

**The Truth about Homosexuality: What Was Happening in Corinth, I Corinthians 6:9
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Corinth was known for its immorality. Even the Corinthian church, the local body of Christ, was plagued by immorality. In a letter not preserved for us in the Bible, Paul exhorted the Corinthians not to associate with fornicators (see I Cor. 5:9). Alas, Paul did not mean pagan fornicators, but rather fornicators within the church itself. Apparently the church, which was almost exclusively made up of Gentiles rather than converted Jews, had no problem with the concept that Christians are free from the Old Testament law. In fact, a faction within the church was beginning to doubt Paul's spirituality, possibly because he still obeyed much of the law.

Despite the fact that Paul had planted the church (ca. A.D. 49-51) and had remained in Corinth for 18 months, his relationship with church members was more than a little strained by the time he wrote I Cor., some three years later. The church members had misunderstood Paul's first letter and were beginning to question his authority over them. I say "beginning," because I Cor. was occasioned by a letter brought to Paul from Corinth (answered in chapters 7-16) by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, as well as by news from "Chloe's household." Paul took the opportunity to deal with the problems of the Corinthian church, to answer its questions, and to establish its understanding of his apostolic authority.

Things in Corinth had clearly gotten out of hand. Some within the church had gone so far as to espouse the slogan, "All things are lawful." It was to this slogan and the attendant sexual misconduct that I Cor. 6:12-20 was addressed. Paul's task was to convince the Corinthians that there was (and still is) a profound difference, moreover one with eternal consequences, between freedom in Christ and freedom from Christ.

In the first half of chapter 6, Paul wrote concerning a lawsuit which had come to his attention. It impresses me as being rather ironic that the same body which championed the "All things are lawful" mentality was also chastised by Paul for taking its disputes before civil courts. "'All things are lawful,' but only if they cause me no inconvenience or impinge on one of my rights" seems to describe the Corinthian bottom line. Paul, who later in chapter 9 explained that he was willing to waive even his rights as an apostle for the sake of the gospel, was horrified by the Corinthian behavior.

He was doubly upset -- because church members had disputes with one another in the first place, and because they couldn't, or wouldn't, solve those disputes among themselves. Pointing out that Christians would judge the world at the end of the age, Paul's stated intent was to shame the Corinthians. He wanted them not just to feel guilty, but to acknowledge legitimate guilt for embarrassing the body of Christ before the world. Paul was very clear in saying that it was better to be wronged than to take a fellow Christian before any court, much less a secular one. Paul's biggest problem seems to have been that the Corinthians weren't acting like Christians at all.

Chapter 5 began with Paul's flabbergasted reaction to a report that there was in the church immorality "of such a kind that does not exist even among the Gentiles" (5:1). Rather than sorrow, the Corinthians' response to such sin in their midst was arrogance. They were actually proud of such extreme "freedom in Christ," or so 6:12-20 would lead me to believe. The picture we have, then, as we come to 6:9, is of a

church that is virtually indistinguishable from its pagan surroundings. Paul is compelled to remind the Corinthians that the unrighteous, whom they resemble far more than he would like, will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul defines the types of persons with whom the Corinthians ought not to associate in chapter 5; he employs a similar "vice list" in chapter 6. His goal is to get the Corinthians to examine their behavior. He certainly seems to be warning them that if they continue to act like unrighteous pagans, they will not inherit heaven. Whether or not one can renounce his or her salvation is beyond the scope of this article, but it must be said that Paul's warning is serious. In Paul's mind, certain things just cannot be. He lists those who will not inherit the kingdom, homosexuals among them. Neither "thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers shall inherit the kingdom of God" (6:10). "And such were some of you," continues Paul (6:11a). And such were some of us as well. If we persist in such sins, if our lives are characterized by giving in to rather than fighting against (even if we fail) such sins, we are doomed according to Paul (so Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 245). It is good for the Corinthians and for us that Paul ends his section on lawsuits on a positive note.

The Corinthian church was in deep trouble. It had allowed rampant sin to continue, and far from being repentant, its attitude was one of pride. Though Christians would judge the very angels of God, the Corinthians were unable to settle their disputes without recourse to secular courts. And yet they "were washed...were sanctified...were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (6:11b). As real as was Paul's warning to the Corinthians is his statement of who they are now. They were vile sinners, they are now Christians; Paul wants them to act like it. I don't know who first paraphrased Paul thus, but we find here the implicit imperative to the Corinthians and to us, "Become who you are!"

