

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9

David E. Malick

[David E. Malick is Assistant Professor of Field Education, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas.]

The cultural sweep of theological thought toward leniency with respect to moral absolutes requires that Paul's prohibitions against homosexual activity be examined in more depth. The primary argument posed by those who desire to see a more accepting Christian community is that the Apostle Paul did not write general prohibitions against homosexual activity, but against abuses in homosexual activity—specifically pederasty. The purpose of this study is to affirm through an exegetical examination of 1 Corinthians 6:9 that Paul's prohibitions against homosexuality were indeed against all forms of sexual relationships between persons of the same sex.

Within this debate various aspects of abuse are purported to be in view: abuses in general,¹ pederasty,² cult prostitution,³ and male, bisexual prostitution.⁴ While all these alternatives to a general prohibition against homosexuality have their own areas of emphasis, the first two are foundational to a discussion of the latter two. Therefore only "abuses in general" and "pederasty" are the subject of this article.

p.480

A Critique of Contemporary Views

General Abuse

The position. This first argument is a logical and theological objection (more than exegetical) to understanding Paul's vice-list in 1 Corinthians 6:9 as prohibiting all homosexuality.

Blair affirms that Paul was not against homosexuality per se but against homosexual abuse, or perhaps better—homosexual sins related to abuse of the body and comparable to heterosexual sins such as adultery and fornication. Blair says Paul's discussion of homosexuality is like Paul's allowance for temperance in drinking without requiring abstinence (cf. 1 Tim 5:23).

One should not assume uncritically that there is in the Corinthian passage a proof-text against all homosexuality or even all homosexual acts. Of course, homosexual behavior can be perverted and sinful and exploitative just as heterosexual activity can be—or any kind of activity can be—but this is not the same as rejecting either sexual orientation or specific acts as sinful as such.⁵

¹ Ralph Blair, *An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality*, rev. ed. (New York: Evangelicals Concerned, 1977), 6; and Joseph C. Weber, "Does the Bible Condemn Homosexual Acts," *Engage/Social Action*, May 1975, 31.

² Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

³ Peter Zaas, 1 Corinthians 6:9ff: "Was Homosexuality Condoned in the Corinthian Church?" *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* no. 19, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1980), 2:205-12.

⁴ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁵ 5. Blair, *An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality*, 6.

Likewise, Weber suggests that Paul's vice-lists in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 were expressions of doing harm to one's body.⁶

A refutation. Three lines of reasoning are critical for refuting the above affirmations.

First, the argument of "general abuse" is not logical on the level of comparison. To compare homosexual abuse with the perversion of heterosexuality is to make less than a one-to-one correlation. If homosexuality were truly parallel to heterosexuality as a proper expression of sexuality, then there would be no need to mention any category beyond adultery and fornication since both of these would be the expression of practicing an improper sexual relationship. On the contrary, homosexuality is expressed as another example of an improper sexual relationship outside a monogamous heterosexual union.

Second, not all the descriptions in this passage are of an "excessive" nature. As Walve accurately observes, "there is no such thing as 'responsible' covetousness. All covetousness is wrong."⁷ Therefore since homosexuality is not being compared to heterosexuality but is being expressed as a perversion of sexual relationships, and since all the vices listed are not "excessive" by nature but absolute in many cases, the argument of "abuse," suggested by Blair and Weber, is inappropriate in this passage.

p.481

Third, the assumption in this argument of "general abuse" is that expressions of homosexuality exist that would not be harmful to one's neighbor. But is this appropriate? In Paul's vice-list are there expressions of "immorality," "greed," or "theft" that would not harm one's neighbor? There are no positive discussions of moral homosexuality in the Scriptures. Therefore it is appropriate to place this word alongside other absolute evils. Also Romans 1 describes homosexuality as an evil in itself (i.e., a perversion of nature).⁸

Therefore the argument that Paul in his vice-list was not addressing homosexuality in general but abuses of it is a conclusion based on the illogical presuppositions that all sexual relationships are equal before God, that Paul's descriptions are of excessive practices, and that homosexuality is a biblically approved expression of sexuality.

Pederasty

The position. Pederasty, the same-sex male relations between an adult and a child (or teenager), is often suggested as the abuse Paul had in mind in his vice-list of 1 Corinthians 6:9.

In its most general expression, the significant terms in 1 Corinthians 6:9 are said to be descriptive of male prostitution.⁹ Then in a more detailed manner, the specific terms are

⁶ Weber, "Does the Bible Condemn Homosexual Acts?" 31.

⁷ Greger Walve, "A Critique of Contemporary Theologians Attempt to Justify Homosexuality in the Bible" (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1983), 27.

