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**An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Its  
Discourse in Relation to the Contemporary Church**

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**Abstract**

Human sexuality has been a fundamental and complex issue throughout history. Scholars have debated the meaning of the term “ἀρσενικοῖται” (*arsenokoitai*), used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9, to support their arguments for or against same-sex relationships. In recent times, several countries, primarily in the northern hemisphere, have recognized gay marriage and allowed homosexual practices. The objective of this paper is to examine Paul’s usage of the Greek term *arsenokoitai* in its original context and to explore its theological implications for the contemporary Church. Historical and exegetical methods were employed to analyze the lexical and contextual meanings of the text. Data was gathered partly through interviews with ministers from selected Christian churches and through desk research of relevant online and library sources. The analysis of these sources suggests that, although same-sex relationships were common in the ancient Greco-Roman world, Paul likely coined the term *arsenokoitai* from Leviticus 20:13 to condemn not only same-sex relationships but also other immoral behaviours. The paper concludes that by using the term *arsenokoitai*, Paul

acknowledged that while some individuals in Corinth had engaged in same-sex relationships, they could still seek forgiveness and be cleansed by the blood of Jesus if they repent and accept Christ.

## Keywords

**Keywords: Same Sex, *Arsenokoitai*, 1 Corinthians 6:9, Christians, Contemporary Church**

## Introduction

In his condemnation of all kinds of same-sex practices, Paul seems to have been unquestionable and set standard for Biblical teachings for nearly two thousand years of recorded Christian history. However, beginning from 1960s, some Biblical passages used in supporting prohibition of same-sex relations, have not only been disputed but also vigorously scrutinized by scholars who disagree with the general opinion. One of the vital words at the centre of this argument is the word, *Arsenokoitai*, used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9. *Arsenokoitai* is a unique and controversial word. Many researchers call it *hapax legomena* meaning it is once spoken or used in a single context in any Greek document of its time and for many centuries that followed.

Also, *Arsenokoitai* is a problematic word because it has not been easy for translators to translate it to English language. For instance, some translate it to mean “men who practice homosexuality” (ESV); “men who have sex with men” (NIV); “male prostitutes ... homosexual offenders” (NIV); and so on. These translations appear to agree with the individuals’ view of men who engaged in some kinds of sexual activity of which Paul disapproved. But the translations’ differences outshine their agreement. There are questions such as “Should the terms be understood together or separately? Does the term *Arsenokoitai* denote male homosexual activity generally or the active participant in a homosexual act specifically?”

Again, there has been a great disparity and lack of consensus among Biblical scholars as to what Paul had in mind when he first used the word. Brandon Wallace <sup>1</sup> writes: “there is nothing for at least three hundred years, after the writing of Paul that could shed

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<sup>1</sup> Brandon Wallace (2012), “Response to a Critique” In the Gay Christian Magazine, [www.thegaychristian.com/karl-hand-response](http://www.thegaychristian.com/karl-hand-response). Accessed on 11/06/2022.

light on the meaning of the word". Gene Robinson<sup>2</sup> shares his view about the uniqueness of the word *Arsenokoitai*: that it is found just at two places in the New Testament (1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10) and have nothing either internal to the Scripture or external, to give guidance as to its meaning.

This lack of consensus on the meaning of the word among Biblical scholars has some implications. It points to the reality that there is little understanding about the precise contextual meaning of the word. A more serious implication has to do with the various ethical positions of the Church on the issue that relates to same-sex relationship as we have in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian Church.

## **Context of the Book of 1 Corinthians**

### **Historical Context**

The consideration of a given text in its context either of the Bible or any literary work is very vital. Historical context will greatly help in determining its contextual meaning, as intended by the original author. The book of 1 Corinthians belongs to the category of literature called, the letter or epistle genre. It therefore follows the format of most letters or epistles written during the first century. Frank Decanio pointed out that the basic form of Pauline letter has the following elements... salvation, thanksgiving, body of the letter, exhortation, instruction and closing. Again, carefully reading through the book of 1 Corinthians, one will discover that, it is an occasional letter, written to address specific needs of the church at Roman province of Corinth.

This paper divides the whole sixteen chapters of 1 Corinthians into five parts, namely: introduction, division in the church, issues related to moral and ethical disorder, answers to specific questions asked by the Corinthians and conclusion. The introductory section comprises of Paul's salutation and thanksgiving (1 Cor. 1:1-10). In section two, Paul deals with the issue of division in the church, as reported by the members of the house of Chloe (1Cor. 1:11, 4:21). This division can be attributed to their "... misunderstanding of the essence of Christian leadership (Kelvin, 2003). Section three deals with decadence and other vices committed by members of the Church such as incest, law suit and sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5-6). The fourth section talks about Paul's response to the specific question asked him by the Corinthians on

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<sup>2</sup> Gene, Robinson (2013), "Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy". [www.faithstrett.com/./977](http://www.faithstrett.com/./977). Accessed on 19/06/2020.

issues like: marriage, personal liberty, and conduct during public worship, Spiritual gifts and resurrection (1 Cor. 7-15). The last section deals with conclusion or closing (1 Cor. 16). The focus and limitation of this paper is contextual interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:9 which belongs to the third section as given above.