Part of becoming who we are entails remembering who we were. Paul's vice lists were not so generalized as to be meaningless, or merely excerpted from current Greek lists, as some commentators argue. No, Paul was very careful to tailor his vice lists to his audiences. The church was having a problem with litigation, hence a list including thieves, covetous ones and swindlers. Church members had questions about meat offered to idols, hence a list including idolaters. Corinth and its church were noted for immorality, hence a list including sexual sins. In chapter 5, Paul told the Corinthians not to associate with sexually immoral people. In chapter 6, he warned them that God's kingdom would not be inherited by the sexually immoral and gave three examples of such immorality: adultery, and two aspects of homosexuality. The precise meanings of the words I consider to be referring to homosexual activity are hotly debated, and to that debate we now turn our attention.

WORD STUDY

One of the seeming paradoxes of the Christian life is that we find true freedom only in obedience to God. It is supremely true for the Christian that freedom and lawlessness are not synonyms. Paul very much wants to get this through to the Corinthians, and to do so before their "All things are lawful" slogan places them in the company of those who "shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:12, 10b). Not only does Paul's vice list of 1 Cor. 6 call to mind particularly Corinthian sins, but also the

Holiness Code of Leviticus. "Of the ten vices in I Cor. 6:9-10, only one (drunkards) is not found in Leviticus 18-20" (James B. De Young, "The Source and NT Meaning of Arsenokoitai, with Implications for Christian Ethics and Ministry," *The Masters Seminary Journal* 3/2 (Fall 1992): 213, transliteration mine).

As we have seen, the Levitical Holiness Code condemns male homosexual activity as a capital crime. We have also noticed that the wording of the laws reflects heterosexuality as normative for the Israelites about to enter the land of Canaan, "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman..." We now need to take an even closer look at that wording, specifically at the LXX (Septuagint). A transliteration of Leviticus 18:22a, quoted above, would be: kai meta arsenos ou koimethese koiten gynaikos. We find bed, koiten, and the same word for man as sexually male, arsenos, as we saw in Romans 1 (a term which refers to males of all ages and could, therefore, include, but not be limited to, a reference to pederasty [Ibid., 214]). These two words, male and bed are the component parts of the term arsenokoitai found in I Cor. 6.

Paul says that "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate (malakoi), nor homosexuals (arsenokoitai), nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers shall inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9b-10, NASB, parentheses and emphasis mine). Though the "correct" translation of both underlined words is debated, it is the second that we have begun to consider. The fact that arsenokoitai is made up of the Greek words for male and bed is agreed upon by pro-gay and traditional scholars alike. Consensus ends there.

Sherwin Bailey, among the first pro-gay writers to challenge the traditional translations (there are many) of arsenokoitai, actually comes very close to the current, conservative understanding of the noun. "He takes the term in I Cor. 6:9 as denoting males who actively engage in homosexual acts, in contrast to malakoi ('effeminate'), those who engage passively in such acts" (Ibid., 193). He repudiates, however, the current, conservative conclusion that the noun should be rendered as homosexuals. He claims, incorrectly according to De Young,* that Paul could "know nothing of inversion as an inherited trait, or inherent condition due to psychological or glandular causes and consequently regards all homosexual practice as evidence of perversion" (D. S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* [London: Longmans, Green, and Co.. 1955], 38). His point is that Paul's focus on homosexual activity, not on homosexual orientation, has relevance for the pervert, but not the invert. His bottom line is that Paul is irrelevant to a modern discussion of homosexuality and so modern words such as homosexuality (orientation as well as activity) should be avoided when translating his outdated works.

In my article on Romans 1, some time was spent interacting with the work of Robin Scroggs. His view is that Paul could only have known about pederasty; thus his condemnation of homosexuality must be limited to that one manifestation thereof. His conclusion is similar to Bailey's: since Paul wasn't talking about what we mean by homosexuality (the monogamous, adult variety), he has nothing to say to us. Still, although he defines both malakoi and arsenokoitai in pederastic terms, Scroggs was the first to notice the linguistic link between Leviticus 18 & 20 and I Cor. 6. That link is extremely significant because we know of no pre-Pauline usage of arsenokoitai. It is not a term used in secular Greek of any period and is fairly rare in patristic Greek. Scroggs is of the opinion that Paul borrowed the word which is of

“Hellenistic coinage, perhaps influenced by awareness of rabbinic terminology” (R. Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 107-8).

*De Young makes a compelling case that the speeches on homoeroticism in Plato’s *Symposium* presuppose an understanding of homosexual orientation as well as passing pederasty and other homosexual behaviors. (For a full discussion, see James B. De Young, *Homosexuality* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000], 190, 205-213.)