⁸ See in particular Romans 1:22-27 where Paul's entire discussion is drawn from his reference to creation in Genesis 1 and 2. For a more in-depth examination see S. Lewis Johnson, "God Gave Them Up: A Study in Divine Retribution," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (April-June 1972): 132. Also see Richard B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to J. Boswells Exegesis of Romans 1," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (Spring 1986): 191, 212, n. 6.

⁹ John J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Kansas City, KS: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1976), 52-53. In a broad manner he attempts to wrestle with the central terms but only on the basis of late sources (second to sixth century A.D.).

focused on to describe pederastic men, ἄρσενοκοῖτοι, who bought the services of the μαλακοί, or "call boys."¹⁰

Scroggs strongly propounds the view that Paul was speaking

p.482

of the Greco-Roman understanding of pederasty. He insists that there are no texts concerning same-age sex by adults.¹¹ In support of his position he presents the testimony of classical works, Palestinian Judaism, Hellenistic Judaism, and church fathers. His strongest arguments are these: (1) pederasty was the most common expression of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world,¹² (2) sources around and after the time of Paul refer to pederasty when they discuss homosexuality,¹³ and (3) even though the term ἄρσενοκοίτης may be a contraction from the prohibitions in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13,¹⁴ it was probably coined first by Hellenistic Jews and thus referred to the "partner who keeps the malakos as a 'mistress' or who hires him on occasion to satisfy his sexual desires"—in other words, pederasty.¹⁵

However, several facts mitigate against interpreting Paul's words as referring only to pederasty.

¹⁰ Olsen insists that the μαλακοί in Paul's time, "almost always referred in a negative, pejorative way to a widely despised group of people who functioned as effeminate 'call boys' " (Mark Olson, "Untangling the Web: A Look at What Scripture Does and Does Not Say about Homosexual Behavior," *Other Side*, April 1984, 3334). Scroggs affirms that, the word in Paul's list refers specifically to this category of person, the effeminate call-boy (*The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 42).

Surprisingly Stott also concedes to this view when he cites Coleman's affirmation that "probably Paul had commercial pederasty in mind between older men and post-pubertal boys, the most common pattern of homosexual behaviour in the classical world" (Peter Coleman, *Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality* [London: SPCK, 1980], 277, cited in John Stott, *Homosexual Partnerships: Why Same-Sex Relationships Are Not a Christian Option* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985], 12). This allows for the conclusion that Pauline condemnations are not relevant to homosexual adults who are both consenting and committed to each other.

¹¹ Though Scroggs cites examples of near equals in age and acknowledges "rare textual references to same-age youths in sexual relationships" and even "an early citation in Xenophon to an age reversal in which a beardless youth is the lover (i.e., active partner) of one who is already bearded," he still affirms that, "apart from certain exceptions of an adult male prostitute who retains his passive (or perhaps also active) role well into adulthood and thus may service adults his age, *I know of no suggestions in the texts that homosexual relationships existed between same-age adults*" (Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 34-35, italics his).

¹² *Ibid.*, 17-65.

¹³ He notes that Josephus' discussion of Genesis 19 refers to pederasty (*ibid.*, 91). This is indeed true when Josephus writes, "But the Sodomites, on seeing these young men of remarkably fair appearance whom Lot had taken under his roof, were bent only on violence and outrage to their youthful beauty" (Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 1.200). He also argues that late second-century to fourth-century sources suggest pederasty (Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 44).

¹⁴ Leviticus 18:22 reads, "And you shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." The Septuagint reads, "Καὶ μετὰ ἄρσενος οὐ κοιμηθήσῃ κοίτην γυναικείαν, βδέλυγμα γὰρ ἐστὶ."

Leviticus 20:13 reads, "If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their blood guiltiness is upon them." In the Septuagint this is as follows: "Καὶ ὅς ἂν κοιμηθῇ μετὰ ἄρσενος κοίτην γυναικῶς, βδέλυγμα ἐποίησαν ἀμφοτέρω θανάτῳ θανατούσθω, ἔνοχοι εἰσιν."

Therefore Scroggs acknowledges that the terms for "male" (ἄρσενος) and "to lie" (κοίτην) may well have been placed in a compound (ἄρσενοκοῖται) as a term coined for homosexuality (Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 86, 1079).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 108. He completely dismisses the possibility that Paul could have been the originator of the term. "Since, however, he seems quite uninterested in the issue, and since the list seems quite traditional, it is more likely that he is using a term already known in circles of Hellenistic Jews acquainted with rabbinic discussions" (*ibid.*, 108, n. 14). In addition he notes that Philo, contemporary of Paul, interpreted Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 as pederasty (*ibid.*, 88-89).

