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**CORINTHIANS  
 6: 9-11 AS A  
 CARIBBEAN  
 RESPONSE TO  
 THE  
 HOMOSEXUAL  
 AGENDA**  
 by  
*JULIE-ANN  
 DOWDING*

MA (Hons) CGST

### Cultural Background of the Recipients

As a centre of economic opportunity, the new Corinth was not only resettled by Greeks, but also attracted persons from other parts of the Roman Empire, including retired soldiers, freedmen from Rome, traders, entrepreneurs, and sailors. It was characterised by the typical moral decadence of a port city amidst which sexual immorality was rife. The realities of this can be seen in Paul's lengthy discussions regarding incest (5:1-13), prostitution (6:12-19), marriage (7:1-2, 5, 8-9), and his references to adultery and homosexuality in 6:9.

Although Corinth was governed under Roman law, culture, and religion, like much of the Empire, the Hellenistic influence was strong: Greek was the common language, and Greek religion, philosophy and culture pervaded the Empire. Hellenistic elevation of wisdom and a corresponding emphasis on rhetoric and philosophical argumentation prevailed, and gifted rhetors/orators were 'both admired and followed' like heroes. In the church at Corinth, misguided pagan views on wisdom (1:18-2:15) and the rallying of persons around different leaders so as to create factions (1:10-17, 3:1-4:21), demonstrate the manner in which this culture played out. In such an atmosphere of corporate disunity and dissension, the door was opened for competing and immature perspectives on many issues, including sexuality (5:1-12; 6:12-20). Greek culture and philosophy, adopted by the Romans, also endorsed homosexuality of various kinds. Paederasty, the most common form, had been an entrenched facet of Greek society. Outstanding Greek philosophers, orators and poets such as Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Plutarch and others – greatly admired by Roman society – had not only extolled the praises and virtues of paederasty in their writings but also engaged in paederastic unions themselves.<sup>1</sup> The practice was carried over into the multi-ethnic and pluralistic Roman Empire. Biting criticisms of paederasty are provided by Philo, Josephus and others roughly contemporaneous with Paul.<sup>2</sup>

Arguments that suggest paederasty was the only known form of homosexuality during the time of Paul, however, are erroneous. As early as circa 385-380 B.C., Plato's celebrated *Symposium* provided a striking appreciation of adult-adult mutuality in relationships, long-term commitments in which age was irrelevant, and concepts

<sup>1</sup> Boswell, 50-51, 345-56. De Young, 253.

<sup>2</sup> Fee, 243. Also De Young, 247-48.

which can only today be described as homosexual ‘orientation’ or ‘inversion.’<sup>3</sup> While some scholars over-emphasise the cultural unacceptability of an adult male engaging in the passive homosexual role as grounds to exclude any form but paederasty, there is nevertheless evidence of homosexual unions in which both the active and passive partners were far beyond boyhood and adolescence.<sup>4</sup> This was due to a departure from traditional sexual roles (passive vs. active) to more reciprocal erotic relations by the time of the early Empire; and “[m]any homosexual relationships were permanent and exclusive.”<sup>5</sup> The emperors Caligula and Nero (who both reigned during the time of Paul), were known not only for their homosexual unions, but for enjoying the passive homosexual role.<sup>6</sup>

Greek religious concepts were active and alive in the Roman Empire. The promiscuity of the Greek gods cannot be overlooked when analysing the Corinthian perspective on sexual morality, and the participation of the chief god Zeus in homosexual acts was significant to the cultural acceptability of homosexuality, as noted by Aristide in his *Apology*.<sup>7</sup> Greek religion also featured a dualism/disjunction between body (*sarx*) and spirit (*pneuma*)—later widely perpetuated through Neo-Platonism.<sup>8</sup> This created a mindset where the body was free to engage in any kind of activity, since the spirit was all that mattered. Thus, sexual prudence was not considered relevant to spirituality, as can be seen in 6:12-19. Amidst this pagan background, the Corinthian congregation had been exposed to Old Testament teachings and the Law. These would have been introduced by Paul as constituting the word of God during his evangelistic outreach and pastoral ministry, and would have continued to be used in their gatherings, as in the other churches. This fact is evidenced by a number of direct quotes, paraphrases, and allusions, and the inclusion of the Law as a basis for Christian teaching (9:8-9).

### **Occasion and Purposes: Historical Reconstruction**

The Corinthian church had been birthed under the preaching of Paul during his second missionary journey (Acts 18).<sup>9</sup> He remained with the new congregation for one-and-a-half years, and had left the church well established in the spring of A.D. 51 or 52.<sup>10</sup> Following

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<sup>3</sup> De Young, 189-91.

<sup>4</sup> Boswell, 81-82.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Boswell, 75 incl. n. 66; 81-82 incl. n. 98; 130 n. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Wright, “Homosexuals or prostitutes?” 132-33.

<sup>8</sup> Carson and Moo, 445.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 420.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 421.

his departure, other leaders and apostles carried on the role of ministering to the church, with Peter and Apollos obviously contributing at one or more points in time (1:12, 3:22).

Some time thereafter, Paul was made aware of problems that had arisen in the church, in response to which he penned a first letter (the “previous letter” of 5:9, referred to as Corinthians A) that has not been preserved, but warned against associating with immoral people.<sup>11</sup> The content of the letter was evidently misunderstood and did not achieve its desired effect (5:9-12).<sup>12</sup> As he neared the end of his mission in Ephesus (c. AD 52 to c. AD 55),<sup>13</sup> Paul received further disturbing reports from Chloe’s household (1:11) and Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17), along with a letter from the church requesting his advice on certain matters (7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). This information provided the framework for First Corinthians, which constitutes his second letter (Corinthians B) in attempting to resolve the issues plaguing the church. Among these problems are cases of immorality involving grave sexual misconduct, and an improper understanding of celibacy, marriage, and divorce.

First Corinthians is thus an occasional letter, written to address specific issues and persons (as opposed to a general, or ‘tractate’ letter).<sup>14</sup> It is not a circular correspondence providing general theological information. Paul’s statements and arguments are targeting specific and troubling issues at hand, and warnings such as that of 6:9-11 are absolutely not rhetorical as scholars such as Scroggs have charged. The so-called ‘vice list’ of 6:9-10 speaks to real people in terms of lifestyles they practiced before their conversion (6:11) with a warning to not revert to such behavior, or refrain from it if they already had reverted. Such behaviours – incest, litigation between believers, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality *et al* – are characteristic of the unredeemed and are unacceptable among those saved by Christ for the Kingdom of God (5:1, 9-11; 6:1-8).

Paul’s objectives were: (1) to provide clarity and godly correction to the Corinthians in areas where they were spiritually immature and lacking in understanding – one of which was sexual morality; and (2) to answer questions pertaining to the various matters on which they were seeking his guidance (7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). The apostle aims to do so without compromise to the gospel and irrespective of

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 422.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 421.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 415.

strong opposing opinion, all while trying to restore harmony in what had become a very divided congregation – a segment of which had also become disdainful of (or perhaps even hostile to) his leadership/authority as 1 Cor.4 suggests. Despite these problems, Paul evidently expected a favourable response from the Corinthians (his spiritual children, 4:15), and did not think it necessary to personally go to them (although it becomes apparent in Second Corinthians that further intervention, including a visit by Paul, eventually proved necessary).