## **Religious Context**

Apart from its rich historical context, Strabo Hafemarn<sup>3</sup> infers that the religious context of the book of 1 Corinthians also provides a helpful insight for the understanding of the text: 1 Corinthians 6:9. The citizens of the ancient Greek Corinth and their numerous visitors worshipped dozens of gods and goddesses. In fact, scores of cults thrived in the city. Examples include: Apollo, Hermes, Hercules, Athema, Poeidon, Asclepius (the god of healing), Demeter, Isis and Aphrodite, just to mention a few. The most significant pagan cult in Corinth is the cult of Aphrodite. Both the Corinthians and their visitors worshipped Aphrodite or Venus (Roman name) by engaging in sexual act with temple prostitutes. Strabo claims that, "one thousand prostitutes served as slaves for the temple of Aphrodite in Corinth". Several words were coined to describe the numerous vices that characterized the city. For instance, Aristophanes (450-385BC) coined the term, 'Corinthianize' to describe the act of fornication, for which the city was known. Plato uses words such as 'Corinthian Girl' and 'Goddesses' which involved religious sexual prostitution, to depict the act in the Old Greek Corinth before its destruction, and even in the revived Roman Corinth. Craig Keener<sup>4</sup> asserts that the proverbial sexual looseness of ancient Greek Corinth seems to have continued in Roman Corinth as well. Thomas Lee and David Black<sup>5</sup> corroborate Keener's assertion by saying that immorality, contentiousness, heresy and brutality were prosperous in this pagan community.

Interestingly, the worship of gods and goddesses which often involves sexual immorality, most especially, the worship of the goddess of love and fertility- Aphrodite had heavily influenced the thinking of the citizens of Corinth including the members of the

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<sup>3</sup> Strabo J. Hafemann (1993), "Corinthian Letter" in *Gerald F. Hawthorne* (Chief Editor) *Dictionary of Paul and his letters*. (Illinois: Intervarsity Press), 172.

<sup>4</sup> Craig, S. Keener. (1993), "The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament" (Illinois: Intervarsity press), 451.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, D. Lee and David A. Black (2003), "The New Testament: Its Background and Message" (Nashville: B& H Publishing group), 401.

Church there. John Wycliffe<sup>6</sup> posits that many had been brought up to believe that sex was a normal part of worship and that sexual deviations were an acceptable alternative. This is wrong and it is not surprising therefore, to notice issues related to Christian morality being dealt with in Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians.

### Literary Context

Apart from the religious context in which 1 Corinthians 6:9 exists, a close study of the context is also vital to the understanding of this important passage. This immediate context relates particularly to chapters 5 and 6 and the addendum chapter 7 which constitute a distinct section. The beginning of 1 Corinthians 5 marks a major transition that concludes at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter. Here, Paul addresses what Kelvin<sup>7</sup> calls clear-cut breaches in Christian ethics, especially the Christian sexual ethics. The Christian sexual ethics discussed here centres on how Christians should behave differently from those outside the Corinth Church (1 Cor. 5:9-12). Paul started with the case of a member of the Church having sexual intercourse with his father's wife. What upset Paul the most in this situation was that, the Corinthian church members and leaders tolerated and condoned the act. Paul then stated the general principle that Corinthians should not welcome or allow anyone who is sexually immoral into their midst. This principle also applies to the greedy, robbers, idolaters, revellers and drunkards (1 Cor.5:9-11). Paul expected the conduct of the Corinthian Christians to be exemplary, standing in clear contrast to the conduct of the unbelievers in the city of Corinth.

Also, on what should be the clear-cut demarcation between life in the Church at Corinth and life in the outside, Paul finds it abhorrent for believers going to the public court headed by unbelievers to settle disputes among themselves (1 Cor. 6:1-8). On getting to verse 9, Paul repeated what he has said earlier in chapter 5:9-12 where he asserts that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God. He listed ten vices (all nouns) that refer to people who habitually behave in one of these ways. Six of these sins or vices are non-sexual in nature, while the remaining four are sexually related. The word *arsenokoitai* belongs to the category of the four. In 1

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<sup>6</sup> John, Wycliffe (1999), *The New American Commentary*: second Corinthians vol.29. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers), 21.