An examination of ἀρσενοκοΐτης. A diachronic study of this word demonstrates that limiting its meaning to pederasty is less than adequate.

p.483

Liddell and Scott list nothing under the spelling of ἀρσενοκοΐτης,¹⁶ and the reader is told to cross reference to ἀρρενοκοΐτης. Under ἀρρενοκοΐτης, they provide the definition of "sodomite" with a reference to 1 Corinthians 6:9 (the verse in question); here they also note one extrabiblical reference.¹⁷ Its usage is similar to Paul's in that it is part of a vice-list.¹⁸ Some synonyms are also provided in *Mega Lexikon Oles tes Hellenikes Glosses* (A Great Lexicon of the Entire Greek Language).¹⁹

While the Greek correlations above support a broader field of meaning than that of pederasty for ἀρσενοκοΐτης, they are not in any way determinative, since the term itself does not appear in classical Greek literature. Therefore one must look beyond this era of writing.

The term ἀρσενοκοΐτης" appears nowhere in the Septuagint. The closest term is ἀρσενοκοΐτης", which means nothing more than "male" in the generic sense with no moral overtones.²⁰

Wright, however, expends considerable effort in identifying ἀρσενοκοΐτης" with Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.²¹ In response to

p.484

Scroggs's affirmation that it was probably coined first by Hellenistic Jews and is thus referring to "the partner who keeps the malakos as a 'mistress' or who hires him on occasion

¹⁶ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon: With a Supplement*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), s.v. ἀρσενοκοΐτης, 247.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹⁸ The citation is as follows: "Concerning Divinities of Licentious Persons: With those [is] Aphrodite. Aphrodite indicts (the constellation of) Aries as the first god doing licentious acts and who eats unlawful meats and marries unlawfully and practices unmentionable vices and licks (or is licked), and is a fault finder, and is subject to passion, and is a homosexual (or a sodomite) [ἀρρενοκοΐτας]. Aphrodite indicts Apollo as the second god who takes away (or diminishes), and declines toward (or is falling away toward) homosexuality [ἀρρενοκοΐτας], having sexual intercourse" (*Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum*, vol. 8, part 4, codice 82, p. 196 lines 6 and 8, authors translation).

Obviously these are vice-lists and "homosexual" appears twice with respect to the gods' licentious behavior. Hence the sense is not with respect to temple prostitution or prostitution in general, even though these are the gods of the temples.

¹⁹ *Mega Lexikon Oles tes Hellenikes Glosses: Demotike, Katharevousa, Mesaionike, Metagenestera, Archaia*, ed. D. Demetrakos (Athens: Asemakopoulos, 1964), s.v. "ἀρρενοκοΐτας," 985. The parallels are as follows: (1) "ὁ συγκαομώμενος ἄρρενις - the - one who sleeps or lies with a man" with the idea of making love (cf. *Herodotus* 3.69 where συγκαομάομαι is used heterosexually). (2) "τό τε αἰσχρουργεῖν ἐπάρατον ὄν παρ' ἡμῖν ὁ Ζήνων οὐκ ἀποδοκιμάζει" - "Masturbation too, which we call loathsome, is not disapproved by Zeno" (Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 3.206). (3) "ἀσελγῶν ἐπι ἀρρένων" - "licentiousness upon men" (Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon: With a Supplement*, s.v. "ἀσελγαίνω", 255).

²⁰ For example Genesis 17:10, 12; 34:15, 22, 25; Exodus 12:48. For all the verses see Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament (including the Apocryphal Books) in Three Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), s.v. "ἀρσενικός," 1:160. The Hebrew term is אָרְוֵן, which allows for the same sense as male or male offspring (Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), s.v., "אָרְוֵן," 271).

²¹ David F. Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes: The Meaning of ἀρσενοκοΐται (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 126-29. It is significant that this connection was actually first made by E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (from B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100)*, 2 vols. (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1887), s.v. "ἀρσενοκοΐτης," 1:253. Even Scroggs notes the correlation before Wright, but he discounts its relevance because of his focus on the Hellenization of the Jews (*The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 108).

to satisfy his sexual desires,"²² Wright seems to be more on target when he affirms, "If, as seems likely, the ἀρσενοκοίτ- group of words is a coinage of Hellenistic Judaism or Hellenistic Jewish Christianity, the probability that the LXX provides the key to their meaning is strengthened."²³ Not only this but, if Paul is the first in extant literature to use this compound term,²⁴ then it is also probable that he, as a Jew, is reflecting the sense of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 rather than later affirmations concerning pederasty.²⁵

The significance of this derivation is that these passages in Leviticus have nothing to do with pederasty. They refer to the act of homosexuality-man with man. It is significant that of all the terms available in the Greek language, Paul chose a compound from the Septuagint that in the broadest sense described men lying with men as they would lie with women. This is a broad denotation that could include pederasty but need not be limited to it.