In his first appendix to *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, Boswell includes what De Young calls “the most influential study of arsenokoitai among contemporary authors” (De Young, 193). His conclusion is that “there is no reason to believe that either ‘arsenokoitai’ or ‘malakoi’ connoted homosexuality in the time of Paul or for centuries thereafter (John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980], 353, transliteration mine). Instead he takes the latter to refer “to general moral weakness, with no specific connection to homosexuality” (p. 340) and the former to mean “male sexual agents, i.e., active male prostitutes ...capable of the active role with either men or women” (Ibid., 344).

According to Boswell, “Perhaps the most extensive evidence that ‘arsenokoitai’ did not connote ‘homosexual’ or even ‘sodomite’ in the time of Paul is offered by the vast amount of writing extant on the subject of homoerotic sexuality in Greek in which this term does not occur” (Ibid., 345, transliteration mine). This “evidence” loses its value if the term was not coined by native Greek-speakers (see Scroggs, 107). It becomes almost ridiculous if, as De Young opines, Paul coined the term himself.

If arsenokoitai means roughly, males who bed males, it makes sense that Paul did not use the more specific terms found in that “vast amount of writing extant on the subject of homoerotic sexuality.” Paul wanted a general term which would encompass all homoerotic sexuality. What better place to find one, or the concepts behind one, than in the Levitical prohibitions against any and all male homosexual activity? And if Paul did coin arsenokoitai, we need not wonder why it does not appear in rabbinic literature. Scroggs’s notion that the word is Jewish is a good one; De Young’s that it is Pauline, is in my opinion better.

Paul was in the habit of making up words if existing ones did not quite suit his purpose.

In general, statistics show that Paul probably coined many terms. There are 179 words found in Paul and nowhere else in pre-Christian Greek literature. Of these, 89 occur only one time.... In addition, Paul displayed considerable dependence upon the LXX. He usually quoted from the LXX rather than the Hebrew of the OT when he quoted the OT (De Young, 212).

Moreover, contra Boswell, he was also perfectly capable of invoking “the authority of the old law to justify the morality of the new” (Boswell, 105). Remember that it was Paul (not deutero-Paul in my opinion) who wrote, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (I Tim. 3:16). It is untrue that “the Levitical regulations had no hold on Christians and are manifestly irrelevant in explaining Christian hostility to gay sexuality” (Ibid.). Where I certainly agree with De Young

that his thesis cannot be proven, it makes good sense that Paul made the composite term *arsenokoitai* up of its two constituent nouns found in the Greek version of Leviticus.

If we accept for the sake of argument that *arsenokoitai* is a Pauline term, there is still room for debate as to what exactly it means. Scroggs acknowledges the connection between I Cor. and Leviticus, yet limits Paul to prohibitions of pederasty. Boswell says it has nothing to do with homosexuality per se at all. An examination of Boswell's "influential" word study must be our next step.

Whereas a truly thorough treatment of Boswell's study would be too long and very possibly too boring, we will deal with his main points. He begins his appendix, "Lexicography and Saint Paul," with the somewhat daunting statement:

It is not readily apparent to modern English speakers with little knowledge of classical languages that the passage of thousands of years obscures, sometimes beyond recovery, the exact meaning of words in the languages of cultures with experiences and life-styles very different from their own (Boswell, 335).

Such a caution should certainly cause us to consider the accuracy of our translations of the Bible. Let us remember that the conservative appeal to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture is an appeal to original manuscripts, not to any modern translation. Having been so cautioned, however, the modern reader of the Bible may rest assured that most translations available to him or her are the result of careful scholarship. In other words, one need not have much knowledge of classical languages to read the Bible with confidence. To be sure, knowledge of Greek and Hebrew is well worth cultivating, if for no other reason than that translation always involves interpretation. But in the final analysis, I find Boswell's statement misleading.

Boswell made his statement with the purpose of undermining confidence in modern English translations of the Bible. Thus, though on the face of it the statement is quite true—that is, the passage of time may well obscure the meaning of words—it fails to account for the fact that the Bible has not been translated by "modern English speakers with little knowledge of classical languages." I spend so much time on what may seem a trivial point precisely because I am convinced that it is far from trivial. Boswell makes the case that the average reader of Scripture has no feel for the languages which underlie his or her translation. Then he proceeds to argue in terms which would leave in the dust even an above average reader. His very methodology is bound to overwhelm any reader with no knowledge of linguistics and classical languages.

According to a 1986 journal article by Richard Hayes, Boswell "expressed surprise and some disappointment that the exegetical arguments in his book had been ignored or accepted without challenge by biblical scholars" (R. B. Hayes, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (Spring 1986): 184). Such reactions are not all that surprising. The liberal community was happy to accept his scholarship and conservatives didn't take him particularly seriously (he was neither a linguist nor a classicist, but an historian). Since 1986, there has been plenty of scholarly interaction with Boswell, presumably because his conclusions have made it into the pro-gay mainstream.