<sup>7</sup> Kelvin, Giles (2003), "Paul's condemnation of Phoenicia: sexual immorality in 1 Cor. 6:9-10" [www.ethos.org.au/online-Articles/Bi...](http://www.ethos.org.au/online-Articles/Bi...) Accessed on 8/06/2022

Corinthians 6:12-20, Paul concludes the whole section by expressing his concern on how sexual immorality has been accepted in the life of the Corinthian church, the same matter he mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:1. He reviews this matter too in 6:13; 6:18 and 7:2. The repeated use of similar words in chapters 5 and 6 with sexual immorality being prominent gives a remarkable theological insight into Paul's likely primary theme in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6.

It is worthy to note that there exists several overlaps and intertwine in the language and thought of the three sections of 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 namely; 5:1-13; 6:1-11; 6:12-20. The tone, forms of speech and theme of judgment remain the same throughout the three sections. And with sexual immorality prominent in the list, the basic thrust of chapters 5 and 6 is sexual, specifically the right way of dealing with sexual challenges in the face of the imminent end when judgment will be given and the kingdom of God will be attained.<sup>8</sup>

Another part of the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 6:9 is chapter 7 which constitutes an entirely distinct section. This is crystal clear in the introductory aspect of 1 Corinthians 7:1. Paul in response to the questions asked him by the Corinthian Church on the various phases of the subject of marriage, he approves of sexual relation between a husband and his wife, as against forms of sexual immorality which he condemned in chapters 5 and 6. Steven Barabbas argues that while Paul praises celibacy as a valid choice for those who can accept it, he holds marriage to be wise and honorable.<sup>9</sup> Paul equally addresses the issue of circumcision and slavery while asking believers to remain in the marital relationship they were before becoming Christians (1 Cor. 7:16-24).

## Origin and Diverse Translation of the Word

### “ἀρσενοκοῖται” *Arsenokoitai*

There are two main issues closely related to 1 Corinthians 6:9. One has to do with the origin of the word and the other about the correct way to translate the Greek word. The task of tracing the origin or source of the term *Arsenokoitai* has not been easy. Translating the term is much more difficult, being a rare word and scholars differ greatly in their opinions as to how the term should be translated. The

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<sup>8</sup> George, Shillington (1997), “people of God in the court of the world: A study of 1 Cor. 6:1-11” In *Direction*, [www.directionjournal.org](http://www.directionjournal.org)15/1/people... Accessed on 8/06/2022.

<sup>9</sup> Steven, Barabbas (1987), ‘Corinthians, 1 & 2, In J.D Douglas (Ed.) *New International Bible Dictionary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House), 235.

issues that are related to the origin and translation of the term shall be considered one after the other.

### A. Origin of the word *Arsenokoitai*

The origin of the word, *Arsenokoitai*, and the views of scholars about it can be grouped into two. The first view holds that the word is a coinage of Paul, while the second postulates that it is a Jewish coinage from the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 18:20 and 20:13. Scholars like Colin Smith, Bridgeless Canyon, De young and Rembert Truluck among others support the Pauline coinage of the word. Colin Smith asserts that Paul appears to have created it by joining the two words *arseno* (male) and *Koiten* (bed or sexual lying).<sup>10</sup> Bridgeless Canyon (2018) shares the same view that Paul seems to have coined it from two words *arsen* meaning male and *koites* meaning bed.<sup>11</sup> James De Young on his own, explains that Paul coined the term *arsenokoitai*, deriving it from the Septuagint of Leviticus 20:13 and using it for homosexual orientation and behaviour".<sup>12</sup> Rembert Truluck (2012) posits that the word is rare in Greek and Paul was apparently the first author to use this word.<sup>13</sup>

There are also quite a number of scholars who do not agree with the Pauline origin of the word, but, hold to the Jewish coinage of the word from the Septuagint. Scholars like Richard Hays, Eugene Rice and Robin Sroggs just to mention a few hold onto the second position. Richard Hays as quoted by David Gushee<sup>14</sup> surmises that Paul is not altogether being original, but instead, alluding here to the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Hebrew Bible's Leviticus 18:20 and 20:13. Tracing the origin of the word to the Septuagint, Eugene Rice submits that the source of *arsenokoita* is in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible known as the Septuagint. This then means that the word was almost certainly coined by Greek-speaking Jews.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Colin, Smith (1982), "Paul's views on Corinthians and Timothy" in *Gay and Christian-Homosexuality in Corinthians Details*. [www.gaysandslave.com/or-detain.html](http://www.gaysandslave.com/or-detain.html). Accessed on 19/07/2023

<sup>11</sup> Bridgeless, Canyon (2018), "Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians" *In a daily walk* [www.adailywalk.com/11/1Cor./Background.html](http://www.adailywalk.com/11/1Cor./Background.html). Accessed on: 04/06/2023

<sup>12</sup> James, De Young (2021), "The source and N.T. Meaning of *Arsenokoitai* with implications for Christian ethics and ministry" in *Masters Theological Journal*. [www.galaxie.com/article/tins/03-2-05](http://www.galaxie.com/article/tins/03-2-05). Accessed on: 20/06/2023.

