

## Prohibitions of Homosexual Practice in Leviticus 18 and 20: Moral or Ceremonial?<sup>1</sup>

BY ROY E. GANE

Leviticus contains the following laws concerning homoerotic activity:

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (18:22<sup>2</sup>).

“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them” (20:13).

Leviticus 18:22 is a categoric apodictic prohibition addressed to the Israelite male regarding an action that he (the subject) should not do to another male (as direct object). Following this prohibition is an expression of the Lord’s assessment of the act: “it is an abomination.” Leviticus 20:13 expresses the same idea in a casuistic formulation, specifying that both men who (voluntarily) engage in this—the giving and receiving partners—have committed an abomination, and adding the penalty of capital punishment under Israelite theocratic jurisprudence.<sup>3</sup>

The Hebrew word *to‘ebah*, translated as “abomination” in these passages, can refer to a wide variety of evils that are abhorrent to the Lord.<sup>4</sup> So we should not single out homoerotic activity as if it were the only abomination.<sup>5</sup>

As with legislation regarding other serious sexual offenses, Leviticus 18 and 20 offer no qualifications, limiting cultural factors, or mitigating circumstances, such as a loving, exclusive, committed relationship. It is simply forbidden to engage in a homosexual act, regardless of one’s intentions. Obviously, the death penalty that applied under the Israelite theocracy, which no longer exists, cannot be enforced on the authority of Leviticus in a secular state. However, this penalty indicated God’s attitude toward the act, which was to be

entirely excluded from the community of His people. Furthermore, those who deliberately violate any of the laws in Leviticus 18 are additionally condemned to the divinely inflicted punishment of “cutting off” (v. 29), which God Himself can carry out anytime and anywhere. One who is “cut off” loses his afterlife, which can occur through extirpation of his line of descendants.<sup>6</sup>

In Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, the defining element of the homoerotic act is described as (literally): “lay (verb from root *škb*)<sup>7</sup> a male the lyings down (pl. of *miškab*) of a woman.” In Numbers 31:17, 18, 35 and Judges 21:11, 12, “the lying down of a male” is what a female experiences when she has sexual relations with a man.<sup>8</sup> In this light, “the lyings down of a woman” in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 would describe what a man experiences when he has sex with a female. So the point is that a man should not have the kind of sexual experience with another male that he would otherwise have with a woman.

The expression in Leviticus 18 and 20 is further clarified by Genesis 49:4, where Jacob addresses Reuben, his eldest son, regarding his incest with Bilhah, Jacob’s concubine, (literally): “... for you went up (onto) the beds (plural of *miškab*) of your father.” The real problem was not the location of this act on a bed, i.e., a place of lying down, belonging to Jacob, but the fact that Reuben usurped a prerogative regarding Bilhah, i.e., bedding down with her, that exclusively belonged to Jacob. This prerogative is expressed by the (probably abstract) plural of *miškab*, the meaning of which closely corresponds to that of the same word in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, where “the lyings down (also plural of *miškab*) of a woman” are legitimate for a man to experience with the right woman, but never with another man.<sup>9</sup>

The meaning of the biblical laws regarding homoerotic activity is clear, but to what group(s) of people do they apply? The legislation in Leviticus 18 and 20 is primarily addressed to the Israelites, but also applies to the foreigners living among them (18:2, 26; 20:2). According to the narrative framework of Leviticus, the Lord gave these laws before they entered the Promised Land, and He did not restrict their applicability to that land.<sup>10</sup> In Leviticus 18:3, the Israelites are not to behave like the Egyptians or inhabitants of Canaan, indicating that God does not approve

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of the ways in which these peoples violate His principles of morality. Divine disapproval of Gentile practices becomes explicit in verses 24, 25 and 27, 28, where the Lord says that He is driving the inhabitants of Canaan from the land (cf. 20:22, 23) because they have defiled it by doing the abominations prohibited earlier in the chapter, which include homosexual activity (18:22). So God holds accountable both Israelites and also Gentiles, who should understand basic principles of sexual morality from general revelation (cf. Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 5:1).<sup>11</sup>

