

**A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE CONCEPT OF
HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE BIBLE AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONTEMPORARY
AFRICAN (NIGERIAN) CONTEXT**

Philemon Ibrahim¹

Abstract

The African Church is still seeking the proper way to address homosexuality and the act of homosexuality through its daily quest for better hermeneutical interpretation of biblical texts without African cultural influence and biases. This paper uses a historico-grammatical method to critically engage the biblical texts for their contribution to the existing interpretive discourse of the passages that condemned homosexuality. The author evaluates the context of Genesis' and Leviticus' prohibition of homosexuality as a form of counter-narrative to the Ancient Near Eastern culture of the Old Testament and argues that the New Testament writers, especially Paul and the apostles, condemned the act of homosexuality as a counter-narrative to its Greco-Roman culture too. The Israelites were warned not to engage in such homosexual practices because they were exclusive of the community of Yahweh. The early Church also followed suit to distinguish itself as a new Israel and an exclusive community of

¹ Philemon Ibrahim is a doctoral student at the University of Jos, Nigeria. His research interest is in Old Testament Studies, especially Biblical Ecotheology and Ethics. He also lectures at ECWA Theological Seminary, Karu, Abuja, Nigeria. He can be reached at Scholarmoon6666@gmail.com

Yahweh through salvation in Christ Jesus. Therefore, the paper submits that the present Church must join the war of counter-narrative against homosexuality that is rooted in the Old Testament and has its bearing in the New Testament to speak against the act of homosexuality today irrespective of the cultural indifference, prohibition or legalization of homosexuality. This condemnation of the act of homosexuality in the Church must be done in the sense of embracing homosexuals without compromising the counter-narrative of the Old and New Testaments regarding homosexuals today.

Key words: ANE, Greco-Roman, Biblical Concept, Homosexuality, African (Nigerian) context.

Introduction

The topic of homosexuality is full of hurdles, sensitivity, and complexity. This complicated homily of homosexuality is everywhere, and every human being seems to be a potential homosexual to scholars today. Even in the ANE (Ancient Near East)² Epic of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh and Ekindu were alleged to have homoerotic/homosexual relationships,³ and on that lens, respectable biblical characters are being indicted for the act of

² It is very vital to note that “there are four main groups of religious literature from the Ancient Near East which are of particular importance for the light they throw on the origin and background of Hebrew religion: Egyptian, Mesopotamian (Sumero-Accadian), Hittite and West Semitic (Canaanite, Aramaean, South Arabian).” W. F. Albright, “The Ancient Near East and the Religion of Israel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 59. No. 2 (1940): 85.

³Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*. Translated by Kirsi Stjerna (Fortress Press, 1998), 20-21.

Homosexuality; David and Jonathan's supposed homosexual relationship,⁴ Canaan's supposed homosexual paternal incest with his drunken father Noah,⁵ and even Jesus himself is regarded as a homosexual because "for over a century various psychiatrists have thought that Jesus was a paranoid schizophrenic and we now know that the most frequent cause of schizophrenia is the repression of homosexuality".⁶ Note that this paper is not about defending biblical characters by engaging the trend of scholars who are protesting that it is wrong assumption and interpretation to imagine homosexuality out of such characters, but its concern is to critically evaluate the biblical prohibition of homosexuality with an effort in engaging the contemporary Nigerian context that seems to have zero tolerance for homosexuals, constitutionally and religiously.

The modern focal argument is that the Church seems to go extreme in its condemnation and homophobic mentality that is not promoted biblically. The question is, does the Bible truly promote heterosexuality or homosexuality? And does the Bible condemn same-sex attraction? What does the Bible truly condemn? Although we don't have words like homosexuality or heterosexuality in the *ANE* and Greco-Roman world, which were the cultural settings of our biblical writers, it does not mean that

⁴ See Markus Zehnder, "Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan and the Debate on Homosexuality." *Westminster Theological Journal* 69, no 1 (2007): 127–174.; and some other pages in the book of Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 152 n244.

