

Throughout the book of Roman's, Paul uses Stoic phrases but mangles their meaning to illustrate that they are NOT the thing that governs the universe. Rather, he points to God as having that role. The old order of things is gone; in Jesus we have a new order.

Things may be degrading – that is – socially unacceptable (Gk. *atimia*; compare Rom1. With 1Cor.11:14) but they are not necessarily morally objectionable or disapproved of God. Clay pots fashioned for “dishonour” (Rom9:21) may not be socially acceptable subjects of conversation but they are not morally objected to. Similarly, our bodies sown in dishonour (1Cor.15:43) although to be raised in glory may not be socially acceptable in some cultures to be seen in all their glory (at this present time!) but there is no moral judgement being made about their beauty and acceptableness.

Pastors from many generations have taught their apprentices' to “Keep it in context or else you'll be setting yourself up for a pretext!” The context we must investigate has already been shown in this study series. Paul sets a foundation of grace in his manifesto for Roman's; he uses the religious sensibilities of the listeners to incite them against the animist religions before turning the tables on them to show them that their religious intolerance is just as far off the mark as the false idolatrous religions they saw around them. He uses the Stoic phrases and references that were familiar to set them up for a fall.

Paul's real intent is to show that religious laws and social norms are not the basis for salvation, but rather there is a righteousness from God that is apart from the law. This righteousness is embodied in the Son, Jesus, who lived his life as a spotless lamb to fulfil the law and died a sacrificial death for us so that through him the law would be consummated and completed. Jesus last word on the matter was “tetolestai” – it is finished. There is nothing else to pay. (Jn. 19:28-30)

It is easy to choose an group into which we do not fall and use that fact as a means to demean it. Non-smokers find it easy to castigate smokers; t-total folk find it easy to look down on alcoholics; straight folk find it easy to demean gays. They are not in the group being vilified. When Jesus visited the house of Simon the Pharisee, he challenged Simon about his view of the woman crying at his feet. “Simon, do you see this woman?” Given the flamboyant entrance, he would have had to be blind Bartimaeus to have missed her! But Jesus wasn't checking Simon's visual acuity – he was challenging his view of women.

Which group of people would Jesus challenge you about if he came to supper?

Free to Live as You



"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." 2Tim2:15



Romans 1 revisited – Pt 2

In part 1 of this study, we reviewed how Paul used his training in rhetoric to turn the tables on those who thought they were morally superior to those they castigated. We saw him string a series of connected arguments together with a conjugation, “for,” and use the switch in pronouns to move the emphasis from the allegedly good “you” to “they” who are known to be so bad, before he turns the tables on them in Roman's chapter 2 with a stark wake-up call – “but you are not better...you do the same thing.” We also considered the animist religions around at the time to which Paul makes reference to, and considered the temple prostitution which he was referring to and how the Hebrew words reflected the difference between whether someone was a temple prostitute or a street prostitute.

We remembered the gospel: The *Manifesto Verses* of Romans set the foundation for the whole of Romans:

The origin of the Gospel: it is the Gospel of Christ (v. 16a)

The operation of the Gospel: it is the power of God (v. 16b)

The outcome of the Gospel: it is the power of God to salvation (v. 16c)

The outreach of the Gospel: “to everyone that believeth” (vv. 16d-17).

In the middle of his rhetorical device, in which Paul has repeated connected arguments with the conjunction “for,” and in which he uses a switch of pronouns from first to third person switching the emphasis from *you* to *they*. *They* were using sexual practices to worship false gods which is something quite removed from the modern day concept of a same-sex loving relationship. It had no more to do with condemning homo-genital sexual practice than sex-based creature worship would condemn hetero-genital acts. It was not the sex he was focusing on but rather the abandonment of true worship for the worship of false gods and images.

In the middle of this rhetorical device, Paul inserts a text which has been used to indiscriminately inflict shame on members of the LGBT community despite this text being clearly linked to animist and heathen religion at the time; he says:

26Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. **27**In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

28Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

29They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,

30slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; **31**they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

32Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. (NIV)

In this passage Paul uses several words to describe this group including such phrases as *un-natural* relations (Gk. *paraphysin*). Now when you and I use the word natural - we instantly think biological, physiological, basic functioning...that's what our modern 21st century world view leads us to believe - that's what the modern word means. But two points must be made. Firstly, we're using an understanding of an English word in a modern context that is, to say the least, a little removed from the original context. And secondly, we're not trying to understand what Paul meant by natural and un-natural.

Here are two Pauline examples of how he used *paraphysin* elsewhere in his writings to illustrate that he did not have a physiological or biological concept in mind but rather means *unexpected, atypical, out of the ordinary, not a social norm etc.*

Romans 11:24

24After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! (NIV)

Since when was grafting ever an act of nature or a natural thing to do? No matter how well suited the graft and recipients are the act is not a natural act. It doesn't normally happen in nature; it's not how things were in the Garden of Eden; it's not how God intended things to be...Sound like familiar phrases? Yet, we see here that the Bible advocates grafting of both hetero – and homo typical genera. Good Biblical scholarship would highlight that I've taken a facetious point and ignored the salient one – that the word nature (Gk. *physin*) is NOT here taken to mean “nature” in modern context of the word, but rather it is taken to mean expected, typical practice. It is not out of the ordinary.

Similarly in 1Cor 11:14, Paul says:

Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him,(NRSV)

Now, I may be mistaken, but I have a notion that if I don't get my hair cut regularly, it DOES grow long quite naturally. It is totally in order with nature for hair to do this. Or, could it be, that my understanding of Paul's use of the word *physin* is not correct? I am making the point facetiously to underscore it. We come to the text with a preconceived notion of what the word means, but when we pause to check back what it actually means, we realise that our internal definition is wrong and inappropriate.

So, when we read Roman's 1:26-27 we should keep in mind the misogynistic society that Paul was using as a reference wherein it was according to custom and practice the males role to be “on top” and in control, while the wife was supposed to be submissive and controlled. In this setting, The Jewish concerns for purity and the Roman's preoccupation with social status were the nerve which Paul was hitting in order to provoke, lulling them into a sense of false security before he turned the tables on them.