<sup>13</sup> Rembert, Truluck (2012), 'Bible and Homosexuality: 1 Timothy 1:9" in *Whoever Magazine*. [www.whosoever.org/bible/tim.shtml](http://www.whosoever.org/bible/tim.shtml). Accessed on 20/06/2021

<sup>14</sup> David, Gushee (2017), "Two odd little words: the LGBT issue part II (Revised)". [www.baptistnews.com/opinion/columns/ite...](http://www.baptistnews.com/opinion/columns/ite...) Accessed on 21/06/2023.

<sup>15</sup> Eugene, Rice (2010), "glbtz>>social science >>Paul, St." [www.glbtq.com/Paul2](http://www.glbtq.com/Paul2). Accessed on 19/06/2023.

Robin Scroggs<sup>16</sup> also supports a non-Pauline origin of the word, *arsenokoitai*, as a Hellenistic Jewish coinage perhaps influenced by awareness of rabbinic terminology. Paul did not originate the term, but borrowed it from circles of Hellenistic Jews acquaintance with rabbinic discussion.

Considering the views of both sides, Paul could have coined the term being the only writer who has used the term in the New Testament. However, the word does not exist in a vacuum; it is possible he coined it from the Septuagint version of Leviticus 18:20 and 20:13. Another possibility is that the word could have been derived from rabbinic discussion of homosexuality based upon the term in Leviticus 18:20 and 20:13. The term "*arsenokoitai*" does not appear in the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 18:20 and 20:13 in the exact form it appears in 1 Corinthians 6:9.

## B. Diverse Translations of the word *Arsenokoitai*

The Greek word, *Arsenokoitai*, has been a bit of a mystery to many scholars. It is a compound Greek word, formed from the joining together of the Greek adjectival prefix for male (*arseno*) and bed (*koitai*). Literally, the word denotes male beds. The accurate translation of the word is highly contested and contentious among scholars. The differences in the way the word is translated to English by many scholars could be attributed to the fact that it appears just twice in the New Testament and is rarely used in the Greek literature of its time. Additionally, the disparity of the translation of the word has made it have different connotations. Justin Canon observes that the variation in translation, points to the fact that there is very little understanding of its precise meaning.

The first translation of the Greek Bible into Latin was done by Jerome in 405 A.D. In this Latin Bible, *Arsenokoitai* is translated as: *Masculorum concubitores*, meaning male concubines. Also, the first English translation of the Greek Bible was done by John Wycliff 1380 A.D and *Arsenokoitaias* was translated as *thei that don lecherie with men*. Over the years, the word has been translated differently by scholars into English. This is very true of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV), as well as other contemporary versions of the Bible in English today. The first edition of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) published in 1946 translates *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 as homosexual. This is the first time the word

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<sup>16</sup> Robin, Scroggs (1972), "The Analytical Greek Lexicon", (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing house), 6.



homosexual will appear in the English Bible. The word homosexual is a Greco-Latin compound word, comprising homo and sexual. Cannon writes the Greek word, consisting of homo, meaning the same, and the Latin term *sexualis*, meaning sex. The term homosexual is of modern origin and it was not until in used till about a hundred years ago after it was first used.<sup>17</sup>

The second edition of RSV was published in 1952, rendering both “μαλακοὶ” (*malakoi*) and “ἀρσενοκοῖται” (*arsenokoitai*) as same. The 1977 version of RSV replaced homosexuals with sexual pervers for both *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. Rogers Matt<sup>18</sup> observed that the translators did not state whether the sexual pervers were homosexuals or heterosexuals or both. There is a remarkable change in 1989 revision of the RSV as the Greek words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* were translated separately; the former is translated as male prostitute, while the later as sodomites. The King James Version translates *arsenokoitai* as abusers of themselves with mankind, while the New King James version uses ‘sodomites’. Other English translations of the Greek word *arsenokoitai* in the Bible include: (NKJV) sodomites; (NASB) homosexuals; (NED) homosexual perversion; (NIV) homosexual offenders and so on. Jeremy Townsley<sup>19</sup> (1989) in one of his scholarly works traced the translation of the words, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* through history. His research further attests to the fact that *arsenokoitai* is a difficult word to translate.

## Analysis of 1 Corinthians 6:9

The term *Lexico* here refers to words and their meaning. *Lexico* analysis therefore seeks to study the meaning of each key word in the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 6:9.