⁵ See Corinne E. Blackmer, "No Name Woman: Noah's Wife and Heterosexual Incestuous Relations in Genesis 9:18–29", *Judaica Ukrainica* I (2012): 29–46.

⁶ Robert Dole, "Was Jesus Homosexual?" *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2019): 344–346.

there was no such concept and practice. There are same-sex unions, attraction, and identification in the *ANE*, and such define our concept of homosexuality today. On this note, K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, says that "homosexuality is the disposition to seek sensory pleasure through bodily contact with persons of one's sex in preference to contact with the other sex."⁷ This desire and attraction to engage in sexual acts with a person of the same sex is what we call homosexuality today, and it is all over Africa and other parts of the world.

The African culture is a different culture if we compare it with the cultural setting of the biblical writers who found themselves in a culture where same-sex marriage was legalized. This paper will argue from the cultural-biblical perspective. The paper argues that homosexuality was biblically condemned to differentiate the covenant people of Israel from the *ANE* and Greco-Roman societies whose concepts and practices of homosexuality were a distortion of the divine orderliness of sexual union from the inception of creation in Genesis and this orderliness leads to the commandment that we are envisaging in texts and context of the Old Testament and New Testament view of Homosexuality, and then we are going to evaluate how the historical and texts of the OT and NT apply to African culture and church today.

⁷ K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, (Bloomsbury, 2013), 1.

The Texts and Context of Old Testament View of Homosexuality

The Old Testament scripture is for disorientation, orientation, and reorientation when it comes to the issue of human sexuality. There are a lot of accusations that the Old Testament writers display a higher level of sexual bias in their theological presupposition of sexual identification and expression because of the misogynistic cultural mindset that influenced them. Therefore, we have many alluded passages to Old Testament heterosexuality and homosexuality, but there are a lot of complicated and complex understandings of homosexuality within such passages. Most evangelical scholars have directly and indirectly pointed out some of the passages that seem to unequivocally condemn the practice of homosexuality, but other scholars have argued the opposite to almost all the passages. The critical questions that matter here are: what does the Old Testament say about homosexuality, and how does the Old Testament inform our understanding of God's view on this issue? And on this regard, most of the understanding of these passages is based on one's interpretation.⁸ Scholars have argued, based on

⁸ It is because of these hermeneutical presuppositions that Alex Montoya asserts that, "Various forms of interpretation have been used to arrive at conclusions which support the homosexual lifestyle. However, unless a consistent hermeneutic is applied to the interpretation of Scripture; each interpreter will arrive at his own conclusion. The text will say whatever the interpreter wants it to say. Unless the literal, historical-grammatical approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures is held strictly, the Scriptures will cease to speak and thus cease to be authoritative (cf. 2 Tim 3:15-17). Consider what approaches the homosexual movement uses to arrive at its conclusions." Alex D. Montoya, "Homosexuality and the Church." *TMSJ* 11/2 (Fall 2000): 156.

their interpretative lens, that the Hebrew Bible does not make even a reference to same-sex and does not condemn it.⁹ If we look at the Hebrew scripture or OT, there is no such terminological concept as sexuality and homosexuality as we have today.

Old Testament references and condemnation of homosexuality are rooted in its *ANE* context because the same sex is well known in the *ANE* and was only condemned in a few instances that some scholars led to the doctrine of creation and command in Genesis 1:27,¹⁰ or Gen 1:28; 2:15-24; Lev 18:22; 20:13. This is where our argument begins. This portion of Gen.1:27 says,

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

"And God created man in His image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them."

Genesis 1:27 noticeably and unswervingly notes that זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה male and female, not female and female. It is not Vivian and Joan, but it is Vivian and John.¹¹ That is why in God's design, sexuality

⁹J. Stiebert and J. T. Walsh, "Does the Hebrew Bible have anything to say about Homosexuality?" *OTE* 14 (1) (2001): 119-152.

¹⁰ G. J. Wenham, "The Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality", *ET* 102, (1990): 359-363.

