

The Apostle Paul and Homosexuality—Answering Homosexual Objections (Part 1)

For almost the entire 2,000 years of recorded Christian history, the apostle Paul's condemnation of all types of homosexual practice was considered an unquestionable fact of biblical teaching. Not until the sexual revolution of the 1960s did "gay liberation theologians" emerge to dispute and distort the plain reading of Scripture on this subject. And as Michael L. Brown further notes in his excellent book *Can You Be Gay and Christian?* "Every major dictionary of New Testament Greek or Classical Greek understood Paul's key vocabulary (in particular, the word *arsenokoites*) to refer to men engaging in homosexual acts."

Furthermore, the historic theological consensus expressed no distinction between exploitative (prostitution, rape, pederasty, promiscuity, sex slaves) and nonexploitative (consensual, committed, monogamous) forms of homosexuality. The divine prohibition against aberrant homoerotic behavior was considered comprehensive and unequivocal. But that was then, and this is now.

With society's rapid moral decline, rejection of authority and a self-centered approach to life, God's Word has come under an intense, unrelenting assault. And only the strong have been able to withstand the anti-Christian onslaught.

We will be examining two particular Pauline passages with an emphasis on the Greek word *arsenokoites* (plural, *arsenokoitai*), which is properly translated as *homosexual*. We will also answer the common

objections to the traditional—and, I might add, the accurate—interpretation of each of these crucial texts.

First Corinthians 6:9-11 says, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners [*malakoi*], practicing homosexuals [*arsenokoitai*], thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you once lived this way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

First Timothy 1:8-11 says, “But we know that the law is good if someone uses it legitimately, realizing that law is not intended for a righteous person, but for lawless and rebellious people, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, sexually immoral people, practicing homosexuals [*arsenokoitais*], kidnappers, liars, perjurers—in fact, for any who live contrary to sound teaching. This accords with the glorious gospel of the blessed God that was entrusted to me.”

Many biblical scholars identify the word *arsenokoitai(es)* as a neologism (a newly coined term) created by the apostle Paul or Greek-speaking Jews living around the turn of the millennium. From the apostle Paul’s initial usage through 1453 A.D., the *Greek Language Thesaurus* at the University of California, Irvine, lists 73 occurrences of the *arsenokoit* stem. The first two are found in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, and all of the remaining 71 references come *after* the biblical citations made by the apostle Paul. Therefore, these later occurrences cannot be argued to have any influence on the meaning of Paul’s usage of the term—if anything, it would have to be the other way around.

So, where or how could he have possibly conceived of such a word? The answer is quite simple. We need only look to the

Septuagint (from the second century B.C.), the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The authors of the Bible, including Paul, read and included quotations from the Septuagint in the New Testament. If we look at the Septuagint's translation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, we find the two Greek stems from which Paul constructed the compound word translated as *homosexual*.

In particular, here's what we find in Leviticus 20:13: *hos an koimethe meta **arsenos koiten** gunaikos*. *Arsenos* is translated as *male*, and the word *koiten* means "to lie/bed with," which is a euphemistic reference to sexual intercourse. In fact, the linguistic connection between *koiten* and the English word *coitus* is noticeably apparent. As a compound word [*arsenos* + *koiten* = *arsenokotai(es)*], it is clearly referring to same-sex male intercourse.

The traditional understanding of Paul's grammatical structure is also confirmed by the homosexual-affirming *LGBTQ Online Encyclopedia*, which states, "And so we have, describing Oedipus, *metrokoitēs*, 'a man who lies with his mother,' *doulukoitēs*, 'a man who lies with maidservants or female slaves,' *polykoitēs*, 'a man who lies with many,' and *onokoitēs*, 'a man who lies with donkeys,' [slanderously] said of Christians in a graffito from Carthage of about 195."

Dan O. Via, the pro-homosexual professor emeritus of New Testament at Duke Divinity School, writes in his co-authored book *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, "The term is a compound of the words for 'male' (*arsen*) and 'bed' (*koite*) and thus could naturally be taken to mean a man who goes to bed with other men. True, the meaning of a compound word does not necessarily add up to the sum of its parts. But in this case I believe the evidence suggests that it does. In the Greek version of the two Leviticus passages that condemn male homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13) a man is not to lie with a male as with a woman each text contains both the words *arsen* and *koite*. First Cor 6:9-10 simply classifies

homosexuality as a moral sin that finally keeps one out of the kingdom of God.”

Likewise, the ancient rabbis utilized the Hebrew phrase *miskab zakur* (lying with a male), which is taken from the Masoretic text (a Hebrew translation of the Old Testament) of Leviticus 20:13, to denote the sin of homosexual sex.