The fact that Leviticus 18 refers to illicit sexual activities defiling (root *tm* ' ) those who engage in them and also their land (vs. 20, 23–25, 27, 28, 30) does not mean that the prohibitions are ceremonial laws that regulate physical ritual impurity.<sup>12</sup> A ritual/ceremonial impurity is recognizable by the facts that (1) it is generated by a physical substance or condition, which explains why it can be transferred by physical contact in many cases; (2) incurring it does not constitute a sin—that is, a violation of a divine command (e.g., 12:6–8—no forgiveness needed; cf. chap. 4), unless contracting it is prohibited (e.g., 11:43, 44; Num 6:6, 7); (3) its purpose is to avoid defilement of the holy sphere centered at the sanctuary (Lev 7:20, 21; 15:31; Num 5:1–4); and (4) it has a ritual remedy, such as ablutions and sacrifice (e.g., Lev 14, 15).

The defilements in Leviticus 18 belong to another category: moral impurity that results from seriously sinful action, cannot contaminate another person by physical contact, defiles both the sinner and the land, and cannot be remedied by ritual means.<sup>13</sup> Such moral defilements are generated by sexual offenses (chap. 18), idolatry (18:21; cf. v. 24), and murder (Num 35:31–34), which violate divine moral principles (cf. Exod 20:3–6, 13, 14) and are forbidden both to Israelites and foreigners dwelling among them (Lev 18:2, 26; Num 35:15).

The contexts of the laws against homosexual practice in Leviticus 18 and 20 reinforce the idea that their application is permanent. Laws in Leviticus 18 concern incest (vs. 6–17), incestuous bigamy (v. 18), sexual relations during menstruation (v. 19), adultery (v. 20), giving children to the god Molek (v. 21), homosexual activity (v. 22), and male and female bestiality (v. 23). Leviticus 20 deals with Molek worship (vs. 1–5), occult (v. 6), cursing one's father or mother (v. 9), adultery (v. 10), incest (vs. 11, 12), homosexual activity (v. 13), incest (v. 14), male and female bestiality (vs. 15, 16), incest (v. 17), sexual relations during menstruation (v. 18), incest (vs. 19–21), "pure" (fit to eat) and "impure" (unfit to eat) meats (v. 25), and occult (v. 27).

Principles of several of the Ten Commandments appear in Leviticus 18 and 20: Molek worship and occult practice violate the first (and probably also the second) commandments (Exod 20:3–6), cursing parents disregards the fifth commandment (v. 12), and adultery breaks the seventh commandment (v. 14). So at least some of the laws in these chapters express or apply permanent principles.<sup>14</sup> However, this alone does not prove that all other laws in these chapters are permanent. Compare Leviticus 19, which reiterates some of the Ten Commandments (e.g., vs. 3, 4, 11, 12, 30) but also contains some ritual laws that cannot remain applicable because they depend on the function of the sanctuary/temple on earth (e.g., vs. 5–8, 20–22), which has been gone since A.D. 70. Nevertheless, Leviticus 18 and 20 do not contain any ceremonial laws that require the sanctuary/temple.<sup>15</sup>

The laws concerning sexuality in Leviticus 18 delineate boundaries to safeguard people's moral purity (vs. 4, 5, 24–30) in ways that go beyond the exemplary prohibition of adultery in the seventh commandment (Exod 20:14), but which are also based on the principle of sexuality expressed in Genesis 2:24: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Leviticus 20 adds the overall motivation of gaining holiness from the Lord that emulates his holy character (vs. 7, 8, 26). The laws in this chapter are all about personal holiness in relation to God. Therefore, their principles are moral



## Reflections

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and permanent, although Leviticus 20 adds some civil penalties for enforcement under the theocracy (vs. 2, 9–16, 27).<sup>16</sup>