### **Cultural Background of the Author**

The relative weight of Paul's Jewish, Hellenistic and Christian influences must be borne in mind in order to have a proper understanding of his thoughts.<sup>15</sup> Although born as a Roman citizen in the Hellenistic city of Tarsus, the apostle Paul's background is decidedly Jewish, not Greco-Roman, and is foundational to his views on all issues of life. An appreciation of this fact is crucial in understanding Paul's perspective on sexual matters in First Corinthians. Unlike the Greeks with their pantheon of gods who engaged in flagrant sexual promiscuity, homosexuality and general immorality, Paul knows of the one true God, through whom one clear standard for life – including morality – is revealed (Dover, 203).<sup>16</sup> His understandings of God and morality were first shaped by an upbringing in accordance with strict Jewish customs (Phil 3:5), and he lived as a proud and devout Pharisee prior to his Damascus experience (Phil. 3:6).

Aspects of this Jewish background carried over to Paul's Christian life and understanding. He continued to reject pagan immorality (Rom. 1:26ff.), and to regard the Old Testament as the Holy Scripture (Rom. 1:2; 4:3) – inspired of God, and thus still useful for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).<sup>17</sup> Any deviations from traditional Jewish perspectives concern Paul's more complete understanding of God and the Old Testament Scriptures in light of the revelation of Christ as both Jewish Messiah and Saviour of all mankind. The Law is incapable of providing righteousness or justification as per Judaism's perspective; justification is by faith in Christ, 'entirely apart from and in contrast to the works of the Law.'<sup>18</sup> As such, the finished cleansing, sanctifying and justifying work of Christ, which the Corinthians had appropriated by faith, declares them "saints" (1:2) and different from what they formerly "were" (6:11) – even as some

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<sup>15</sup>Ladd, 398.

<sup>16</sup> Dover, 203, in Wold, 193.

<sup>17</sup> Ladd, 401.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 404.

continued to struggle in the proper outworking of this faith in terms of sexuality and other conduct.

However, for those who wish to read into the principle of ‘justification by faith’ a complete abrogation or nullification of the Law, a proper understanding of the results of Paul’s encounter with the exalted Christ is necessary. ‘Saul was not converted ... from irreligion to religion, nor even from one religion to another, since he considered Christianity to be the true Judaism. He was converted from one understanding of righteousness to another – from his own righteousness of works to God’s righteousness by faith.’<sup>19</sup> Within the parameters of this revelation, his basic views on sexual morality, as shaped by the Old Testament, remain essentially unchanged.

In the debate surrounding the New Testament (Pauline) condemnation of homosexuality (1 Cor. 6:9-11; also Rom. 1:26ff., and 1 Tim. 1:10), those who claim that Paul would not have appealed to the Law (Lev. 18:23 and 20:13) and to the old (the Creation accounts, the Sodom account) in order to justify the new,<sup>20</sup> have entirely misunderstood the mind and theology of Paul. He is easily able to distinguish between the permanent, ethical aspect of the Law and its temporary ceremonial aspect<sup>21</sup> – the latter having functioned as divinely-based ethnic distinctions and/or as foreshadows of Christ (with homosexuality satisfying neither criteria). Thus, in 1 Cor. 7:19, circumcision is of no relevance, yet believers are exhorted to keep the law. ‘[Paul] never thinks of the Law as being abolished. It remains the expression of the will of God.’<sup>22</sup> This is evident from his frequent assertion that redemption in Christ enables believers in some real sense to fulfill/uphold the Law (Rom. 3:31, Rom. 8:3-4) and from his reference to specific commandments as ‘the norm for Christian conduct’ (Rom. 13:8-10; Eph. 6:2).<sup>23</sup> In 1 Cor. 6:9-10, those who by their actions indicate that they have failed to recognise the perpetuity of the laws against homosexuality (or incest, adultery, and other forms of sexual immorality) have essentially rejected the rule (Kingdom) of God and, as a result, exclude themselves from the eternal community (Kingdom) of God.

### **Paul, the Letter to the Corinthians, and the Levitical Proscriptions**

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 406.

<sup>20</sup> Boswell, 105.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 554.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 553.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 553-54.

Numerous linkages support the argument that Paul had the Holiness Code in mind as he responded to issues in the Corinthian church in chapters 5-6.<sup>24</sup> There is a common theme of “moral separation to God,” which includes issues of “distinction from the Gentiles (5:1; see also 6:1-6; Levit. 18:3, 24-30; 20:23) and future inheritance (*klēronomeō*, 6:9, 10; Levit. 20:23-24).”<sup>25</sup> The idea of moral separation in Leviticus 19-20 centres on the holiness of God and a resulting expectation of holiness on the part of His people – hence, the term “Holiness Code.” This is expressed as a call to “be holy” (Greek *hagioi*/Hebrew *qadōsh*) and in the declaration of the people as being sanctified/made holy by the LORD (Greek *hagiazō*/Hebrew *qadash*):

19:2 Be holy(*hagioi/qadōsh*) because I the LORD am holy (*hagios/qadōsh*).

20:7 Consecrate yourselves and be holy(*esesthe hagioi hoti hagos/qadash*<sup>26</sup>), because I am the LORD your God.

20:8 Keep my decrees and follow them: I am the LORD, who makes you holy/sanctifies (*qadash*) you.

20:26 You are to be holy(*hagioi/qadōsh*) to me because I, the LORD, am holy(*hagios/qadōsh*), and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

Paul’s references to believers in 1 Cor. 6:9-11 and elsewhere in the epistle are reminiscent of these concepts (1 Cor. 1:2; 3:16-17; 6:1-2, and 19-20; see pp. 89-90 above), echoing the levitical call to live in a manner conducive to having been set apart (made holy/sanctified) by God. Holiness – the levitical term for the highest moral virtue – is established as the ground of even sexual conduct,<sup>27</sup> a principle that is reiterated in 1 Corinthians.

Other parallels to the Holiness Code in First Corinthians include:<sup>28</sup>

- (1) 1 Cor. 6:8, which reflects the law of loving your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18);
- (2) The ten vices of 1 Cor. 6:9-10, of which only drunkenness is not found in Leviticus 18-20
- (3) The literary pattern of incest (1 Cor. 5:1-13) followed by homosexuality (6:9-11) and prostitution (6:12-20), which

<sup>24</sup>De Young, 195-96.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 196.

<sup>26</sup>*Hithpael waw consecutive Perfect 2nd person Masculine plural.*

<sup>27</sup>Wold, 99.

<sup>28</sup>De Young, 196.

parallels the pattern of incest and homosexuality in Leviticus 18 and 20.

