

**Romans 1:26-27.** For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also they abandoned the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned with desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Paul describes the lives of those who reject God, abandoning self-control and engage in lusts and uncontrolled passions.

**Dave Jackson** says Paul was building an argument over the 3 chapters that no matter our category, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23). Jackson outlines Chapter 1 as the “wicked”, Chapter 2 as the “good” and Chapter 3 as the “chosen”. Chapter 1 instills the fact that the depravity came from denying God, they were heterosexuals and abandoned/exchanged their natural relationships” p. 155-156. These were heterosexuals who abandoned what was natural to them. A deliberate choice. All those in Rome would have been aware of the Greco-Roman cults where orgies and subjugation of slaves and younger boys was a type of sport. (p. 156) These people became filled with every type of wickedness. We would recognize this today in some people - regardless of their orientation, but this should not be read as a blanket condemnation of LGBT individuals today many of whom embrace God.

**Colby Martin** suggests we look at the audience Paul is writing to. He wants to level the playing field. From AD 49-54 all Jews were expelled from the city in Rome. This would have included Jewish Christians. So, for a 5 year period, the Roman churches consisted of only Gentiles. Without the Jews by their side, there was change. The audience he wrote to needed to hear both the approach to Gentiles (to turn away from the excesses and behaviors of those who’ve rejected God) in the first part as well as the second part that begins in Romans 2:1 that tells Jewish Christians, that their role in judging is no better than those Gentiles who didn’t follow God and engaged in behaviors listed in chapter 1- idolatrous, exploitative and culturally offensive sex acts - as with prostitute or non-procreative or even fleeting relationships (hook-up).

**Martin** continues (p 121) to discuss an epideictic discourse as a type of rhetoric that Aristotle had described. The goal was to “either praise or heap blame, after which the speaker would rally the audience around a shared hatred for a common enemy.” This happens all the time today when we hear partisan speeches from our politicians. The details of what they say are not as important as rallying the crowd around shared thoughts.

**Martin** compares this passage to a book called Wisdom of Solomon (circulated between 200BC-40AD). The plot lines were to 1. Explain how Gentiles didn't know God and 2. Turned to idolatry which led to 3. Sexual immorality and then 4. Punishment. The Jewish community of the 1<sup>st</sup> century was familiar with this and Paul's goal might have been that the audience would pick up on this type of discourse and rally against Gentiles in Rome.

**Colby Martin** says that the trap, though, is that in Romans 2, the Jewish Christians are now called out and are no different than the Gentiles from Romans 1. Paul was “exposing Jewish prejudices and leveling the playing field.”

**Martin** has more to say about ‘para phusis’ or against nature. Up to 400 AD it was read as engaging in non-procreative sex, whether anal/oral sex between man and woman or anal sex between two men.

Paul uses the same term ‘para phusis’ in Romans 11 when he explains that God including Gentiles in the kingdom was a move against nature. “Contrary to nature cannot inherently imply that it is evil and wicked.”

Isn't idolatry the subject of this passage? Says **Pastor R.D. Weekly**. There was a strong cultural association between same sex activity and idolatry says Weekly. That is not true today. Same as long hair and tattoos, women not covering their head are not tied to anything such as idolatry today and are thus seen as acceptable among faith communities.

**Brownson on page 156-157** discusses “allusion to the Roman Imperial House”. Gaius Caligula, emperor (37-41AD) who claimed to be divine. He lived in incest with all his sisters, having sex with them and raping wives of dinner guests - the ultimate in out-of-control lust and violence. Suetonius, a Roman writer, says he was stabbed through the genitals when murdered

and perhaps it aligns with “Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own person the due penalty for their error.” When Gaius placed his sisters below him with his wife above him, perhaps that was how “women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural”. Overall this “picture was over-the-top lust, self-centeredness and greed.” Another reference is in [Wikipedia](#).

**Brownson** p.83 suggests women exchanged natural for unnatural could mean women engaging in non-procreative sex. “Stronger case for understanding this passage as non-coital heterosexual intercourse.”

Brownson explains that the uncontrolled lust in Chapter 1 and the judgement in Chapter 2 both have in common the “attempt to advance one’s own honor, status and will at the expense of others” p. 152. Following their own way - what we know as sin.

Whatever the acts were in verses 26-27, they were motivated by lust and not love, were excesses and were tied to rejecting God. “Writers in the first century, including Paul, did not look at same-sex eroticism with the understanding of sexual orientation that is common place today.” p. 166. “Paul’s focus on out-of-control desire may not be reflected in committed gay and or lesbian relationships” and thus not addressed in Romans, says Brownson.

**Baldock** talks of the “natural” having to do with the hierarchy of male and female and the male having the active penetrator role and it being focused on procreative sex.

**Matthew Vines** says Paul doesn’t use any words like love, fidelity, monogamy or commitment to apply to his lines in verses 26-27 so how can we tell this is applied to all same-sex relationships? And not just to damaging, exploitative, fleeting same-sex relationships that certainly occur among heterosexuals, too. Paul’s focus is on condemning excess, lust, lack of control.

**DeYoung** assumes on page 53 that Paul must have had a concept of orientation yet that is not corroborated by other writers such as Brownson and even Gagnon, nor has there been any evidence of widespread acceptance of “orientation” in the centuries to come. [Brownson p.49 says] “scholars now have a fairly accurate picture of the relevant data on

same sex erotic relations in the ancient world. He also says that “the nearly universal pattern of same-sex erotic relationships in the ancient world, particularly among men involved status differences between the active and passive partners. Dominant penetrating man was always older, free and of higher status vs. younger, slave and lower status.”

**DeYoung** says on page 56 that Paul is condemning the vile sins of Gentiles. I would add, “idolatrous Gentiles”, those who have turned away from God. Page 57 - Gay Christians would agree that sexual promiscuity and sensuality are not holy.

**Schmidt** - Think about it in terms of today. To paint a picture of today's wrongs and excesses. God gave them over to selfish and exploiting behavior. Instead of building relationships within marriage, they took advantage of others with passing sexual remarks, sexual advances, hands in the wrong places, eyes looking at the wrong parts of the body and words used to make others feel as if they were cattle taken to market. Men abandoned the sanctity of their own marriage beds and instead, looked at computer screens, visited others in houses on-the-street, sent messages on their devices. They did not encourage others, but rather, treated them as mere sexual objects to conquer. Women did the same and both engaged in sexual excesses fueled by lust and passion and devoid of covenant and commitment, one to another. “Both men and women were satisfied with images on screens and defiled the relationships of their covenantal partnerships.” Men of the cloth displayed impropriety with young people in their care and under their guidance. Men exchanged the natural for the unnatural with a pill for days upon day, not satisfied with the aging that God's creation endures, but masking it with pills so they can appeal to the younger women.