¹¹ The "therefore" (Hebrew: *al-ken*) connects the creation of woman (v. 23) to the joining of marriage (v. 29). While William Loader also asserts that "The creation stories leave no room for notions of people being anything other than heterosexual and so imply that to depart from that order is sin." William Loader, "Homosexuality and the Bible," in *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, ed. Preston Sprinkle, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 23. We have to understand that the creation's narrative of man and woman is meant to be an original model for a divine arrangement

and intimacy are rooted between male and female, and this connotes only the difference and the complementary interplay of זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה "male and female", uniquely reflecting the image and likeness of God. Therefore, Stanley J. Grenz, a theologian and author of the book *Welcoming But Not Affirming*, says that "... same-sex intercourse loses the symbiotic dimension of two-becoming one present in male-female sex. At best, it is only a simulation of the two becoming one ritual the act of sexual intercourse is designed to be."¹² However, the creation account of Gen. 1-2 makes four crucial unavoidable points regarding sexuality that counteract the ANE culture of same-sex union; (1) Reproduction is good. (2) Sex is good. (3) Marriage is good. (4) Male and female are necessary sexual counterparts.¹³

Hence, Gen. 1-2 only gives us the background to the oppositional opinion of same-sex intimacy. Gen. 19 and Leviticus 18 and 20 are two major passages of the Old Testament that evangelical scholars think and argue that God openly condemned homosexuality. Therefore, let's examine these OT's pertinent texts for proper comprehension: Gen. 19 talks about the sexual expression and harassment of Sodom and Gomorrah, which to

of marriage or else it does not make sense to us at all.. on this particular issue of creation as a model to marriage, we can see the well-argued work of e Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000).

¹² Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexual* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 110.

¹³ Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 43.

others, is an attempted gang rape issue. This text captures a gang of rapists who wanted to demasculinize Lot's male strangers.

The **revisionists** have argued that this sodomite text has nothing to do with homosexuality, but it has everything to say about the hospitality of the sodomites. From this hospitality's arguments against the homosexual undertones of the text, Boswell gave us five reasons to portray the argument against the homosexual reading of the text; he listed the argument as follows: (1) "know" in Genesis 19:5 cannot refer to homosexual relations; (2) the offering of Lot's daughters was a bribe with no sexual overtones; (3) the story of Judg 19:22-30 is also in hospitality; (4) the LXX uses an expression without carnal knowledge; and (5) the reference to Sodom in Ezek 16:48-49 does not list the sin of homosexuality.

Some scholars have debunked the five points arguments of Bowell¹⁴ with some of the plain assertions of the texts that there is more evidence that the usage of "know" in 19:8 is a euphemistic expression used unquestionably and unequivocally for sexual relations, and then Ezekiel 16:27 and 28 are incontrovertibly sexual sins (Lev.18:22; 20:13). Although the euphemistic usage of "to know" instead of sexual act is not that parapt like the way people are insinuating for it was mentioned

¹⁴ Wold argues contrary to the perspective of Bowell. Because Wold demonstrates that homosexual violations are central to the Genesis 19 account and cannot be ignored. He does concede, however, that the Ezekiel 19 material adds to this central theme by discussing violations of hospitality perpetrated by the citizens of Sodom. "The narratives portray both hospitality and homosexual conduct". Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 85

about nine hundred and forty-three times in the Old Testament, and only ten of these have the sense of carnal knowledge. That means even in this context of the sodomite, it might not imply that the sodomites wanted sex, while it seems so when we don't only adopt the homoerotic behaviour without considering the context of the narrative. It is likely an attempted homosexual rape¹⁵ of Lot's visitors. Both texts of Genesis 1-2 and Genesis 19 have no direct references to same-sex or condemnation of same-sex immorality in the people. Therefore, there is no need for much argument and exegetical considerations. Although the texts have homosexual consent, there is only one text that directly mentions same-sex, which is the text of Lev.18:22; 20:13, apart from the prohibition of male cult prostitutes (*qedeshim*) in Deut. 23: 17).¹⁶ These passages are indirectly agitating for heterosexuality. The chapters of Leviticus do not come to the level of criminalizing and prohibiting the act of homosexuality, but they seem to also set a deadly consequence for any involvement in such activities.