### Text in Greek

ἢ οὐκοῖδατε ὅτι ἄδικοι θεοῦ βασιλείαν οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν; ἢ μὴ  
 πλανᾶσθε: οὔτε πόρνοι οὔτε εἰδωλόατρα οὔτε μοιχοὶ οὔτε  
 μαλακοὶ οὔτε ἀρσενοκοῖται

<sup>17</sup> Glaze, R.E (2020), “Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians background” *In a daily walk* [www.adailywalk.com/11/1Cor./Background.htm](http://www.adailywalk.com/11/1Cor./Background.htm). Accessed on 04/06/2023.

<sup>18</sup> Rogers, Matt (2019), “Matt Rogers>>Paul on homosexuality: part six” . [www.mattrogers.us/..1](http://www.mattrogers.us/..1) Accessed on 23/06/2023

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy, Townsley (1989), *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 306-12.

## Text in English

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor the idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts...” (Revised Standard Version).

## Word Study

Here, the key verse and noun used in Greek text of 1 Corinthians. 6:9 such as: οἶδατε, κληρονομήσουσιν, πλανᾶσθε, ἄδικοι, θεοῦ, πόρνοι, εἰδωλόατραι, μοιχοὶ, μαλακοὶ, ἀρσενοκοῖται shall be examined. In all, there are three verbs and eight nouns in the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 6:9.

οἶδατε: Parsing this verb indicates that it is the second person plural perfect active indicative of οἶδα which denotes to know, to know how, to regard with favour. William Arndt<sup>20</sup> describes it as to know, know about something, be intimately acquainted with, and know or understand how.

Κληρονομήσουσιν: This is the third person plural, future active indicative of κληρονομεῶ, meaning to inherit, to enter into full possession of something. Sakae Kubo describes it simply as inherit.

πλανᾶσθε: This word is a second person, plural present passive indicative or imperative of πλανᾶω, which denotes to deceive or err. Fritz Rienecker submits that the verb signifies to lead astray, mislead, or to deceive.

ἄδικοι: This word is a nominative plural masculine of ἄδικος which denotes unjust, unrighteous, iniquitous, vicious, deceit, and fallacious. In classical Greek, this covers all that offends, “against morals, customs, norm or decency; all that is unseemly, unspeakable or fraudulent”. Schrenk<sup>21</sup> (1985) affirms that it denotes violator of the law. In the Septuagint, the word refers to deceit, fraud, lie and so on. (Ps. 63:11; Prov. 6:17; Jer. 5:31).

Βασιλείαν: This word is an accusative singular of βασιλεία, meaning a kingdom, realm, the region or country that is governed by a king, kingly power, authority, dominion, reign, royal dignity and so on. In classical Greek, it is described as an abstract noun denoting the fact of being the king, the position or power of the king... the area cover which a king reigns, his kingdom. The classical

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<sup>20</sup> William, F. Arndt, (1987), “*Epistle of the Corinthians*”, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987, 154.

<sup>21</sup> Schrenk, George (1985), ‘alkos’ in Geoffrey W. Bromiley (ed), *New International Dictionary of New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing company), 23-24.

Greek usage agrees with the lexical meaning earlier given. In the LXX, it denotes kingdom or reign. The reference is usually to power rather than locality (1 Sam. 20:31; 1 Kgs. 2:12; 1 Chro. 12:23; 11 Chro. 11:17; Dan. 9:1; Ps. 103:19; 145:11-13 etc). In the New Testament, it refers to being, or natural, or state of a King (Lk. 19:12, 15; Rev. 7:12; Matt. 4:8; 12:25) Kingdom of the devil (Matt. 12:26), Kingdom of Christ (Matt. 13:41; 16:28; Lk. 22:30 etc), Kingdom of God (Jh. 3:5; Matt. 13:43; 26:29).

θεοῦ: This word is a genitive singular of θεος, denoting an idol, the true God, deity and so on. The origin of the word has been a subject of considerable discussion among scholars. Some scholars argue that it is originally used as a title. In classical Greek, the word refers to the Greek gods, who are presented in anthropomorphic form as personal being, though Greek philosophy conceives the gods as non-personal beings.

In the LXX, the word occurs 300 times, usually as an equivalent of *El* and *Elohim*. These two Hebrew words “are (the) generic designation of God and are not limited to Israel alone; but are words common to all Semitic languages.”<sup>22</sup> It can be found in passages like: Hosea 11:9; Exodus 20:4; Isaiah 52:7; 37:18; 40:25; Habakkuk 3:3 and so on. In the New Testament doctrine of God and in a few contexts, it refers to pagan god or goddess. The New Testament adds a new fact to the Old Testament doctrine of God in that, He is presented as being near and the father of Jesus Christ (Matt. 23:9; Rev. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:4; Gal. 3:20; 1 Tim. 2:5; Js. 2:19).