If Boswell begins his appendix by highlighting the average reader's ignorance, he does not continue in that vein. Rather, he launches into a discussion of the relative imprecision of Koine Greek words. As regards the meaning of arsenokoitai, Boswell's argument is roughly threefold: 1, the term wasn't used in "the vast amount of writing extant on the subject of homoerotic sexuality in Greek" (Boswell, 345); 2, the word means "active male prostitutes," not homosexual; and 3, the early church Fathers do not use the term.

The first aspect of Boswell's argument has been addressed. To recap: if, as seems likely, Paul coined the term with the nouns bed, koiten, and male, arsenos, with Leviticus 18 and 20 in mind, it could not have appeared in secular literature of the period. The second aspect, that the term doesn't mean homosexual at all, needs to be considered now.

The component of Boswell's thesis which is at once the least accessible to the average reader and most problematic to the scholar, is the notion that the prefix, male, arseno- is adjectival rather than objective. In other words, according to Boswell, the one who does the bedding is male, not the one bedded. To use one of Boswell's examples, the English "lady killer" is ambiguous. If "lady" is adjectival, the phrase refers to a female who kills; if, on the other hand, "lady" is objective, the phrase refers to one who kills women. In English, we determine whether "lady" is adjectival or objective by observing the context in which the phrase is used. According to Boswell, at least when the prefix is male, arreno- or arseno-, spelling, not context, is the deciding factor.

Boswell states, "In general, moreover, those compounds in which the form 'arreno-' occurs employ it objectively; those in which 'arseno-' is found use it as an adjective" (Ibid., 343). If Boswell is correct, and overlooking the possibility that arsenokoitai could be an exception to the "general" rule, had Paul intended to say that homosexuals would not inherit the kingdom, he would have used the term arrenokoitai. The average reader may find this "observation" compelling, or he or she may wonder what the big deal is about an s. From a scholarly perspective, we must consider whether or not such a spelling change affects meaning.

Boswell admits, "The origin of this distinction (the adjectival/objective distinction mentioned above) and its relation to the general orthographic shift from Attic 'arren' to Hellenistic 'arsen' have not been carefully examined" (Ibid., parentheses mine). Wright, however, indicates, "On this subject there has been considerable discussion, but so far as I can discover, no writer has yet suggested the difference is other than one of dialectical diversity" (David F. Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes?" *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 131). By 1989, and after further study, Wright is far stronger, "[Boswell] reaches this position by construing the word in a manner calculated to evoke from classical linguists only scornful derision....This is patent nonsense; the difference is purely dialectical" (D. F. Wright, "Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 61:4 (1989): 297). Interestingly along these lines, Liddell and Scott's classical lexicon has no listing for arsenokoites, but "the reader is told to cross reference to arrenokoites. Under arrenokoites they provide the definition of 'sodomite' with a reference to 1 Corinthians 6:9" (David E. Malick, "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (Oct.-Dec. 1993): 483). In other words, Liddell and Scott consider arreno- and arseno- to be interchangeable.

Also germane to our discussion is Wright's observation:

In so far as a distinction can be drawn between those compounds of the group (the very small sample of arreno- and arseno- compounds studied by Boswell) in which the first element is the object of the second and those in which it supplies the qualifying gender of the second we must start at the other end, with the second element...In most if not all of the compounds in which the second half is a verb or has verbal force (as is the case with koites), the first half denotes its object irrespective of whether it is arreno- or arseno-. When the second part is substantival, the first half denotes its gender ("Homosexuals or Prostitutes," 132, parentheses mine).

I will agree with Wright that arsenokoitai, as a masculine noun, denotes men who bed, that is have sexual intercourse with, other men.

As for the third aspect of Boswell's argument, it suffices to say that he misrepresents the data. It is not true that early Church Fathers avoid the term. For example, Boswell claims that Eusebius "quotes Romans 1:26-27 almost verbatim, excoriating homosexual relations in all their manifestations, yet nowhere does he employ the word which supposedly means 'homosexual' in Paul's writings" (Boswell, 346). Though he does not use the term any more than Paul does in Romans, Eusebius paraphrases Mt. 5:18 using the verb arsenokoitein (Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes," 127). This use Boswell discounts as having to do with attitudes of men towards women. Boswell also fails "to cite all the sources," e.g., Hippolytus (De Young, 199). Perhaps most importantly, "Boswell conspicuously misrepresents the witness of Chrysostom, omitting references and asserting what is patently untrue" (Ibid., 200). According to Boswell,

Saint John Chrysostom probably wrote more about the subject of same- sex sexuality than any other pre-Freudian writer except Peter Damian.... Yet among the dozens of words and phrases used by Chrysostom to name, describe, or characterize homosexual relations, neither "arsenokoitai" nor any derivative of it occurs in any of these writings (Boswell, 347).