Therefore even though the Septuagint nowhere specifically uses ἀρσενοκοίτης this term seems to have been first coined by the Apostle Paul from the terms in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 as a broad description of mutual, adult, same-sex relationships.

In the New Testament ἀρσενοκοίτη is used only twice and both instances are in vice-lists by Paul, namely,

p.485

1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10.²⁶ There is no question that Paul was condemning behavior in these vice-lists, but whether ἀρσενοκοίτης is referring to the abuse of pederasty or the broader category of "men lying with men" is not determined by these lists alone. However, since these usages predate all other usages, it is reasonable to consider Paul as the one who first coined the term and thus as the one who determined its meaning. As already suggested, the most logical place for Paul to derive these terms, in view of his style elsewhere,²⁷ is from the Septuagint in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 where the Law addressed homosexuality in its broadest sense.

The writings in the Koine period of Greek history are most often cited as support for the Hellenistic understanding that ἀρσενοκοίτης refers to pederasty. Scroggs notes that when Philo (13 B.C.-ca. A.D. 45), Paul's contemporary, discussed Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, he

²² Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 108.

²³ Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes," 129.

²⁴ This is a point Nägeli asserts when he cites all the other usages of ἀρσενοκοίτης as occurring during the Imperial age (Theodor Nägeli, *Der Wortschatz des Apostels Paulus: Beitrag zur sprachgeschichtlichen Erforschung des Neuen Testaments* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903], 46).

Even Scroggs concedes to this when he writes, "As far as I have been able to determine, its earliest extant occurrence is in 1 Cor 6:10. Apparently, then, *it has no recoverable history prior to Paul's use of it*" (*The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 108, italics his). Also Boswell notes that Nägeli's earliest reference, *Oracula Sybillina*, probably does not predate Paul (*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 341, n. 17).

²⁵ Even Scroggs considers this, but his presuppositions draw him away from including this possibility in his array of evidence. "It is possible, of course, that Paul is responsible for the term. Since, however, he seems quite uninterested in the issue, and since the list seems quite traditional it is more likely that he is using a term already known in circles of Hellenistic Jews acquainted with rabbinic discussions" (*The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 108, n. 14).

²⁶ "Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals [ἀρσενοκοίται] shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9-10). "Realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals [ἀρσενοκοίταις] and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching" (1 Tim 1:9-10).

²⁷ Again in Romans 1:24-27 Paul based his argument against homosexuality on the Hebrew Scriptures.

was referring to pederasty and not homosexuality in general.²⁸ In his discussion of Leviticus Philo had pederasty in view;²⁹ however, it is also true that he did not use the term Paul coined. His vocabulary is rich with other terminology common to pederasty.³⁰ Philo is well known for his tendency to Hellenize the Scriptures in order to relate them to his contemporary culture.³¹ In view of this tendency it is inappropriate to

p.486

assume that his Hellenized approach was also the pattern of the Apostle Paul. Yes, Philo related Leviticus 18 to pederasty, but this is because he was making application to various aspects of life as he knew it, and not because he was explaining the passage in its historical setting.

The writings of Josephus (ca. A.D. 37-100) also argue against the assumption that the later Greek writers saw pederasty in all their references to homosexuality. While it is true that Josephus alluded to pederasty in his understanding of Genesis 19,³² it is also significant to note that when Josephus mentioned the laws in Leviticus against homosexuality, he retained the general terms found in the Septuagint.³³ Though the Loeb Classical Library translates the Greek with "sodomy," Josephus was careful to use the words "male with male." This not only argues for the fact that not all Hellenistic Jews understood Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 as a reference to pederasty, but also that this broader category is similar to Paul's usage in Romans 1:26-27 when he too argued according to nature (μεττήλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν) and of "men with men" (ἄρσενες ἐν ἄρσεσιν).³⁴

²⁸ Concerning Philo, Scroggs writes, "Thus it is clear that when Philo reads the general laws in his Bible against male homosexuality, he is thinking entirely about the cultural manifestation in his own environment" (*The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 88; italics his). Scroggs adds, "It is crucial to note that when he reads the general law against homosexuality, he is *thinking*, about male prostitution and those who buy the service of such youth" (ibid., 89, italics his).

²⁹ Much graver than the above is another evil, which has ramped its way into the cities, namely pederasty [τὸ παιδεραστειν] (*The Special Laws* 3.37).

³⁰ (1) "Pederasty" (παιδεραστειν) (ibid. 3.37); (2) "not only to the active but to the passive" (οὐ τοῖς δρῶσι μόναν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς πάσζουσιν) (ibid.); (3) "disease of effemination," (οἷ νόσαν θήλειαν) (ibid.); (4) "and the lover as such" (ὁ δ παιδεραστής) (i) (ibid. 3.40); (5) "to licentiousness and effeminacy" (ἀκρασίας καὶ μαλακκίας) (ibid) (ibid.); (6) "youthful beauty" (τὴν καλὴν νεανιείαν) (ibid. 3.41).

