for Christians” (Hays, 1988:200).



Hays (1988:190) is under the conviction that in Romans 1 Paul does not argue on a case by case basis that every individual had first known and rejected God. He rather suggests that Paul’s story in Romans 1 is the story of the universal fall. This, as we will see, is fundamental in understanding that Paul was not interested in the development of whether certain individuals were homosexuals by birth or not. As several scholars agree, what Paul is really doing in Romans 1 is to present an empirical survey of rampant human lawlessness as evidence that God’s wrath and judgment are already at work in the world. Smith similarly states, “Paul is not engaging in an exacting examination of each type of sin, but rather pointing up the desperate situation of an unredeemed humanity” (1996:225). The fact that Paul’s indictment is on all human impiety and

unrighteousness helps us to recognise that Paul's purpose in Romans 1:26-27 is not to discuss whether or not certain heterosexuals had abused the institution of healthy homosexual relationships.

In light of the fact that Paul's point in Romans 1 is primarily theological, how are we to deduce his moral implications? And why does Paul specifically include matters pertaining to homosexual activity? We are inclined to ask whether or not the Apostle Paul ever tried to offer his communities a handbook of discipline? Richard B Hays states the following: "Paul nowhere sets forth a systematic presentation of Christian Ethics. Nor does he offer his communities a 'manual of discipline', a comprehensive summary of community organization and duties" (Hays: 1996: 17). Hays is under the conviction that Victor Furnish has correctly stated that the study of Pauline ethics must begin with the 'theological convictions' which underlie Paul's concrete exhortations and instructions" (Hays, 1996:19). Therefore what we are to believe about Paul's ethical teachings are that they are rooted in his theological thought. Therefore, as interpreters of Paul our first inclination should be to establish what Paul's theological motives are in Romans 1, and in this to establish how the present discussion fits into theological framework of Paul. A more thorough discussion of this matter will be included into the final chapter of this study.

Therefore with these considerations in mind we want to consider to a further degree the possible influences on Pauline theology/ethics and the affect it may have on our present discussion.

3.1.1. The Old Testament and Judaism

The Apostle Paul himself gives several clues to suggest that his heritage is at least partly Jewish. Some of the clues given by the apostle himself are to be found in scripture verses such as Philippians 3:4-6 where he identifies himself with the people of God. An examination of Paul's letters will indicate that he attests his indebtedness to the faith of the Old Testament and to the

traditions of this covenant people (Furnish, 1968:28). Yet, how are we to understand how Paul's use of the Old Testament specifically functions within Paul's letters. Furnish states,

“...the Old Testament is not a source for his ethical teaching in that it provides him rules, aphorisms, maxims, and proverbs. Rather, it is a source for his ethical teaching in that it provides him with a perspective from which he interprets the whole event of God's act in Christ, and the concomitant and consequent claim God makes on the believer” (Furnish, 1968:42).

3.1.2. The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

In Paul's day the “Apocryphal Books” were used in association with the more canonical Old Testament books. The view of Furnish is that we cannot definitely determine whether Paul drew upon these works for his ethical teaching, but that “Paul's acquaintance with the Wisdom of Solomon (first century B.C.) is more clearly demonstrable and has long been recognized by many scholars” (Furnish, 1968:35-36). As several scholars have pointed out, there are the parallels between Romans 1:20 ff and Wisdom of Solomon 13:1 ff and Romans 9:19 ff and Wisdom of Solomon 10-11. The first of these is of special interest to the student of Paul's ethic for Paul's description of the Gentile's sin and its consequences follow closely the corresponding passage in Wisdom of Solomon. It will become evident that not only is the apostle's terminology similar (cf. the vice list in Romans 1:26ff. and Wisdom of Solomon 13:22, but, more important, the type and line of argument are significantly parallel in the two writings (Furnish, 1968:35-36). Of the ethical materials of apocalyptic Judaism, Furnish (1968:37-38) states that it is possible to detect some formal and material relationship, but not as strong as the influence of the more established books of the Old Testament canon. Of Rabbinic Judaism, Furnish states that there are elements of rabbinism, “but it is going too far to say that Paul is a self-conscious and consistent bearer and interpreter of that tradition” (Furnish, 1968:42). We can conclude from Furnish that although these works find expression in Paul's ethical teaching, it does not seem to be part of his overall purpose. Secondly,

we cannot use the Jewish influences in Paul's ethical teaching to state that his teaching is identical in character, function, and objective with Jewish materials. Finally, as it will become evident within the next section we have to realise that the Jewish influences does not exclude the possibility that Paul's ethical perspectives and teachings were also nourished by other religious and cultural sources, for example Hellenistic.

3.1.3. "The Hellenistic World"

Numerous scholars have indicated that Pauline phrases, metaphors, and terms are familiar and frequent in Hellenistic circles as represented by the broad and pervasive movement of Stoicism. To this Bultmann's monograph on Paul's style has "impressively documented the extent to which the apostle, in his oral preaching was influenced by the diatribe form as practiced and popularized by the Cynic and Stoic preachers of his day" (Furnish, 1968:46). Furnish (1968:46) states that it is not so clear if Paul is materially dependent upon the Hellenistic concept of "natural law" which helps a person to choose between what is right or wrong. The passage that Furnish refers to is Romans 2:14-15, "when Gentiles who do not possess the law do by nature [φύσει] what the law prescribes..." Furnish (1968:48-49) states that G Bornkamm argues that all the elements (nature, law, written in their hearts) are un-Jewish but thoroughly and specifically Greek. Furnish (1968:48-49) further states that in support of Bornkamm's conclusion, many Hellenistic motifs are present here in the same context and even arranged in a way which have a Hellenistic ring. It can be argued that *φύσει* here is not used as a technical term but only with the meaning 'instinctively' or 'spontaneously', and that, therefore, the law which the Gentiles sometimes obey is none other than God's law (the Torah), not a universal 'law of nature' (Furnish, 1968:49).

Was Paul, therefore, original in his ethical teaching? From our general observation we can state, quite the contrary. We are able to deduce that Paul makes use of traditions – Christian and non-Christian, biblical and non-biblical, in order to show that his existing expectations for the

Christian life are not necessarily new (Furnish, 1968:69). A point extremely important for this study is the realisation that much of the concepts that Paul takes up, has been adopted into Paul's own thought and applied in new ways. It is therefore also more than possible for us to assume that Paul in Romans 1:26-27 has done exactly this. Our assumption is that he has taken up relevant concepts and then in turn adopted it in new ways. Therefore at this point let us to a further degree consider the historical development of *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*), especially in relation to it being used as a proscription against homosexuality.

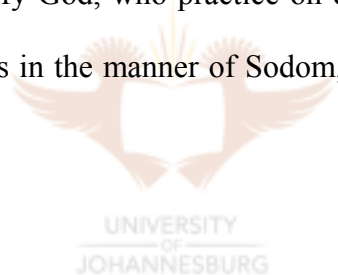
3.2.1. Historical context: the development of *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) considering the possibility of Paul carrying on the tradition of *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) in relation to procreation.

From several sources already cited in chapter two, we want to consider that it is plausible to believe that the phrase *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) was a concept not original to Paul. It had been pointed out by several scholars, in the previous chapter that the formula 'by nature, 'contrary to nature', 'according to nature' is found very frequently within Hellenistic literature. (Brown, 1971:659). Hays (1988:197) also points out that the noun *physis* occurs in a stereotyped phrase (*para physin*)

For Gagnon (2001) Paul, in Romans 1:26-27 primarily describes homosexual activity to be *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) (against nature) because homosexual intercourse does not lead to procreation. Therefore for Gagnon the ethical implications are explicit in that homosexual intercourse does not lead to procreation. Several aspects of Gagnon's argument—in relation to procreativity—will be discussed at this point. In conjunction with this we want to consider whether the phrase *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) was used in ancient literature as a polemic against homosexual activity, specifically in relation to the argument of procreation. If homosexual activity throughout

ancient literature was considered to be *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*), then did Paul simply apply a concept that his readers were familiar with, into his proscription to be found in Romans 1:26-27. And in this are we to assume that the audience were familiar with the ethical implications.

Gagnon's (2001:161) initial reference is to the sentences of Pseudo-phocylides. He states that the sentences of *Pseudo-phocylides*, 190-92, 212-14 9ca. 50 BC (100 CE. Alexandria?), urges that the "limits of sexual intercourse set by nature not be transgressed by intercourse between males nor should females imitate...the sexual role of men" (Gagnon, 2001:161-162). In relation to this The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (of uncertain date and location: ca. 150 B.C.E - 200 C.E.) in Syria speaks despairingly of corrupters of boys *:(paidophthoroi)* and Sodom, which 'exchanged the order of its nature'. Second Enoch 10:4 reads, "this place [of torment], Enoch has been prepared for those who do not glorify God, who practice on earth the sin which is against nature, which is child corruption in the anus in the manner of Sodom, of witchcraft" (Gagnon, 2001:161-162).



Gagnon (2001:164) states that rejection of same-sex intercourse on the grounds that it resulted in an infertile union was commonplace among Greeks and Romans. The classic texts are from Plato's *Laws*, particularly the statement in 636 C: "When male unites with female for procreation, the pleasure experienced is held to be in 'accordance with nature' (*kata physin*), but 'contrary to nature' (*para physin*) when male mates with male or female with female" (Gagnon, 2001: 161-164). In reference to this the Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus also wrote:

"Men who are not wantons or immoral are bound to consider sexual intercourse justified only when it occurs in marriage and is indulged in it for the purpose of begetting children, since that is lawful, but unjust and unlawful when it is mere pleasure seeking even in marriage. But of all sexual relations those involving adultery are most unlawful, and no

more tolerable are those involving males with males, because the daring and flagrant act is ‘contrary to nature’ (*para physin*, XII)” (Gagnon, 2001: 161-164).

