

A HISTORICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH TO THE VICE-LISTS

A PAULINE PERSPECTIVE
CONCERNING HOMOSEXUALITY
AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Abstract

The subject of homosexuality is controversial in the Church, even among Pentecostals; consequently, there has arisen a need for a historical and hermeneutical examination of the topic, especially in the Pauline corpus. The vice lists of ancient literature along with the ones in the Pauline epistles provide insight into the apostle's understanding of their purpose and function. Of the ones where Paul lists sexual sins, three specifically mention homosexuality: Romans 1:26–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, and 1 Timothy 1:9–10. This article discusses Paul's understanding of the connection between homosexuality and idolatry and provides an in-depth analysis of the Greek words *μαλακοί* and *ἀρσενοκοῖται*. It concludes by emphasizing the Pauline response to overcoming the vices he enumerates: follow the Spirit.

Setting the Stage: The Importance of the Subject

Paul Nathan Alexander, in his presidential address presented to the Society for Pentecostal Studies in 2013, entitled “Raced, Gendered, Faithed, and Sexed,” discusses “constructions of race and white supremacy, diversities of religious faith, and constructions of genders and sexes together with the concomitant ongoing inequalities for females and limitations on discourse regarding LGBT+ realities.”¹ Particularly, he points out the various views of the Pentecostal Churches concerning a Christian approach toward homosexuality and argues for inclusive understanding and dialog.² Alexander concludes, “I am hopeful we can thrive as a society even as we argue civilly and charitably about biblical, theological, ethical, historical, philosophical, practical, ecumenical, missional, and cultural perspectives regarding LGBT+ realities both within and beyond the pentecostalism we experience and study.”³

Certainly, dialog on any subject is to be welcomed. However, it is imperative that both doctrine and praxis emerge out of a proper historical and hermeneutical perspective. A valid and appropriate Pentecostal hermeneutic⁴ is one that treasures Scripture and seeks a correct Spirit-inspired textual interpretation. To do anything else is to do violence to the Biblical text and to create a culture of scholarly eisegesis. What has been happening in recent scholarly pursuits is the placing of a filter over Scripture that ignores tried and true exegetical methodologies—ones that enlighten and enliven the text, that create space for revelation as inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that support interpretations grounded in Scripture. Gordon Fee, a premier Pentecostal scholar, and Douglas Stuart explain:

The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the “plain meaning of the text.” And the most important ingredient one brings to this task is enlightened common sense. The test of good interpretation is that it makes good sense of the text. Correct interpretation, therefore, brings relief to the mind as well as a prick or prod to the heart.⁵

Nowhere has this departure from truth and solid Biblical interpretation become more apparent than in the Church. Societal influences and the loud cacophony of voices advocating for special interests have replaced the reasoned and proven foundation of Scripture. Without rightly divided Scripture (2 Tim 2:15, NKJV), incorrect teaching and doctrine arise in the Church. A Spirit-empowered path leads to a more satisfactory and intentional interpretation of the Bible, especially regarding the treatment of homosexuality in the works of the Apostle Paul.

Paul's Vice Lists Compared to Other Ancient Literature

Paul's epistles advocate righteous living, and he promotes this specifically through his ethical catalogs. By presenting virtue⁶ and vice⁷ lists in his letters, Paul clearly demarcates the means by which the believer is to live a holy life—one pleasing to God—itemizing what is to be shunned and what is to be embraced. According to J. D. Charles, “vice and virtue lists in the NT function paraenetically [as moral exhortations] in different contexts. They may be used for the purpose of antithesis (e.g., Gal 5:19–23 and Jas 3:13–18), contrast (e.g., Titus 3:1–7), instruction (e.g., 2 Pet 1:5–7) or polemics (e.g., 1 Tim 1:9–10; 6:3–5; 2 Tim 3:2–5).”⁸ “Common in ancient literature,”⁹ vice lists are “a literary form widespread in secular moral writings as well as in the NT”¹⁰—including the twenty-one “vices” listed in Romans 1:29–31 and the twelve “vices” listed in 1 Clement 35:5 and “even longer lists in Philo and in other writings.”¹¹ In the Pauline corpus, there are at least three of these passages that mention sexual sins, especially condemning homosexuality: Romans 1:26–27 (A.D. 57–58), 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 (A.D. 53–58), and 1 Timothy 1:9–10 (A.D. 61–66). As Paul delineates these iniquities and admonishes believers to reject them, he advocates they walk a Spirit-filled life.