- (4) Paul's disciplinary approach regarding the person engaged in incest, which is reflective of the *kārat* concept. According to the *kārat* penalty of Lev. 18:29, persons guilty of the sins listed, such as incest and homosexuality, were to be "cut-off" from the community of God (through banishment, execution, or direct divine judgment). In 1 Cor. 5:1-11, Paul similarly calls upon the church to enforce discipline by removing the guilty (defiled) individual from fellowship and handing him over to Satan so that his spirit might be saved (5:2, 5). Paul's discussion of incest in a context of sexually immorality (5:9-11), and the inclusion of the sexual immoral with the other categories of vices/immoral persons (6:9-10), allows for the disciplinary instructions regarding incest to function as a paradigm for dealing with persons engaging in other immoral acts, including homosexuals.<sup>29</sup>

'Paul's method of interpreting the Old Testament places him in the tradition of rabbinic Judaism.'<sup>30</sup>While we cannot be certain whether Paul became an ordained rabbi, he received rabbinical training in Jerusalem under the outstanding Jewish teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and his letters betray thinking and argument like that of a Jewish rabbi. His exposition on incest in Chapter 5 and the stance to be adopted by the church uses rabbinic principles. This is significant, as the application of these principles therefore carries over to any other forms of sexual immorality mentioned in the immediate context, including adultery, homosexuality, and prostitution. The source of his views on sexuality would be based on the creation account and the regulations of the Torah which, as demonstrated above, would have included the proscriptions against homosexuality in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. Any suggestions that these would not have been in Paul's mind as he formulated his response to the Corinthians would be to ignore his fundamental moral compass. As Ladd states: 'Since Paul regards the Old Testament so highly as the word of God, we will not be surprised to find that his theological thought is grounded in Old Testament theology.'<sup>31</sup>This would include his understanding of anthropology,<sup>32</sup> inclusive of taxonomy and other issues that modernity would place under the social and biological sciences.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ladd, 401.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 434.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



Although Paul's writings feature elements that can only have come from exposure to Greek thought and culture, including a style frequently reminiscent of stoic diatribe, and words that are particular to Greek religion and philosophy, his treatment of these terms does not carry the Greek religious ideas with which they were associated.<sup>33</sup> Pauline thought on the use of the body, the relationship of body to soul, his views of what is according to or against 'nature' (Romans 1), and the relation of these to sexuality and the unacceptability of homosexuality, are best interpreted against a distinctly Jewish – not Greek – background.

It is not likely that Paul would have received formal education in Greek philosophy and literature in light of his conservative Jewish family background.<sup>34</sup> His familiarity with Greek ideas and language is more likely to have come from informal exposure to the Hellenistic environment of Tarsus,<sup>35</sup> and from his missionary travels, which included lengthy sojourns in which he would have become familiar with each place and its people, and engaged in conversation over religious matters. Paul's Hellenized Gentile companions and friends (example, Luke, Titus, Gaius *et al*) would likely have added to his knowledge of the culture and philosophy by the time he wrote many of the epistles. Therefore, Paul was not necessarily influenced by Greek thought and philosophy as some scholars have claimed (example, Frederickson's uses Aristotle's discussion on lacking self control as the basis for interpreting Paul's use of *malakoi*, see pp. 27-28 above). Although he uses Greek terms, such use does not reveal a parallel adoption or approval of Greek religious ideas or philosophical perspectives. He instead uses the terms as *familiar grounds for discussion and reasoning* with his Gentile congregations; his objective is to steer their understanding towards the truth of God, which finds its ultimate revelation in the gospel of Christ.

Thus, with his Christian views on morality – including sexuality – being informed by the God of Judaism, we find that Paul explicitly rejects conventional worldly (Hellenistic) wisdom as having any part in the gospel of Christ he had imparted to the Corinthians (see 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16, 3:18-20, 4:10; also "knowledge" in 8:1-3, 11; 13:2, 8). Such wisdom included [[a cosmological dualism and an anthropological dualism<sup>36</sup> – a disassociation of body (of the earthly realm) and spirit (of the heavenly or divine realm), which in turn allowed indulgence in lustful appetites. The outworking of such

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 399.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 435.

dualism is revealed in the homosexuality and other problems (sexual and non-sexual) that Paul has to address in his letter. No such disassociation exists in Hebrew thought, which understands the entire person as having been created by God. Thus, in Paul's writings, the body, soul, spirit, mind, and heart are not 'different separable faculties...but different ways of viewing the whole person.'<sup>37</sup> Most importantly, believers have been purchased by Christ; they entirely – body and spirit – belong to Him (6:19f. - temple). Paul exhorts the Corinthians to not be deceived, reminding them of the destiny that awaits homosexuals and all other wrongdoers. They had based their views on sexuality on 'the wisdom of this age [which] is incapable of bringing people to God (1 Cor. 2:6; 1:20) and must be abandoned as a way of salvation (1 Cor. 3:18).'<sup>38</sup>

Also coming from the Old Testament is the prophetic theme concerning the hope of the *Kingdom of God* (1 Cor. 6:9-10), which remains the basic structure of Paul's thought as a Christian,<sup>39</sup> and is a key motivating factor in his exhortations to proper conduct (6:11). 'The centre of Pauline thought is the realisation of the coming new age of redemption by the work of Christ..... Therefore, Paul's message is one of both realised and futuristic eschatology.'<sup>40</sup> He now understands that Old Testament prophecies of the messianic salvation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which were an eschatological hope associated with the Day of the Lord, have already begun in the old age.<sup>41</sup> There has been a partial fulfillment in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus, which will reach its final fulfillment with the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:8) when the parousia will occur, and every power hostile to God will be destroyed and creation will be fully freed from the consequences of evil and sin (1 Cor. 15:23-26). Then the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. Until then, there is a tension between the already and the not yet; the indicative and the imperative. 'The life of the Spirit is both [present] experience and [future] hope; the Kingdom of God is both present and future.'<sup>42</sup>

For Paul, this means something to the believer in real and practical ways. While the present age continues, those "in...Christ" (6:11), upon whom the "ends of the ages" have arrived (*ta telē tōn aiōnōn*, 1 Cor. 10:11) must endeavour to no longer practise immorality as

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 499ff.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 412.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 402, 410, 412.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 409, 413.

the ungodly/the people of the world do (5:10; 6:9). ‘Their standards and motivations are different’<sup>43</sup> – they have been changed by the Holy Spirit (6:11) and are now the temple of God (6:19); and although complete victory over sexual and other sin has not yet been realised, the persevering believer in Christ is never defeated; victory has been assured in the age to come. In the interval between the two ages, the world and humankind at large remains in the grip of the old age with its burden of sin, evil and death; however, the blessings of the new age, which include the coming of the Spirit, have reached back to those in Christ.<sup>44</sup> As Ladd reminds, ‘Reception of the Spirit does not mean that the problem of the flesh is disposed of. There is a conflict between the flesh and the Spirit in which the believer must learn how to let the Spirit have dominance.’<sup>45</sup>

### **Nature of Relationship between Author and Recipients**

Paul would have felt an especially close connection with the Corinthian church since it was formed and nurtured as a young congregation under his preaching and pastoral care. Given the length of time he spent with them (Acts 18:11), it is likely that he knew a good number of the congregants personally, some of whom are mentioned in his letter (1:11, 14, 16; 16:17). The expression of this apostolic, pastoral and personal relationship is seen in the terms he uses to address them – “my dear children” (4:14), “dear friends” (10:14), and “brethren/brothers and sisters” (used seventeen times).