These views were held specifically in relation to procreation. Therefore, primarily, any sexual activity which does not lead to procreation was considered to be ‘against nature’. Boswell on writing on several reasons why there is hostility towards gay people states:

“First of all, I want to dispose of what might seem the most likely primary reason for hostility toward homosexuality-namely, general opposition to non-procreative sexuality. There was indeed on the part of many early Christians a feeling of hostility toward any form of sexuality which was not potentially procreative. This cannot, however, be shown to stem from Christian principles” (Boswell, 1979:7).

Boswell is under the conviction that Theologians rather wished to used this type of argument of procreation as a method of birth control in order to show Christian parents that they had to be responsible for the creation of a child every time they had sexual pleasure. According to Boswell (1979:7) the original aim of this approach, it appears, was only to protect children and that it was not to attack homosexuality. Boswell’s views can be evaluated in accordance with works from both Philo and Josephus which will be cited later in this chapter. The question is: did these early Christian writers specifically make use of the argument of non-procreative sex in their proscription against homosexual acts, or as a means of birth control?

It will become apparent in this section that similarly to Greek and Roman, Jewish critics of same sex intercourse rejected homosexual conduct on the ground that it was “contrary to (or: against) nature’. According to Gagnon (2001:163), apart from the obvious and central fact that the

law forbade same-sex intercourse, there were four reasons why only intercourse between male and female was considered to be in ‘accordance with nature’ or ‘natural’. “The first two are of primary importance: (1) Homosexual intercourse cannot lead to procreation; (2) homosexual intercourse represents an affront to God’s sexual stamp on males and females by uniting two non-complementary sexual being (with emphasis on the inherent degradation of males penetrated as if females); (3) homoerotic desire constitutes an excess of passion; and (4) homosexual intercourse is not practiced even by animals” (Gagnon, 2001: 163).

Upon investigating the writings of both Josephus and Philo we are able to detect that they also witness to this view. Philo states the following, “What are our marriage laws? The law recognizes only sexual intercourse (or mixing, union) that is in ‘accordance with nature’ (*kata physin*), the [intercourse a man has] with a woman, and that only for the procreation of children” (Gagnon, 2001:166-167). Later, in the same work, Josephus also writes of sexual intercourse with males which is “contrary to nature (*para physin*) and without restraint” and accused the Greeks who attributed ‘to the gods sexual intercourse between males’ of inventing an excuse for their pleasures, which were “disgusting and contrary to nature” (Gagnon, 2001:166-167).

In commenting on Leviticus 20:13, Philo cites the following as one of the reasons why the law was justified in condemning the active and older lover in *pederastic* same-sex intercourse: “He pursues a pleasure that is ‘contrary to nature’ (*para physin*) and does his part to make the cities desolate and empty of inhabitants by destroying (*diaphtheiron*) or wasting the procreative sperm....” (Gagnon, 2001:163-167).

Romano Penna (2005:1) in commenting on why the New Testament does not deal explicitly with the subject of homosexuality states that the reason for this was that homosexuality had already been condemned by Jewish tradition to which the early Christian writers were indebted. Similarly it

was also censured by the predominant Stoic philosophy as “contrary to nature” (Penna, 2005:1). Therefore according to Penna Philo of Alexandria, who is the leading exponent of Hellenistic Judaism, in his treatises repeatedly criticizes sodomy and pederasty as ‘illicit relations’ and those that practice them as ‘enemies of nature’ (Special laws 3:36).

Ward (1997:263), in a similar argument to Gagnon, also enquires into the aspect of non-procreative sex. He also suggests the possibility of Paul continuing the tradition of *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) as argued by Plato and eventually carried on by Philo. His argument is largely in response to a statement of Scroggs, whereby Scroggs states, “I know of no Greco-Roman text which attempts to explain why homosexuality is ‘against nature’ (Ward, 1997:263). His response is that same sex acts described as ‘against nature’ appears in Plato’s creation story, the *Timaeus*, “and that leads in turn to the answer of why females feature in the *Laws* and in the subsequent philosophical tradition” (Ward, 1997:263). Along with reference to Plato, Ward also makes reference to the *Timaeus* which lays out what is *kata physin* and why. This, as we will discuss in the closing chapter of this study, is an integral part of interpreting *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*). A certain passage of Plato which Ward cites (1997:264) specifically states that the female and male nature (*φύσις*) is for procreation, “and that acts between males and females which are obviously non-procreative are *para physin*”. As Ward point out, this particular passage from Plato however does not explain what *kata physin* is. However in a particular creation story from the *Timaeus*, the *Timaeus* states that, “...the creator’s purpose is paramount, and thus *kata physin* is tantamount to the will of the creator” (Ward, 1-997:264). The following passage from the *Timaeus*, Tim. 30a-b reads as follows:

“For God willed that, as far as possible, all things should be good and nothing bad....It was not and is not right for him who is the best to do anything except what is the fairest. Therefore, taking thought, he found that, among things that are visible *kata physin*, no work that is without intelligence on the whole will ever be fairer than one that has intelligence

(νοῦς), and intelligence cannot belong in any without soul (ψυχή). Because of this reasoning, when he framed the universe (τό πᾶν), he constructed intelligence within ψυχή within σῶμα, so that the work he completed might be *kata physin*, the fairest and the best.” (Ward, 1997:265).

In considering the similarities that exist between the writing of Philo and Plato, it would seem that certainly Philo continues the tradition of Plato, in that erotic acts must be for procreation. In this matter Philo’s description of the Sodomites, “...echoes Plato in *Phaedr.* 250e-251a, where a person given over to *ἡδονή* acts like an animal in trying to beget children (*παιδοπορεῖν*) and is unashamed in pursuing *παρά φύσιν ἡδονή*” (Ward, 1997:270). According to Ward certainly Philo’s language does not come from the text of Genesis. Hebrew has no equivalent for the words *ἡδονή* and *φύσις*; hence these words rarely occur in the Septuagint (LXX), and then primarily in works originally written in Greek” (Ward, 1997:270). This therefore is extremely significant in understanding also that the language Paul uses in Romans 1:26 is not characteristically Pauline.

Ward also cites from Philo his condemnation on the female prostitute. “The female prostitute who infects the souls of both men and women with licentiousness (*ἀκολασία*)” (Ward, 1997:272.) He goes on to state, “This is the only passage I have been able to find in Philo about female same-sex acts, and it seems to have gone unnoticed in the scholarly literature” (Ward, 1997:272). Relating to this matter the *De opificio mundi* which purports to be Moses’ account of the world’s creation draws heavily upon Plato, especially the *Timaeus*. And in this work we are able to deduce that *φύσις* (*physis*) sometimes serves interchangeably for God.

In questioning whether this tradition of procreation is carried over into Romans 1:26-27, Ward states,

“The tradition stemming from Plato and merging with Judaism in Philo and Pseudo-Phocylides, resembles Romans 1:26-27 in these respects: (1) all the texts oppose same-sex intercourse by both women and men; (2) they describe such acts as *para physin*; (3) their opposition rests on a negative view of ἡδονή or πάθος/πάθη; (4) except for Pseudo-Phocylides, they connect this with creation; and (5) they use words ἀρσην and θήλυσ. Romans 1:26-27 lacks an explicit reference to procreation, which in the tradition that I have explored is *kata physin*; but θήλεια in Romans 1:26 is a term that, by etymology and often by usage, designates the woman in her role as procreator” (Ward, 1997:277).

Upon closer inspection of Romans 1:26-27 it will become evident that one important component of the attack of same-sex -in Plato and later in Philo is missing in Paul. That is the emphasis on procreativity as the mark of what is natural in sexual relations. What can we state to be the reason for Paul’s lack of attention to procreation? Some would argue that it can be attributed to Paul’s expectation of the coming of the end of the age. (Schoedel, 2000:49). Or can we simply state that Paul’s theological motives are not similar to that of perhaps his contemporaries, and that what is noticeable in Romans 1:26-27, is that it is actually the abhorrence of pleasure for the sake of pleasure that provides the real impetus to the rejection of same-sex relations.

Christine E. Gudorf (2000:134) has a different view on this matter. She states,

“We cannot read into Paul the long tradition of Christian interpretation of “acts against nature” as referring to nonprocreative sex. Not only is there nothing in the text referring to procreation, but it is well recognized that Paul put no stress on procreation in what he regarded as the last days. Moreover with global warming, ozone hole, and predictions of massive world hunger within the next half century as world population increases from five to ten billion, we can no longer snicker and smirk at the idea that nonprocreativity should perhaps be regarded as an important social benefit of homosexuality. Given humanity’s role

as God's steward of the earth, in this day and age it is no longer human nonprocreativity which must be morally defended, but procreativity itself. This is of course, something that Paul could not have foreseen" (Gudorf, 2000:134).

Apart from Ward's observation that *θήλεια* in Romans 1:26 is a term that, by etymology and often by usage, designates the woman in her role as procreator, we could state that Paul does not explicitly state that 'acts against nature refers to non-procreative sex. This, as we will see is also true for the next category (active/passive) we will discuss.

3.2.3 "Active/Passive Gender Categories":

Pieter JJ Botha in his work *Wat Sê Die Bybel Oor Homoseksualiteit* (2002) states, "Die fundamentele kategorie vir die beoordeling van aanvarbare erotiek in die antieke Mediterreense wêreld was die onderskeid tussen aktiewe en passiewe rolle, eerder as fisiologiese, emosionele of sentimentele faktore" (Botha, 2002:4). His conviction is that what was considered to be 'according to nature' or 'against nature was based on this category. According to him grown men should not have been passive and women should not have been active partners in a sexual relationship. Therefore, men and women changing the roles ascribed to them were acting 'against nature'. He states,

"Hierdie opvatting was baie diep gestel in die antieke Mediterreense psige. Mens loop dit oral raak, vanaf Aristoteles (bv *Ethica nichomachea* 1148b) regdeur tot by die Kerkvaders (bv Johannes Chrusostomos *Homiliae in epistulam ad Romanus* 4.2.3); dit blyk uit Akkadiese en ander Semitiese tekste en, soos ons sal sien, speel dit ook 'n rol in die Ou Testament" (Botha, 2002:4-5).