Hardly anyone would argue that biblical laws against incest, bigamy, and bestiality in Leviticus are not moral in nature. However, Christians generally do not understand that the laws against deliberate sexual relations during menstruation (18:19; 20:18) are also moral,<sup>17</sup> which explains why not sexually approaching a woman during her period appears in Ezekiel 18:6 among a list of moral virtues.<sup>18</sup> The fact that the prohibitions against sex during menstruation constitute a moral requirement removes the force of the argument that Christians do not observe it because it is ceremonial, and therefore, the laws against homosexual activity a few verses away are no longer in force either. The fact is that Christians should avoid sex during menstruation. Their violation of this requirement through ignorant and inconsistent oversight does not justify breaking the prohibition of homosexual activity.<sup>19</sup>

We have found that the laws against homosexual activity in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 appear in contexts that exclusively consist of moral laws that guide God's people in morally pure and holy living, which indicates that these laws are permanent. The New Testament affirms the ongoing applicability of the holiness laws of Leviticus. The Jerusalem council established lifestyle requirements for Gentile Christians as follows: “that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality” (Acts 15:29; cf. v. 20). The list in this verse summarizes the groups of prohibitions in Leviticus 17 and 18.<sup>20</sup> These laws were clearly applicable to Gentiles because in Leviticus the foreigners living among the Israelites were required to keep them (17:8, 10, 12, 13, 15; 18:26). In Acts 15:20, 29, the Greek word *porneia*, for “sexual immorality” in general, fits the range of sexual offenses prohibited in Leviticus 18.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version.

<sup>3</sup>Those who execute them are blameless because the sexual partners bear their own bloodguilt—that is, responsibility for their own deaths.

<sup>4</sup>On this Hebrew term and its semantic range, see H.D. Preuss,

“*tô‘ēbā; t‘b,*” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry; transl. David E. Green; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 15:591–604. Preuss summarizes: “Within the OT, then, *tô‘ēbā* refers to something in the human realm that is ethically abhorrent, either as an idea or as an action; above all it is irreconcilable with Yahweh, contrary to his character and his will as an expression of that character, an ethical and cultic taboo. To call something *tô‘ēbā* is to characterize it as chaotic and alien, and therefore dangerous, within the cosmic and social order... Because the noun (as well as the verb) enjoys such a wide range of usage in the OT, it is difficult to arrive at a single root significance of everything characterized as *tô‘ēbā*. Sapiential and legal material stand side by side with cultic material in the great majority of instances” (602).

<sup>5</sup>In Leviticus 18, however, where the same word in the plural (*to‘ebot*) characterizes all of the offenses prohibited earlier in the chapter (vs. 26, 27, 29, 30), the only individual case labeled as an “abomination” (*to‘ebah*) is male homosexual activity (v. 22). Also, only this kind of activity is called an “abomination” in Leviticus 20 (v. 13).

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Donald Wold, “The Meaning of the Biblical Penalty *Kareth*” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1978), 251–255; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 3; New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 457–460; Baruch Schwartz, “The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. David P. Wright, David N. Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 13.

<sup>7</sup>Here Hebrew *‘et* is apparently the direct object marker, but alternatively, it could be understood as the preposition “with,” in which case the translation would be: “lie with a male...”

<sup>8</sup>“Lying down” renders the singular of *miškab*, literally, “bed” or place of lying down.

<sup>9</sup>Against the interpretation of Jacob Milgrom, who interprets the plural of *miškab* as an idiom for only illicit heterosexual unions and therefore limits the prohibitions in Lev 18:22; 20:13 to incestuous homosexual activity (*Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [Anchor Bible 3A; New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000], 1569, 1786; citing David Stewart), see Roy E. Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 326–328. In Leviticus 18, verse 22 is separated from the incest laws (vs. 6–18). If verse 22 were implicitly limited to incest, one would have to argue the same regarding the intervening laws concerning sex during menstruation (v. 19), adultery (v. 20), and Molek worship (v. 21). This would not make sense because incestuous sex during menstruation and incestuous adultery are already ruled out by the earlier incest laws, and all adultery and Molek worship are already categorically forbidden by the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:3–6, 14).