The Corinthians are Paul’s spiritual children (4:15), a reality of which he is proud (15:31), and he carries a deep affection for them (16:24). They are “the result of his work in the Lord (9:1)” and “the seal of his apostleship (9:2). Paul understands that, in this capacity, he is a servant of Christ “entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed” (4:1). As such, he “must prove faithful” in carrying out his responsibility before God regardless of how unfavourably he may be judged (4:2-3), and this includes ensuring that their understanding of the gospel is not compromised in any way, and that they grow to maturity in Christ. It is this ominous task that accounts for Paul’s often harsh and cutting tone in the letter to the Corinthians. Quite apart from any personal disappointment he must have experienced as a leader who had invested much of his time, knowledge and self, the reports and questions that he received evinced a gross misapprehension of the gospel message in critical areas such as morality (holiness/sanctification) and therefore concerned/impacted the eternal welfare of many congregants.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 512.

Paul appeals to the Corinthians – some of whom were flouting his leadership – in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:10), sometimes emphasising his role as their apostle (9:2) and spiritual father (4:15). This is surely intended to evoke a response of obedience, that of a child to its father, and moreso, of disciples who need to rely on the apostolic authority and wise counsel of their leader in order to grow in spiritual maturity and truth. In other places, he warns against thinking or behaviour that arises from being deceived (3:18, 6:9). Paul's blunt and unapologetic warning of exclusion of unrepentant homosexuals and other ungodly persons from the Kingdom of God matches the tone of much of the letter. The spiritual immaturity of those who were taking pride in wrongdoing had to be confronted directly so as to prevent the sinful yeast of some members from leavening the whole batch of dough (5:6). The alarming eternal consequences of such behaviour had to be drummed home (6:9-10).

At the same time, the harshness of Paul's tone is not the real character of his letter. It is ultimately one of exhortation to holiness, encouraged by the assurance of the sustaining power of God (6:11, 10:13b), and the hope of final victory. He struggles to communicate his points to the Corinthians firmly, yet assure them that the motivation behind his firmness is the purest love. His letter closes with the conveyance of warm greetings (16:19-20), an indication of his plans to spend time with them (16:6-7) and, lastly, the declaration of his love for them (16:24). 1 Cor. 6:9-11 should not be read through a lens of harsh condemnation motivated by self-righteousness or judgmentalism, but through the lens of difficult-to-hear truth motivated by deep concern.

#### LITERARY CONTEXT

Following the salutation (1:1-3) and thanksgiving (1:4-9) is the first main structural division in the letter (1:10-4:21), in which Paul addresses reports received from Chloe's household concerning major factions in the church (1:11).<sup>46</sup> The next structural division (5:1-6:20) contains the pericope under examination, and likewise focusses on distressing reports to which Paul is compelled to respond, this time pertaining to instances of severe moral laxness in the church – a subject on which Paul had already written but was clearly misunderstood, 5:9-13).<sup>47</sup> The matters currently at hand concern a case of incest and failure to exercise proper discipline (5:1-18); lawsuits between believers before pagan courts (6:1-11); and sexual immorality stemming from a misunderstanding of spirituality in relation to the physical body by some members (6:12-

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<sup>46</sup>Carson and. Moo, 415.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 416.

20).<sup>48</sup>Structurally, Chapter 7 initiates a third division, wherein Paul's attention shifts from these verbal reports to addressing a series of issues on which the Church itself wrote to solicit his guidance<sup>49</sup> ("now for the matters you wrote about," 7:1 –see 7:1, 7:25, 8:1, 11:17, 12:1, 15:1; 16:1). However, despite this distinction in how Paul organises his responses to the various issues impacting the Corinthian congregation, there is a noticeable theme throughout Chapters 5, 6, and 7 pertaining to the matter of sexual immorality/the sexually immoral, as indicated by the repeated occurrences of *porneia* and  *pornos*(see Table 1 below). Chapter 7 further provides the correct parametres for sexual relations, in contrast to the multiple expressions of of sexual immorality raised in Chapters 5 and 6.This clear line of thought defines Chapters 5-7 as the proper exegetical and hermeneutical context for the interpretation of 1 Cor. 6:9-11.

**Table 1: Occurrences of *Porneia* (Sexual Immorality) and *Pornos* (the Sexually Immoral) in 1 Corinthians 5-7**

5:1	<i>porneia</i>
5:9	<i>pornois</i>
5:10	<i>pornois</i>
5:11	<i> pornos</i>
6:9	<i> pornoi</i>
6:13	<i> porneia</i>
6:18	<i> porneian ... porneuōn</i>
7:2	<i> porneias</i>

***Contextual Issues: Lawsuits (1 Cor. 6:1-8) vs. Sexual Immorality (1 Cor. 5:1-13)***

The disjunctive coordinating conjunction  $\eta$  ("or") in the opening words of 6:9 ("or do you not know...?") places *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* (homosexuals) directly in the line of discussion regarding litigation between believers before pagan courts (6:1-8),<sup>50</sup> although this is not the pericope's interpretive framework, as already indicated above and further demonstrated shortly. An important pattern is however established in 6:1-11 with four references by Paul to wrongdoers, wrongdoing or being wronged, using the adjective *adikos* (substantively meaning "the wicked, the ungodly, wrongdoers") along with the associated verb *adikeo* ("to wrong, do wrong;" passive = to be wronged).<sup>51</sup> The linkage of the litigating parties in 6:1-8 to the wrongdoers listed in 6:9-10 should not be misconstrued as solely an attempt by Paul to expose the corresponding moral failure of the former individuals by way of

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Fee, 240, 242.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

comparison with a list of readily identifiable sinners. Although such a point is achieved, Paul's greater intention is to make an important distinction for the wider congregation between wrongdoers and the godly (the saints of 6:1-2) with respect to present behaviour and future judgment.

The description of the *malakoi*, *arsenokoitai* and other persons listed in 6:9-10 as *adikoi* ("wrongdoers") connects them directly with the ungodly/wrongdoers (*adikōn*) of 6:1; such wrongdoers constitute the people of the world (*kosmon...kosmos*) in 6:2 who will be judged by the saints (*hagiōn*), and who will not inherit the Kingdom of God at its eschatological consummation according to 6:9-10.<sup>52</sup> That Paul is addressing these warnings to the entire congregation, and not merely to the litigants, is supported by the consistent use of the second person plural "you" throughout 6:1-11, and by connections between the wrongdoers (*adikoi*) listed in 6:9-10 and problems discussed in preceding and subsequent portions of the letter (5:1-13, 6:1-8, and 6:12-20; also see 7:2ff). In fact, it is Chapter 5 that opens up the interpretive context for all the ensuing discussions of chapter 6 (vv. 1-8, 9-11, and 12-20).

