God-rejecters who have "exchanged" their original heterosexual nature for homosexual interests (v. 26-27); it is clear he views this as a conscious decision on their part and also as a punishment sent by God for their turning to idol worship. (*Furnish*) This passage then can hardly be applied gay people who have been Christian (and loved the Lord) their whole lives and who never have felt a heterosexual desire to "exchange." Moreover, they desire not a life of lust, promiscuity and prostitution, but rather another Christian gay person with whom they might share their life in a loving, caring and lifelong commitment. Scriptural commands must always be viewed in their historical setting, and Paul here is condemning specific social traditions in the ancient world. Although paiderasty (the love of boys) was still practiced in the Roman period, it was increasingly supplanted by the exploitation of young male slaves, the use of effeminate call-boys, and even the castration of boys to please a certain clientele. (*Furnish*)

William Schoedel notes that for Paul it was not acceptable for a Greco-Roman convert to have sex with his wife, along with his slaves and a male favorite as well. Yet, the radical changes that he has introduced (e.g. rejecting all of the OT purity rules) suggests that he might have had no trouble "in pushing further into the sphere of sexuality," if he had known about deep-seated, fixed homosexual orientation. Those who violently oppose gay commitments today fail to see that such a recognition really only strengthens this traditional model. (*Cf. Balch*) If Paul had known about homosexual orientation, he probably would have utilized his sexual advice given in 1 Cor 7 – namely, that sexual passion can be strong and not easily denied, celibacy is a gift only given to a few, Christian compassion sometimes stretches Christian ideals (here with Jesus' "no divorce, except for adultery"), and people in general should seek to find sexual satisfaction in long-lasting, committed relationships. Paul did not believe that the ascetic life will work for most, but lead to promiscuity and prostitution (7:1-8,36).

But what about the views that one hears today that (1) no one is born gay – these desires stem from disordered parent-child relations; (2) homosexuality is only a "lifestyle," not an ingrained orientation; (3) life for all gay people is miserable; and (4) any "gay" person can change into a heterosexual or live a sexless, celibate life if only he or she wants to, with God's help?

First, studies with intersex patients show that varying levels of sex hormones in prenatal infants play a significant role on whether they will later follow a heterosexual or homosexual track, as well as limiting their options for sexual desire. Psychiatrists Friedman and Downey note also that it is simply a myth that parental-child interactions are the great cause of homosexuality and also that a gay or lesbian has voluntarily chosen to be that. The poll taken by B.J. Gallagher and colleagues of 508 psychiatrists showed that the top five factors picked as leading to gay male orientation were all biological, with genetic inheritance and prenatal hormones at the top – and with a dominant mother and a weak father sixth and seventh on the list. (*Cf. Balswick & Balswich*)

Second, there is no more a single "homosexual lifestyle" than there is a "heterosexual lifestyle" or an "American lifestyle." The important distinction is between those who love Jesus and are trying to live their lives to please him, contrasted to those who are not. Of course, there still will be differences in how believers discern God's will in their individual lives, depending on the gifts and also the limitations that God gives to each of his children. It is a mark of both humility and wisdom to recognize that no one Christian leader or group knows all of God's wisdom or work in the world; and we must be careful not to become like the religious zealots in Jesus' day who in their fanaticism to maintain the Scriptural law missed the grace of God at work around them.

Third, yes, gay people's lives are made difficult by all of the hatred, homophobia, and hostility that the Church and society heaps on them. Yet, Evelyn Hooker's famous study showed that psychological tests given to socially-integrated gay men as well as to heterosexual men could not be used to distinguished one group from the other by professionals afterward. We know of many contented gay people and also of many miserable heterosexuals; peace and stress exist in both groups – and even believers have never been promised a rose garden. Understanding God's will is not so easy as simply "prooftexting" verses often out of context; rather, Scripture, tradition, reason, experience, science, individual conscience, and the Spirit's inner voice all help the Christian discern God's leading. (*Cf. Gudorf*)

Fourth, outside studies done of the ex-gay ministries have shown largely that they are a failure and oppressive to gay people. Wayne Besen, in his undercover exposé of the ex-gay movement (Anything but Straight) noted that even reparative (repair) therapist Joseph Nicolosi now says that he seeks not a "cure" but rather a "change" in self-identity (i.e. a gay becomes an "ex-gay" but he still continues to have his strong homosexual passions!). When psychotherapist Ralph Blair asked Roger Grindstaff, an ex-gay leader who worked with Teen Challenge, if he knew of homosexuals who were becoming heterosexual through the ex-gay ministries, he replied "of course not, I don't know of any." He went on to explain how the ex-gay leaders talked about total reversal in churches, because that is what they want to hear. (*Blair*)

Wiser, compassionate counsel comes from Christian psychiatrist Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, who wrote that gays who came for treatment could not "be converted to the heterosexual adaptation" and that to force them into celibacy, "is not possible without crippling them in other ways, and it is unreasonable and cruel to demand it." Judith and Jack Balswick, psychologists on the faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary, note that while they highly value heterosexual marriage, they also recognize the reality of "homosexual orientation" and support those gays and lesbians who seek to honor God in their lives by trying to find a lifelong commitment with another gay person. Too bad so many Christian leaders can't find the grace and love of God to do the same.

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TRANSLATIONS: KJV = King James Version. NRSV = New Revised Standard Version.

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