<sup>10</sup>Contrast 14:34; 19:23; 23:10; 25:2, regarding laws that begin to function when the Israelites are installed in Canaan.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. James R. White and Jeffrey D. Niell, *The Same Sex Controversy: Defending and Clarifying the Bible’s Message About Homosexuality* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2002), 66.

<sup>12</sup>Roy E. Gane, “Same-sex Love in the ‘Body of Christ?’” in *Christianity and Homosexuality* (ed. David Ferguson, Fritz Guy, and David Larson; Roseville, CA: Adventist Forum, 2008), part 4, pp. 66, 67 in response to John R. Jones, “‘In Christ There is Neither...’: Toward the Unity of the Body of Christ,” in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 4, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1326; Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity*



and *Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21–31; Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 139–153. It is true that an emission of semen generated a minor physical ritual impurity (Lev 15:16–18), but this was separate from the moral question of whether it was permitted to incur the impurity in a given situation.

<sup>14</sup>God originally gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites (Exod 19, 20; cf. Deut 5). However, according to the New Testament, they have ongoing application for Christians, whether they are Jewish or Gentile and live inside or outside the land of Israel (Rom 7:7, 12; 13:9; Jas 2:11; cf. Matt 19:18, 19).

<sup>15</sup>Even the basic distinctions between “pure” (fit to eat) and “impure” (unfit to eat) meats, of which Leviticus 20 provides a reminder (v. 25; cf. 11:1–23, 29, 30, 40–45), are not ceremonial because an impure animal cannot be made pure by ritual remedies and there is no ritual remedy for a person who violates a categorical injunction against eating an impure animal (contrast vs. 24–28, 31–40, which provide for ritual purification from contact with various kinds of animal carcasses by touch or carrying, or by eating a pure animal that has died of itself). The purpose of these distinctions is to maintain the purity of the people, independent from the sanctuary, in harmony with their personal holiness in relation to God (11:43–45; cf. Dan 1:8—far from the destroyed temple; Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 206–209, 215).

<sup>16</sup>On moral law outside the Ten Commandments and permanent moral/ethical principles in civil laws, see Gane, *Leviticus, Num-*

*bers*, 307, 308. Notice that when Jesus was asked to identify the greatest commandment in the Torah, He did not refer to one of the Ten Commandments, but cited Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, permanent moral laws given through Moses that sum up the overarching moral responsibilities of love for God and for other human beings (Matt 22:36–40).

<sup>17</sup>Just as they generally do not understand that it is a moral requirement (based on respect for life, the principle behind Exod 20:13—“You shall not murder” ESV), even for Gentile Christians as a test of fellowship, to abstain from eating the meat of an animal from which the blood was not drained out at the time of slaughter (Acts 15:20, 29; cf. Gen 9:4; Lev 17:10–12).

<sup>18</sup>It is true that in Leviticus 15:24 there is a ritual remedy for a man who has sex with a woman during her period, but either this refers to an accidental/inadvertent case or the concern here is only with the nature of the physical ritual impurity, irrespective of any penalty for incurring it (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 940, 941).

<sup>19</sup>Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 324–326, responding to William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 168–170.

<sup>20</sup>Lev 17:3–9—well-being offerings, of which the offerer eats, sacrificed to goat-demons; 17:10–14—eating blood in improperly slaughtered meat; chap. 18—sexual immorality in general.

<sup>21</sup>For example, in the New Testament, *porneia* includes incest (1 Cor 5:1). The New Testament agrees with Lev 18 and 20 in explicitly condemning incest (1 Cor 5:1) and male homosexual activity (Rom 1:27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10).

## Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6?

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

The New Testament contains a number of texts that directly or indirectly address the issue of same-sex sexual behavior, a topic widely and controversially discussed today. Among these New Testament texts, the most important ones are Jesus’ discussion of heterosexual marriage in Matthew 19 and Mark 10 as well as Paul’s statements in Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:10.

The passage in Romans 1 was discussed in the BRI newsletter *Reflections* number 20 of October 2007.<sup>1</sup> It was concluded that homosexuality in Romans 1 is not limited to a certain time, culture, or to certain homosexual forms only. It is sinful behavior. By pointing out that all practices of homosexuality are sin, this passage warns humanity not to get involved in such behavior.