Five of the ten categories of wrongdoers (*adikoi*) in 6:9-10 were previously used to define the unredeemed of the world (*kosmou*) in 5:9-10. The same five categories are repeated in 5:11, along with a sixth (drunkards), as behaviours unbefitting for believers (accompanied by a warning to not associate with believers who practise them). In all three lists, the sexually immoral (*pornos*) are included, thus tying the warning of exclusion from the Kingdom of God in 6:9-10 with the issues of 5:1-13 (sexual immorality, including incest); prefacing the discussion of 6:12-20 regarding prostitution and sexual immorality generally; and seamlessly leading into Paul's positive discussion on sexual relations within the context of marriage (in contrast to, and, as the alternative to, engaging in sexual immorality, 7:2). With respect to the four new categories in 6:9-10, three of are of a sexual nature (*moichoi* ["adulterers"], *malakoi*, *arsenokoitai*), and therefore tie back to the issues of chapter 5. The remaining category, *kleptai* ("thieves"), corresponds to the discussion in 6:1-8.

Throughout chapters 5 and 6, Paul is highlighting the behaviour of the ungodly (wrongdoers) as that which can no longer be practised or accommodated by the *hagiōi* (the "saints" who themselves shall judge the world (6:1-2). To maintain or approve such behaviour is to be defeated already (6:7), or to have been deceived (6:9). This warning applies to the passive and active homosexual partners, and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 242.

all the other sexually immoral. There is an exhortation to those who are erring in these ways (including those who fail to discipline the ones in error, 5:2-8, 6:5) to be “as you really are” (5:7), rather than what “you were” (6:11). The basis for such exhortation and the transformed life to which it refers is that “Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed” (5:7), and believers have been “washed...sanctified (*hegiasthete*, from *hagiozo*)... justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (6:11). As such, the believers now individually and corporately constitute the temple of God’s Holy Spirit (6:19 and 3:16-17 respectively), having been bought at a price, and must honour God with their bodies, which includes their sexuality (6:20).

The inclusion of “the sexually immoral” (*pornoî*) among the wrongdoers (*adikoi*), and the recurring emphasis on matters of sexual morality (5:1-13; 6:9-10, 6:12-18; 7:2; 10:8), extends the warning and exhortation of 6:9-11 even beyond chapters 5 to 6 to impact on discussions in Chapters 7 and 10 regarding marriage and food sacrificed to idols, respectively. In chapter 7, persons are encouraged to marry if they are so able “since sexual immorality is occurring” (7:2) and, in discussing idolatry in chapter 10, Paul encourages the believers to “not commit sexual immorality” as some of the people of Israel did (10:8).

The repetition of this subject matter indicates, clearly, the significance of sexuality in relation to sanctification and the sanctified people of God. It is certain that homosexuals, adulterers and other sexually immoral persons have been identified as wrongdoers in 6:9. The pericope of 6:9-11 is clear in its admonition that persons who persist in a homosexual lifestyle or pattern of behaviour will be excluded from God’s eschatological Kingdom – such practises are “pagan” and worldly (5:1-2, 9) and contrary to the behaviour of believers (5:9-11) sanctified and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (6:11, 19). The link between the wrongdoers/ungodly of 6:9-11 and 5:9-11, with the latter occurring in a wider discussion on incest, confirms the gravity and unacceptability of sexual immorality for those who are sanctified, along with its consequences: persons who are unrepentant of their sexual immorality are to be excluded from the present fellowship of believers (5:2, 5, 11). Judgment has already begun in effect in the present (within the community), but with a view towards the ultimate salvation of the erring believer at the final judgment (“the Day of the Lord,” 5:5). The attitude and disciplinary measures indicated in the case of incest provide a framework that can be applied by rabbinic interpretation or hermeneutical principles in

dealing with sexually immoral persons of all kinds, including the *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* of 6:9.

Therefore, while the pericope of 6:9-11 immediately follows a discussion on litigation between believers, it comes in the wider context of a discussion on flagrant immorality, which includes a long discourse on sexual matters that extends from Chapters 5 to 7, and even touches on Chapter 10. Issues raised are incest, adultery, homosexuality, prostitution, the ability to master one's sexual desire, engagement, marriage, abstinence in marriage, divorce, and widowhood. It is worth noting that Chapter 7, rather than being just a discussion about marriage per se, is properly one about sexual relations (7:1). The only appropriate context for such is prescribed (marriage) if one finds that one's sexual desire is becoming problematic (7:2).

Chapter 7 is thus crucial to the interpretive context for 6:9-11, as it brings Paul's treatment of the subject matter to proper completion by providing the positive/correct perspective on sexual relations, in contrast to the sexual immorality dealt with in Chapters 5 and 6. Within marriage, sexual relations are indicated as normative and are encouraged (7:3-5), and restricted to the married partners who are indicated as male and female (7:2, 4 – echoing the unchanged divine prescriptive of Gen. 2:24; 1 Cor. 6:16). The options available to the unmarried regarding their sexual desires are also addressed (7:8, 36-37). Within this literary context, and given the historical reality of the prevalence of homosexuality at the time of writing, there would have been a perfect opportunity for Paul to discuss any possible merits of homosexuality as an acceptable option under particular circumstances, especially if the Old Testament principles had been nullified by the new covenant in Christ as some claim. (Contrast with how he highlights subtle distinctions and allowances when discussing meats sacrificed to idols; see also distinctions regarding the exercise of prophecy and tongues in corporate gatherings, abstinence from sex within and outside of marriage, and so forth). The fact that Paul makes no such allowance for homosexuality is especially significant in 7:9, where the only option offered to the unmarried in lieu of "burning with passion" is marriage. There is no mention of homosexual relations as a possible option for married or unmarried believers. On the contrary, it is qualification for exclusion from the Kingdom of God (6:9-10).

### **The Wider Context**

First Corinthians is structured topically around problems occurring in the church, and its overall purpose is to correct errors in thinking and conduct playing out as factions, immorality, poor fellowship



and the like. There is a definite tension between that which reflects the appropriate or ideal conduct of persons who are in Christ and that being actually demonstrated by the congregation. The letter thus addresses the issue of positional versus progressive sanctification, which is directly tied to an eschatological focus frequently found in Paul's letters.

Paul repeatedly emphasises the Corinthians' identity in terms of their positional relationship to Christ. This identity is stated in 1:2 – they are “those sanctified in Christ Jesus (*hegiasmenois en Christōi Iesou*) and called to be saints/His holy people (*kletois hagiois*).” The same terms are used in reference to the Corinthian congregation as being among the saints/the Lord's people (*hagiōn...hagioi*) who will judge the world in 6:1-2, and at the end of the pericope of 6:9-11 where Paul stresses the fact of their sanctification effected in Christ by the Spirit of God (*hegiasthete...en tōi onomati tou Kuriou Iesou Christou kai en tōi pneumatic tou Theou hemōn*). It is on the basis of this divine Trinitarian partnership and proclamation that God's Spirit can dwell among the Corinthian congregation (3:16) so that, corporately, it constitutes the holy (*hagios*) temple of God (*ho gar naos tou Theou hagios estin, oitives este humeis*, 3:17). However, each individual member is himself or herself a temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19), and thus even one's body and sexuality must be treated with holiness (honour, 6:20).