Emeritus professor William Loader, of Murdoch University in Australia, is a New Testament scholar and a strong proponent for same-sex marriage. Loader has written eight significant books on sexuality in early Judaism and Christianity, and he has established himself as one of the premier scholars on sexual ethics for this time period. In *The New Testament on Sexuality*, Loader contends that “it is inconceivable that [Paul] would approve of any same-sex acts if, as we must assume, he affirmed the prohibitions of Lev 18:22; 20:13 as fellow Jews of his time understood them.” Again, Loader affirms, “It is also hard to imagine that Paul would approach [issues of homosexual practice] without awareness of the prohibition of same-sex relations in Lev 18:22 and 20:13, which had come to be applied to both men and women.”

Besides the first-century rabbinical prohibitions against homosexuality, the instructions in Genesis (1:27, 2:24), the words of Jesus (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9) and the apostle Paul’s own additional words (1 Cor. 7:2; Eph. 5:31) make it abundantly clear that the Bible defines marriage in opposite-gender terminology and forbids all forms of homosexual deviancy. There is simply no reasonable way to arrive at the ridiculous conclusion that Paul would argue to the contrary.

Objection #1: The apostle Paul was only referring to exploitative homosexual relationships when he referred to the word *arsenokoitai(es)*.

When reading the apostle Paul’s words about homosexuality, modern “gay apologists” assert either ambiguity or alternative

meanings for the original Greek word found in the biblical text. Instead of *arsenokoites* (plural, *arsenokoitai*), they claim that a much better and clearer Greek term was available for Paul's usage if he had actually intended to condemn nonexploitative, monogamous homosexual relationships.

However, there is absolutely no scholarly agreement regarding the identification of this elusive "better" Greek word. The suggested alternatives are all over the map, and there is nothing even remotely close to a consensus—even among liberal scholars. Some contend that the apostle Paul should have utilized *paiderasste* to more precisely indicate consensual same-sex activity between adult males. However, this term more accurately refers to adult male relationships with minor-aged boys, as can easily be seen by considering the very close Greek relative *paiderastía*, which is translated into English as *pederasty*.

Others argue for terms such as *arrenomanes* or *maiandros*, which were both extremely obscure terms during antiquity. *Arrenomanes* occurs in only two ancient Greek writings (. 8(2).43 and v.1 in) and *maiandros* appears in just one ancient Greek manuscript (. 83). *Arrenomanes* and *maiandros* are also literally interpreted as "mad after males/men," and each could actually be argued to have the more specific meaning of sex-crazed, promiscuous homosexuals.

As for the Greek words which were commonly employed during the first century to describe sodomy (*arrenomixia*, *androbateo*, *androbates*), each of them are definitely too general and imprecise. They can be broadly understood to mean sexual activities that are either oral, anal or animal in nature.

If the apostle Paul had utilized the word *androkoites*, the issue of ambiguity would have been even more pronounced since *andros* can be translated as either *man* or *mankind*. And,

of course, "mankind" includes both males and females. So, when the apostle Paul chose the linguistic stem *arsen(os)*, the result was much greater clarity and certainty. This distinct Greek term can only be properly translated as *male*.

Each of the aforementioned alternative terms exhibit greater ambiguity and/or are less descriptive of nonexploitative, monogamous homosexual relationships. Therefore, *Arsenokoitai(es)* unquestionably represents the best option at the apostle Paul's disposal. It also makes profoundly much more sense for Paul to choose a word derived from the Septuagint, a source that would have certainly been more familiar and accessible to him and his scriptural audience. As Dr. Robert Gagnon flatly told me in a recent telephone interview, "There is no better word!"

Objection #2: The apostle Paul had no concept of sexual orientation.

To begin with, such an assertion denies the critically important doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). Since the apostle Paul wrote every biblical word as he was "carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21), his psycho-social knowledge of homosexuality is irrelevant. First Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 were actually written by the God who knows all things.

Not that I am agreeing with the popular, contemporary understanding of "sexual orientation," but such theories are actually nothing new. In fact, the great minds of the Greco-Roman world posited several hypotheses, each of which argued for a congenital, biological or other unchosen basis for homosexual attraction. The proposed theories are found in numerous sources including Platonic, Aristotelian, Hippocratic and even astrological texts.