Also, in his discussion of Romans 1:26-27 he states that Paul also held up this view in that the women as well as the men have taken on either the passive or the active role in the sexual relationship which was not ascribed to them according to nature. In response to Botha, we can state that the active/passive category was not the only category to be considered to be 'against nature' within the ancient world. We can also question whether such a category was still significant, or, existed within the first century for Paul and his audience.

In response to Botha we will consider several arguments in relation to the active/passive categories. Several scholars are in agreement that for Philo concerns for procreation and for clarity with respect to one's gender or species seem to govern his categorizations. Yet in stating this it is not altogether clear if female procreation was at stake in condemnations of female homoeroticism. Brooten argues that Paul condemns sexual relations between women as 'unnatural' because he shares the widely held cultural view that women are passive by nature and therefore should remain passive in sexual roles. It is without doubt that historical data documents that active and passive constitute foundational categories for Roman-period and culture. Yet in stating this we are apt to ask just how widely held this view was in the Roman late Republic and early Empire. Ward (1997:279) states that Brooten has demonstrated through a variety of sources that this view did exist and did have ramifications for homoerotic relations, but he also argues that a variety of sources indicate that female sex enjoyed a personal, sexual, and economic liberation unparalleled in civilized states before the latter half of the twentieth century. It is in fact the recently discovered wall paintings from the Suburban Bath at Pompeii- which depict some persons to appear to be both active and passive at the same time- which sheds some light on this matter. In several scenes from these paintings men and women are represented as participating equally in both passive and active sexual roles. In citing these wall paintings we can consider it plausible to argue for the deconstruction of the active/passive gender categories. It would seem more than probable that the procreation argument is typical of Hellenistic Jews who wished to set themselves apart from the

pleasure-orientated Romans (Ward, 1997:284). If Paul did not explicitly explain that ‘acts against nature’ refers to non-procreative sex, or to the men and women exchanging their active/passive roles in the sexual relationship, is there a possibility that Paul was saying that acts which were *para physin* (against nature), were against God’s intent for mankind? And that in this, an understanding of how God created the sexes within the creation account needs not to be qualified with various categories. And that at this point a proper understanding of God’s intent for the various sexes would be the theological grounding which leads to proper ethical standards.

3.2.4. Was Paul’s referring to nature as the natural order as created by God?

Several scholars have pointed out that the text of Romans itself does not contain sufficient clues to the precise meaning of ‘unnatural’. In other words we cannot clearly state that Paul was arguing in favour of one category as appose to the other. Can we perhaps state that in Paul stating that sexual acts in Romans 1:26-27 were *para physin*, - against the created and intended order of God- that Paul indeed had different theological motives to that of his contemporaries. We can indeed ask whether the act of procreation was the primary purpose for God creating man and women. Or can we simply state that since Paul’s reference in Romans 1 was a reference to the creation account as found in Genesis 1 that Paul would sense that he would not need to explain that which was obvious. It is Käsemann that has pointed out that the Roman Christians must have had a high degree of theological understanding in view of dogmatic concentration of this letter. But in coming to such conclusions we would firstly have to be convinced of the fact Paul’s use of *para physin* was in actual fact a reference to the created order (as found in the Genesis account)

Firstly, in relation to the matter of the phrase *para physin* referring to the created order, scholars indicate that such an argument becomes apparent by Paul's previous illustration that idolatry entails the suppression of truth. In reference to Romans 1 we see that Paul argues that God's will as regards the worship of idols is plainly visible or 'obvious' (*phaneron*) because 'from (the time of) the creation of the world his unseen qualities (*ta aorata*) are clearly seen (*kathoratai*), capable of being mentally apprehended by means of the things made (*tois poiēmasin*). In fact, according to Malick (1993:332), the decisive factor in Paul's use of *physis* is his biblical doctrine of creation.

How plausible it is to view that Paul in Romans 1:24-27 did not regard same-sex intercourse as a rebellion against, and distortion of, the created pattern of sexuality in Genesis 1-2. An investigation into Paul's theological motives will show that since Paul traces the origin of all sinful passions ultimately back to the fall, it is not surprising that the biblical creation stories serve as a backdrop to the narrative in 1:18-32. Obvious allusions to Genesis 1 include the words 'ever since the creation of the world' (1:20) and 'the Creator' (1:25). Paul's denotation of the sexes in 1:26-27 as 'females' (*thēleiai*) and 'males' (*arsenes*) rather than 'women' (*gynaikes*) and men (*Andres or anthorōpoi*) follows the style of Genesis 1:27: 'male and female (*arsen kai thēlu*) he made them. Therefore are we to believe that when Paul speaks of same-sex intercourse as acts that are *para physin* that he is really speaking about human rebellion against the sexual pairing of male and female as found in Genesis 1:26-31?

In a footnote on pg 255 no 16 Gagnon (2001:255) states that most commentators speak vaguely of same-sex intercourse as a violation of the "order of nature" or "natural order" created and intended by God. However he states that Fitzmyer explicitly states that the order of sexual organs themselves is an indication that it was intended for the expression of love between man and woman and for procreation. Similarly Cranfield takes 'nature' as a metonym for "the intention of the Creator' or 'the way God made us'. He states, "For this appeal to 'nature' in the sense of the

order manifest in the created world compare 1 Corinthians 11:14, where *ἡ φύσις αὐτῆ* might almost be translated ‘the very way God has made us’ (Cranfield, 1975:126). Cranfield states that it is not impossible to consider that Paul was aware of the great importance which *φύσις* had in Greek thought for many centuries and that the decisive factor in Paul’s use of *φύσις* lies in Paul’s use of it in his biblical doctrine of creation. (Cranfield, 1975:126). Therefore ‘nature’ denotes that order which is manifest in God’s creation.

According to Hays, “The understanding of ‘nature’ in this conventional language does not rest on empirical observation of what actually exist, instead, it appeals to a conception of what ought to be, of the world as designed by God and revealed through the stories and laws of Scripture” (Hays, 1996: 387). Therefore, according to Hays those who take part in sexual practices *para physin* are defying the Creator and demonstrating their own alienation from Him.

An argument that certain scholars have taken up is to split the forms of argumentation in 1:18-25 and 1:26-27 for the purpose of pointing out the fact that *physis* does not occur at all when Paul speaks of the knowledge of God from His works of creation in the visible world. Several commentators however indicate that such a split is not at all plausible. But even so, according to scholars who use this type of argumentation they do admit that in sayings in Philo which parallel Rom 1:18-25 *physis* is repeatedly used, personifying nature as creator and sustainer of the world (Gagnon, 2001:255-56).

Botha (2005) seems to definitely put Paul’s use of ‘nature’ into perspective. His view is that the words ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ can be used in different senses, the biological, the moral and the religious sense. His argument is that the ‘contrary to nature’ argument is a theological argument and not a scientific biological argument. Botha states, “Hence nature is not the result of empirical investigation, or speculative determinism, but a theological norm determined by God. “Therefore,

natural and/or nature refer to one's constitution as given by God, the Creator" (Botha, 2005:186). A significant element of interpreting Paul is to realise that he had a different theological emphasis to that of his contemporaries. In that in Paul's argument in Romans 1, which certainly seems to refer to the Genesis account of creation, man and woman fulfil a function of creative complementarities. In that the man without the woman (apart from their procreative abilities) is created incomplete, and without the man, the woman is created incomplete (Botha, 2005:185). I would state at this point that if the procreative category does have any bearing on this passage it only serves within a secondary function, since the ability of the man and the women to create certainly also defines them as creatures made in God's image.

Conclusion:

What is quite notable about Paul's comments in Romans 1:26-27 is that there are several similarities between his condemnation of homosexual behaviour and that of his contemporaries. We should however make an important distinction between Paul's writings and the writings of his contemporaries. The distinction being that Paul's ethical teachings are integrally related to his fundamental theological convictions. These theological convictions we have to state was most probably not shared by several of his contemporaries.

Gagnon (2001:254) argues, "Given the meaning of 'contrary to nature' (*para physin*) and comparable expressions used by Jewish writers of the period to describe same-sex intercourse, the meaning of the phrase in Paul is clear" (2001:254). Gagnon states that for Paul it was a simple matter of "commonsense observation of human anatomy and procreative function that even pagans, otherwise oblivious to God's direct revelation in the Bible, had no excuse for not knowing" (Gagnon, 2001:255-56). His argument is that even,

“pagans who have no access to the book of Leviticus should know that same sex organs fit male to female, not female to female, or male to male. Again by fittedness I mean not only the glove-like physical fit of the penis and vagina but also clues to complementarity provided by procreative capacity and the capacity for mutual and pleasurable stimulation” (Gagnon, 2001:254).

Even if Paul could have been influenced by the Genesis account of creation, for Gagnon the primary purpose for Paul’s use of nature (Romans 1:26-27) is found in the anatomical “uncomplimentary”.

“The reference in 1:24 to same –sex intercourse as a ‘dishonoring of their bodies’, combined with the reference to ‘natural use’ in 1:26-27, confirms that Paul viewed same-sex intercourse as an ‘unnatural’ use of the gendered body because of the clear anatomical ‘discomplementarity’ of such intercourse. The fact, too, that ancient philosophical discussions about nature’s provision for gender differentiation often appealed to visible, bodily characteristics of men and women (including 1 Corinthians 11:14) confirms the understanding proposed here for ‘nature’ in Rom 1:26-27” (Gagnon, 2001:258).