Boswell corrects his statement that Chrysostom uses none of the arsenokoitai word group in a footnote (note 34, 347); alas, not everyone reads footnotes. More to the point, a footnote wouldn't have been necessary had he changed his statement to reflect the truth of Chrysostom's usage.

In all three aspects of his argument, Boswell has failed to demonstrate that arsenokoitai means anything other than male homosexual. One assumes that his word study has been so influential on other than scholarly grounds. It appears scholarly, as long as one knows little or nothing about linguistics, classical languages or church history. The term is a very general one which Paul himself coined, contra Boswell in particular, who opined,

It would simply not have occurred to most early Christians to invoke the authority of the old law to justify the morality of the new: the

Levitical regulations had no hold on Christians and are manifestly irrelevant in explaining Christians' hostility to gay sexuality (Boswell, 105).

I have concluded that Paul coined the term with the language of Leviticus 18 and 20 in mind. Because Paul wished to condemn homosexual activity in general, he went to the equally general wording of Leviticus, "a man who beds a man." Boswell is correct in stating that the Greek language had "dozens of words or phrases" with which to refer to homosexual activity (Ibid., 346). The fact that Paul chose none of them is significant, not because he wasn't speaking of homosexuality as Boswell asserts, but because he wanted a catch-all word which would include all of the more specific Greek terms current in his day. And finally, I have concluded that arsenokoitai is an active term, that is, an arsenokoites actively beds other men.

The notion that arsenokoitai is an active term, something no scholar I know of disputes, is germane to our topic for this article. It is time to turn to the second term in I Cor. 6, which addresses homosexual activity, malakoi. Though there has been considerably less debate on the meaning of malakoi than of arsenokoitai, it is more difficult to define with precision. This is so because malakos has quite a wide range of meaning:

Liddell and Scott define malakos under the broad definition of "soft." The following categories demonstrate the implications of such a definition: (1) To be soft as in things "subject to touch like freshly plowed land or soft grassy meadows." (2) To be soft as in persons or

modes of life which are mild or gentle... In a good sense it speaks of a fallen hero and in a bad sense of those who are "fainthearted" and

thus "cowardly" or morally weak because of lack of self-control. (3) To be soft as in being "mild" or "gentle" with respect to pathetikos (emotion, or morbid affection) (Malick, 150).

According to Boswell, Paul uses malakoi in the sense of morally weak, "with no specific connection to homosexuality" (Ibid., 340). Scroggs, on the other hand, takes it to refer to an "effeminate call-boy" who is used sexually by older men (R. Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1983), 108). More conservative scholars side with Ukleja, "It is not beyond reason to see the word representing the passive parties in homosexual intercourse. This is even more reasonable when it is in juxtaposition with arsenokoites which does imply an active homosexual role" (P. Michael Ukleja, "The Bible and Homosexuality, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (Oct.-Dec. 1983): 351).

So who is correct? If what we have seen concerning Scrogg's position is accurate, his is the least likely to be correct of the above options. Scroggs believes that Paul condemned pederasty, not homosexuality in general. Therefore he takes arsenokoitai to refer to older men who actively make sexual use of boys or very young men. Like conservative scholars, he sees a link between arsenokoitai and malakoi, and so takes the latter term to refer to the younger partner. Also with conservative scholars Scroggs sees in the use of malakoi an indication of effeminacy, softness. But unlike conservatives, he defines the term so narrowly as to preclude applying it to much of the modern homosexual scene.

With Wright, I must agree that Scrogg's narrow definition is inconsistent with his understanding of Paul's vice list in I Cor. 6. As was mentioned above, there are those scholars, Scroggs among them, who believe that Paul's vice lists are not his own, but "preformed tradition" too generalized to tell us anything specific about Pauline views on morality. One wonders how so generalized a list could, with the use of *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi*, employ "not only surprisingly precise forms of pederasty but two different expressions of it" (for which, by the way, there were technical Greek terms available for Paul's use) (D. F. Wright, "Homosexuality," 296).

Boswell's understanding of the term is less problematic, though perhaps more disingenuous. He begins his discussion of *malakoi* with the observation that such divergent translations of the term as *catamites*, *effeminate* and *sissies* "inspire skepticism and ... suggests that no modern translations ... are very accurate" (Boswell, 339). I find no such suggestion. All three of the above translations are certainly variations on the notion of "softness" as applied to men. That it is true that these translations probably say as much about the translator as the word translated does not negate the fact that they are variations on the same theme. The problem may be that at least the first translation is too precise. Again, *malakos*, or soft, is a versatile adjective, so one must appeal to context to get at the particular brand of softness to which it refers at any given time.