In this essay, we turn to 1 Corinthians 6.

### The Biblical Passage

The New American Standard Bible translates 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 in the following way:

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will

not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”

The term “homosexual” is a term used today usually to describe same-sex sexual behavior. Many translators think that two Greek terms in 1 Corinthians 6:9 refer to this behavior. NASB translated them with “effeminate” and “homosexuals.” NKJV chose “homosexuals” for the first term and “sodomites” for the second term, while KJV talks about “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with mankind.” NAB suggests “boy prostitutes” and “sodomites,” NLT “male prostitutes” and those who “practice homosexuality,” and NRSV “male prostitutes” and “sodomites.” The old Darby Bible has “those who make women of themselves” and those “who abuse themselves with men.” Other translations lump both terms together: e.g., ESV reads “men who practice homosexuality,” NIV “men who have sex with men,” and RSV “sexual perverts.” Some of this language is no longer acceptable in modern societies, but at least there seems to be some kind of agreement among Bible translators that 1 Corinthians 6:9 describes homosexual practice.

### Suggested Interpretations

Today it is oftentimes claimed that Paul does not refer to monogamous homosexual relationships of mutual respect but condemns pederasty, homosexual prostitution, and exploitive and dehumanizing forms of homosexuality.<sup>2</sup> If this is true, not all male-male intercourse would be prohibited.<sup>3</sup> So we have to take a closer look to understand what Paul had in mind.

### The Historical Context

The ancients did not only know what has been called “contingent homosexuals” (people who are not true homosexuals, such as teenagers and adults who are bored with heterosexuality and get involved with members of the same sex) and most probably “situational homosexuals” (people who, for lack of heterosexual encounters, resort to homosexual acts) but had also some idea or concept of “constitutional homosexuality” (homosexuality which is said to be permanent and may be part of people’s constitution). At least the notion that a person is attracted to the same sex because of his or her constitution is found in Plato’s androgynous myth.

Paris states: “Ancient Greek and Roman artifacts and literature show long-term, loving, same-sex sexual relationships between social equals.”<sup>4</sup>

### The Literary Context

The immediate context of 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 reaches from chapter 5 to chapter 7, dealing with the issue of human sexuality. In chapter 5 Paul mentions a case of incest in Corinth. Paul accepts as binding the legislation of Leviticus 18, which discusses incest and homosexuality, and urges the Corinthian church to disfellowship the church member involved in an incestuous relationship with his stepmother.<sup>5</sup> Toward the end of chapter 5 he presents a short list of four different categories of people involved in vices (v. 10), the first one being fornicators. This list is enlarged in the next verse by two additional groups of people. Christians must separate from church members who practice such vices. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 Paul expands the vice lists of chapter 5 to ten groups of people.<sup>6</sup>

The outline of 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 seen on this page indicates that the “unrighteous [who] will not

inherit the kingdom of God” are the same as the subsequent ten groups of evildoers neither of whom “will inherit the kingdom of God.” It is possible that the ten groups of verses 9b and 10 can be divided in two major parts, because four of the first five evildoers are committing sexual sins.

The first five groups of people are idolaters and sexual offenders discussed in 1 Corinthians 5–7. In this section, two groups seem to be involved in heterosexual misconduct, while the next two groups refer to people engaged in homosexual misconduct. “Adulterers” applies to married people, while “fornicators” may refer to singles, if the term is not used in its broader sense encompassing all other kind of sexual misbehavior. The rest of chapter 6 warns against a relationship with a prostitute. Like in Romans 1, so also in 1 Corinthians 6 Paul uses a creation text. In 1 Corinthians 6:16 Genesis 2:24 is quoted, rooting the discussion on sexuality in God’s creation and His ideal for marriage and sexual relations. Chapter 7 goes on to describe heterosexual marriage, singleness, and divorce.<sup>7</sup> In order to avoid *porneia*, “each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband” (1 Cor 7:2). There is no room for homosexuality. If people “do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.” Paul is clearly referring to heterosexual marriage.