They include the following:

1. A creation narrative involving the splitting of three original types of binary humans (Plato's *Symposium*, 189e-193c). As Robert Gagnon explains, "Aristophanes constructs a myth about human origins in which humans were once binary beings, one type consisting of man-man, another of female-female, and a third kind of male-female. When they attempted to extend their power to the heavens, Zeus sliced each in two and closed up the wounds. Ever since then, all humans long for their other half" (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 353).

2. A particular mix of male and female sperm elements at conception (Hippocratic treatise *De Victu*).

3. An inherited disease analogous to a mutated gene (Soranus, *De Morbis Chronicis*,).

4. Sperm ducts leading to the anus (Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1148b, lines 28-34; Pseudo-Aristotle, *Prob.* 4:26).

5. An inherited disease of the mind.

6. The particular alignment of the heavenly constellations at the time of one's birth.

7. And for women, the anatomical deformity of an overly large clitoris.

(The last three theories are described in Bernadette Brooten's *Love Between Women*, 140-141, 172, 242-43, 360-61; also John Boswell, *Homosexuality*, 52).

Some of the ancient theories are obviously closer to our modern explanations than others. What matters, though, is that many in the ancient world attributed one or more forms of homosexual practice to an interplay of nature and nurture. Others also viewed same-sex attractions as exclusive and very resistant to change. And every one of these theories predated the apostle Paul. So, he most certainly would have had access

to, and heard about, such concepts. Yet, despite the fact that these theories were not foreign to first century, educated Jews, the apostle Paul nonetheless unequivocally condemned homosexual practice.

Objection #3: The concept of committed, loving, monogamous relationships was completely foreign to the apostle Paul or anyone living during the first century A.D.

Gagnon confronted retired Episcopal Bishop Eugene Robinson for his repeated appeal to this erroneous objection during a 2012 debate entitled “A Conversation on the Definition of Marriage” held at the Skyline Wesleyan Church in La Mesa, California. On this occasion, Dr. Gagnon indicated that Roman poet Martial (ca. 40-104 A.D.) and satirist Juvenal (ca. late first century to early second century) each referred derisively to effeminate men who willingly committed themselves as “brides” to another man of equal age. For example, Juvenal mentioned Gracchus, “a man renowned for his family background and his wealth,” who “wedded” a common cornet player through the issuing of semi-official “marriage” documents (*Satire* , 125, 129).

Even earlier, in Plato’s *Symposium* (ca. 380 B.C.), Aristophanes remarked about male-male relationships: “They [the two men] continue with one another throughout life ... desiring to join together and to be fused into a single entity ... and to become one person from two” (192E). In the Greek historian Plutarch’s *Dialogue on Love* (late first to early second century C.E.), Protogenes further argued for the superiority of committed homosexual male relationships (750D, 4).

Clement of Alexandria (150-215 A.D.) also mentioned with revulsion “women ... contrary to nature ... marrying women,” and he identified such arrangements as a violation of Scripture (*Paedagogus*). So, although committed homosexual relationships

were in existence during New Testament times, the apostle Paul still described them as unnatural and immoral.

Finally, the sequential use of the two Greek terms *malakoi(s)* and *arsenokoitai(es)* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 provides additional confirmation for the traditional understanding of Paul's negative viewpoint on homosexuality. In *The New Testament on Sexuality*, pro-gay William Loader reminds us that the apostle Paul "uses the two terms with reference to men who engage in same-sex behavior, with the first [*malakoi*] referring to the willing passive partner, whether by private consent or as a male prostitute, 'those who submit to sexual penetration by other men,' and the second [*arsenokoitai*] referring to 'those who engage in sexual penetration of other men,' which would have a broader reference and include, but not be limited to, exploitation, also by force." Likewise, Dr. Michael L. Brown in *Can You Be Gay and Christian?* explains, "Significantly, when the two words *malakos* and *arsenokoites* are used side by side, the sexual connotations are undeniable, which is why there is virtually unanimous agreement in all major dictionaries and translations."

The apostle Paul's condemnation of all types of homosexual behavior is clear and incontrovertible. There is really no ambiguity in his words, and every single homosexual counterargument falls flat when held up to the scrutiny of the linguistic and historical evidence. As the gay-friendly *GLBTQ Online Encyclopedia* specifies, "The bad news from the Christian Bible is that it condemns same-sex desire and same-sex acts without qualification of age, gender, role, status, consent, or membership in an ethnic community." And there is a substantial number of liberal, homosexual or pro-gay Ph.D. scholars who also agree that the Bible generally, and Paul specifically, forbids homosexuality.

Author's Note: *Two primary sources were utilized for this column: Robert Gagnon's excellent The Bible and Homosexual*

Practice and Michael L. Brown's highly recommended Can You Be Gay and Christian?

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