Boswell is of the opinion that a vice list does not provide much in the way of context, "there is no more reason to take 'malakoi' as [*arsenokoitai*'s] passive than to assume it to be the passive of the preceding word, 'moixoi' (Ibid., 341). I disagree, *moixoi* means adulterers, and its use would therefore not presuppose a passive party. In the Jewish mind, adultery involved two equal partners, only one of whom needed to be married. In the case of rape, the woman involved was not seen as guilty of adultery, and therefore the rapist was just that, not an adulterer (unless he was the married party, in which case adultery was committed against his wife, not with the woman he raped).

On the face of it, it seems permissible to understand *malakoi* as morally weak in general. The term was occasionally so used, and it is possible that nearly all of its translators have been in error. Stranger things have happened. Against the general view, however, is Boswell's own admission that the word was often used in the context of masturbation in early Christian literature. Moreover the context of I Cor. 6 seems to argue against it. "What is certain is that it refers to behavior of some kind, not simply to an attitude or characteristic" (Fee, 244). Fee bases his conclusion on Paul's words, "And such were some of you" of I Cor. 6:11a and the fact that the other items on the list describe behaviors. Although covetousness must certainly be construed as an attitude rather than a behavior, I think Fee's point is valid. Paul was able to use the past tense "were" precisely because he had seen demonstrable, behavioral changes in the Corinthians.

We are left, then, with Ukleja's understanding of *malakoi* as the most probable in context. Paul condemns both partners in a homosexual sexual relationship, just as Leviticus did. The need for two terms to do this comes, of course, from the active nature of *arsenkoites*. And the need to be so inclusive at all stems from the Corinthians' sexually immoral, cultural context. Paul being neither redundant nor cruel, rather he is being impeccably clear: "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable" (Lev. 20:13a, emphasis mine).

It has been assumed above that there are scholars who recognize in I Cor. 6:9-10, a distinct literary form or genre, a "vice list." Ancient Jews, Christians and pagans alike made use of both vice and virtue lists. That is, they all listed those characteristics which their respective cultures deemed praise- or blameworthy in human attitude and conduct. Robin Scroggs, as has been noted, makes the case that Paul employs a current vice list, rather than writing his own. This is certainly possible, though unlikely, given the ties to the context we have discerned. It seems that Paul lists vices with which the rest of I Corinthians makes clear the Corinthians struggle, e.g., greed, sexual immorality and idolatry. We can conclude, at the very least, that if Paul did, after all, avail himself of "preformed tradition," he tailored that tradition to his own particular needs.

Even if one assumes that Paul borrowed his vice list verbatim from Hellenistic Judaism, it does not necessarily follow that he didn't agree with all of it. Why else would he have borrowed it? Equally germane to the case against Scroggs is the fact that the ancient world accepted paraphrase as readily as direct quotation. Again, Paul had the literary freedom, not to mention the personality, to tailor existing material to his needs. Another point against Scroggs's thesis is mentioned above. David Wright recognized the inconsistency in Scroggs's argument that Paul both used a list, so generalized as to tell us nothing about his real beliefs, and employed two extremely precise terms describing pederasty (Wright, "Homosexuality," 296).

Moving on, we might contemplate Introduction to Biblical Interpretation's mention of Bauckham's observation concerning vice and virtue lists, "First and last items on a list often prove the most important, but the subsequent order of items may indicate no particular hierarchy" (Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, Introduction to Biblical Interpretation [Dallas: Word, 1993], 364). In terms of I Cor. 6, then, sexual immorality and swindling are in the forefront of Paul's mind. This should not surprise us. Lawsuits were Paul's topic when he used the vice list in question, and his next topic was to be immorality. Why he included homosexuality on the list can not be answered with certainty. This is so because Paul does not discuss it elsewhere in the letter. We may be sure, because the Greco-Roman world accepted homosexuality, that its double inclusion on Paul's list "would have stood out and caused offense then as it often does today" (Ibid.). How ironic, if this is true, that we share with the Corinthians an inability to see the sexual forest for the trees.

We may guess that, because sexual immorality in general was such a problem for Corinth, homosexuality was particularly problematic. Others, however, have guessed that because the immorality with which Paul deals in the next section of chapter 6 is prostitution, he has homosexual prostitution in mind in the vice list. The notion clearly has some merit; it fits the context. Even the NIV translates *malakoi* as "male prostitutes." At this point we need to do some mental juggling.