### The Text

1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 as part of this larger context is based on Leviticus 18, the creation account, and Jesus’ exposition of it (Matt 19:3–12; Mark 10:1–12). Although the Corinthian church with its problems pertaining to sexuality is addressed, the issue is broader. The interconnectedness of chapters 5 through 7 as well as its Old Testament background imply a universal dimension, not limited to time, culture, or certain forms of homosexuality only. The entire passage is prescriptive and

not just descriptive. Therefore, Thiselton suggests that 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 is “an even more important and foundational passage than Romans 1<sup>8</sup> . . .” Practicing homosexuality permanently excludes people from the kingdom of God, as does any of the other vices mentioned by Paul.

The two terms dealing with homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9 are *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*.<sup>9</sup> Mala-

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived;

- neither fornicators,
- nor idolaters,
- nor adulterers,
- nor effeminate,
- nor homosexuals,
- nor thieves,
- nor the covetous,
- nor drunkards,
- nor revilers,
- nor swindlers

will inherit the kingdom of God.”

*koi* has been rendered “effeminate,” “those who make women of themselves,” “boy/male prostitutes,” “(pervert) homosexuals,” and “catamites.” The term normally means “soft” or “luxurious” and appears four times in the New Testament (Matt 11:8—twice; Luke 7:25; 1 Cor 6:9). The two Gospel references depict the same event and describe persons in soft clothes. The meaning of the word must be determined by its context. Jones points to later Christian literature (1 Corinthians 6. Polycarp) where the term describes an unworthy person and could easily have been seen as effeminate.<sup>10</sup> However, he admits: “None of this, of course, negates the possibility that the term *malakos* included male homosexual behavior.”<sup>11</sup> Those called *malakoi* are not just soft, mild, or weak men. The majority of interpreters agree that in 1 Corinthians 6:9 this term refers to homosexuals, especially to partners who play the female role in a homosexual relationship.<sup>12</sup> In verse 9 *malakoi* is surrounded by other terms referring to sexual and homosexual behavior, which makes it clear that this word also has a sexual meaning and must be understood as some kind of homosexual behavior.<sup>13</sup> Gagnon sees this confirmed in extra-biblical literature—for instance, Philo of the first century A.D.<sup>14</sup> However, to restrict the *malakoi* to children and pederasty, as some do, is not only speculative but untenable.<sup>15</sup>

The term *arsenokoitai* helps to define the *malakoi*. It is a unique term and in the New Testament found with Paul only.<sup>16</sup> Paul may actually have invented it. It clearly goes back to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 (LXX). There, the two terms *arsēn* and *koitē* that Paul has joined together, now forming one term only, are found separately.<sup>17</sup> A literal translation would describe a man lying with a man in bed—having homosexual intercourse. Its meaning is not restricted to pederasty.<sup>18</sup> The *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 may be the active partners in a homosexual relationship.<sup>19</sup>

The severe penalty for being a *malakos* or an *arsenokoitēs*, namely exclusion from the kingdom of God, indicates that the two terms refer to adult males who of their own free will—whether by innate orientation or not—have homosexual intercourse with each other.<sup>20</sup>

Malick notes:

While Paul’s choice of the words ἀρσενokoῖται and μαλακοί allows for an application to the abuse of pederasty in his day, the words actually denote a broader field of reference including all men who have sexual relations with men. The illogical presuppositions that (a) all sexual relationships are equal before God, (b) Paul’s descriptions are of excessive practices, and (c) homosexuality is a biblically approved expres-

sion of sexuality, are necessary prerequisites to the popular conclusion that Paul was discussing only ‘abuses’ in homosexual behavior. The Apostle Paul condemned all homosexual relationships in his vice-list in 1 Corinthians 6:9 as he addressed the need for the Corinthians to judge those within their midst.<sup>21</sup>

### Summary and Conclusion

The situation in the New Testament is comparable to that of the Old Testament. The two parts of Scripture agree with each other. The Old Testament contains texts that are clearly dealing with homosexuality; so does the New Testament. Both sets of texts are not limited in scope and time and include all homosexual activity at all times. They spell out that homosexual behavior is a sin that needs to be repented of and forgiven.