Gagnon states that even if Paul was aware of non-exploitive same-sex relations it would “not have changed the verdict for any first-century Jew because the anatomical, sexual, and procreative complementarity of male and female unions, in contrast with those between female and female or male and male would have remained indisputable” (Gagnon, 2001:182).

At this point of our study we can state that this categorization of homosexual activity as *para physin* was a commonplace feature of polemical attacks against such behaviour, particularly in the world of Hellenistic Judaism. It would seem therefore that Paul was hardly making an original contribution. The conclusion we would have to come to is that Paul did employ current forms and

concepts already familiar to his readers. Together with this should be the understanding that “the apostle usually assimilates traditional ethical material so thoroughly into the total context of his letters that its function, if not always its form and content, may be said to be significantly transformed” (Furnish, 1968: 68). I would suggest this to be significant in Paul’s omission of the various categories attached to what could be considered to be *para physin*. We can suggest that Paul integrates the phrase *para physin* into the total context of his theological convictions and from that point also implies his ethical instructions.

At this point we can also make several comments about the historical context of *para physin*. We can hardly examine specific words without considering its context. This is exactly the criticism on certain scholars that have ignored the context. We would have to state at this point that one cannot just focus on the expression *para physin* and discuss the meanings of its possible component parts apart from their setting. If *para physin* is a stereotypical phrase used throughout Hellenistic literature to mean contrary to nature – meaning against the created order- then we are apt to believe that it would mean the same in Romans 1:26-27. As we will further discuss in the closing chapter of this study, we are able at this point to note that the meaning of *para physin* is significantly determined by contextual considerations. The Greek, Stoic and Jewish sources, which in this chapter have been cited at length, demonstrates to us that the categorisation of homosexual practices as *para physin* was a commonplace feature of polemical attacks against such behaviour, especially in the world of Hellenistic Judaism.

At this point we want to consider several aspects of the cultural climate of which Paul was a part. A general observation of the historical context will be done to give us a view of the sexual practices present in Paul’s day.

CHAPTER FOUR
ANCIENT SEXUALITY

Introduction:

Is it at all possible for us to recreate and present the cultural climate of which Paul was a part and which formed the basis of what Paul knew and rejected? In relation to this Smith states the following,

“We cannot of course be certain what Paul knew, but ancient historians can be little concerned with certainty, we can only discuss probability. We cannot be sure what, if any, of the evidence we have examined might have been known to Paul” (Smith, 1996:246). Rather after we have presented the evidence we would hope that it offers a picture of the cultural milieu in which Paul lived” (Smith, 1996:246)

Angelo di Berardino in his article, *Homosexuality in Classical Antiquity*, states,

“Aided by extant works, we can only partially reconstruct the ancient mentality and corresponding behaviour, which moreover, were not those of the plebeian masses, of which we know little of. Furthermore any discussion of classical civilization is always somewhat imprecise, since we have no way of comparing the differences between cities and between peoples.” (Berardino, 1997).

If as historians we are only working on probability and being able to partially reconstruct ancient mentality, in which manner then does the historical reconstruction of a certain passage aid us in our exegesis? In this matter we are inclined to speak about the weight of the evidence. This as we will discover means taking into consideration all the historical evidence including matters pertaining to the fact that Paul was a widely travelled Roman citizen, who spent considerable time in Macedonia and Achaia, including Corinth (which was renowned for its sexual creativity). Although we are working in the area of probability, the suggestion is that the weight of the evidence

would imply what was most probable. In our quest then to consider a few aspects of ancient sexuality we initially want to consider the term “homosexual”. This will be done to aid us in our understanding of ancient sexuality.

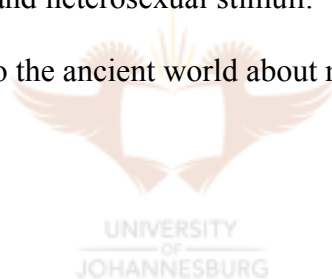
4.1. Homosexuality:

Hubbard (2003:1) explains the problematic nature of the term homosexuality. He explains that the term is adopted in his volume not out of any conviction that a fundamental identity exist between ancient and modern practices or self-conceptions, but as a convenient shorthand linking together a range of different phenomena involving same –gender love and/or sexual activity. Up to this point (in this study) the term ‘homosexual’ had been used with the presupposition that the Ancient Greeks and Romans had an equivalent term. Research into historical data will indicate to us that the etymological anomaly, built of mixed Latin and Greek roots, is the creation of the past century. In fact ancient Greeks and Romans had no equivalent term. Therefore this term is very problematic especially when used to define persons, groups, or lifestyles.

In using this term throughout this chapter our understanding will be that we are making reference to those who are engaging in sexual activity with persons of the same sex. The modern term may invoke modern concepts or ideas foreign to the ancient context. Also to state, therefore, that Romans 1 is a condemnation on homosexuality would therefore also not be completely correct. The concepts that the modern term invokes could lead to an anachronistic interpretation of Romans 1.

In looking at how the original form of the word came into being, Dynes points out that “the German term *Homosexualität*, the original form of the word, points to a concept of homosexuality that crystallized in Central Europe in the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century” (Dynes,

1990:557). According to Dynes, what modern society has adopted is a “hybrid owes its existence to the interaction and fusion of three remarkable semantic innovations stemming from historically distinct cultural epochs, two of great antiquity and one of recent origin” (Dynes, 1990:557). Dynes points to the three source as, “Firstly the Judaic Law; secondly, there was the equation of male-male and female-female relationships in the more abstract thinking of the Greeks; and thirdly, modern Europe-specifically nineteenth-century Germany” (Dynes, 1990:557). As several scholars point out (as will be discussed in this chapter) bisexuality is probably a better model to describe the sexual practices of the Greco-Roman world, in that it is believed that for the Greeks and Romans humans were simply sexual, and they expressed that sexuality in many different ways. Botha (2005:53) also correctly observes that the Greek language had no nouns corresponding to the English nouns homosexual and heterosexual and that the Greeks assumed that mostly any individual responds at different times both to homosexual and heterosexual stimuli. Therefore in taking these matters into consideration we want to inquire into the ancient world about matters concerning ancient sexuality.



4.2.1 Ancient Sexuality

Several examples, as stated in the previous chapter, from writers such as Philo and Josephus explicitly states that intercourse which does not lead to procreation is ‘against nature’. In several instances their proscription is against ‘homosexual activity.’ The questions we want to ask are, were these men along with the Apostle Paul specifically only writing against pederasty (the love of boys and its more dehumanizing forms), or was there a broader scope of homosexual activity present within the first century?

Osborne (1991:139) suggests that within our historical research we should not be selective in the evidence gathered. Therefore, our quest is to decide which model best describes the ancient sexual practices. The evidence should give us the possibilities of that which Paul could have been

aware of. As pointed out by several scholars the fact that Paul includes female homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27 helps us to determine just how much Paul probably knew of the homosexual practices of his own culture. We hope the evidence will allow us to draw a parallel between the sayings of the first century writers and the historical data, and more specifically, where possible, to draw a parallel between homosexual activity and the term *para physin*.

From the onset we can state that there are arguments which state that pederasty was the only type of homosexuality that Paul knew when he wrote his letters. This, however, has been shown to be incorrect. Several authors, such as Dover (2nd edition), Boswell (1994), and Smith clearly show that pederasty was not the only form of homosexuality known in Greek and Roman culture in the first century CE. Smith (1996) and Boswell especially give numerous examples of homosexual relationships that are not age structured, and that are based on mutual consent. As we have stated above it would seem that the major flaw in the assumption for pederasty as the only focus of Romans 1:26-27 is Paul's inclusion of female-female homoerotic relations in his argument.

Because of the scope of this paper we will not enquire in depth on these matters; however, brief observations will be made in order to consider the possible diversity that existed in Paul's time.

4.2.2. "Non Pederastic Homosexual Practices in the Greco-Roman World":

Was pederasty the only model that existed within the first century? Is it possible to consider as, mentioned by Scroggs, that Paul knew only of the model of pederasty literally, 'the love of boys and that his words in Romans 1 can only be interpreted as a proscription of that ancient practice. Smith argues that although there are several instances to suggest that pederasty continued within Rome, "evidence for pederastic practices declines considerably, though other homosexual practices

continue unabated” (Smith, 1996:226). In support of this Smith cites Canterella who basically confirms this argument. Smith states,

“Canterella demonstrates that in the Roman Republic, pederasty was considered the ‘Greek vice’, which true Romans reviled, but that did not prevent them from engaging in other forms of homosexual activity. By the early second century BCE Rome had passed the *Lex Sca [n]tina* and the edict *De adtemptata pudicitia* which made pederastic behaviour, and even the attempt to seduce a freeborn boy, liable to criminal prosecution. By the time of the Principate, pederasty becomes extremely rare in the sources, while at the same time there appears to be a significant increase in homosexual activity among consenting adults” (Smith, 1996:233).

In support of this Smith believes that Boswell correctly notes that, “the stereotyped roles of ‘lover’ and ‘beloved’ no longer seem to be the only model for homosexual lovers” (Smith, 1996: 233).