There are several items which we must keep in the air as we juggle. Among them is the fact that, we defined *malakoi* in terms of *arsenokoitai*. Another item is the conviction, by no means shared by all scholars, that nothing Paul says in one letter will contradict what he says in another. To look at the second item first: if, as we have concluded regarding Romans 1, Paul condemns all homosexual activity, female and male, then he cannot be limited to condemning only homosexual prostitution on the basis of I Corinthians. In others words, if it could be proven that Paul had male prostitution in mind when writing

to the Corinthians, we could not therefore conclude that Paul had nothing to say about monogamous, same-sex unions. Paul's overall assessment of homosexuality does not hang on how broadly or narrowly we define the elements of a vice list. This is especially so since we have already admitted that certainty regarding terms used in a list, which are not subsequently taken up in a precise context, is allusive.

Although it does not matter, in the grand scheme of his thoughts on human sexuality, whether or not Paul's focus is narrowed to homosexual prostitution in I Cor. 6, it still matters. We must always try to define terms as precisely as we can. Where context is not of particular help to that end, we must look elsewhere. We said above that homosexual prostitution fits the context. It does, if we assume that Paul is anticipating what he has to say about the heterosexual version in 6:12-20. It is equally true, though, that homosexuality in general fits the context, if Paul still has in mind the first item on his vice list, immorality in general. Because we cannot be sure one way or the other, we need to go back to word meanings as we juggle.

John Boswell, we may recall, defines *arsenokoitai*, not *malakoi* (which, even if translated as "male prostitutes," implies effeminacy and homosexuality), as "male sexual agents, i.e., active male prostitutes" who could service either men or women (Boswell, 344). He opines that Paul was more concerned with prostitution than homosexuality and tries to prove the point linguistically. We have taken a fairly extensive look at Boswell's linguistic evidence and concluded that it is not at all compelling.

It cannot be demonstrated that Paul cared more about prostitution than homosexuality. Given the wide range of meaning of the *porne* word group, the word group used both of prostitution and of sexual immorality in general, it cannot even be demonstrated that he discussed prostitution more than homosexuality. We do know that Paul cared very deeply about the sexual immorality which plagued the Gentile churches of his day. To be sure, Paul confronted prostitution (men seeking the services of female prostitutes) in I Cor. 6:12-20. He also confronted an instance of a man sleeping with his step-mother in the previous chapter (I Cor. 5:1-12). Paul included immorality in his vice lists and dealt with specific instances thereof as the need arose.

Paul, as we have seen in Romans, proscribes lesbian and homosexual activity in terms calculated to call to mind the language of creation. Homosexuality for Paul is the antithesis of God's intent for male and female. Prostitution clearly twists God's intent for sexuality, but homosexuality twists God's intent for humanity. If I had to choose, I would say very tentatively that homosexuality is more of a problem for Paul than prostitution, because it violates a more basic decree of God.

Yet another time, I will align myself with James De Young and his belief that Paul coined the term *arsenokoitai* to reflect the very language of the Levitical prohibitions of homosexuality. We have defined *malakoi* in terms of *arsenokoitai*. Because the former has so wide a range of meaning, it made sense to view it in contradistinction to the latter. *Arsenokoitai*, as scholars on both sides of the "homosexuality issue" agree, is an active term. It describes the one "bedding," regardless of arguments as to whom he is bedding. Therefore, although it reflects the actual wording of Leviticus 18 and 20 in the Septuagint, it fails to be as inclusive.

Remember that God communicated to His people about to enter the promised land in terms they would have understood, that is heterosexual terms, "Do not sleep with a man as one sleeps with a woman...." At this point God was more concerned with defining homosexuality than with its consequences. What's the point of calling something an abomination if one's listeners have no frame of reference with which to understand that thing? It was only after God had described homosexuality, by analogy to heterosexuality, that He pronounced it a capital crime for both partners (something not captured in the term *arsenokoitai*).

Paul's audience was not so naive; they knew what homosexuality was, and not by analogy either. They needed to hear not only that the active "bedder" in a homosexual act was a sinner, but so was his "passive" partner. In other words, to capture both the language and inclusivity of Leviticus, Paul needed two terms (*arsenokoitai* reflects the language and *malakoi*, the inclusivity). When it came to matters of sexual conduct, Paul was learning to leave nothing to the Corinthians' imaginations. For Timothy in Ephesus, *arsenokoitai* (I Tim. 1:10) was enough, but not so for the Corinthians. If they were proud that one of their church members was sleeping with his father's wife, if they thought freedom in Christ included freedom to fornicate, they probably needed to hear, to see on paper (papyrus), that both members of a homosexual couple were of the sort who would not inherit the kingdom of God.

APPLICATION

We would do well to step back and remind ourselves of the context in which two words describing homosexual activity occur. We should note that the terms are found in a vice list and that the overall topic of Paul's discussion is litigation. In other words, homosexuality is by no means Paul's main point. Frankly, in terms of the structure of Paul's argument in 6:1-11, one would be hard-pressed to elevate it to "sub-point" status.