The Corinthians, who consisted of homosexuals, adulterers, and other kinds of sexually or otherwise immoral people indicated throughout the letter, have received positional sanctification as a gift (Christ Jesus, through God, has become their sanctification/holiness – *hagiasmos*, 1:30; see also 5:7 – Christ as the Passover Lamb has been sacrificed). This positional sanctification (6:11) is a component of realised eschatology (the “already”) which has ensued with the coming of the Kingdom of God with power into the present age (4:20). Accompanying it evidentially are the “first fruits” resurrection of Christ (15:20) and the anticipated outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2:12).<sup>53</sup> “Already,” a moral separation ultimately reserved for “the Day of the Lord” is unfolding in the world (1:18) and a sifting is occurring even among those within the church (“divisions... show which of you have God's approval,” 11:19).<sup>54</sup> Judgment has begun in the present (16:22) and is in fact required from believers in relation to their own conduct individually and corporately (5:2-4, 12, 13b; 6:1, 2b, 5; 11:30-31).

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<sup>53</sup>Ladd, 408-9.

<sup>54</sup>See also Fee, 242.

The reality of sifting and judgment among believers provides evidence that perfect sanctification has not been attained. It belongs to the realm of future or unrealised eschatology (the “not yet”), which includes the general resurrection of the dead (15:22-23), and the final judgment of wrongdoers and angels (5:13; 6:2a, 3), and of the works, motives and conduct of believers (3:12-15, 4:3-5, 11:32). The Kingdom of God will have reached its full consummation when Jesus defeats death as the last of His enemies and hands over the Kingdom to God (15:24).<sup>55</sup> In this respect, the Kingdom is a future blessing yet to be inherited, as Paul states in 6:9-10 and 15:50. However, the wrongdoers of the world and those who claim to be believers but live as wrongdoers will have no part in the Kingdom (6:9-10).

The Corinthian church demonstrates the outworking of the tension between realised and future eschatology caused by the overlapping (or culmination) of the ages (10:11).<sup>56</sup> Paul states that their giftedness is proof that they are in Christ (1:5-6) and declares them sanctified and holy in spite of their present conduct (1:2). However, they are not maturing in character (progressive sanctification) because they fail to “live by the Spirit” as they should (3:1-3).<sup>57</sup> Their thinking and conduct are instead reflective of the unredeemed (“mere humans,” 3:3-4) rather than of their true identity/life in Christ.<sup>58</sup> Therein lies the reason for Paul’s frequent admonitions to the Corinthians saints: “be...as you really are” (5:7), “do not be deceived” (6:9), “do not be misled...Come back to your senses as you ought and stop sinning” (15:33-34).<sup>59</sup>

The grammatical tension between the indicative and the imperative in the warning-exhortation pairings of 5:6-8 and 6:9-11 (already shown to be closely linked) reflect the eschatological tension of the letter as it relates to sanctification.<sup>60</sup> As indicated above, both pericopae refer directly to the Corinthians’ positional sanctification (5:7; 6:11) in Christ, with statements expressed in the indicative tense. Forceful instructions for progressive sanctification are stated in metaphoric terms in the imperative tense of 5:7-8: “Get rid of the old yeast [old ways/conduct], so that you may be a new and unleavened batch – as you really are. Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed ... Let us keep the Festival...with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”<sup>61</sup> Though no direct instruction is given

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<sup>55</sup>Ladd, 450.

<sup>56</sup>Ladd, 409-10; Fee, 242, see also 238.

<sup>57</sup>See also Ladd, 516.

<sup>58</sup>Fee, 245.

<sup>59</sup>See also Fee, 242.

<sup>60</sup>Ladd, 565; Fee, 247-48.

<sup>61</sup>Fee, 245.

in 6:9-11, the allusion to progressive sanctification and its implications for conduct are evident in the contrast between the ungodly listed in vv. 9-10 and Paul's assertion in v. 11, "And that is what some of you were. But...!" In both cases, the warnings issued (5:6; 6:9-10) must be viewed in light of the positive exhortations attached (5:7; 6:11), so that the focus rests on the promise and hope they contain.<sup>62</sup>

It has already been shown that sexuality is tied to sanctification. The body has become a vessel for the presence of the Holy Spirit and, as such, believers are to honour God with their bodies (6:20). So significant is the body as the temple, that it is impacted negatively by sexual immorality (6:16-20).<sup>63</sup> It also explains why an unbelieving spouse and the children produced through the sexual relations of such marriage covenants are sanctified in some manner by God because of the partner who has become a believer (7:14).<sup>64</sup> (Incidentally, homosexual unions, which are in defiance of the biblical marriage covenant, provide no such covering for children or the complicit partner.) Believers' sexuality must conform to their identity as people sanctified in Christ, and those who struggle with homosexuality must maintain an eschatological focus of perfect sanctification as a motivation.

The reality of the present struggle is not scoffed at by Paul. In chapter 10, following a warning not to engage in sexual immorality as Israel had done, he makes the statement that "no temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind" (10:13), which encompasses issues such as the intensity of desire and the seeming "naturalness" that often accompanies temptation. There is an implication of the overwhelming and seemingly insurmountable weight of temptation that one has to bear, and a clear reference that endurance may be the only option available; however, he also affirms the faithfulness of God in assisting the believer to endure it and even providing some form of relief ("God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it").

Chapter 10 shows that redemption (10:1-4) is not equated with transformation (10:5-10): a real gap exists between the already and the not yet, between the assurance of positional sanctification of 6:11 and the reality of what progressive sanctification may really look like (10:12).<sup>65</sup> The reality and intensity of temptation depicted

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<sup>62</sup>Fee, 239, 245.

<sup>63</sup>See also Ladd, 508-9.

<sup>64</sup>See also Ladd, 564.

<sup>65</sup>See also Ladd, 563-65.

in the present life must be respected by both the individual believer and the rest of the congregation. The overarching principle for dealing with those struggling with homosexuality is empathy and perseverance, with hope, borne of love which is personified in chapter 13.

