

# Updated Version of Bible Translation Stirs Accusations of ‘Gaywashing’ Within the Body of Christ

The question of how the Bible treats homosexuality, both in terms of sexual orientation and conduct, has become a hot-button topic in the kingdom of God in recent years. And now it has gotten even more contentious with a recent update to a Bible translation used by many mainline Protestant churches, *The Washington Times* reported last week.

The New Revised Standard Bible Updated Edition is the publication in question and it has stirred accusations of “gaywashing” by some in the body of Christ over the Greek word *arsenokoitai*, which is used only twice in the New Testament. The debate is whether or not it means all same-sex relations or only illicit ones.

*The Washington Times* reports that gay activists say that verses condemning same-sex relations “actually refer to temple prostitution and forced sex, not committed partnerships.” Charismatics, evangelicals and others with more orthodox views reject that interpretation, saying that “the Bible prohibits homosexual activity of any kind.”

The updated edition of the New Revised Standard Bible has appeared in digital form, and printed versions are expected from a range of Protestant and Catholic publishers in May. The last time the National Council of Churches revised this edition was in 1989.

The two scriptures where *arsenokoitai* appear are in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, where it translates it as “men who engage in illicit sex.” The previous version

translated the word as “sodomites.”

“The terms ‘sodomite’ and ‘sodomy’ were the first used in English in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and have nothing to do with the term *arsenokoitai*, an obscure Greek term coined from others terms meaning ‘man’ and ‘bed,’” Jennifer Knust, general editor of the 2021 edition’s New Testament and professor of religious studies at Duke University, told *The Washington Times* in an email. “I Corinthians 6:9 in no way refers to Sodom (the biblical city).”

Dr. Michael Brown, host of the Christian radio talk show “In the Line of Fire” and writer of a *Charisma News* column of the same name, says Knust is partially correct but adds that the final translation of *arsenokoitai* in the NRSV is “deficient.”

“While the translation of ‘sodomites’ is anachronistic, translating *arsenokoitai* as ‘men who engage in illicit sex’ is meaningless,” Brown told *The Washington Times*. “This new translation, virtually unknown before now in the history of the Bible translations, is as misleading as it is misguided, and it must be recognized as a capitulation to culture and a rejection of the authority of scripture.”

Robert A.J. Gagnon, a professor at Houston Baptist University, told *The Washington Times* that whoever made the change is doing its readers “a disservice.”

“Translating the word ‘sodomites’ was not the most felicitous translation, but at least it had the benefit of making clear to readers exactly what Paul was making clear to his readers; that the behavior has to do with male homosexual practice,” Gagnon said.

Gagnon said the new interpretation makes Paul’s meaning “so obscured in their new so-called updated translation that nobody has an inkling that it has an reference at all to homosexual practice. That’s intellectually dishonest or

intellectually ignorant.”

In 2001, Gagnon wrote *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, an analysis of biblical texts relating to homosexuality. He has offered to debate Knust online or in person about the translation. {eoa}

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