Some modern translations (e.g., KJV and NIV) render זָכָר as "man" in Leviticus 18:22

וְאֶת־זָכָר לֹא תִשָּׁב מִשְׁכָּבִי אִשָּׁה תוֹעֵבָה הִוא: . This is the text that seems to have the absoluteness of the condemnation of same-sex relations amid covenant people of God, the Israelites if we look

¹⁵ But the larger context of the later prophetic passages that refer to this narrative indicates a sexual interpretation and a condemnation of the homosexual practice and not simply homosexual rape (Ezek 16:43, 50; cf. Jude 6–7; 2 Pet 2:4, 6–8).

¹⁶ Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 91–105.

at the Hebrew clause *לֹא תִשָּׁכַב* "you shall not lie" is a negative particle followed by the qal imperfect, expressing a permanent negative command. The phrase *מִשְׁכַּבִּי אִשָּׁה* "the lying of a woman", is a euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf. the male equivalent of this passage in Judg 21:11–12).¹⁷ This Leviticus is a condemnation of same-sex which has its root in the creation story that is in Gen.1-2.

We have to object to the argument of some scholars who think that the Leviticus Holiness Code is not saying that same-sex is wrong in itself, but same-sex was an act of Gentile communities and therefore was not permitted in the exclusive Israelite holiness code of conduct. The prohibition is given to the exclusive community of Israel against the Gentile community of ANE and is wrong because the prohibition is timely and timeless regarding same-sex orientation and identity for all God's people who are always in such a culture that is violating the heterosexual union God created.

The aforementioned infers that the Old Testament condemnation of homosexuality is not cultural but theological and timeless. The ANE culture legalized and normalized such concepts based on some principles because it was not meant to take place within the

¹⁷ An Understanding of the Biblical View on Homosexual Practice and Pastoral Care Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Position Paper, 6. This would also prohibit pedophilia or pederasty since the term *zakar* refers to any male, and not just a grown man, we can see the work of Nicholas P. Miller, "Should Adventists Care About Protecting Traditional Marriage?" in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church* (ed. Roy Gane, Nicholas Miller, and Peter Swanson (Andrews University Press, 2012), 214–216.

people of the same status.¹⁸ Therefore, the issue of homosexuality was not odd but was fecund in Old Testament times, and so its Leviticus condemnation was counter-cultural to the people of the ANE. That is why R. Patai notes that "male homosexuality was rampant in Biblical times and has so remained in the Middle East down to the present day."¹⁹ Therefore, the commandment of total abstinence from same-sex and its punishable warning is a serious spasm to the culture and a unique separation of Israel from that very culture of the ancient eastern community itself. So the Old Testament did not give room for the toleration or approval of same-sex relations. While some will say that Leviticus only mentioned male-male we should know that the biblical writers often use man as a generic sense which entails female inclusive; hence, homosexuality is an abomination to the Old Testament holiness code, which was very common among the ANE nations around Israel.

The Texts and Context of the New Testament View of Homosexuality

¹⁸ Maciej Münnich, "Homosexuality in Ancient Mesopotamia: A Survey of Sources", *Verbum Vitae* 39/1 (2021): 27.

¹⁹ R. Patai, *Sex and family in the Bible and the Middle East* (Doubleday & CO., 1959), 169.

issue of homosexuality was normal to the ANE as much as to the ancient Greeks²⁰ and Romans.²¹ Therefore, the camaraderie of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world was among age, social status, and gender, not in the form of the sexual preferences we often categorize people today. Hence, homosexuality, to them, was simply the act of a man sleeping with a man or a woman having sexual intercourse with a woman,²² and the acceptability