³¹ Concerning Philo, Colson writes, "A citizen of the place which was at once the chief home of the Jewish Dispersion and the chief center of Hellenistic culture, he owes his position in the history of religious thought mainly to that remarkable fusion of Hellenism and Judaism which we find in his voluminous writings" (Francis Henry Colson and George Herbert Whitaker, *Philo: With an English Translation*, Loeb Classical Series [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929-62], ix). Similarly another writer says, "First, I see in Philo a man divided in his loyalty not only between the Jewish and hellenistic [*sic*] ways of living, but also between their religious motivations. I cannot emphasize one at the expense of the other. Philo, as I see him, tried to combine the two, not in a metaphysical system but in his heart" (Erwin Goodenough, *Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, 2d ed. [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986], 26). Specifically concerning the above work, *On the Special Laws*, Goodenough notes how these four books, "systematically review Mosaic legislation to show how the individual statutes of that legislation are all logical and proper results of the application of these principles to various aspects of life" (ibid., 44).

³² He called attention to the young men: "But the Sodomites, on seeing these young men of remarkable fair appearance whom Lot had taken under his roof, were bent only on violence and outrage to their youthful beauty" (Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 1.200-201).

³³ "What are our marriage laws? The Law recognizes no sexual connections, except the natural union of man and wife, and that only for procreation of children. Sodomy [ἄρρενος ἄρρένων] it abhors, and punishes any guilty of such assault with death" (Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.199-200).

³⁴ Scroggs passes over this material with no discussion of its significance (*The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 89, n. 5).

Therefore Philo's interpretation is not determinative for Paul, especially when Josephus, who wrote after Paul, allowed for the broader sense of "men with men" as he discussed the laws in Leviticus.

Eusebius, though late (ca. A.D. 260-339), is another example of a Hellenistic writer cited by Nägeli³⁵ who used the term

p.487

ἀρσενοκοΐτης in a Jewish manner rather than following that of his Greek culture.³⁶ Again a meaning beyond pederasty is supported.

Another document significant for this discussion is the *Sibylline Oracles* (30 B.C.-A.D. 250). Though it is difficult to date any particular portion of this Jewish-Christian work, it is generally agreed that the section pertinent to this discussion was typically Jewish in its nature. As such it allows for the broader Pauline sense of homosexual activity.³⁷

A diachronic study of the term ἀρσενοκοΐτης argues against limiting its definition to pederasty and supports a broader sense of "a man lying with man as he would with a woman" from the combining of two terms in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Probably the first one to use this term was the Apostle Paul. Therefore it is more compatible to look to Leviticus for its sense than to Hellenized applications because of its chronological history as well as the ways in which it was used in Koine Greek.

An examination of μαλακός. Though Scroggs is careful to note that μαλακός is not a technical term for "effeminate," he relates the definition of "effeminate" exclusively to pederasty: "The use of μαλακός would almost certainly conjure up images of the effeminate call-boy, if the context otherwise suggested some form of pederasty."³⁸ This is a convenient but less than complete admission, as a diachronic study of the word demonstrates.

p.488

Liddell and Scott define μαλακός under the broad definition of "soft."³⁹ The following categories demonstrate the implications of such a definition: (1) To be soft as in things

³⁵ Nägeli, *Der Wortschatz des Apostels Paulus*, 46.

³⁶ In his discussion of the Law of Moses, Eusebius wrote, "Moses severely ordained for adulterous and licentious ones not to commit adultery, neither to commit homosexuality, neither to pursue enjoyment against nature" (Eusebius, *Demonstration of the Gospel* 1.6.67, cited in Greek by Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes," 127). Wright adds, "It is surely a safe presumption here that ἀρσενοκοιτεῖν" refers to the Levitical proscription of male homosexual activity" (ibid.).

Also in this discussion of vices Eusebius stated, From the river Euphrates and as far as the Mediterranean Sea is from the east, the one who reproaches as a murderer or as a thief is not actually vexed; and the one who reproaches as a homosexual [ἀρσενοκοΐτης] avenges himself as far as even murder" (Eusebius, *The Preparation for the Gospel* 1.6.67, cited in *Eusebius Werke: Die Praeparatio Evangelica*, ed. Karl Mras, vol. 1 of *Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der Ersten Jahrhunderte*).