Within first century Rome the attitude of the Romans were that they considered male homosexuality practiced with adolescents, or more precisely, *ephebic* love to be the Greek vice. As certain historians would point out, it was something totally foreign to the traditional Roman mentality, and therefore they absolutely condemned it. However in Horace’s time it had gained a certain foothold in Rome, where it took on various forms. We also find reference to this in the writings of Cicero who stated, “It seems to me that this habit of loving boys originated in the Greek gymnasiums, where these love affairs are free and tolerated” (Berardino, 1997:1). It would seem that the cultural, political and family environment gave rise to a different attitude towards male homosexual love. Within first century Rome there was a new tradition and the purpose of education was to train a truly virile citizen capable, also sexually, of dominating and never being dominated. For this reason homosexuality became a private matter, it was not socially or legally accepted, and was sometimes practiced among slaves with the master having absolute power and authority over his slave girls as well as his slave boys (Berardino, 1997:3). Berardino states that the

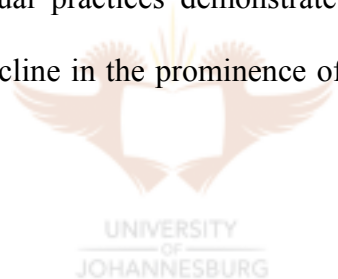
Roman attitude in the first century of our era was summarized in the following way by the lawyer of a freedman accused of having a relationship with his former master: “Indecency (the passive relationship with another man) is a crime for a free man, a necessity for a slave and a duty for a freedman” (Berardino, 1997:4).

Miller’s (1997) criticism on Smith’s (1996) historical research is that he believes that Smith places considerable emphasis on Classical (pre-Hellenistic) Greek sources. He states that although some background from the fifth century B.C.E may be helpful it does not adequately establish popular conceptions of bisexuality in a culture half a millennium later. It would seem, however, that Smith’s purpose, in specifically citing sources of a culture half a millennium earlier, was to indicate that also within the Ancient Greek period there were various forms of homosexual activity as opposed to only the pederastic model. Therefore Paul’s audience would not only have understood his condemnation in Romans 1:26-27 to be a condemnation on pederasty.

Hupperts, has discovered in his study of Attic Black-Figure vases, at least twelve homosexual scenes involving two or more bearded men. From such evidence Hupperts have concluded that he believes that he has shown enough vases to justify that pederasty was not the only form of homosexual practices in Attica of the sixth century. According to the vases that Hupperts investigated there are boys, youth or men of equal age who could have been involved in a love affair (Smith, 1996:234). Similar examples of love affairs outside the realm of pederasty can also be found in Plato’s Symposium. Plato makes mention of the relationship that existed between Agathon and Pausanias. Within this story we see that the focus of Pausanias’s speech is that his relationship with Agathon is superior to common pederasty (and to heterosexual relationships), precisely because it has endured and is based on their loving regard for one another’s souls (Smith, 1996:235). Other sources we can cite also include examples from Xenophon. Xenophon, Plato’s fellow follower of Socrates, includes three exceptions to the pederastic model. In the *Memorabilia*,

Plato also refers to men using men [not youths or boys] as women (Smith, 1996:235). Our conclusion at this point is that within the ancient world leading up to the first century Greco-Romans world there existed a variation of sexual practices outside the sphere of pederasty. Therefore an audience at this time would not only understand homosexual activity in a pederastic context but would be aware of other forms of homosexual activity.

As we widen our scope and explore Latin literature we see that the evidence for non-pederastic homosexual relationships increases. Caligula, Roman Emperor from 37-43 CE, is said to have been attached to Lepidus as both lover and beloved. From the pen of Cicero other similar examples can be cited. Cicero cites examples where two males appear to be married to other males (Smith, 1996:237). In view of the sources we have cited up to this point we can state that the extant sources of Greco-Roman homosexual practices demonstrate many exceptions to pederasty and perhaps as Smith would argue, a decline in the prominence of pederasty in the last three centuries immediately preceding Paul.



Miller's (1997) assessment of Smith's use of Martial is that according to Miller, Martial deals extensively with pederasty and shows no indication that it is in any form in decline. Of the more contemporary source that Smith cites, Miller states,

“The Latin evidence is important but not compelling to everyone. The primary criticism in using this evidence to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans is that Paul himself was not from Rome but was on his way for his first visit. Unless the mores represented in the Latin texts were widespread in the Hellenistic cosmopolitan centers of the empire, the witness of Martial for Paul's Epistle would be somewhat dampened...” (Miller, 1997:863).

The assumption that we have to make, especially in reconstruction historical settings, is that since Paul was such a widely travelled Apostle, we would have to assume that Paul could have been

familiar with this Latin text. But this matter, as we will discuss within the concluding chapter of this study, is not of ultimate importance in relation to Paul's indictment in Romans 1:26-27. As we will argue later, Paul has found enough evidence in his world to make an indictment on mankind as a whole.

In reference to this matter of pederasty, there is an argument in support of the fact that important for understanding Romans 1:26-27 is the frequent use of *arsen/arren* (male, not age specific) and the rarity of the term *aner* (man/ adult male) in these Jewish attacks on pederasty. According to this view the use of the non-age specific term is sometimes a code-word for the adolescent boy, and in other cases it is used for both ages to emphasize the sameness of the two where a Gentile author would emphasize the age difference. Therefore as the argument goes it should be no surprise that the earliest extant patristic exposition of Romans 1:27 also specifies pederasty (Miller, 1997:863). However we can similarly argue that Paul's use of *arsen/arren* can be deliberate in showing the intertextual connection between Romans 1:18-32 and Genesis 1:26.

Smith is under the conviction that Paul's use of general language to be found in Romans 1:26-27 is deliberate. In considering the similarities that exist between Paul and Philo, Smith states that Paul does use general language like Philo, and even many times the same terms. However, according to Smith, on closer inspection of Philo's condemnation of pederasty we will find that he uses specific terms (e.g. *paidikēn*, *erastas*, and his mention of age differential), so that there can be no mistaking his meaning. According to Smith, this is precisely what Paul does not do (Smith, 1996:245).

Concerning the same matter of Paul's use of general language Smith states,

“If he knew of several exceptions to pederasty, his use of general language becomes dangerously misleading, for his sloppiness would unwittingly condemn all homosexual practices, including those he might consider acceptable, when he only intended to censure pederasty. Paul could easily have been as precise as Philo, but it appears he chose not to be” (Smith, 1996:246).

Hubbard (2003) has also done extensive historical research in the area of homosexuality in Greece and Rome. At this point several references will be made to his research. Early Imperial Rome is the time period we will specifically consider at this point. The imperial age of Rome begins with the death of Augustus (14 C.E.) and continues arguably until the fall of the western empire nearly five centuries later. Our interest lies specifically within the first century and only several texts will be cited from this time. These texts, as suggested by Hubbard, will also give evidence to a form of lesbianism. As Hubbard states: “Indeed the literature of this period evinces the first real recognition of female homoeroticism as a phenomenon that occurred in Rome.” (Hubbard, 2003:385). An in-dept study of this period of time will also reveal that because of the influence of Stoic philosophy on Roman letters several of the proscriptions of homosexual activity are described to be “against nature”. Therefore also making a direct link between homosexual activity and the phrase *para physin*.

Our initial reference is to the works of Petronius, Satyricon. We see that Petronius was a master of entertainments in Nero's court, who eventually fell into disfavour due to false accusations and was forced to commit suicide. Petronius left behind a picaresque novel concerning the adventures of Encolpius (the first person narrator), a young man cursed with impotence by the god Priapus, and Giton, a slave boy whom he loves. Only excerpts from part of the novel survived and the setting appears to be southern Italy. (Hubbard, 2003:395).

Petronius was one of Nero's courtiers, who wrote, for the emperor's entertainment, a lengthy picaresque novel involving the lurid misadventures of an educated but penniless youth and a runaway slave boy whom he loves. The novel inverts the orthodox plot of Greek romance, predicated on a chaste and unfailingly loyal heterosexual couple, by immersing us in a lowlife underworld where homosexuality is the norm and no couple is mutually faithful. The historical data indicates that not long after Nero's reign, in 79 C.E., several towns south of Naples were buried by the sudden volcanic eruption of Mt. Vesuvius and thus preserved virtually intact, affording us an archaeological window into the daily life of the period. Numerous graffiti are found in Pompeii (9:16) and attest a flourishing homosexual subculture even within this small provincial city. While some are horrific love declarations in the Greek style or boast of sexual prowess, "most are abusive slurs, and oral sex, never mentioned in Greek graffiti, is the most common charge" (Hubbard, 2003:384). In also considering several aspects on the works of Martial, the literature of this period gives us the first recognition of female homoeroticisms as a phenomenon that occurred in Rome. From Martial's excerpts we can identify deviancy of every type. The historical evidence also attest to the emperor Galba's preference for masculine men. (Hubbard, 2003:384).

Significant for this study is mention of the fact that these denunciations of such extreme behaviour should be contextualised within the growing influence of Stoic philosophy in Romans letters. Hubbard states that the Stoics believed in living one's life in accordance with the laws of nature and not exceeding proper mortal limits. Therefore to Seneca, men acting like women, or women acting like men were examples of rebellion against nature. Musonius Rufus goes a step further in arguing against any sexual activity outside of married heterosexual intercourse for the purpose of procreation. (Hubbard, 2003:385).

There are several other texts from this period not cited here, but of this period of time Hubbard states that the coincidence of such severity on the part of moralistic writers with the flagrant and open display of every form of homosexual behaviour by Nero and other practitioners indicates a culture in which attitudes about this issue increasingly defined one's ideological and moral position. As Hubbard states, "homosexuality in this era may have ceased to be merely another practice of personal pleasure and began to be viewed as an essential and central category or personal identity, exclusive of and antithetical to heterosexual orientation" (Hubbard, 2003:386).

Ward (1997:282) points out that several recent discoveries of the erotic wall paintings from the undressing room of the Suburban Baths at Pompeii give us an insight on sexuality within the first century.

"The men engaging in same-sex acts are of the same size and age, so this is not the old Greek practice of pederasty. Jacobelli describes the final picture of the man with the oversized testicles as '*umoristic*' 'humorous', not unlike exaggerations in political cartoons today...Brooten has supplied ample evidence that in some circles 'unnatural', as applied to same-sex relations, was based on active/passive gender categories, but she also admits that 'the text of Romans itself does not contain sufficient clues to the precise meaning of unnatural'" (Ward, 1997:283-284).