The thread of realised versus future eschatology links the earlier portions of the letter to chapter 13's discussion regarding the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit received in 1:7, which chapter 12 explains are for the nurturing of the church as the body of Christ (12:7ff.). Spiritual gifts themselves are limited/have limitations because they operate "in part" (13:9, 12) within the sphere of realised eschatology which is incomplete, partial, imperfect (13:10).<sup>66</sup> Their use must therefore be exercised in love (13:1-3), for love exposes our motives and thus best governs our conduct (10:4-7). As such, love never fails and (along with faith and hope) will remain when the fullness of things have come to pass ("completion, perfection," 13:10).<sup>67</sup> If this is true in the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, then all things related to the body of Christ in the present time must be executed within the context of love, such as conflict resolution (6:8), the decisions we make in exercising our rights and how this may negatively affect others (8:9-13; 10:23-33), the manner in which we treat and fellowship with others (11:4-10, 17:22), and the discipline of persons caught in sexual immorality (5:5-6).<sup>68</sup> The rule is love and even judgment is centred on it in the form of concern for the ultimate welfare of the sinning believer. Even the harsh directive to exclude the guilty and unrepentant party from fellowship ("hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh") is done from a motivation of love with the faith and hope that "his spirit will be saved" at the final judgment (5:5).

### HERMENEUTICAL IMPLICATIONS

As the church seeks to minister in the Jamaican environment, especially in light of the growing pressures for "gay rights," a number of applications arising from the grammatical, historical and literary analyses of 1 Cor. 6:9-11 should be borne in mind.

1. The ethical pluralism of Graeco-Roman society makes the message of the pericope directly applicable to the modern situation.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>See also Ladd, 409-10.

<sup>67</sup>See also Ladd, 581.

<sup>68</sup>See also Ladd, 567, 581; see also Fee, 238 ref.

<sup>69</sup>Thiselton, 452.

2. The prohibition against homosexuality in 1 Cor. 6:9-11 is trans-temporal and trans-cultural. It therefore cannot be compromised or tailored due to changing worldviews and scientific theories (or realities) about natural orientation. The warning “Do not be deceived” is more applicable than ever before.
3. Exclusion from the Kingdom of God is primarily concerned with habituated actions or a practised attitude. A homosexual orientation would not in itself be grounds for exclusion from the Kingdom. However, *practising* homosexual behaviour based upon that orientation is condemned as unrighteous. The church will need to know how to accept and deal lovingly with those who seem to be so oriented but are celibate or committed to upholding the Biblical perspective, versus dealing firmly with those who arrogantly parade their sin (as per case of incest in 1 Cor. 5).
4. The prohibition of homosexuality is listed with eight other dispositions, all with an equal penalty. It receives no greater emphasis than the other eight.<sup>70</sup> Thus: ‘[A]ny persistent activity cited here should be regarded on an equal footing when issues of church membership, ordination, or related question are discussed. Constraints are laid upon heterosexual desire, and upon desire for ever increasing power and possessions, as much as upon same-sex relations.’<sup>71</sup>  
The Jamaican church must address its hypocrisy about the way it treats homosexuality as against other sins.
5. The theological high point of the pericope is the redemptive possibilities available through Jesus Christ (v. 11). The Jamaican church has failed to focus on this at more than a superficial level and has instead focused primarily on the admonition of vv. 9-10.
6. Even if there are issues of orientation, it must be communicated that there is room and responsibility for change (v. 11). The opportunity available to “heterosexual” sinners and all the other sinners of 9-10 is equally available to “homosexuals”: ‘The claims often made that “the issue of ‘homosexuality’ – psychosexual orientation – simply was not a biblical issue” are confused. Paul addresses every form of “desire,” whether heterosexual or materialistic, and distinguishes between passionate longing and action (cf. 7:9). It is true that

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 451-452.

“homosexual orientation” does not feature as a phenomenon for explicit comment, but to dismiss the parallel, e.g., between heterosexual desire and an illicit habituated heterosexual relationship is itself to isolate same-sex relations from other ethical issues in a way which such writers as Furnish, Scroggs, Boswell, and Nelson rightly deplore.<sup>72</sup>

7. The link between 1 Cor 6:9-11 and the Levitical passages and the matter of holiness reveal a large part of the transformation that a person struggling with issues of homosexuality will have to face concern: (a) submission to the decrees of the Lord; (b) that this is a matter of choice; (c) that they have already been consecrated as ‘holy’ and therefore what they are dealing with is the outworking of that new identity (progressive sanctification).
8. The doctrine of future eschatology provides a basis for sustained hope for those persons who face greater difficulties with their homosexuality, as it focuses on the ultimate victory over sin that is guaranteed to believers. The intensity of the conflict between their natural desires and the desire for holiness/purity is an outworking of the tension between ‘the already’ and the ‘not yet,’ caused by the overlapping ages. Viewed in this light, the internal struggle they experience should serve as a motivation to persevere rather than as cause for despair.
9. Since the thread of realised versus future eschatology links 6:11 and earlier portions of the letter to chapter 13’s discussion regarding the temporal use of the gifts of the Spirit received in 1:7, which chapter 12 explains are for the nurturing of the church as the body of Christ (12:7ff.), the principle of love may be upheld in dealing with persons struggling with homosexuality. (Love however does not equal compromise.)
10. Part of love involves patience in allowing time for transformation. Richards explains:

Immorality was accepted as a part of the Corinthian life-style. These patterns of thought, these old passions and desires, were sure to appear again and again. .... In a world like theirs and ours, in which the “rights” of the individual are stressed while old distinctions between

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

right and wrong are blurred, there are sure to be times when immorality and other kinds of sin affect even the church of God. The old ways of thinking die hard. Transformation, while real, is a gradual and progressive process of change. On the way to Christian maturity, both individuals and a local church family can falter.<sup>73</sup>

11. Stott, who also recognises the link with Chapter 13, elaborates on how the triad of faith, hope and love are indispensable to both the person struggling with homosexuality and the church that is trying to walk with him/her. 'FAITH is our human response to divine revelation; it is believing God's Word.'<sup>74</sup> "[F]aith accepts God's standards which declare that "the only alternative to heterosexual marriage is singleness and sexual abstinence...."<sup>75</sup> Although the secular world considers sex as essential to human fulfillment and therefore charges it as cruelty "to expect homosexual people to abstain from homosexual practice" (resulting in "frustration...neurosis, despair and even suicide"), the Bible declares that this is not so<sup>76</sup>(see discussion in 1 Cor 7 re: marriage and celibacy). As Stott points out, "Jesus Christ was single, yet perfect in his humanity."<sup>77</sup>Therefore, if the Christian by definition is a follower of Christ and becoming more like Him, then it is clearly "possible to be single and human at the same time!"<sup>78</sup>

It is this truth/reality, Stott elaborates, that causes Paul to warn in 1 Cor. 6:9-10 that "homosexual offenders will not inherit God's Kingdom" and to go further to declare "And that's what some of you were," indicating the source/mode of the transformation in v. 11. Stott reminds that the same warning and encouragement applies "to the millions of heterosexual people who are single."<sup>79</sup> However, we cannot "call ourselves Christians and declare that chastity is impossible."<sup>80</sup>(Paul himself, as indicated in 1 Cor. 7:7, was unmarried and celibate.)Although "[i]t is made harder by the sexual obsession of contemporary society," to deny the

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<sup>73</sup>Larry Richards, *The Early Church in Mission, Studies in Acts, I & II Thessalonians, I & II Corinthians*. Bible Alive Series (Eglin, Illinois: David C. Cook Publishing Company, 1977), 76.