Various vice lists exist outside of the New Testament, for example, in the Wisdom of Solomon, the Dead Sea Scrolls, 1 Clement, and the Didache. Similarities to the Pauline passages are apparent. In Wisdom of Solomon 14:23–26 (ca. 50 B.C.), the author mentions “unnatural lust” and “murder” (Rom 1:26–27, 29), “adultery” and “theft” (1 Cor 6:9–10), and “murder” and “perjury” (1 Tim 1:9–10):

For while they practice either child sacrifices or occult mysteries,
 or frenzied carousing in exotic rites,
 They no longer respect either lives or purity of marriage;
 but they either waylay and kill each other, or aggrieve each other
 by adultery.
 And all is confusion—blood and *murder, theft* and guile,
 corruption, faithlessness, turmoil, *perjury*,
 Disturbance of good people, neglect of gratitude,
 besmirching of souls, *unnatural lust*,
 disorder in marriage, *adultery* and shamelessness.¹²

The Dead Sea Scrolls also contain examples of vice lists as seen in “The Community Rule” (ca. 150 B.C.):

But the ways of the spirit of falsehood are these: *greed*, and *slackness in the search for righteousness*, wickedness and lies, haughtiness and pride, falseness and deceit, cruelty and *abundant evil*, ill-temper and much folly and brazen insolence, *abominable deeds (committed) in a spirit of lust*, and ways of lewdness in the service of uncleanness, a blaspheming tongue, blindness of eye and dullness of ear, stiffness of neck and heaviness of heart, so that man walks in all the ways of darkness and guile. (1 QS 4:9-11)¹³

The vices mentioned in this DSS passage that are common to the Pauline corpus are “greed, and slackness in the search for righteousness,” “abundant evil,” and “abominable deeds (committed) in a spirit of lust.” For example, Paul categorizes some of these sins as “being filled with all unrighteousness,” “greed,” “inventors of evil,” and a description of unnatural lusts in Romans 1:26–32.¹⁴ First Clement 35:5 (ca. A.D. 100) also incorporates vice lists, admonishing believers to cast off iniquities:

But how shall this be, dearly beloved? If our mind be fixed through faith towards God; if we seek out those things which are well pleasing and acceptable unto Him; if we accomplish such things as beseeem His faultless will, and follow the way of truth, casting off from ourselves *all unrighteousness* and iniquity,

covetousness, *strifes*, malignities and *deceits*, whisperings and backbitings, *hatred of God*, pride and *arrogance*, vainglory and inhospitality.¹⁵

The vice lists in the Pauline corpus mention “all unrighteousness,” “strife,” “deceit,” “haters of God,” “arrogant,” “gossips,” and “slanderers” (“whisperings” and “backbitings,” 1 Clement) (Rom 1:29–31). Of course, Clement is familiar with Romans since he quotes from the book.

Another detailed vice list occurs in the Didache 5:1 (A.D. 50–120):

But the Way of Death is this: First of all, it is wicked and full of cursing, *murders*, *adulteries*, lusts, *fornications*, *thefts*, *idolatries*, witchcrafts, charms, robberies, false witness, hypocrisies, a double heart, fraud, pride, malice, stubbornness, covetousness, foul speech, jealousy, impudence, haughtiness, boastfulness.¹⁶

Some of the specific vices Paul notes in the lists above as well as general categories for others (e.g., lusts) are also reflected here in the Didache.

Paul’s Vice Lists Mentioning Homosexuality (Especially Romans 1)

Paul’s use of vice lists in Romans 1:29–31, Galatians 5:19–21, 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, and 2 Corinthians 12:21–21 hearkens back to a “moral tradition from the OT and Judaism especially from Deuteronomy,” not just reflecting Greek or Hellenistic moral writings.¹⁷ Anthony Thiselton notes, “[W]hat most scholars call ‘the vice catalogue’ is better interpreted in terms of the Deuteronomic covenant identity and convenient obligations.”¹⁸ He rightly observes,

Evidence of similar patterns of style and parenetic catalogues within the NT . . . owe more to a common *catechetical Sitz im Leben* than to the hellenistic settings. . . . *If the background is catechetical, this transforms the significance of such a “list” into guidelines explicit for teaching on the nature of the Christian life.*¹⁹