From the above discussion, and from the text cited at length it should become more than probable that the historical evidence suggest that in Paul's time there was a wide variety of homosexual activity present. That Paul was not an isolated Jew in a Greek world is most probable in light of the fact that it has been documented that Paul had undertaken various journey to various major cities. Botha also believes that the view that Paul is discussing pederasty in Romans 1 cannot logically and exegetically be determined to be the case (Botha, 2005:193). He rather suggest that

humanity is created male and female and the one is not above the other to be excluded from the effect of homoeroticism and therefore for Paul to give a general indictment against homosexual acts he has to include both male and female.

4.2.3. Female Homosexuality:

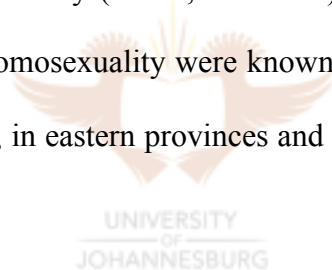
Ward argues that the purpose of his paper was to show “that *para physin* language in Plato’s laws, applied to women with women, men with men, and even women with men...” (Ward, 1997:284). This tradition he believes was “passed on to Hellenistic Judaism, as exemplified by Philo and Pseudo-Phocylides” (Ward, 1997:284). In his analysis of female homosexuality within the Greco-Roman period he states the following in response to Miller,

“I think that he misjudges the extent of sexual activity between women in the time of Paul. Brooten (*Love Between Women*) offers the most extensive evidence in print on the prevalence of female same-sex relations to date. See her critique of Miller (248, n. 99). The fact that there were women loving women in the ancient Graeco-Roman world should no longer be in question” (Ward, 1997:278).

Apart from first century examples there are also several other examples starting from Plato which indicates an awareness of female homosexuality. In a citation from Plato’s *Laws* we see that he condemns both female and male homosexual practices as contrary to nature. In an extract from Plato’s *Laws* he states the following, “When the natural form of the female and male come together for procreation, the pleasure in this act appears to have been given them in accordance with nature, but the immoderate pleasure experienced by male in intercourse with males or by females in intercourse with females seems to be contrary to nature, a most shameless act (Smith, 1996:239). Similarly Plutarch shares the same disapproving attitude as Plato and Pseudo Phocylides. If we are under the conviction that Paul stands firmly in the Jewish tradition of considering homosexuality as a pagan abomination then it is also noteworthy to mention that Rabbinic literature offers some

additional examples of female homosexual activity. In the *Sifra*, a rabbinic commentary on Leviticus 18:3, the text applies Moses's warning to the Israelites to the particular vice of homosexual marriage both male and female. Also in the Talmud we find a debate between the schools of Hillel and Shammai over whether female homosexual intercourse invalidates virginity and thus disqualifies such women from marrying priest (Smith, 1996:242)

What are to deduce from our study of female homosexuality. We can state that examples of female homosexuality do not appear in literature and art with the frequency of male homosexuality. Several authors suggest that this could perhaps be due to the fact that the authors of the time were exclusively male. There is much less said about female homosexuality in comparison to male homoeroticism within the Graeco-Roman world, and Romans 1:26-27 is also an only Biblical passage referring to female homosexuality (Botha, 2005:186). However from the evidence listed we are able to deduce that female homosexuality were known from "Sappho's time until well after Paul's, in Greek and Latin literature, in eastern provinces and Italy, and even among Jewish rabbis" (Smith, 1996:243).



If Paul therefore included female homosexuality into his proscription in Romans 1:26-27 it most probably gives us an indication of just how much Paul knew about homosexual practices in his own culture. Also if we are to state that Paul in Romans 1:26-27 only condemns pederasty we would have to state that the same argument cannot be applied to female homosexual practices.

4. Conclusion:

We are compelled, by the evidence, to strongly consider that there were at least several different types of homosexual practices among both women and men present within the first century. Several authors have come to different conclusions, but what the evidence suggests is

that when Paul along with his contemporaries wrote that homosexual activity was “against nature” it included a variety of homosexual practices.

Within modern times we are apt to speak of heterosexuals or homosexual. From a observation of the historical data we notice that the Greeks and the Romans did not have such language at their disposal. The implication being that from their point of view humans are simply sexual and have expressed that sexuality in many different ways, with their own sex or the opposite or, perhaps, from what we can tell of pederastic practices, with both at different times, maybe even at the same time. (Smith, 1996:244). We can conclude that there exists the possibility to consider that Paul was not only familiar with the sexual practices of his time, but that he was also aware of the proscriptions (language) used against the practices of these activities.



CHAPTER FIVE

ΠΑΡΑΨΥΣΙΝ IN ROMANS 1:26-27

Introduction:

For the author, there are several aspects that arose from this study that will now be integrated into the conclusion of this study. The concluding comments will be made under the following heading: The Theological context, The Literal context and The Historical context. These aspects are invaluable to the interpretive process.

5.1 The Theological Context:

Firstly, it would seem that at the heart of the matter lies the importance of identifying that Paul's story in Romans 1 is Paul's story of the 'universal fall,' as opposed to 'Paul's developmental history of individuals'. The conclusion of this matter for the interpreter has an overbearing influence on how Romans 1 is interpreted. In matters pertaining to the audience and theological structure we do well to note that Romans is not addressed to a congregation with which Paul was very well acquainted. Paul declares that he had longed to meet the Roman Christians, but had not yet, at the time of his writing, had the opportunity (Romans 1:10-13). Paul had also not founded the church there, as he had the one in Corinth. And perhaps as was the case in Corinth we are not aware of whether or not they had written to him. Therefore we can also argue whether or not Paul's teachings really had any Roman problems in mind (Furnish, 1979:74). Johnson has correctly observed that Paul's primary purpose was not to correct the faults in the community (Johnson, 1997:6).

It is also more than likely that Paul knew that Rome was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Empire. Such knowledge would inevitably affect the structure of Paul's letter to the Romans. It is without doubt that if Paul wanted to sound out a note about the 'universal fall' of mankind that Rome would be the perfect setting for such an occasion. Ben Witherington notes: "Rome was the hub of the ever-expanding empire. Anyone like Paul with an urban ministry strategy and a desire to reach the West could not possibly ignore this city of vital importance" (Witherington III, 2004:11).

The major emphasis of our historical research was to identify the variations of sexual activity within the Roman Empire. However, the theological emphasis of Romans 1 requires us to consider that such an approach is not of the utmost importance and that Paul inevitably had a larger audience in mind. In relation to this, Harmon makes the following statement:

"Whether or not Paul gives an accurate account of the condition of society in the Roman Empire of the first century is not our immediate problem. There is much corroborative evidence in satirist and moralist of that time, though their strictures must be used with some reserve. Such writers do not profess to exercise the objective care which is the ideal of the social historian. No more does Paul. He writes as a prophet, and he found quite enough in society to awaken the most anxious concern" (Harmon, 1954:401).

As we have pointed out in an earlier discussion by Hays, Käsemann also concurs that Romans 1:26-27 which forms a part of a larger section (Romans 1:18-3:20) deals with the totality of the cosmos and not just with an aggregate of individuals (Käsemann, 1973:33). The acknowledgement of this argument is fundamental in response to the arguments which strives to point out that Paul could have been engaging in an examination of the lives of several individuals. In acknowledgement of Paul's condemnation on the corporate rebellion of humanity against God, the argument that Paul is examining the lives of individuals basically runs aground when we consider the theological motives of this letter. In conjunction with this, Käsemann also explains

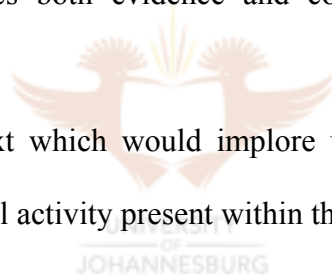
that the epistle is clearly addressed to a church that is firmly grounded in Christianity. Therefore we can conclude that the church in Rome had a high degree of theological understanding when one considers the dogmatic concentration of this letter (Käsemann, 1973:34). We can therefore state that in light of this the Apostle Paul did not have to qualify several concepts with which the audience he was writing to were already familiar with. These special concepts would certainly have included his use of the phrase *para physin*. At this point we can suggest that it is integral that only in light of this insight can one correctly define the theological relevance of Romans 1:18-32. This is perhaps an insight that has eluded many interpreters of Paul, especially in relation to the debate in question.

4.2. The Literal Context:

It is the overwhelming conviction of this paper that the context does not only help us understand meaning, but that it virtually makes meaning (Osborne, 1991:78). Similarly Cotterell states, “The context of the utterance usually singles out (and perhaps modulates) the one sense, which is intended, from amongst the various senses of which the word is potentially capable” (Cotterell, 1989:175). It is also the view of Furnish (1979:74) that the text (Romans 1:26-27) in Romans needs to be appraised in the light of its literary and theological context of which it is a part. In which direction is the context leading us? Which one sense that is intended are we able to identify for *para physin*?

As apposed to how the phrase *para physin* is used in Romans 11:24 and the context in which it stands, what do we make of the context of which Romans 1:26-27 is a part? I would suggest that for a proper understanding of Romans 1:26-27 the interpreter of Paul has to take into consideration the following concerning the context:

1. The theme of the passage, which several leading scholars describe to be “the wrath of God”, 1:18.
2. The unrighteousness of men and their refusal to honour God and render Him thanks, 1:21.
3. Paul’s condemnation of humankind, 1:21, As opposed to his condemnation of certain individuals.
4. The repeated sentence, “God gave them up”, 1:24, 26, 28. Is this an impulse toward self-gratification in response to rebellion towards the Creator?
5. The exchange language to be found in 1:23, 25, 26-27. Is this a reference to the conscious decisions made by mankind to act in one way rather than another? Is there a rhetorical link between the rebellion against God and the “shameless acts” (1:27) which are themselves both evidence and consequence of that rebellion (Hays, 1988:192).
6. The historical context which would implore us to believe that there was a wide variety of homosexual activity present within the first century.