Πόρνοι: This word is a nominative plural of πόρνος. In classical Greek, it refers to a person who has sexual intercourse with prostitute; an immoral male, male prostitute or whoremonger. In its usage in the LXX, the word signifies fornication, to play the harlot (Gen. 38:15; Jos. 2:1; Jud. 11:1; 16:1; 1 Kgs 3:16). In the New Testament, it connotes prostitution, a fornicator or impure person (Matt. 21:31-32; 1 Cor. 1:26; 6:12; 2 Cor. 12:21; Heb. 11:31).

εἰδωλολάτραι: This word is a genitive feminine singular of εἶδος. In classical Greek, it refers to the images of the gods or idols. In the LXX, it signifies the images of the heathen gods and the deities represented by them (Ex. 20:3-4; Deut. 5:7-8). The New Testament uses it as a reference to false god (Rom. 2:22; 1 Cor. 10:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Thess. 1:9)

<sup>22</sup> Glaze, R.E (2020), “Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians background” *In a daily walk* [www.adailywalk.com/11/1Cor./Background.htm](http://www.adailywalk.com/11/1Cor./Background.htm). Accessed on 04/06/2023.

μοιχοὶ: This is a nominative word and vocative plural of μοιχος which Liddell<sup>23</sup> describes as “adulterer, paramour, seducer”. In classical Greek, the law strictly forbids adulterous women and grants to the husbands or family the right of revenge. The LXX usage covers every extra-marital sexual relationship by a married woman and the extra-marital relationship of a man with a married or engaged woman (Gen. 38:15; Lev. 19:20-22; Deut. 22:28-29). In the New Testament, it is used in the same sense as the Old Testament. Adultery on the man’s part is unreservedly measured by the same standard as in the woman (Mtt. 5:32; Mk. 10:11-12; Lk. 16:18).

μαλακοὶ: This is a nominative plural masculine of μαλακος. In classical Greek, it refers to effeminate men (men and boys who indulge in homosexual acts). Greek medical writers describe it as a weakness or an illness but LXX uses it for sickness (Deut. 7:15; Isaiah 38:9; 53:3). New Testament uses it as soft, soft to touch, delicate (Mtt. 11:8; Lk. 7:25), an instrument of unnatural lust, effeminate (1 Cor. 6:9). Fritz Rienecker regards it as a technical term for the passive partner in homosexual relation.<sup>24</sup>

ἀρσενοκοῖται: This particular word occupies a central place in this research. It is a nominative masculine plural of ἀρσενοκοῖτης. It has been translated differently as sodomites, perverts, homosexuals, the abusers of themselves with mankind. Liddell simply describes it as one guilty of sexual perversion.<sup>25</sup> The noun, ἀρσενοκοῖτης, is derived from two Greek words: ἀρσεν denoting, male as opposed to female (with strong emphasis on sex), a male child and κοῖτης which signify bed, marriage bed, den of an animal or the nest of a bird, to lie down, co-habitation (whether lawful or unlawful). It is also used in a number of instances in association with sexual intercourse (Lev. 15:18; 19:20; Micah 5:13; Prov. 7:17; Hebrews 13:4 and so on).

## Paul’s Meaning of *Arsenokoittai* and Its Implication for the Contemporary Church

The difficulty in the choice of the appropriate English word that best translates *Arsenokoittai*, also applies to the meaning of the word as originally used by Paul. *Arsenokoittai* is derived from the combination of two Greek words: *Arseno* (male) and *koittai* which signifies bedroom or bed; and euphemistically denotes lying with or having

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<sup>23</sup> Liddell, G.T. (1998), “ἀρσεν” Greek - English Lexicon (Oxford: The Clarendon Press), 450.

<sup>24</sup> Fritz, Rienecker (1998), *Practical word studying in the New Testament* vol.2 (Chattanooga: Leadership ministries).

<sup>25</sup> Liddell, G.T. (1998), “ἀρσεν” Greek - English Lexicon, 450

sex with someone. *Arsenokoitai* simply describes the active males who are doing the bedding (sexual act), regardless of whom the partners are. Scholars however differ in their arguments on the full extent of Paul's intended meaning of *Arsenokoitai* as used in 1 Corinthians 6:9.

