The voices of any early Christian women who may have romantically loved other women have not come down to us. Instead, we have the early Christian voices who treated such love with contempt. The apostle Paul declared that same-sex unions shared between women disturbed the natural order (Romans 1:26-27). Paul’s understanding of sexual love between women overlaps closely with the general conceptions of sexual relations found throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. Greek and Latin writers in his culture agreed with Paul that a woman was to be "under a man" (Romans 7:2, where the Greek word for "married" is literally "under a man"), thereby the passive object of sexual activity, and not a sexual subject who actively pursues her desires with other women.

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Paul’s Sexual Attitudes Culturally Determined
We can best understand Paul’s response to sexual relations between women in the context of the culture of the Roman Empire and its assumptions about proper sexual relations. While Roman-period non-Christian writers disagree on whether to condone sexual relations between males, nearly all of these writers condemn sexual relations between women. Against the background of the common cultural assumption that sexual relations should naturally occur between two unequal parties (e.g., a man and his wife, a male slave owner and his slave, a man and his mistress, a man and a prostitute), such writers as Seneca the Elder, Mar-
tial, Soranos (1st-2d C. CE), and Lucian (2d C. CE) depicted women with sexual relations with other women as having become like men. They applied the term tribades (cf. the later term "trabades") to such women and repre-
sented them as trying to assume the male role, by dressing in male clothing and adopting a male name. 

Ancient medical writers went as far as to prescribe a selective clitoridectomy, apparently for women whose clitorises were considered capable of penetration (Soranos, as excerpted in Claudius Aurelianus [5th C. CE], Musto perhaps 5th or 6th C. CE], and Paulus of Aegina [7th C. CE]). Paul's condensation fits in well with the greater awareness of sexual love between women documented in the Roman world.

Paul's earliest readers, the early church fathers, read Paul as a man of his time; they saw him as condemning homosexual practices for the same reasons that others of their culture did. Paul used the terms "impurity," "to de-

scribe," "to exchange," "natural," and "unnatural" in the ways that others in the ancient world employed these terms. In ancient Mediterranean culture generally, "impurity" meant a blurring of boundaries, in this case, of the boundaries between femaleness and maleness. Just as, according to the book of Leviticus, impure animals were those that did not conform to delineated c

categories, the people about whom Paul was speaking were not maintaining the clear gender polarity and comple-

mentarity necessary for a specific social order. Thus, taking seriously Paul's des-
scription of homosexuality as "impuri-
ty" helps us to see it as societal, rather than a private concern.

The term Paul uses for "degrade" can also be rendered "dishonor." Paul's use of this term demonstrates his convic-
tion that the treatment of female and male bodies should differ, especially with respect to honor. Men were ac-

claimed honor because their sex occu-
pied a superior and dominant station in society. Women, on the other hand, were often seen as inferior and subordinate, and their honor was dependent on the honor of their husbands. This is evident in Paul's letters to the Corinthians, where he addresses the issue of women's roles in the church and emphasizes the importance of maintaining proper order and decorum. Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:2-3, where he allows women to teach and be in the church but not to have authority over men, can be seen as an attempt to balance the competing demands of maintaining order and respect for both men and women.

In Romans 1:24-27, Paul describes how the natural desire for sexual intimacy is corrupted when it is directed toward non-human objects. He argues that this corruption leads to further degradation, as people begin to worship idols and idols themselves. This is a clear example of Paul's concern with maintaining proper relationships and avoiding the corruption of natural desires.

In 1 Timothy 2:8-10, Paul stresses the importance of women's roles in the church and marriage. He emphasizes the role of men as leaders and the role of women as subordinates, arguing that this is in line with natural order and God's design for the world. This is consistent with Paul's earlier teachings on gender roles and sexual relations, which were intended to maintain order and respect in the church and society.

In conclusion, Paul's teachings on sexual relations reflected his concern with maintaining proper order and decorum, and his understanding of these issues was grounded in his understanding of the natural order and God's design for the world. His teaching on sexual relations was intended to guide the church in maintaining proper order and respect in the face of the temptations and challenges of the day.
to feel more shame than men." Chrysostom, arguing that women have a different nature from men and that by nature woman was commissioned to be man's helper, sees homoeroticism as overturning the social order and possibly being protected by nature: "nature knows her own boundaries." Chrysostom attacks homoeroticism with such vehemence as: "Whatever transgression you speak of, you will have none equal to this lawlessness;" there is nothing more irrational and disgraceful than this outrage"; and "how many hells will suffice for such people?" (Homo- lysis on Romans).

Marriage Between Women

In spite of tremendous opposition by Christians and others, sources demonstrate that women in this period engaged in what they saw as woman-woman marriage. Clement of Alexandria (3rd-4th C.) responds to women who had long-term relationships with other women that they defined as marriage (Instructor). (Protempy, luckin, the author to his son's wife known as the Sibyl before ca. 220 CE, Hephastion of Thebes (4th-5th C. CE), and possibly Ambrosius 26 (3rd. C. CE) also refer to woman-woman marriage. Further, in a papyrus letter from Egypt (probably 3d C. CE), a mother refers to her daughter's marriage. [Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 4340].) Clement argues that such marriages were unnatural because they defied God, who created woman from man in order for her to receive man's seed and to help him; that they prevented the male seed from finding a proper field; that the uterus of the two women were calling out to be filled with the male seed; that humans should not imitate such lascivious animals as the hare; and that Paul called female homoeroticism unnatural in Romans 1:26-27.

Hippolytus of Rome (3rd-4th C.) reports on a group of Gnostic Christians called the Naassenes (defined by Hippolytus as heretical), who rejected "natural intercourse" between women and men on the belief that Androgyne characterized the world above. We do not know whether they promoted same-sex love, but they did interpret Paul in Romans 1:20-27 as speaking about an "unproachable mystery of blessed pleasure" (The Refutation of All Heresies). Interestingly, even though early Christians generally opposed homoeroticism, they themselves created homosexual environments in which it could occur, a fact that did not escape Christian monastic leaders. Egyptian monk Shenute of Atbine (4th-5th C.) explicitly warns runs against same-sex sexual contact (On the Monastic Life) and describes the bearing of two runs as punishment for having had such contact (Letter). In a similar vein, Augustine of Hippo (4th-5th C.) instructs that runs go out in groups of three (Epistles).