Together with this, the interpreter has to consider the manner in which Romans 1:26-27 fits into the logical structure of Paul’s argument in Romans 1. Romans 1:26 starts with the words ‘because of this’ (*dia touto*) which can also be rendered ‘therefore, which inevitably ask of the reader to make a connection between what has been said and what will be said. Therefore, the “desires” (*epithymiais*), uncleanness (*akatharsian*), their bodies being ‘dishonored among themselves (as described from Romans 1:24-27) will be given more clarity in Romans 1:26-27. A point also taken up by Cranfield who states that *διὰ τούτο* at the start of verse 26 connects the following statement with verse 25. Starting from verse 18 Paul’s initial indictment of mankind is with a reference to the relation of creature to Creator. In this relationship human beings failed to glorify God as God or give Him thanks (1:21). Dunn (1998:91) certainly believes that what lies

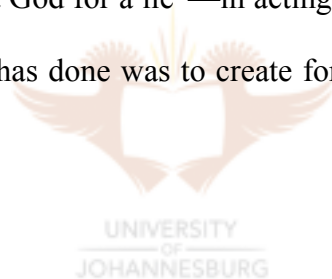
lurking behind this passage is a definite reference to the figure Adam who refused to give God his due. Like Adam then, man's ultimate purpose is to covet wisdom, independent from God, but this as Paul explains further, only leads to the futility and confusion of humans. As Dunn explains, "The tragedy is that humankind apart from God can no longer properly know itself or recognise its true nature." (Dunn, 1998:92). In verses 23-24 Paul then explains what humankind has exchanged God for – for human-made idols, the desires of their own human hearts, and sexual immorality, all of which forms a part of Paul's attack on idolatry. In Isaiah 44:9-20 we see that Israel since the time of the prophets had cultivated a tradition of polemic against idolatry, which is connected with the rejection of the true God.

Similarly, if we are in agreement that the "therefore" in Romans 1:26 points us to what has been said previously, we then have to consider in which way Paul uses the language of exchange (*ēllaxan*) throughout Romans 1:23-27. The deliberate repetition of the verb *metēllaxan* forges a powerful rhetorical link between the rebellion against God and the 'shameless acts' which are themselves both evidence and consequence of that rebellion (Hays, 1988:192). It would be incorrect to state that the homosexual practices described in Romans 1:26-27 does form a part of Paul's overall argument, and that the homosexual acts described in Romans 1:26-27 are not a part of the story of man's rebellion against the Creator.

Starting from verse 24 we see that there is also a context of sexual immorality which according to Dunn (1998:121) finds its full expression in Romans 1:26-27. The Uncleaness, impurity (*akatharsia*) found in verse 24 typically denotes sexual immorality. The 'dishonouring of their bodies among themselves' also refers to activities in which people treated themselves with lack of respect. Dunn also points out that the sense of 'desire' as sexual lust is also obvious in the association of *epithymia* (desire) with *pathos* (passion) in both 1 Thessalonians 4:5 and Colossians 3:5 (Dunn, 1998:121). What we are able to identify is that in each case what is in view is

unspecified sexual indulgence. Therefore the type of sexual irregularity (homosexuality) which Paul describes in Romans 1:26-27 is not part of an unspecified sexual indulgence but more a specified example which the hearers were familiar with. Dunn (1998: 122) explains that Paul's reaction against a pagan abomination, stands firmly in the Jewish tradition, as 1 Corinthians 6:9 confirms, and that Paul regards homosexual practice as 'contrary to nature' which in itself is the consequence of a life that has wandered away from God.

If Romans 1:26-27, therefore, forms a part of Paul's overall evaluation of the effects of idolatry and sexual immorality, then the rebellion against the Creator can now be seen in the sexual distinctions that are fundamental to God's creative design (Hays, 1988:191). Therefore, the women and the men leaving the "natural use"- *kata physin*: which is tantamount to the will of the Creator—similarly "exchanged the truth about God for a lie"—in acting *para physin*—and therein lies the sin of idolatry. In fact what mankind has done was to create for himself something new and thereby suppressed the truth of God for a lie.



However in describing idolatry, and the effects thereof as seen in Romans 1:26-27 as 'sin', it has been duly noted that Paul does not use the term 'sin' in Romans 1. A further reading of Romans will indicate that Paul only fully brings 'sin' into the picture from Romans 5:12. Dunn however points out that given the prominence of the term in the two most explicit uses of the Adam narrative (5:12-14; 7:7-13), its absence in 1:18-32 is of little moment (Dunn, 1998:111). As Dunn (1998:111) points out Paul actually sums up the indictment of his opening section (1:18-32) in Romans 3:9 where he states: "we have now charged both Jews and Greeks as all alike under sin". Therefore what Paul was describing in the preceding paragraphs were the varying manifestations of sin. We can state further that for Paul sin is that power which makes human beings forget their creatureliness and dependence on God, that power which prevents humankind from recognising its true nature, which deceives the *adam* into thinking he is godlike and makes him unable to grasp that

he is but *adamah*. And as Dunn (1998:114) would point out the effect of sin is initially ‘misdirected religion’ which eventually leads to ‘self indulgence.’ It is also noticeable that the link between idolatry and sexual license was well established both in Jewish folklore and in Jewish apologetic, and eventually carried over into Christianity (Dunn, 1998:119) Examples of this can be found in New Testament passages such as, 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9; Galatians 5:20; Colossians 3:5; 1 Peter 4:3 and Revelations 21:8; 22:15. Käsemann also argues that “for the apostle, history is governed by the primal sin of rebellion against the creator, which finds repeated and universal expressions’ (Käsemann, 1980:47). It is only in light of this context that the meaning of *para physin* can be understood. If for Paul history is ‘governed by the primal sin of rebellion (which according to the context, Romans 1:26-27 is a part of) against the creator’ then the one meaning intended for *para physin* in this instance is that the rebellion described in Romans 1:26-27 is therefore also a rebellion against the creator (*para physin*)



5.3 The Historical context:

Within this study we have managed to point out that several scholars agree to the fact that *para physin* is a common stock phrase. To the admittance of several scholars, the best rendering of *para* with the accusative in certain stock phrases is then “against” or “contrary to”. Yet for some this is not conclusive evidence in coming to a conclusion of how Paul uses *para* within this common stock phrase. Yet in coming to a conclusion that *para* within Romans 1:26-27 could also mean ‘beyond’ we would have to eliminate everything said about the literal context as stated above. In that mankind in suppressing the truth of God for a lie did not go ‘beyond’ God’s original intent but in actual fact went ‘against’ the intent of God in that they had created for themselves a new sexual order. As we have pointed out in this study, the crucial element in understanding this text is firstly to acknowledge that Paul’s indictment is truly universal. We can also state at this point that apart from its context there are various options for the preposition *para* and the noun *physis*, but

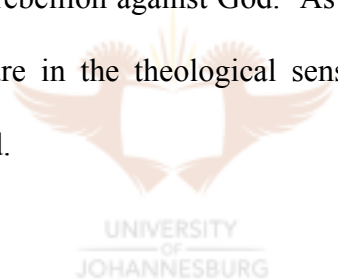
there does not appear to be various options for the common stock phrase *para physin*, in that it could mean anything other than ‘against nature’/contrary to the created order. But apart from this argument we have also managed to point out that it would appear that within every instance of its usage *para physin* within Hellenistic philosophy and literature (as shown in chapter 2 and 3) is interpreted as ‘contrary to’. Therefore also in considering the universal indictment of Paul’s argument it also does not become plausible to argue that Paul was referring to the characteristics of individuals. In conjunction with this the historical evidence does indicate that the way ‘nature’ had filtered through Hellenistic Jewish culture with its typical Stoic connotations it is impossible for us not to consider its notion of ideal universal norms.

I would however suggest that the historical evidence still gives us more clues as to how Paul used ‘nature’ in Romans 1:26-27. I would suggest that further clues are to be found in the relationship that exists between *kata physin* and *para physin*. In support of this we can cite an extract from Philo in which he states,

“But God moved by pity for mankind whose Saviour and Lover He was, gave increase in the greatest possible degree to the unions which men and women naturally (*kata physin*) make for begetting children, but abominated and extinguished the unnatural and forbidden intercourse, and those who lusted for such He cast forth and chastised with punishment...” (Hays, 1988:194).

An important aspect recognisable in Romans 1:26-27 is the historical development of the relationship that exists between *kata physin* and *para physin* (in that *para physin* is an antonym for *kata physin*). In Romans 1:16-27 the Greek reads, “*tēn physikēn chrēsin*”. Gagnon states, “In Romans 1:26-27 (as often elsewhere in Greek literature), *physikos* is equivalent to *kata physin* (in accordance with nature), an antonym of *para physin* in 1:26” (Gagnon, 2001:236). The historical

evidence (as pointed out by scholars such as Ward and Hays) points to the fact that *kata physin* is tantamount to the will of the creator. In that in Rom 1:26-27 mankind had thrown off, or left behind (*aphentes*) that which is in accordance with the will of the creator to act on that which is against the will of the creator. The *physis* of man, or the constitution of man, therefore referring to his being as derived from the Creator. Therefore in conjunction with everything that has been stated up to this point, I would state that the final clue to Paul's use of *para physin* is to be found in the phrase *kata physin*. Of this Cranfield states, *φυσικός* (here used to describe that which is *kata physin*) and *para physin* Paul clearly means 'in accordance with the intention of the Creator' and 'contrary to the intention of the Creator' respectively (Cranfield, 1975:125). But as we have pointed out in this study the distinctive point that informs us of Paul's use of 'nature' in this passage is the context of the passage. The distinctive feature being that Paul's point in Romans 1:18-32 is that it is the world as an organised system which is in rebellion against God. As Botha(2005) has correctly observed, Paul in Romans 1:26-27 uses nature in the theological sense, in that nature in this sense is a theological norm determined by God.