²⁰ Gayle Zive notes, "The Ancient Greeks regarded homosexuality as a normal part of life, but only within certain parameters. The relationship was supposed to be between a 'beardless' youth and an older man. The elder was supposed to be the 'active' partner; it was shameful for him to be the 'passive' partner. The youth should not accept money from the man, nor was he supposed to enjoy the act of penetration. Once the youth reached adulthood and recognition as a citizen, the relationship was supposed to lose its sexual side". Gayle Zive, "A Brief History of Western Homosexuality", <https://www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/honors/documents/journals/sexinstone/Zive.pdf>. Although you can also read the book of Kenneth James Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, (Harvard University Press, 1978), 91-109. While on this practice of homosexuality between the younger folk and the older ones, the ancient Greeks used two salient terms for them; *eromenos* (younger) who is referred to as the loved, and *erastes* (older) is the lover which sex refers to the older *erastes* ejaculating between the thighs of the younger *eromenos* and the age of *eromenos* was between twelve to eighteen at the moment of his beardlessness, but the age of the *erastes* is 30 years and above; see Marilyn B. Skinner, "Alexander and Ancient Greek Sexuality," in *Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History, and Cultural Studies*, ed. Paul Cartledge and Fiona Rose Greenland (University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 124.

²¹ This book is very important for the understanding of Roman Homosexuality. Craig Williams' book titled *Roman Homosexuality* gives us much of the Roman literature and sources that inform our understanding of how homosexuality was practiced and viewed in the years between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200 (Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 246.

²² See Nicole Speth, *Female Homoeroticism in the Roman Empire: How Many Licks Does It Take to Get to the Disruption of a Phallocentric Model of*

of this act depended on who the two people were and their respective social statuses in society and not on their gender preferences. This status is that of the older man sleeping with, the younger man.²³ They must not appear to be of the same age: the *erastes* have a beard and play an active role, whereas the adolescent *eromenos* have no beard and remain passive. This is legalized homosexuality as far as it is an adult playing the active role and not the younger. Homosexuality²⁴ cuts off the moment the younger becomes an adult, too, because it is prohibited for an adult man to sleep with another adult man.²⁵ In the ancient Greeks, Homosexuality was not wrong in itself, but it was wrong based on the age of the person. This was not about gender but about the ages of the persons. So, "It was certainly shameful when a man with a beard remained the passive partner (*pathikos*), and it was even worse when a man allowed himself to be penetrated

Sexuality? (Hofstra University Press, 2015). And the most important work of Joseph Wittreich, "Reclaiming the Sacred: The Bible in Gay and Lesbian Culture," *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 33, No. 3/4, (1997).

²³ Dover provides photographs of hundreds of vases made during 570 to 470 B.C. that had outstanding paintings of older men doing everything to actively engage in homosexual intercourse with the youths. He then explains how this early pictorial attestation to homosexuality developed into the literature of the next several centuries, which he then describes throughout the rest of the book, and concludes that we can by no means believe that the Greeks had a "latent or repressed homosexuality." Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*. 2nd ed (MJF Books, 1989), 1-6.

²⁴ This Greek practice, called "Greek Pederasty or pedophilia" was an erotic relationship between men and boys; although the Romans forbade pederasty with free boys. Cristina Richie, "An Argument against the Use of the Word 'Homosexual' in English Translations of the Bible" *HeyJ LI* (2010): 727, 723–729.

²⁵ Zive, "A Brief History of Western Homosexuality", 1

by another grown-up man."²⁶ This Greek viewpoint is quite different from our modern concept of homosexuality, which based its argument on gender rather than on the age of the persons involved.

Therefore, the New Testament, like the Old Testament, was produced in societies that have normalized and promoted the act of homosexuality. We ought to understand that it is the coming of Christianity to the Greco-Roman world that brought to an end the legalization of homosexuality or same-sex union. That is why Zive reiterates, "The introduction of Christianity into the Roman world brought the old Hebrew prejudice against homosexuality into the Empire."²⁷ With the coming of Christianity in 533 AD, homosexuality became entirely illegal and prohibited in Rome, which was a Christian-dominated period. Emperor Justinian was known to castrate those found guilty of homosexuality. But, after the collapse of the Roman Empire, the status of homosexuality changed yet again. In most areas, there were no laws against homosexuality.²⁸

For sure, Christians during that time of Romans and Greeks got their teachings about the prohibition of homosexuality from the Old Testament because the New Testament manuscripts were possibly not available like the Old Testament at that time.