On one hand, some scholars argue that Paul condemns all men in general, who are active partners in male-male sexual act. On the other hand, some are of the opinion that, *Arsenokoitai* does not apply to all males who play any active role in male-male sexual act. Bill Fortenberry contends that *arsenokoitai* is a reference to homosexuals.<sup>26</sup> He argues that *arsenokoitai* is a compound word coined from the Septuagint version of Leviticus 20:13. David Wright is of the opinion that the compound word refers to those who sleep with males and denotes male homosexual activities.<sup>27</sup> Scholars like Robin Scroggs and Boswell do not agree with the views of Bill Fortenberry and David Wright. While Robin Scroggs posits that the word denotes "exploitative pederasty",<sup>28</sup> Boswell believes that the word refers to homosexual rape or homosexual prostitution.<sup>29</sup> Robert Gagnon explains that the two words, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, describe individuals who are engaged in an activity that Paul regards to be *sin*.<sup>30</sup>

From the above, it can be deduced that there are diverse interpretations of the words. This researcher is of the view that Fortenberry and David Wright's interpretations are more appropriate and correct. Looking at the two words, they fall in a much longer list of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Paul insists that people whose lives are characterized by these actions "will (not) inherit the kingdom of God." There is a considerable overlap between this list and the list of 1 Corinthians 5:11 which describe individuals who are subject to the discipline of the church. Also, these two terms together capture the range of male same-sex activity which is contradictory to the word of God but found practiced by some believers. Though, some have argued that Paul is only condemning a particular or narrow kind of homosexual behaviour, such as prostitution,

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<sup>26</sup> Bill, Fortenberry (2015), *People To Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just An Issue*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 107, 118.

<sup>27</sup> David, Wright (1987), *An introduction to the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 40.

<sup>28</sup> Robin, Scroggs (1972), "The Analytical Greek Lexicon", (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing house), 6.

<sup>29</sup> Boswell, Black (1994), "Literary context of first Corinthians", In *Lives matter: Jesus died and rose again*. [www.biblicalfaith.tumblr.com/post/28394](http://www.biblicalfaith.tumblr.com/post/28394), Accessed on 18/06.2023

<sup>30</sup> Robert, A. J. Gagnon (2001), *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, (Nashville: Abingdon), 303-39.

pederasty, or rape. But on a careful reading of the text, there is a space in Paul's ethic for homosexual activity between two consenting adults and not on forceful engagements. This view runs through Paul's argument in Rom 1:18-32. The last verse says "Who knowing the judgement of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (KJV). For one thing in Paul's day, the term, *malakos* had already acquired a meaning when it was used in sexual contexts.

In his own submission, Preston Sprinkles asserts that the term, *arsenokoitai*, is a compound word formed from two nouns meaning "man" and "bed".<sup>31</sup> Its origins are not difficult to discover. These two terms appear together in LXX Lev 18:22 and 20:13. In fact, in Leviticus 20:13, the two component parts of Paul's new word stands side by side. Both these passages in Leviticus roundly and categorically condemn same-sex activity. This word *arsenokoitai* must refer to a wide range of male same-sex activity and may properly be translated "bedders of males, those (men) who take (other) males to bed," "men who sleep or lie with males". Since it is paired with the word *malakoi*, the word *arsenokoitai* may particularly denote the active partner in male same-sex activity. The two terms, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, then, capture, in unqualified and comprehensive fashion, male same-sex activity.

James De Young avers that Paul is concerned with the address of sinful sexual behavior in these two terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. He added that in Paul's day, the term *malakoi* could denote more than just a sexual activity. Such persons sometimes "intentionally engage (d) in a process of feminization to erase further their masculine appearance and manner".<sup>32</sup> That is to say, the word, *malakos* was used to describe a man who is trying to be a woman or a man who significantly blur (s) gender distinctions. This signifies that Paul's primary concern in 1 Cor. 6:9 is with same-sex behavior. The Apostle is also aware that, in the social context of which he and his readers were part, those who committed themselves to this lifestyle are not infrequently blurred with the culturally discernible lines between a man and a woman. It is in this

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<sup>31</sup> Preston, Sprinkle (1998), LXX Lev 18:22 reads καὶ μετὰ ἄρσεως οὐκοιμηθήσῃ κοίτην γυναικὸς βδέλγμα γάρεστιν. Lev 20:13 reads ὁς ἄνκοιμηθῇ μετὰ ἄρσεως κοίτην γυναικὸς, βδέλγμα ἐποίησαν ἀμφότεροι ἔνοχοί εἰσιν. θανατοῦσθωσαν, Accessed on 12/09/2023

<sup>32</sup> James, De Young (2021), "The source and N.T. Meaning of *Arsenokoitai* with implications for Christian ethics and ministry" in *Masters Theological Journal*. [www.galaxie.com/article/tins/03-2-05](http://www.galaxie.com/article/tins/03-2-05), Accessed on 20/06/2023.



sense that one can appreciate the translation “effeminate” for *malakoi*, even if one opts for another English word that better captures the sense of the Greek word in the context of Paul’s argument.