For Hays it is clear that although Paul in Romans 1:26-27 offers no explicit reflection on the concept of "nature", it is clear that in this passage Paul identifies "nature" with the created order. Witherington in commenting on Romans 1:26-27 states, "In both Jewish and Greco-Roman tradition there was a long history of seeing such behaviour as 'unnatural' or counter to the way God originally created and intended things to be (Plato, *Laws* 1.2.; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9.758; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Philo, *Abraham* 26.135; *Special Laws* 2.14.50; Josephus, *Apion* 2.25, 199; 2 *Enoch* 10.4)" (Witherington, 2004:69).

Leading up to Romans 1:26-27, there are also obvious allusions to ascribing the creative process or order of the world to God. These allusions include: "Ever since the creation of the world" (1:20) and "the Creator" (1:25). Paul's denotation of the sexes in 1:26-27 as "females"

(*thēleiai*) and “males” (*arsenes*) rather than “women” (*gynaikes*) and “men” (*Andres or anthorōpoi*). They certainly allude to the fact that there is an inter-textual connection between Romans 1 and Genesis 1. Do these allusions inform Paul’s use of *physis* Romans 1:26-27? As we have shown above, it would seem illogical to presume that the previous verses have no direct implication upon Romans 1:26-27.

Conclusion:

In relation to the fact that the context singles out the one meaning that is intended by the author, I have taken into consideration the following (as discussed in this paper) points to form my own view: the agreement of several leading scholars that in Romans 1 Paul’s indictment is on mankind (with the understanding that *physis* in this instance does not refer to the characteristics of individuals); the avoidance of an anachroistic interpretation of Romans 1:26-27; the understanding that Romans 1:26-27 forms a part of the overall structure of Paul’s argument in Romans 1:18-32 (in that the homosexual acts described in Romans 1:26-27 is continuing example of the idolatry described in this chapter), the allusions to the Genesis account of creation, including Paul’s use of “females” (*thēleiai*) and “males” (*arsenes*) (Hays is under the conviction that the reference to God as Creator would certainly evoke for Paul, as well as for his readers, immediate recollections of the creation story in Genesis 1-3); the development of the phrase *para physin* and the way it has filtered through Jewish monotheism; the relationship that exist between *kata physin* and *para physin* in that *kata physin* within Greek and Jewish literature is tantamount to the work of the Creator. We have also managed to point out in this paper that that the phrase *para physin*, with the attachment of the procreation and active/passive categories was used throughout Hellenistic, Stoic and Jewish literature, as a polemic against homosexual activity. That Paul continued this tradition of *kata physin* and *para physin* is most probable except for Paul qualifying his statement with the various categories.

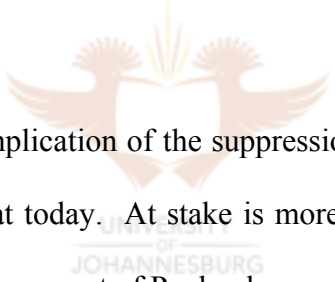
If our analysis of these matters are correct (including the reference to God as Creator, which would evoke recollections of the creation story), and the sexual roles of males and females which are addressed, we are apt to believe that Paul reference to *physis* (in the common stock phrase *para physin*), is a reference to what is the constitution of man, his being as derived from the Creator. Therefore, Paul traces the sexual roles of “females” (*thēleiai*) and “males” (*arsenes*) back to the creation account, where it states, “God created man in his own image...male and female he created, charging them to be “fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:27-28). I would, at this point, agree with Hays in that the complementarity of male and female is given a theological grounding in God’s creative activity: God has made them to become one flesh. In this manner the text in Romans forms part of the major theological and ethical themes of the Bible. The major theological theme being that in the beginning God created them male and female, of which, as Gagnon states, the procreative category gives evidence to this. As Botha (2005:153) also states the fact that God created them male and female has definite implications for humans sexuality. In fact as Botha states: “Sexuality is not an accident of nature, nor is it simply a biological differentiation. Instead it is a deliberate, intentional and functional gift of God. While sexual identity and sexual function are foreign to God’s person, it nevertheless displayed as a part of his will for his image bearers (Botha, 2005: 154). Therefore according to Botha (2005:154) only a man and a woman in a sexual relationship, not a man with another man or a woman with another woman can portray God’s image and unity.

In which way, therefore, are Paul’s ethical teachings in this instance concerning homosexuality rooted to his theological thoughts? I believe his ethical teachings in this context can be understood in the way Paul explains how idolatry affects the moral conditions of humankind. I would agree with Harmon in him saying that,

“The pursuit of false objects has led to the acceptance of false values. The cults of pleasure and of wealth- with all that follows from them- flourish everywhere, and the studies of

moral conditions in the great centres of population reveal conditions essentially similar to those which Paul experienced” (Harmon, 1954:401).

Witherington states vv 24 and 26 holds the key to understanding the text, and to understanding the ethical consequences as a consequence of idolatry. He states, “Because of pagan idolatry, God has given up Gentiles to the ethical consequences of their actions- to unclean and degrading behaviour. Bad theology or worship, in a morally structured universe, leads to bad ethics” (Witherington, 2004: 65). Thus a deliberate rejection (as described in Romans and Genesis) of God’s original intent for mankind as described in the Genesis account, would be bad theology which would eventually lead to bad ethics. Such an evaluation of Paul’s ethics within Romans 1:26-27 would be right in line with an understanding of how Paul’s ethical teaching is integrated into his theological convictions.



For the modern debate the implication of the suppression of God’s truth is exactly the cross roads where the church finds itself at today. At stake is more than just saying yes to homosexual marriages. At stake is the weighty argument of Paul, who accuses mankind of exchanging the truth of God for a lie. Dunn explains, “Left to itself, “free” of God, the human mind is incapable of exercising adequately the discernment and discrimination on which decision making depends. The result is inappropriate and “unfitting” judgements. In which way therefore do we open up ourselves to the suppression of truth?

The main concern for contemporary issues will, therefore, be centred on God’s initial plan for creation. For self-affirming homosexuals, the area of difficulty lies precisely in this matter. The present discussion that homosexuals are born with an inherent disposition towards the same sex is really the crux of the matter at hand. We should inevitably ask that since the beginning of time, has God’s design for mankind changed? If we were to claim that a person in the 21st Century is born

with an inherent disposition towards the same sex, is it also possible to state, “this is the way God has created me”? To this scholars have suggested that perhaps we are finding ourselves in a new “hermeneutical situation”? According to Hays (1988:208), it is exactly the modern empirical studies that provide the clearest argument against the authority of Romans 1. He states, “The fact that modern psychological studies suggest that homosexual preference is for many individuals an innate disposition does confront Paul head-on in posing an ‘alternative’ to his account of the natural order of creation” (Hays, 1988:208). Helminiak (1997:857) is under the conviction that it is exactly in considering the permanence and incidence of homosexual orientation that the ethical conclusions of homosexuality be revised. Helminiak’s conviction is that teaching on slavery; divorce and female subservience have changed because the understanding of these behaviours has changed. For Helminiak (1997:857) there is a parallel between these matters and the modern debate on homosexuality. There are however very strong views in opposition to such a view. Individuals such as Hollings believes that “homosexuality is a form of disablement or sickness in a human being, in that biologically man and woman are made for each other.” (Griffin, 1999:211). Griffin’s criticism of Hollings in this matter is that he believes that “Hollings does not consider studies and perspectives on homosexuality which go beyond the traditional view of homosexuality as pathology, including influential studies by such researches as Evelyn Hooker, Clellan Ford and Frank Beach.” (Griffin, 1999:213). Cole in his article *Biology, Homosexuality, And The Biblical Doctrine Of Sin*, states, “While biological explanations of behaviour are valuable when properly qualified, they are frequently taken to the extreme in the form of biological reductionism.” (Cole, 2000:355). He states further that “While biological predispositions (genetic and intrauterine) may contribute to the development of the homosexual lifestyle, biological factors are not central, most important, or determining influence on existence and behaviour. According to Cole any attempt to reduce people to genetic or biological entities distorts human identity from a biblical perspective (Cole, 2000:360). I would suggest that the consideration of homosexuality as permanence deserves

a study on its own, in that it brings into question several aspects which include: the Biblical doctrine of sin; and several other ethical considerations.

Yet where exactly does such an alternative leave us in relation to Paul's account in Rom 1:26-27. Is it possible to derive moral evaluation of homosexual behaviour from studies of statistical incidence? Can such scientific investigations provide a refutation of Paul's statements? Do modern scientific investigations concerning homosexual orientation challenge the evangelical understanding of sin? Does one sin by performing specific acts forbidden by God's law, or is the very nature of sin something which is not freely chosen? Can the ethical assessment derived from Rom 1:26-27 be revised in light of modern investigations?

I would at this point suggest that for present-day Christians the critical question is not so much exegetical but hermeneutical. In light of later experience and perceptions what are we to do and think about Romans 1:27-27 and several other passages describing homosexual practices. The questions we have asked in the preceding paragraph are hard questions which can be answered only through a long process of discernment within the church. Yet in the same vein it has to be stated that whatever the church decides about the explicit example that Paul uses in Romans 1:26-27, it does not effect or change Paul's argument concerning the distortion of human freedom cut off from its true roots.

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