In other words, Paul’s epistolary vice lists reflect instructions the apostle gives to the Church, by which he establishes a moral framework based on the Old Testament upon which he commands believers to live righteously. In fact, Brian Rosner concludes that “the Scriptures were an indispensable and formative source for 1 Cor. 6:1–11.” He asserts that Paul “showed himself to have Scriptural structures of thought, such as the notion that identity must inform behavior.”²⁰

In three of his vice lists, Romans 1:26–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, and 1 Timothy 1:9–10, Paul condemns homosexuality. In Romans 1:26–27, Paul notes the effects of these “unnatural relations.”

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions (disgraceful passions) (πάθη ἀτιμίας); for their women exchanged the natural function (φυσικὴν χρῆσιν) for that which is unnatural (unnatural relations) (τὴν παρὰ φύσιν), and in the same way (ὁμοίως) also the men abandoned the natural function (φυσικὴν χρῆσιν) of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another (they were inflamed in their lust for one another) (ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους), men with men committing indecent acts (τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι) and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error (the penalty . . . of their [idolatrous] perversion) (τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν . . . τῆς πλάνης).²¹

In the NASB, the Greek words φυσικὴν χρῆσιν (from χρῆσις) are translated “natural function” and τὴν παρὰ φύσιν (from φύσις) as “that which is unnatural.”²² The definition of χρῆσις is the “state of intimate involvement w[ith] a pers[on], relations, function, esp[ecially] of sexual intercourse”²³ and φύσις means “the regular or established order of things, nature,” with τὴν παρὰ φύσιν translated as “one contrary to nature”²⁴ or “what is against nature.”²⁵ In order to move the understanding of this verse from the individual and his or her personal culpability to a broader, more palatable interpretation that encompasses the book of Romans as a whole, Eugene F. Rogers asserts that Paul is here discussing Gentiles. He connects this verse to Romans 11:24 where the same Greek words appear and asserts that “God is acting contrary to

nature” because he is grafting the Gentiles to the Church. He maintains that “Paul’s sex-talk is about something else: ethnic stereotype transformed into another proclamation of the gospel. It is our own Gentile salvation that we misunderstand, if we mis-hear how Paul reclaims the language of sexual stereotype for his purpose.”²⁶ This lays the groundwork for Rogers’ argument that Scripture does not forbid same sex couples, and therefore the Church should embrace them.

A cursory examination of the text calls Rogers’ view into question. Romans 1:27 is connected with the verse before it with the Greek word *ὁμοίως*, which can be translated “likewise” or “in the same way.” Here Paul demonstrates that the “disgraceful passions” that cause women to participate in the “unnatural relations” of homosexuality are also responsible for “men committing indecent acts.” Douglas Moo observes, “Homosexuality among ‘males,’ [ἄρσενες, the same word used in the Septuagint when homosexuality is prohibited, Lev. 18:22; 20:13] like that among ‘females,’ is characterized as a departure from nature, . . . the natural order.” Moo continues,

Paul uses strong language to characterize male homosexuality: “they burned [ἐξεκαύθησαν from *ἐκκαίω*, a *hapax legomenon*, but has been used in writings apart from the NT to mean the ‘kindling’ of sin] in their desire [ὀρέξει, another *hapax legomenon*] for one another, men with men doing that which is shameful [τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην, used here and in Revelation 16:15, with ‘closest parallels in intertestamental Judaism’] and receiving in themselves the just penalty [ἀντιμισθίαν, ‘a payment in place of,’ here meaning ‘penalty’] that was necessary for their error.”²⁷

Moo asserts that Paul believes this “penalty” “was necessary” because “God could not allow his created order to be so violated without there being a just punishment.”²⁸

In Romans 1:24, 26, and 28, Paul acknowledges God as being active in His response to those who decide to follow this path of immorality. The Greek words *παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός*—can be translated “God gave them over,”²⁹ “God gave them up,”³⁰ or “God handed them over.”³¹ John Chrysostom, who according to C. E. B. Cranfield

is “specially strong in exposition of the explicitly ethical sections”³² of Paul, understands this Greek word as God withdrawing His presence from the idolaters, thus allowing them to keep committing wrong and to dive even deeper into sin. He writes:

He “gave them up,” here is, let them alone. For as he that hath the command in an army, if upon the battle lying heavy upon him he retreat and go away, gives up his soldiers to the enemies not by thrusting them himself, but by stripping them of his own assistance; thus too did God leave those that were not minded to receive what cometh from Him, but were the first to bound off from Him, though Himself having wholly fulfilled His own part They perverted to the opposite what they had received.³³

For Chrysostom, the one committing the sin is responsible for its consequences, not God. Frederic Louis Godet presents the following analogy:

The word *gave over* does not signify that God *impelled* them to evil, to punish the evil which they had already committed. The holiness of God is opposed to such a sense, and to *give over* is not to *impel*. On the other hand, it is impossible to stop short at the idea of a simple *permission*: “God let them give themselves over to evil.” God was not purely passive in the terrible development of Gentile corruption. Wherein did His action consist? He positively withdrew His hand; He ceased to hold the boat as it was dragged by the current of the river.³⁴

However, Douglas Moo argues that these explanations place God in too passive of a role; he believes the Greek word demands that God acts more intentionally: “God does not simply let the boat go—he gives it a push downstream. Like a judge who hands over a prisoner to the punishment his crime has earned, God hands over the sinner to the terrible cycle of ever-increasing sin.”³⁵ As Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner observe concerning Romans 1:26–27: “‘God gave them over’ again to immorality, with emphasis on perversion in sexual relations. The sequence Paul follows—idolatry, then immorality—raises the

connection between the two. . . . Sinning against God results in their sinning against their own nature.”³⁶

The Connection Between Homosexuality and Idolatry

Earlier in Romans 1, Paul connects sexual sins to idolatry: “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them” (Rom. 1:22–24). Paul shows here that “sexual sin, specifically homosexuality, is the product of idolatry.”³⁷ This connection between idolatry and fornication, a common one in Jewish literature, is also made in Wisdom of Solomon,³⁸ “For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life” (14:12, RSV), and “For the worship of idols not to be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil” (14:27, RSV).³⁹ Idolatry inevitably leads to participation in the sin that it promotes: “In return for their foolish and wicked thoughts, which led them astray to worship irrational serpents and worthless animals, thou didst send upon them a multitude of irrational creatures to punish them, that they might learn that one is punished by the very things by which he sins” (Wisd 11:15–16, RSV).⁴⁰ These passages are reminiscent of the sin of the Israelites in worshipping the golden calf Aaron fashioned when Moses was in the presence of God receiving the Ten Commandments, an example of “idolatry [as] the source of immorality”⁴¹: “So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings [before the idol of the golden calf that Aaron made for them], and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play [participating in pagan orgies to celebrate their newfound god]” (Exod 32:6). Indeed, Paul believed that sexual immorality, especially homosexuality, displayed the highest rejection of God’s moral order. According to Richard Longenecker,

Likewise important for understanding Paul's rationale in highlighting homosexuality when explicating the connection between idolatry and immorality is the fact that Paul viewed homosexuality as the most obvious result of humanity's failure to respond appropriately to God's revelation in creation. For though it was often asserted by those who practiced it that homosexuality was "natural"—even, as argued both then and today, a legitimate feature of divine creation—Paul viewed such a claim as in direct opposition to the moral order established by God in creation, where only in marriage do a man and a woman "become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).⁴²

According to Paul, this sexual aberration is the direct result of worshipping some other god. J. A. Fitzmyer observes,

Thus pagan idolatry has become the "big lie," and pagans have no excuse; their godlessness and wickedness have made them objects of divine wrath. Second, the condition of pagan humanity results from the moral degradation to which their idolatry has brought them: to the craving of their hearts for impurity. Their idolatry has led to moral perversion: sexual excess (1:24, 26a) and homosexual activity (1:26b–27).⁴³

In "The Testament of Naphtali, the Eighth Son of Jacob and Bilhah," the author discusses how both Sodom and the Watchers "changed the order of nature," which resulted in severe judgment from the Lord, a clear corollary to Romans 1.