³⁷ "(Never accept in your hand a gift which derives from unjust deeds.) Do not steal seeds. Whoever takes for himself is accursed to generations of generations, to the scattering of life. Do not practice homosexuality [ἀρσενοκοιτεῖν], do not betray information, do not murder" (*Sibylline Oracles* 2.70-73, trans. J. J. Collins, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983], 347). Charlesworth notes, "These verses contain a number of clear indications of Jewish authorship or redaction. The polemic against homosexuality (vs. 73), while less conclusive, is also typically Jewish" (Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 330). This provides another affirmation that the Hellenized understanding was not the only one that existed in Greek writings. Therefore it is a misunderstanding to affirm that Paul must have been describing the Hellenistic practice (abuse) of pederasty.

³⁸ Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 65 (italics his).

³⁹ Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. μαλακός, 1076-77.

"subject to touch like a freshly ploughed land⁴⁰ or soft grassy meadows."⁴¹ (2) To be soft as in persons or modes of life which are mild or gentle. This has a positive and negative sense. In a good sense it speaks of a fallen hero⁴² and in a bad sense of those who are "fainthearted" and thus "cowardly"⁴³ or morally weak because of lack of self-control.⁴⁴ (3) To be soft as in being "mild" or "gentle" with respect to παθητικός (emotion, or morbid affection).⁴⁵

This third usage is particularly germane to this study because it allows for the sense of "effeminate" by applying a feminine characteristic⁴⁶ to a man.⁴⁷ A particularly significant expression of this usage may be found in a letter from Demophon, a wealthy Egyptian, to Ptolemaeus, a police official, concerning

p.489

needed provisions for a coming festival.⁴⁸ Deissmann notes, "The word is no doubt used in its secondary (obscene) sense, as by St. Paul in 1 Cor vi. 9. It is an allusion to the foul practices by which the musicians eked out their earnings."⁴⁹ Likewise Moulton and Milligan see this usage as similar in sense to 1 Corinthians 6:9.⁵⁰ Therefore even though the classical usage is not technical, it allows for a broader sense of "effeminate," rather than only the meaning "call-boy" who is abused by older men.

⁴⁰ "Therein he set also soft [μαλακῆν], fallow-land, rich tilth and wide" (Homer, *The Iliad* 18.541).

⁴¹ "Beneath them the divine earth made fresh-spring grass to grow, and dewy lotus, and crocus, and hyacinth, thick and soft [μαλακόν], that upbare from the ground" (ibid., 14.349).

⁴² "Look you, in good sooth softer [μαλακότερας] is Hector for the handling now than when he burned the ships with blazing fire" (ibid., 22.373).

⁴³ And I make a counter appeal to the older men, if any of you sit by one of these, not to be shamed into fear lest he may seem to be a coward [μαλακός] if he do not vote for war (*Thucydides*, 6.13.1).

⁴⁴ "It is possible on the one hand to have such a disposition as to succumb even to those temptations to which most men are superior, or on the other hand to conquer even those to which most men succumb. These two dispositions, when manifested in relation to pleasure, constitute unrestraint and restraint respectively; when in relation to pain, softness [μαλακός] and endurance" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.7.1, or 1150a).

⁴⁵ Liddell and Scott place 1 Corinthians 6:9 under this category (*A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1285).

⁴⁶ "What then are the dirge-like modes of music? Tell me, for you are a musician.' 'The mixed Lydian,' he said, 'and the tense higher Lydian, and similar modes.' 'These then,' said I, 'we must do away with. For they are useless even to women who are to make the best of themselves, let alone to men.' 'Assuredly.' 'But again, drunkenness is a thing most unbecoming guardians, and so is softness [μαλακία] and sloth' (Plato, *The Republic* 398 E.; cf. 411 A for a similar discussion).

⁴⁷ "It is said that when he laid it down as Zeno's opinion that a man's character could be known from his looks, certain witty young men brought before him a rake with hands horny from toil in the country and requested him to state what the man's character was. Cleanthes was perplexed and ordered the man to go away; but when, as he was making off, he sneezed, 'I have it' cried Cleanthes, he is effeminate [μαλακός]" (*Diogenes Laertius*, Dionysius-Cleanthes 7.173). Even though there are specific usages of the term that denote pederasty (cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities* 7.2.4), the above passage demonstrates that the sense can be broader than that of effeminate call-boys since he is called a man (ἄνθρωπον) above.

⁴⁸ "Demophon to Ptolemaeus, greeting. Make every effort to send me the flute-player Petoüs with both the Phrygian flutes and the rest; and if any expense is necessary, pay it, and you shall recover it from me. Send me also Zenobius the effeminate [μαλακόν] with a drum and cymbals and castanets, for he is wanted by the women for the sacrifice; and let him wear as fine clothes as possible" ("Letter of Demophon to Ptolemaeus" [from mummy wrappings found in the necropolis of El-Hibeh about 245 B.C.], *The Hibeh Papyri: Part I*, no. 54, 200-201).