²⁶ <https://www.livius.org/articles/concept/greek-homosexuality/>.

²⁷ Zive, "A Brief History of Western Homosexuality", 1.

²⁸ Without the coming of Christians and the influence of Christianity in Rome, there is no prohibition of homosexuality, see the book of Vern Bullough, *Homosexuality: A History* (Garland Press, 1979), 33 which Zive quoted in "A Brief History of Western Homosexuality", 2.

Therefore, the teachings of the Old Testament influenced the New Testament authors who wrote about the prohibition of Homosexuality and Jesus' condemnation of the act of homosexuality. Most of the statements of Jesus Christ were always rooted and grounded in the Old Testament, which was his manual for instructions on how the disciples should live in the Greco-Roman world. Some scholars argue that the New Testament does not condemn the concept and practice of homosexuality because it does not in any way stand against the normal practices of the Greco-Roman world. For example, Robin Scroggs, in a book titled *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, openly argues that the Bible does not in any way reject all forms of homosexual activities,²⁹ but he further buttresses his argument with this assertion that only a prostitution style which Greco-Roman society at large already detested.³⁰

Two passages in the New Testament bolster the concept and practice of our modern view of homosexuality, which are 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10.

1 Cor.6:9: ἢ οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ἄδικοι θεοῦ βασιλείαν οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν; Μὴ πλανᾶσθε· οὔτε πόρνοι οὔτε εἰδωλολάτραι οὔτε μοιχοὶ οὔτε μαλακοὶ οὔτε ἀρσενικοῖται.

²⁹ Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Fortress Press, 1983), 101-109, 118-121.

³⁰ Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 109, 120-121.

1 Timothy 1:10: πόρνοις, ἀρσενοκοίταις, ἀνδραποδισταῖς, ψεύσταις, ἐπιόρκοις, καὶ εἴ τι ἕτερον τῇ ὑγιαίνουσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ ἀντίκειται,

The texts of 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:9 have produced much debate in the translation of two particular words: μαλακοὶ and ἀρσενοκοῖται. There is an argument that it is only in verse 9 of 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy 1:9 that the μαλακοὶ is translated as "male prostitute" within the New Testament because the other places the word appears are Matthew 11:8, which refers to "fine" clothes, and Luke 7:25, where it refers to "soft clothing".³¹ Some scholars feel the term μαλακοὶ is a very difficult term to translate and a huge problem to know exactly what Paul means here.³² But we have to understand that the Greek terminology μαλακοὶ used only in the 1 Corinthians passage, is the plural form of the adjective μαλακος and according to BDAG in this case "pertains to being passive in a same-sex relationship,"³³ and for that, Paul directly and intentionally confronted the sanctity of the Church as a prototype of a covenant community of Israel because he got his teachings against homosexuality from the Holiness code of Leviticus³⁴ that is discussed above. The Leviticus verse uses two words (*arseno* = "men" and *koiten* = "lies with") which are combined by Paul, presumably to evoke memories of the

³¹ Richie, "An Argument against the Use of the Word," 723.

³² Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1987), 244.

³³ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 106.

³⁴ This is rooted in the word of Robert Gagnon, "The ongoing significance of the Leviticus laws for Christians is seen in how Paul in his context directly draws on Leviticus to articulate his own negative views about same-sex sexual intimacy", see this book, Robert A. J. Gagnon in Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexuality: Two Views* (Fortress Press, 2004), 67.

teaching of Leviticus that forbids "a man laying with another man as he would with a woman".³⁵

It is very important to note that homosexuality was not a new thing to Paul. Paul's use of *pornos* and *malakos* lends credence to the view that Paul had homosexuals in mind when he wrote ἀρσενοκοῖται in the texts of 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. Paul also employs in 1 Corinthians 6 the judgments of Leviticus in what seems to be a direct allusion to the philological style of the Levitical prohibition. Here Paul has in mind the biblical presumption about the creation norm of heterosexuality³⁶ and honour and reverence to God. However, we can vividly see in Romans 1:23 that Paul spoke in general of the "exchange" of God's glory for fabrications of human imagination. Verse 25 identifies same-sex practice as a specific example of what happens when God's truth is "bartered" and substituted for "a deception" and when reverence of "the creature" substitutes for the worship of "the Creator. Homosexuality is an act of idolatry that must be avoided³⁷ because it turns the Church of God into Greco-Roman and ANE shrines. Paul was deliberate with his assertion that homosexuality is a deliberate act of idolatry because it is a lifestyle of the Greco-Roman gods and their worshippers and not the lifestyle of Christians who are rooted in the orderliness of the sexual union between male and