Be ye, therefore, not eager to corrupt your doings through covetousness or with vain words to beguile your souls; because if ye keep silence in purity of heart, ye shall understand how to hold fast the will of God, and to cast away the will of Beliar. Sun and moon and stars change not their order; so do ye also change not the law of God in the disorderliness of your doings. The Gentiles went astray, and forsook the Lord, and changed their order, and obeyed stocks and stones, spirits of deceit. But ye shall not be so, my children, recognizing in the firmament, in the earth,

and in the sea, and in all created things, the Lord Who made all things, that ye become not as Sodom, which changed the order of nature. In like manner the Watchers also changed the order of their nature, whom the Lord cursed at the flood, on whose account He made the earth without inhabitant and fruitless. (3:1–5)⁴⁴

Anthony Thiselton also concludes, “What is clear from the connection between 1 Cor 6:9 and Rom 1:26–29 and their OT backgrounds is Paul’s endorsement of the view that idolatry, i.e., placing human autonomy to construct one’s values above covenant commitments to God, leads to a collapse of moral values in a kind of domino effect.”⁴⁵ This emphasis would explain Paul’s focus on homosexuality. Thomas Schreiner queries, “Why does Paul focus on homosexual relations, especially since it receives little attention elsewhere in his writings (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10)?” Schreiner sees both homosexuality and idolatry as unnatural:

Idolatry is “unnatural” in the sense that it is contrary to God’s intention for human beings. To worship corruptible animals and human beings instead of the incorruptible God is to turn the created order upside down. In the sexual sphere the mirror image of this “unnatural” choice of idolatry is homosexuality. . . . Human beings were intended to have sexual relations with those of the opposite sex. Just as idolatry is a violation and perversion of what God intended, so too homosexual relations are contrary to what God planned when he created man and woman.⁴⁶

For Paul, the connection between the two is axiomatic.

The Greek Words *μαλακοί* and *ἀρσενικοῖται*

Two other passages where Paul mentions homosexuality in his vice lists are 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 and 1 Timothy 1:9–10:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate (*μαλακοί*), nor

homosexuals (*ἀρσενοκοῖται*), nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor 6:9–10)

. . . Law is not made for a righteous person, 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)

The Greek word *μαλακοί* has been translated variously as “effeminate” (“by perversion”), “homosexuals,” “catamites,” and “male prostitutes.” Further analysis of the word reveals that the word can mean “males who are penetrated sexually by males”⁴⁷ or “being passive in a same sex relationship, *effeminate* esp. of *catamites*, of men and boys who are sodomized by other males in such a relationship.” The translation “male prostitutes” is considered by some scholars as “too narrow a rendering and ‘sexual pervert’ . . . is too broad.”⁴⁸ The word *μαλακός* also has the connotation of softness, and for Philo means to change “the male nature to the female, becoming guilty of ‘unmanliness’ . . . and ‘effeminacy’”: “The male becomes ‘womanish.’”⁴⁹ Philo writes that “another evil . . . has made its way among and been let loose upon cities, namely, the love of boys . . . which sin is a subject of boasting not only to those who practise it,” but also to those who “are not ashamed to devote their constant study and endeavours to the task of changing their manly character into an effeminate one.”⁵⁰ Gordon Fee asserts that *μαλακός* was “a pejorative epithet for men who were ‘soft’ or ‘effeminate,’ most likely referring to the younger, ‘passive’ partner in a pederastic relationship—the most common form of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world” and believes the best translation of the word is “‘male prostitute’ (in the sense of ‘effeminate call-boy’).”⁵¹

The Greek word *ἀρσενοκοῖται* that occurs in both 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 “is a compound of ‘male’ and ‘intercourse.’”⁵² It can be translated as follows: “homosexuals,” “abusers of themselves with mankind,” “sodomites,” “those who participate in homosexuality,” “male homosexuals,” “those who practice homosexuality,” “males who sexually

penetrate males,”⁵³ and “lying with men.”⁵⁴ The word can be defined as “a male who engages in sexual activity w[ith] a pers[on] of his own sex, *pederast*” — “one who assumes the dominant role in same-sex activity.”⁵⁵ Paul’s condemnation of same-sex conduct “cannot be satisfactorily explained on the basis of alleged temple prostitution . . . or limited to contract w[ith] boys for homoerotic service.”⁵⁶ The word “does not refer . . . only to sex with young boys or to male homosexual prostitutes, but simply to homosexuality itself”⁵⁷; “it denotes, unequivocally, the activity of male homosexuality.”⁵⁸ Some translate *μαλακοί* and *ἀρσενοκοῖται* together in 1 Corinthians 6:9 as “men who practice homosexuality,” “men who have sex with men,” and “sexual pervert(s)” because they believe the words refer to the “passive and active participants in homosexual acts.”⁵⁹