⁴⁹ Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. R. M. Strachan (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927), 150, n. 4.

⁵⁰ "A certain musician Zenobius is described as ὁ μαλακός", probably in the same sense in which the word is found in 1 Cor 6:9, rather than simply with reference to his style of dancing" (James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-literary Sources* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], s.v. "μαλακός," 387).

All the occurrences of the term in the Septuagint support the general idea of "softness" and do not contribute to the subject of homosexuality (see Job 40:22; Prov 25:15; 26:22).

In a similar manner the New Testament uses the word with the general sense of "soft" as with soft garments worn on festive occasions,⁵¹ but the other usage is in the passage in question—1 Corinthians 6:9.⁵²

Moulton and Milligan note only one other significant use of the term. This is in a Macedonian inscription where "the words ὁ μαλακός have been added in a different style of writing, after the name of the person commemorated, evidently in satirical

p.490

allusion to his corrupt mode of life."⁵³ This usage is not particularly helpful in this discussion. Μαλακός is thus not a technical term to describe being effeminate. It often had a more general sense of "soft" or "mild." When it is employed in reference to sexual relationships of men with men, however, it is also not a technical term for male call-boys in a pederastic setting. The term may mean effeminate with respect to boys or men who take the role of a woman in homosexual relationships. As Ukleja affirms, "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 ἀρσενοκοίτη which does imply an active homosexual role."⁵⁴

In view of these observations it is best to view the two terms in Paul's vice-list in 1 Corinthians 6:9 (ἀρσενοκοίτης and μαλακός) as not requiring a Hellenistic interpretation of the practice of pederasty. Instead they are descriptive of the active and passive parties in a homosexual relationship.⁵⁵ Their reference includes the abuses of pederasty but may denote the broader activities of mutual, same-sex relationships from the cultural perspective of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 . While a great amount of Greek

⁵¹ Concerning John the Baptist, Luke wrote that Jesus said, "What did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft [μαλακοῖς] clothing? Behold those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces" (Luke 7:25). Likewise Matthew wrote, "What then did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft [μαλακοῖς] clothing? Behold, those who wear soft [μαλακά] clothing are in kings' palaces" (Matt 11:8).

⁵² Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich give this definition: "soft, effeminate, esp. of catamites, men and boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually" (Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979], s.v. "μαλακός," 488). Though they do associate this term with catamites they also refuse to limit it to young teenage call-boys. Therefore there is a recognition that "effeminate" may describe activities between men as well as boys. This mitigates against pederasty by definition.

⁵³ Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, s.v. "μαλακός", 387.

⁵⁴ P. Michael Ukleja, "The Bible and Homosexuality, Part 2: Homosexuality in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (October-December 1983): 351. He adds, "A strong possible translation of both μαλακός and ἀρσενοκοίτη is the morally loose (effeminate) who allow themselves to be used homosexually and the person who is a practicing homosexual" (ibid.).

⁵⁵ Louw and Nida come to this same conclusion. They place both of these terms under the semantic domain of "Moral and Ethical Qualities and Related Behavior" and more specifically under the category of "Sexual Misbehavior" (Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols., 2d ed. [New York: United Bible Societies, 1988-1989], 1:74243, 772). They say ἀρσενοκοίτης refers to "a male partner in homosexual intercourse – 'homosexual' " (ibid., 772, ¶88.280). And concerning both terms they write, It is possible ἀρσενοκοίτης in certain contexts refers to the active male partner in homosexual intercourse in contrast with μαλακός, the passive male partner" (ibid., 772-73, §88.280-88.281). "As in Greek, a number of other languages also have entirely distinct terms for the active and passive roles in homosexual intercourse" (ibid., 773, §88.281). This recent work, devoted to semantic domains comes to the same conclusion as the above diachronic study. There is no mention of pederasty.

literature relates this activity to pederasty, not all Greek authors held to this limitation, especially when they, like Paul, spoke from a scriptural perspective.

A logical and lexical examination of 1 Corinthians 6:9 reveals that it is not exegetically correct to limit Paul's prohibition in his vice-list to the homosexual abuse of pederasty. Paul was arguing a specific point that has application to all forms of

p.491

homosexuality. This view is further supported by an examination of the structure of 1 Corinthians.

The placement of this specific unit within the flow of the book is as follows: (1) the book is introduced in 1:1–9, (2) divisions in the church are addressed with respect to the message and the messenger in 1:10–4:21, and (3) disorders in the church are discussed in chapters 5 and 6. In 5:1–13 and 6:1–11 Paul was dealing with moral problems in the church of which he had become aware. The parallels between these two passages are striking.⁵⁶

1 Corinthians 5:1–13

Incestuous Relationship

Paul discussed sin under its genus: an incestuous relationship is πορνεία (5:1–2, 9–11).