<sup>74</sup>Stott, 38.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

power of God's grace "is to portray Christians as the helpless victims of the world, the flesh and the devil, to demean them into being less than human, and to contradict the gospel of God's grace."<sup>81</sup>

'HOPE' relates to more than "self-mastery," and concerns expectations of the possibility for a "reversal of ... sexual bias," which in turn is dependent upon what we believe is the cause ("aetiology") of the homosexual condition.<sup>82</sup> On the basis of what is perceived to be the cause(s), the expectation of a "cure" typically falls into "three categories – those who consider healing unnecessary, and those who consider it possible [e.g., Dr Elizabeth Moberly] or impossible"<sup>83</sup> – e.g. D.J. West, in whose view existing treatments and programmes have insubstantial success in reducing homosexuality, and who "pleads for 'tolerance', though not for 'encouragement', of homosexual behaviour."<sup>84</sup> Stott challenges that such views are "the despairing opinions of the secular mind," and that as Christians, we must "believe that at least some degree of change is possible," since we "know that the homosexual condition, being a deviation from God's norm, is not a sign of created order but of fallen disorder." We therefore cannot "acquiesce in it or declare it incurable."

Stott also outlines certain issues to bear in mind regarding the healing of homosexuals (based on first-hand testimonies from True Freedom Trust, Exodus International, and other ex-gay ministries in the United States):

- (i) Deliverance from a homosexual inclination/change towards heterosexual orientation is not necessarily an overnight experience.

Tim Stafford in the 18 August 1989 edition of *Christianity Today* describes his investigation into several [[ex-gay ministries]]. His conclusion was one of 'cautious optimism'. What ex-gays were claiming was 'not a quick 180-degree reversal of their sexual desires' but rather 'a gradual reversal in their spiritual understanding of themselves as men and women in relationship to God'. And this new self-understanding was 'helping them to relearn distorted

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 42.



patterns of thinking and relating. They presented themselves as people in process...<sup>85</sup>

- (ii) '[C]omplete healing of body, mind and spirit will not take place in this life. Some degree of deficit or disorder remains in each of us.'<sup>86</sup> (This is clearly demonstrated in the letter to the Corinthians, including the "wrongdoers" of 6:9-10.) However, the 'confident hope' of complete regeneration 'sustains us.'<sup>87</sup> Citing Romans 8:22f, Stott explains that at the second coming of Christ 'our bodies are going to be redeemed; sin... [is] going to be abolished;.... we shall be finally liberated from everything which defiles or distorts our personality. And this Christian assurance helps us to bear whatever our present pain may be. For pain there is, in the midst of peace.'<sup>88</sup>

Finally, Stott discusses how the LOVE that is essential to reorientation of the homosexual "is just what the church has generally failed to show to homosexual people."<sup>89</sup>

"Jim Cotter complains bitterly about being treated as 'objects of scorn and insult, of fear, prejudice and oppression'. Norman Pittenger describes the 'vituperative' correspondence he has received, in which homosexuals are dismissed even by professing Christians as 'filthy creatures', 'disgusting perverts', 'damnable sinners' and the like. Pierre Berton, a social commentator, writes that 'a very good case can be made out that the homosexual is the modern equivalent of the leper'. Rictor Norton is yet more shrill: 'The church's record regarding homosexuals is an atrocity from beginning to end: it is not for us to seek forgiveness, but for the church to make atonement.'<sup>90</sup>

Stott emphasises that the "the majority of homosexual people are probably not responsible for their condition (though they are, of course, for their conduct)" and as such "deserve our understanding and compassion (though many find this patronizing), not our rejection"<sup>91</sup>. He cites Richard

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 46.

Lovelace – who “calls for ‘a double repentance’, namely ‘that gay Christians renounce the active lifestyle’ and that ‘straight Christians renounce homophobia,’ ” and Dr. David Arkinson – who chides that “We are not at liberty to urge the Christian homosexual to celibacy and to a spreading of his relationships, unless support for the former and opportunities for the latter are available in genuine love.”<sup>92</sup> Stott elaborates:

“At the heart of the homosexual condition is a deep loneliness, the natural human hunger for mutual love, a search for identity, and a longing for completeness. If homosexual people cannot find these things in the local ‘church family’, we have no business to go on using that expression<sup>93</sup>.... I do not think there is any need to encourage homosexual people to disclose their sexual inclinations to everybody; this is neither necessary nor helpful. But they do need at least one confidante to whom they can unburden themselves, who will not despise or reject them, but will support them with friendship and prayer; probably some professional, private and confidential pastoral counsel; possibly in addition the support of a professionally supervised therapy group; and (like all single people) many warm and affectionate friendships with people of both sexes.”<sup>94</sup>

As Michael Vasey – *Strangers and Friends*, points out: ‘Friendship is not a minor theme of the Christian faith’ he writes, ‘but is integral to its vision of life.’<sup>95</sup>

Stott clarifies his position about the local church being “a warm, accepting and supportive community” to avoid any misunderstanding:

“By ‘accepting’ I do not mean ‘acquiescing’; similarly, by a rejection of ‘homophobia’ I do not mean a rejection of proper Christian disapproval of homosexual behaviour. No, true love is not incompatible with the maintenance of moral standards. On the contrary, it insists on them, for the good of everybody. There is, therefore, a place for church discipline in the case of members who refuse to repent and willfully persist in homosexual relationships. But it must be exercised in a spirit of humility and gentleness (Galatians 6:1f); we must be careful not to discriminate between men and women, or between homosexual and heterosexual offences; and necessary

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

discipline in the case of a public scandal is not to be confused with a witch-hunt.”<sup>96</sup>

He summarises:

“Perplexing and painful as the homosexual Christian’s dilemma is, Jesus Christ offers him or her (indeed, all of us) faith, hope and love – the faith to accept both his standards and his grace to maintain them, the hope to look beyond present suffering to future glory, and the love to care for and support one another. ‘But the greatest of these is love’ (1 Corinthians 13:13).”<sup>97</sup>

### CONCLUSION AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

This article has demonstrated that, despite revisionist scholars’ best efforts to prove otherwise, the Greek words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitaias* used in the context of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 are accurately translated by the modern English word “homosexuals,” or by clearly related phrases and terms over the centuries. Attempts to offer alternative interpretations or to suggest a level of ambiguity that would render the passage useless to discussions about homosexuality are easily overturned upon proper historical, literary, exegetical and linguistic examination. 1 Cor. 6:9-10 is seen to uphold the traditional view of homosexuality as sin and its prohibition is shown to be trans-temporal, trans-cultural, and without exception, regardless of mutuality of age, affection, consent/willingness, or commitment. As such, the accompanying warning that homosexuals will not inherit the Kingdom of God is to be taken seriously. Further exegetical analysis indicates that this warning pertains to those who engage in a willful/unrepentant, persistent homosexual lifestyle, or embrace and defend their homosexual desire/behaviour as normative, in contradiction of the word of God.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.