Some scholars have argued that homosexuality is not condemned by the New Testament. John Boswell asserts, “It is . . . quite clear that nothing in the Bible would have categorically precluded homosexual relations among early Christians. . . . The word ‘homosexual’ does not occur in the Bible.”⁶⁰ He argues that *μαλακοί* has often been translated “masturbation” and that the proper translation of *ἀρσενοκοῖται* is “male prostitute.”⁶¹ Robin Scroggs believes the former word should be understood as an “effeminate call-boy,” and the latter as the one “who hires him on occasion to satisfy his sexual desires.”⁶² Dale Martin takes umbrage at *ἀρσενοκοῖται* meaning homosexual “perversion” and asserts that *μαλακοί* should be translated as “effeminate,” someone who attracts male and female lovers. He sees modern translations as purposefully reinterpreting the text, avoiding historical context and inserting cultural stereotypes that are biased against the gay community.⁶³ None of these authors believes that Paul forbids homosexuality in general. However, Robert Gagnon counters this understanding of the Pauline texts by translating *μαλακοί*, “literally . . . ‘the soft ones’” as “effeminate males who play the sexual role of females” and *ἀρσενοκοῖται*, “literally . . . ‘male-bedders’ as ‘males who take other males to bed.’”⁶⁴ In his in-depth analysis of these Greek words, he demonstrates effectively their homosexual connotations.

Gordon Fee points out that this is the “first appearance [of *ἀρσενοκοῖται*] in preserved literature, and subsequent authors are reluctant to use it, especially when describing homosexual activity.”⁶⁵ Since

the Greek word does not appear before Paul's use, it seems likely that Paul has probably coined the term ἀρσενοκοῖται from the LXX ἄρσενος κοίτην (Lev 20:13),⁶⁶ demonstrating his knowledge and acceptance of the condemnation of the act of homosexuality in the Mosaic writings. The passages in the Septuagint are Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: "And thou shalt not lie (κοιμηθήσῃ—lit., 'go to bed'⁶⁷) (κοίτην—lit., 'in a marriage bed'⁶⁸) with a man as with a woman, for it is an abomination" (Lev 18:22, LXX)⁶⁹; "And whoever shall lie (κοιμηθῆῃ—lit., 'should have bedded') with a male (ἄρσενος κοίτην—lit., 'as the marriage bed') as with a woman, they have both wrought abomination; let them die the death, they are guilty" (Lev 20:13, LXX).⁷⁰ The Old Testament clearly indicates that "lying with a male is a general concept describing 'every kind of homosexual intercourse,' not simply male prostitution or sexual relations with youth."⁷¹

Even though certain types of homosexual behavior were acceptable in the Greek world of Paul's time, "Hellenistic Jewish texts are unanimous in condemning them and treat them and idolatry as the most obvious examples of Gentile moral depravity. Not surprisingly, Paul shares this Jewish aversion to idolatry and homosexual acts."⁷² Paul's echoing of the Leviticus passages demonstrates that he views "homosexuality as a deviation from the Mosaic moral code."⁷³ Paul uses the Greek word ἀρσενοκοίταις as "a broad term that cannot be confined to specific instances of homosexual activity such as male prostitution or pederasty." In the language of the Old Testament "lying with a 'male' (a very general term) is proscribed and relates to 'every kind of male-male intercourse.'" The Old Testament forbids "every type of homosexual intercourse (including a consensual one), not just male prostitution or intercourse with youths." While Paul's emphasis is "on homosexual acts, he would hardly have considered 'celibate' homosexual relationships as legitimate; for this would be to exchange a man's 'natural' function for what is 'unnatural.'"⁷⁴ As Richard Longenecker observes, "Paul's attitude toward homosexual behavior could hardly be more adversely expressed. For he condemns it totally—as did also all Jews and all Jewish Christians of his day."⁷⁵