The general vice is extended to include a number of specific sins: πόρνοι = greedy people, robbers, idolaters, slanderers, drunkards (5:9–11).

Paul's argument hinges on the distinction between Christian and non-Christian πόρνοι: do not associate with πόρνοι (5:9), that is, the πορνοί in the church (5:11), nor with the πόρνοι of the world (5:10).

1 Corinthians 6:1–11

Christian Litigation before Civil Courts

Paul discussed sin under its genus: Christians' use of civil courts is ἀδικία (cognates appear in 6:1, 7–9).

The general vice is extended to include a number of specific sins: ἄδικοι = idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, coveters, drunkards, revilers, robbers (6:9–10).

Paul's argument hinges on the distinction between Christian and non-Christian ἄδικοι: Christians take their case before the ἄδικοι (6:1). Paul described the ἄδικοι as ἀπίστοι (6:6). Christians should allow themselves to be wronged (ἀδικεῖσθε, 6:7); instead they commit injustice (ἀδικεῖτε) to a brother (6:8), thereby becoming ἄδικοι. As Zaas says, "Thus by a rhetorical *tour de force* Paul has transferred the vice of *adikia* from non-Christian judges to Christian litigants."⁵⁷

The vice-lists in chapters 5 and 6 serve to give specific

p.492

examples of the more general vices of πορνεία and ἀδικία.⁵⁸ Unlike Scroggs, who believes that the vice-lists have no relationship to Paul's message,⁵⁹ Zaas is correct in noting that these

⁵⁶ This discussion of 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 is developed by Zaas, but he does not lay it out in this fashion ("1 Corinthians 6:9ff: Was Homosexuality Condoned in the Corinthian Church?" 20-67).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 07.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁵⁹ Scroggs writes, "The lists were often, apparently, traditional. What was important was the list as a list, and perhaps its length. The more vices included, the greater the impression on the reader. That is, the list was a club used to hit an opponent over the head or to warn the writer's own community of the penalty for evil living" (*The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 102). Continuing he writes, "What Paul cites in 1 Cor 6:9-11 is a stereotyped literary form, which may or may not reflect his own sense of priorities, either in general or with regard to the specific situation of the Corinthian church" (*ibid.*, 1023).

lists reflect how the Corinthian church had not judged those in its congregation.⁶⁰ One of those groups of people who needed attention was actively involved in mutual, same-sex relations. Paul's point is that those who are either active (ἀρσενοκοῖται) or passive (mal akoi) in these relationships will be judged.

Summary

While Paul's choice of the words ἀρσενοκοίτης and μαλακός allows for an application to the abuse of pederasty in his day, the words actually denote a broader field of reference including all men who have sexual relations with men. The illogical presuppositions that (a) all sexual relationships are equal before God, (b) Paul's descriptions are of excessive practices, and (c) homosexuality is a biblically approved expression of sexuality, are necessary prerequisites to the popular conclusion that Paul was discussing only "abuses" in homosexual behavior.

The Apostle Paul condemned all homosexual relationships in his vice-list in 1 Corinthians 6:9 as he addressed the need for the Corinthians to judge those within their midst.

© 1993 Dallas Theological Seminary. Reproduced by Permission.

Converted to PDF by Robert I. Bradshaw, March 2004.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

⁶⁰ Zaas's argument is as follows: (1) Every vice enumerated in 1 Corinthians 5:11 is present in 6:9-10 (except ἄδικοι which is not strictly in the list. (2) The terms added to the list of 5:11 are "thieves" (κλέπτται), and three sexual vices, "adulterers" (μοιχοῖ), "sexual perverts" (μαλακοί), and "homosexuals" (ἀρσενοκοῖται) and it is significant that not all these vices appear together in any other vice-catalog, though ἀρσενοκοῖται does appear in the list in 1 Timothy 1:10. (3) After comparing the vice-lists provided by Wibbing in *Die Tugend und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament* as well as those in the New Testament, Zaas concludes that the lack of repetition elsewhere indicates that Paul is quoting his own list in chapter 5 and that his citing of three vices of a sexual nature indicate that he is returning to his earlier theme of πορνεία by virtue of the repetition of the term πόρνοι as the leading term in 6:9 ("1 Corinthians 6:9ff: Was Homosexuality Condoned in the Corinthian Church?" 207, n. 14).

The point of the above discussion is that this list of ἄδικοι is really a list of πόρνοι. Therefore Paul was actually tying chapters 5 and 6 together as he was discussing "how the Corinthian church has not taken it upon itself to judge those inside their midst." The lists do have relevance to Paul's meaning in the passage (ibid., 206).