The use of the word *arsenokoitai* in the teachings of Paul has some implications for the contemporary church. First, Paul helps the Church to see that there is more to same-sex sin than the physical act of same-sex intercourse. In Paul’s day, some persons who engaged in the act consciously attempted to blur the lines between male and female. In the contemporary society, some countries in North and South America who have legalized same-sex marriage are of the opinion that the step was to eradicate gender inequality. On the contrary, Paul was sensitive and attentive to the ways in which this sin can foster and encourage a sinful distortion of a person’s God-given masculinity (or femininity). Similarly, many African leaders have been very sensitive on the issue and therefore refused to legalise same-sex marriage.

Professor and Evangelist Taiye Opoola in an interview explains that in 1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul references *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in the third person but concludes with an appeal which begins as “such were some of you” (1 Cor. 6:11). One of the implications of this way of speaking to the Corinthians then is the recognition that sinners often come to draw their identity from particular sins to which they give themselves freely. In other words, they are known for and may even come to see themselves in light of a particular sin. That was the situation in which some of the Corinthians had found themselves, but no longer. Today, one hears that some Christians may legitimately identify themselves as “gay Christians.” For instance, marriage equality is not largely limited to countries in North and South America, but also in Europe and Oceania. South Africa is the only country in Africa and only Taiwan in Asia that have legalise same-sex marriage. For Apostle Paul, a “gay Christian” is a contradiction in terms. One may identify as “gay” or identify as “Christian” but should not identify as both at the same time. This is the position of most Christian leaders in Africa. Christians’ basic and comprehensive identity is to be in Christ. Just as Paul persuaded the Corinthians in the verses that follow to “flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18, 6:12-20), Christians in the contemporary society are also admonished to do the same. Any Christian wrestling with temptations of same-sex sin must be decisive to flee to Christ for the resources needed to fight sin.

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:9 are a reminder that people today even Christians are susceptible to the temptations of same-sex sin. It is not just that he reminds the church that "some" of them had been enmeshed in such sins but the warning of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 also assumes the possibility of professing Christians falling into the sins that he enumerates in those verses. This submission is supported by the researcher because there is no Biblical reason to think that any Christian is somehow immune to temptation of such sins, or free from their commission. Those who preach and teach the word of God, especially, must never make the fatal error of assuming that same-sex sin, in any of its forms, lies entirely outside the walls of the church. However, Paul's words are full of grace. For example, in Verse 11 of the 6 Chapter, he reminds believers of the resources that are available in Christ to cover the guilt of sin, to dethrone the dominion of sin, and to mortify indwelling sin, "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". Based on the above statement, Paul does not promise Christians that they will be spared setbacks or deep grief in conflict with this sin or any other sin but the joy in Christ that lies before them is well worth the fight. And even in the fight, Paul does not exonerate himself as he said we know that "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

## Conclusion

Same-sex was a common and accepted practice in the ancient Greco-Roman world. In fact, there are standard terminologies for talking about these relationships. Paul, however, did not use any of these. Instead, he probably coined a word from Leviticus 20:13, *Arsenokoitai*, which may refer to all males who play active roles in sexual intercourse with other males. Paul does not focus the search light of his condemnation of same-sex relationship alone but on other vices too. Paul identifies in 1 Corinthians 6:9, male same-sex behaviour as sinful. He places none of the qualifications or limitations upon that behaviour for which some in recent times have pleaded. There is, in other words, no category of acceptable or virtuous same-sex behaviour in Paul's thinking as interpreted by some scholars. He recognizes that what may move one to attend such behavior is the conscious blurring of culturally discernible lines between masculinity and femininity. This practice is alien to Africans even though some engage in it.



Like the discussion on lawsuits (6:1-11), Paul appeals to future realities to inform present moral thought and action. The Corinthians thought that sexual desire meant the body was designed to be satisfied by any sexual partner or any sexual act. In a counter parallel to the food slogan, Paul places the purpose of the body under the use of the Lord. As food is made to quash stomach desires and the stomach was created to eat food (so said Corinth, wrongly), so the Lord exists to benefit the body and the body shows needs of fulfilment from the Lord. It is then disheartening that some civilized countries encourage and legalize the act of homosexuality.

The theological implication of the teachings of Paul is that same-sex relationship is not the only a vice that excludes one from the Kingdom of God. Paul's reference to the Old Testament in order to address an issue in the New Testament Church is a pointer to the fact that both Testaments condemn the act and this condemnation applies to present day Christians. It has been established that same-sex sin may occur among Christians. The good news is that the sin is pardonable by God if the offender repents. It can be forgiven and washed by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:11). Just as Paul admonishes the Corinthians to be cognizant of the fact that their body is the temple of God and not their own, it is also recommended that Christians should flee from sin. Their body has been bought by a price and therefore should glorify God with their body by not committing same-sex practices (1 Corinthians. 6:19).

Finally, if Paul could further condemn thieves, the greedy, drunkards and extortionists (1 Cor. 6:10), then, his condemnation of same-sex practices should not be questioned or mis-interpreted.