The Pauline Response: Walking by the Spirit

Paul's desire is that Christians overcome the sins listed in his vice lists, not embrace them. Even so, believers are not expected to resist these vices on their own. After his vice list in Galatians 5:19–21, Paul asserts that Christ-followers are to leave sin behind: “Now those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24), and he encourages them to live righteously through the power of the Holy Spirit: “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk [στοιχῶμεν] by the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). The Greek word *στοιχῶμεν* (from *στοιχέω*) means “to be in line with a pers[on] or thing considered as standard for one’s conduct, *hold to, agree with, follow, conform.*”⁷⁶ It can be translated “*follow the Spirit.*”⁷⁷

Believers’ bodies—temples inhabited by the Holy Spirit—are commanded to “flee immorality,” for Paul, writing to the Christians in Corinth, teaches “that you are not your own,” “for you have been bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:18–20). According to Anthony Thiselton, the basis for Paul’s vice lists in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, “is not Stoic or Jewish ethics, but Christian identity as temples of the Holy Spirit (6:19) redeemed at cost to belong to Christ as his (6:20). ‘You are not your own’ (6:19b) is as far from Stoic autonomy as can be imagined.”⁷⁸ This forsaking of sin rather than its justification is a central Pauline doctrine, and as Robert Gagnon proclaims,

[T]he good news is that God is on the side of believers in sparing no effort to transform them into the image of Jesus. God both empowers believers by means of the Spirit, and motivates them through God’s unprecedented accomplishment of redemption in Christ and the hope of a magnificent salvation yet to be revealed. The God who once manifested wrath against those who turned to idols by handing them over to their shameful passions has now handed them over to the life-giving, transformative power of the Spirit of Christ.⁷⁹

Paul commands that Christians are to “glorify God in [their] body” (1 Cor 6:20). The Holy Spirit indwells and empowers the believer and provides for victory over iniquity and shows the way toward redemption.



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Notes

- 1 Paul Nathan Alexander, “Presidential Address 2013: Raced, Gendered, Faithed, and Sexed,” *Pneuma* 35 (2013), 319.
- 2 Alexander, “Presidential Address,” 343–44.
- 3 Alexander, “Presidential Address,” 344.
- 4 The pursuit of a distinctive Pentecostal (or Spirit-empowered) hermeneutic has been a key feature of much twentieth and twenty-first century Pentecostal scholarship, ranging all the way from Gordon D. Fee’s “genre hermeneutic” (“Hermeneutics and Historical Precedent—A Major Problem in Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” in *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism*, ed. Russell P. Spittler [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976], 118–132; “Acts—The Problem of Historical Precedent,” in *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982], 87–102; and Gordon D. Fee, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit: The Issue of Separability and Subsequence” *Pneuma* 7.2 [1985]: 87–99) to Howard M. Ervin’s “pneumatic and epistemological hermeneutic” (Howard M. Ervin, “Hermeneutics: A Pentecostal Option,” *Pneuma* 3.2 [1981]: 11–25. Reprinted with slight alterations under the same title in *Essays on Apostolic Themes: Studies in Honor of Howard M. Ervin*, ed. Paul Elbert [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985], 23–35.) to William W. Menzies’ “holistic hermeneutic” (“The Methodology of Pentecostal Theology: An Essay on Hermeneutics,” in *Essays on Apostolic Themes*, 1–14). A good article outlining the development of the Pentecostal hermeneutic is by Roger Stronstad (“Trends in Pentecostal Studies,” *Enrichment Journal*, 2018, n.p., http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/top/month_holyspirit.cfm [23 March 2018]). More recently, Craig Keener has proposed a more traditional approach of Word and Spirit in connection to the Pentecostal experience (*Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016]) along with more interactive models like Kenneth J. Archer (*A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture, and Community* [New York: T & T Clark International, 2004]) and Amos Yong (*Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002]), who both emphasize a triadic engagement of the Word, the Spirit, and the community.
- 5 Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 18.