Paul's main point is perhaps best captured in verse 7, "The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means that you have been completely defeated already." We may recall that Paul was horrified by the news he had received concerning the Corinthian practice of suing one another in secular courts. That they shouldn't have been doing so seemed beyond obvious to Paul. Not only should they not have been taking their battles before secular judges, they shouldn't have been engaging in such battles in the first place. Paul is challenging the Corinthians' self-focus. As he answers their various questions (chapters 7-16) and deals with matters reported to him (chapters 1-6), Paul makes it clear that the Corinthians have put too much stock in their rights.

In 8:1-11:1, the apostle makes it very clear that Christians ought to be willing to waive their rights, real or perceived, for the sake of the gospel. Where the Corinthians' focus is on what they should have or be able to do in the here and now, Paul says that it ought rather to be redirected by Christ. Everything about us and how we view our world ought to be different now that we understand what God has done for us in Christ. If the cross is our focal point, our rights, or even the wanton trampling thereof, ought to pale in comparison. If our focal point is the cross, we will view wrongs committed against us as opportunities to share the gospel, to suffer without seeking revenge, or at the very least, as temporary inconveniences, not eternal realities.

Paul's overall message to the Corinthians seems to come down to the "Become who you are!" mentioned earlier. They, like so many of us, were so caught up in their own lives that they missed who they were in Christ. And when they did catch on and wished to celebrate their freedom in Christ, they did so in purely worldly, frequently sexual terms. Even freedom in Christ must be understood alongside His cross. Unless we are greater than our master, true freedom in a sinful world will more often than not lead us down the road of suffering. Lest this sound defeatist and overly bleak, the power has certainly been made available to us to do so with the mind of Christ. Let us never forget that He was able to endure the suffering and shame of the cross for the joy set before Him. Ours is a joyous inheritance. Despite the rocky path that leads us there, and notwithstanding the derisive cries of "pie in the sky bye and bye," along the way, we are sons and daughters of God who will reign with Him and His Christ for all eternity. This is to be our perspective, the filter through which we view our fallen world.

So what does any of this have to do with homosexuality? If it is barely a minor point in a passage where the main point isn't even really the main point, it fits as well as anything else. Paul's point is that the Corinthians have missed the main point, due to their selfish, temporal focus. He shouldn't have to bring up lawsuits among Christians; the fact that he does proves that they have already lost one battle to the enemy. Things are not as they should be, the Corinthians and we are not acting like who we really are. We need to be reminded of who we are, and if that entails reminding us of who we were, so be it.

For some times and cultures, the application of I Cor. 6:1-11 could be pretty straightforward and neatly focused on litigation. Not so for ours, I am afraid. We are no less self-focused than the Corinthians and no less prone to sexual sins. For generations, Paul's vice list received little comment. The notion that adulterers, thieves and homosexuals wouldn't inherit the kingdom of God was widely accepted. Today we spend pages hammering out the meaning of minor points, items on an illustrative vice list. So on the one hand, homosexuality has nothing much to do with Paul's argument in I Cor. 6. On the other hand, it is as close to Paul's main point as anything else in the passage. The fact that we question the meanings of terms listed merely to serve as illustrations of what we ought not to be, shows that we are in the same boat the Corinthians were.

We don't know who we are; we don't know what it means to live as Christians. We either redefine words (arsenokoites = male prostitute, and every one knows Paul said prostitution was wrong) or minimize their impact (everyone is covetous, so Paul can't possibly mean what he appears to) so that Paul is not pointing his finger at us. In plain, colloquial language, folks, Paul's vice list was meant to be a no-brainer. Even the slowest Corinthian was meant to recognize that everything on the list was wrong. Again, it was illustrative; the list was meant to strengthen the point that the Corinthians were new creatures in Christ, typified by new and better behaviors. They weren't the sinners they used to be, they didn't have to resort to settling matters in secular courts -- no, they were now wise, or godly enough either to resolve their own disputes, or to shrug them off as being of no eternal consequence.

The application of I Cor 6:9 which seems most obvious to me is that we must take more seriously the no-brainers of the faith. For this passage to flow as it should, we, too, must consider the behaviors on the list as vices. Certain lifestyles are wrong, and I do think Paul was speaking of lifestyles. Lives which are best characterized by covetousness, or adultery, or thievery, or homosexuality are sub-Christian. These



Sermons

traits do not describe who we were meant to be, who we really are in Christ, and so must be put behind us. When such things become no-brainers for us again, we will be in a better position to focus on Paul's real point -- who we are in Christ is so vastly superior to who we used to be that we should never look back with longing, but ahead, through the cross, to the joy set before us.