³⁵ Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion & Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (InterVarsity Press, 1995), 95-96.

³⁶ Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexuality*, 81.

³⁷ Willard Swartley, *Homosexuality: Biblical Interpretation and Moral Discernment* (Herald Press, 2003), 51-52.

female as stated and promoted in Genesis 1-2. For that purpose, Pauline's argument is simple and clear; heterosexuality is a gift to Israel and the Church, and so, homosexuality is a curse to the household of God which ought to be uniquely separated from the household of Greco-Roman gods and their cultural formations. This is an affirmative truth to every believer.

Consequently, Jesus Himself, in offsetting the Greco-Roman culture of homosexuality, also refers to the divine order when asked about the legality of divorce and the permanence of marriage which was a norm in the Greco-Roman culture. He asserts: "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh'?" (Matt 19:4-5). The Lord referred back to the Old Testament's divine order not only for its permanence but also for its sexual nature: a man for a woman not a man for a man. Hence, he wants the disciples to understand and note that homosexuality is a perversion of the divine order of sexual union. To stand and condemn homosexuality in all its forms as a perversion of the divine order is not a symptom of homophobia, heartless prejudice, or narrow-minded bigotry.³⁸ It is an affirmation of the exclusiveness of God's people and the obedience of God's people to God's orderliness of sexual identification and orientation that is rooted

³⁸ Alex D. Montoya, "Homosexuality and the Church." *TMSJ* 11/2 (Fall 2000): 166

in the counter-advocacy against both the *ANE* culture and the Greco-Roman culture of the biblical writers.

Application to African (Nigerian) Context

The issue of homosexuality has generated scholarly arguments from different perspectives from the activities, politicians, philosophers, the general public and so on. There is a lot of contention regarding the emergence of homosexuality in Africa, whether it is indigenous to Africa or was introduced from outside so others think that Christianity is one of the foreign religions such as Christianity in inciting homophobia and therefore Africa needs to be liberated from such religion through the urgent emergence of African researchers and activists to provide the narrative that emerges from within the cultural context of Africa.

³⁹Meanwhile, we cannot dismiss the fact that there has been a notable increase in scholarly publications on homosexuality in

³⁹ Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Marc, *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008); Marc, *Sexuality and Social Justice in Africa: Rethinking Homophobia and Forging Resistance* (Zed Books, 2013); Kapyia Kaoma, *American Culture Wars in Africa: A Guide to the Exporters of Homophobia and Sexism* (Political Research Associates, 2014); Thabo Msibi, "Is Current Theorising on Same-Sex Sexuality Relevant to the African Context? The Need for More African Voices on Theorising Same-Sex Desire in Africa." Pambazuka News, www.pambazuka.net/en/category/features/90723/print.

Africa, with anti-homosexuality legislation in Uganda and Nigeria attracting attention.⁴⁰

In Contrast to ANE and the Greco-Roman world homosexuality was legalized; in Nigeria and some parts of Africa, Homosexuality is officially prohibited in the form of the holiness code of Leviticus. On 13th January 2014, the then-President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, signed into law the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act, which the National Assembly had earlier passed in May 2013.⁴¹ For such laws of prohibition, homosexuals don't have breathing space in Africa and Nigeria, to be specific. African (Nigerian) Society and the Church have no peaceful relationship with homosexuals. The acuity of homosexual discussion has been affected not just culturally but religiously in Africa, and such led to the fact that Mike Omilusi reiterates, "In Africa, heterosexual relations are often prized over homosexual ties for their procreative capacity that often consolidates the bond, not only between couples but also their families".⁴² He further asserts, "In this attempt to revive African values, homosexuality has been perceived as a Western value

⁴⁰ Adam Kretz, "From 'Kill the Gays' to 'Kill the Gay Rights Movement': The Future of Homosexuality Legislation in Africa." *Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights* 11 (2), (2013): 207–244.