- 6 J. D. Charles cites thirteen New Testament virtue lists: 2 Corinthians 6:6-8; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:32; 5:9; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:12; 1 Timothy 4:12; 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22; 3:10; James 3:17; 1 Peter 3:8; and 2 Peter 1:5-7, omitting 1 Corinthians 13, because “it concerns the theological virtues and contains particular features of the ethical catalog.” J. D. Charles, “Virtue and Vice Lists,” *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), cranfordville.com, PDF, 5.
- 7 J. D. Charles (“Virture and Vice Lists,” 5) cites twenty-three New Testament vice lists, twenty-one found in epistles: Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21–22; Romans 1:29-31; 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:10–11; 6:9–10; 2 Corinthians 6:9–10; 12:20–21; Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 4:31; 5:3–5; Colossians 3:5, 8; 1 Timothy 1:9–10; 2 Timothy 3:2–5; Titus 3:3; James 3:15; 1 Peter 2:1; 4:3, 15; Revelation 9:21; 21:8; 22:15.
- 8 Charles, “Virtue and Vice Lists,” 6.
- 9 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 410.
- 10 Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 118.
- 11 Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 410.
- 12 New American Bible, Rev. ed., italics added.
- 13 Formerly known as the “Manual of Discipline,” italics added.
- 14 All Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.
- 15 “First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians,” trans. J. B. Lightfoot, *Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry*, 1990, n.p., <https://carm.org/first-epistle-clement-corinthians> (12 March 2018), italics added.
- 16 “Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve,” trans. Kirsopp Lake, *Early Christian Writings*, n.d., n.p. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-lake.html> (12 March 2018), italics added.
- 17 Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 410.
- 18 Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 412.
- 19 Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 442; author’s italics.
- 20 Brian Rosner, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-7* (New York: Brill, 1994), 121.
- 21 Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 217. Translations in parentheses are from Longenecker.
- 22 All Greek references are from *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed., Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlos M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994).

- 23 Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1089; hereafter cited as BDAG; author's italics.
- 24 BDAG, 1070.
- 25 The KJV, NKJV, and MEV translate the phrase like this.
- 26 E. F. Rogers, "Same-Sex Marriage as an Ascetic Practice in the Light of Romans 1 and Ephesians 5," *Modern Believing* 55.2 (2014): 115–25. doi: 10.3828/mb.2014.14
- 27 Moo, *Romans*, 116. Some of Moo's notes have been incorporated into the quotation above.
- 28 Moo, *Romans*, 116–117.
- 29 Longenecker, 215.
- 30 Both the RSV and ESV are consistent in translating this phrase like this.
- 31 Moo, *Romans*, 110–111, 118.
- 32 C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 33.
- 33 John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans*, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, vol. 11, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 354.
- 34 Frederic Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883), 107.
- 35 Moo, *Romans*, 111.
- 36 Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, "Romans," *Romans-Galatians*, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 49–50.
- 37 Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 92.
- 38 Moo, *Romans*, 113.
- 39 Schreiner, *Romans*, 92.
- 40 Longenecker, *Romans*, 216–217.
- 41 Alexander James Lucas, "Romans 1:18-2:11 and the Substructure of Psalm 106(105): Evocations of the Calf?" (Ph.D. diss., Loyola University, Chicago, 2012), 79, 84, 228–31, http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/419.
- 42 Longenecker, *Romans*, 218.
- 43 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 271.
- 44 R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1913), archive.org. Richard Longenecker points out that "The Testament of Naphthali" "is probably a Jewish writing that was later redacted by first-century Jewish Christians" (218).
- 45 Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 452.
- 46 Schreiner, *Romans*, 94.

- 47 David Garland, 1 *Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 211.
- 48 BDAG, 613.
- 49 Garland, 1 *Corinthians*, 214.
- 50 Philo, *Special Laws*, 3.7.37.
- 51 Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 243–244.
- 52 Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 244.
- 53 Garland, 1 *Corinthians*, 211.
- 54 H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones R, McKenzie, *A Greek and English Lexicon, A Simplified Edition*, ed. Didier Fontaine, 1940, www.areopage.net, 105.
- 55 BDAG, 135.
- 56 BDAG, 135.
- 57 George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 86.
- 58 Philip H. Towner, *The Letters of Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 127–128.
- 59 New International Version note to 1 Corinthians 6:9.
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- 62 Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 108.
- 63 Dale B. Martin, “Arsenokoitês and Malakos: Meaning and Consequences,” in *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert Lawson Brawley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 118–19, 124, 128–129.
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- 70 “The Greek Old Testament (Septuagint),” *The Greek Word*, n.d., n.p., <http://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/septuagint/chapter.asp?book=3&page=18>

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72 Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 213.

73 Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 128.

74 Andreas Kostenberger, "1 Timothy," *Ephesians – Philemon*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 12, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 503–504.

75 Longenecker, *Romans*, 217.

76 BDAG, 946.

77 BDAG, 946.

78 Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 447.

79 Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 338.