⁴¹Mike Omilusi, "Between Local Acceptability and International Opprobrium: On Nigeria's Anti-Same Sex Marriage Law; Is Western Voice a Human Rights Advocacy or Cultural Imperialism?" *Cross-Cultural Communication* Vol. 17, No. 3, (2021): 47-56.

⁴² Omilusi, "Between Local Acceptability and International Opprobrium", 50.

which does not readily fit into African traditions and ethos."⁴³ While we don't know if it is an attempt to revive African values that homosexuality is becoming a dilemma to the revivalists or the homosexual practices and orientations have always been a problem to core African person but the major has a lot to do with the cultural orientation regarding marriage.

It is a notable and observable reality in the African culture that marriage is rooted and grounded in fruitfulness or reproduction. In agreement, Thabo Msibi, in his article, *The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa*, says, "A man's sexual identity was constructed about reproduction"⁴⁴ because you don't just marry for companionship, but you marry to have children especially male children for the survival of your lineage. So I think African cultural condemnation of homosexuality is based on the fact that homosexuals have no reproductive aim. However, we have to understand that the biblical veto of marriage is beyond the African cultural presupposition because it is both for companionship and child-bearing. While in the ANE and Greco-Roman world, sexual activities were not based on child-bearing but were based on self-pleasure. It is the pleasure, not reproduction, that was ominous of the world behind the biblical text, and therefore, such culture tolerated homosexuality because of sexual satisfaction, not like African culture. For that purpose, the African culture does not have a rooted reason to condemn

⁴³ G. Ncube, Hypocrisies, and contradictions: Western aid and LGBT rights in Africa. Available at: <http://www.polity.org.za/article/hypocrisies-and-contradictions-western-aid-and-lgbt-rights-in-africa>.

⁴⁴Thabo Msibi, "The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa", *Africa Today*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (2011): 64, 55-77.

homosexuality. This has led to some African cultures legalizing it and forming laws that favour the act of homosexuality because marriage is no longer visualized as an act of reproduction, but pleasure. This has been the concept of *ANE*, and the Western world that has legalized homosexuality on the grounds of human rights.

Hence, we have to grip the congruent nature of biblical prohibition from the Old to New Testament that is rooted in the fact that such an act is against the original plans of God as seen in his orderliness of heterosexual union. For that reason African (Nigerian) context, especially the Church, must unfasten itself from the mentality of condemning homosexuality based on the lack of reproduction in such union and base its argument on the ground that such union is an attack on the orderliness of God's creation and a dishonour to God's original plan of heterosexual marriage. The Church has to also let homosexuals know that they are redeemable and embrace them with the biblical teaching of love, sex, and marriage. The African Church ought to create an environment to welcome homosexuals to the fellowship and pray for the breakthrough instead of demoralizing them with condemnatory messages.

Conclusion

From its inception, homosexuality has been a wrestling desire in the hearts of men and women, which is why from the *ANE* to the Greco-Roman world and the Western world today, we have levels of its normalization. With the above, this critical reflection draws strong conclusions about the applicability of biblical texts

to present-day issues because we have analyzed the adequate historical background to determine what the texts meant to their writers and first readers. Although this article is not agitating for the normalization of homosexuality today like the *ANE* and Greco-Roman world it is not also saying that the Church should marginalize homosexuals against the teaching of the scriptures that reject the normalization of it. The writer is postulating that the Church in Africa has to remain an exclusive community of Yahweh in the sense of Israel within *ANE* and Jesus with His disciples in the Greco-Roman world. The Church should stand against the act of homosexuality not because it is against African cultural values but because it is biblically unwelcome from the Old Testament to the New Testament and remain a faithful and committed community of Yahweh within the cultural context of Africa (especially Nigeria).