Above we have discussed 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 and have concluded that the backgrounds of creation and Leviticus 18 and 20 in 1 Corinthians 6 as well as the study of the text and its vocabulary (v. 9) suggest that in this passage homosexuality includes all forms of homosexual activity and transcends a limited application to the Corinthian church only.<sup>22</sup>

It is also important to notice that the Bible is not interested in discussing causes for or different types of homosexual behavior. It focuses on the sexual act itself among people that share the same biological sex and declares such behavior as opposed to the will of God. It does not deal with homosexual attraction as long as the respective person remains celibate, however recognizing that it is possible to sin by dwelling on impure thoughts.<sup>23</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 6:11 Paul adds the following statement concerning people involved in one or more of the various vices listed before: “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” Paul concludes that some of the Corinthian church members have been involved in these sinful activities, including homosexuality, but they have given up such behavior and live a different life.

Thiselton writes:

On the basis of the distance between the first and twentieth centuries, many ask: ‘Is the situation addressed by the biblical writer genuinely comparable to our own?’ The more closely writers examine Greco-Roman society and the pluralism of ethical traditions, the more the Corinthian situation appears to resonate with our own. . . . What is clear from the connection between 1 Cor 6:9 and Rom 1:26–29 and their Old Testament backgrounds is Paul’s endorsement



of the view that idolatry, i.e., placing human autonomy to construct one's values above covenant commitments to God, leads to a collapse of moral values in a kind of domino effect."<sup>24</sup>

While Christians respect all people whether heterosexuals or homosexuals, they attempt to stay away from sin.

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<sup>1</sup>[https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/BRI\\_newsletter\\_10-07\\_28%202320%29\\_0.pdf](https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/BRI_newsletter_10-07_28%202320%29_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Cf. the examples listed by Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 216.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. James B. De Young, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in the Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), 10, 11.

<sup>4</sup>Jenell Williams Paris, *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex Is Too Important to Define Who We Are* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2011), 57, 68. Robert A. J. Gagnon, "The Scriptural Case for a Male-Female Prerequisite for Sexual Relations: The New Testament Perspective," in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church: Biblical, Counseling, and Religious Liberty Issues*, edited by Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 113, declares: "A conception of caring, mutually loving homoerotic unions already existed in Paul's cultural environment and yet even these were rejected by some Greco-Roman moralists." He develops this statement on the next pages.

<sup>5</sup>Leviticus 18 was accepted as binding even for Gentile Christians by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The legislation in Leviticus 18, though part of the holiness code, also has to do with morality and was binding not only for Israelites but for foreigners.

<sup>6</sup>In all these lists *porneia* is mentioned first.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000) 447, 451; Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 84–87.

<sup>8</sup>Thiselton, 447.

<sup>9</sup>They have been hotly debated. E.g., David F. Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes: The Meaning of ARSENOKOITAI (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10)," *Vigiliae Christianae*, 38/2 (1984): 125–153, has shown that John Boswell's claim in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* that *arsenokoitai* means male prostitutes, not male homosexuals, is groundless. William L. Petersen, "Can ARSENOKOITAI Be Translated by 'Homosexuals' (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim. 1.10)," *Vigiliae Christianae*, 40/2 (1986): 187–191, has responded to Wright. Basically, he holds that the modern concept of homosexuality does not correspond with the one prevalent in antiquity.

<sup>10</sup>John R. Jones, "In Christ There Is Neither . . .": Toward the Unity of the Body of Christ," in *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*, edited by David Ferguson, Fritz Guy, and David R. Larson (Roseville, CA: Adventist Forum, 2008), part 4–9.

<sup>11</sup>Jones, part 4–10.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 33 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 287, and Ronald M. Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference, 1988), 134. Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 93, understands *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* as "the passive and active partners in homosexuality."

<sup>13</sup>William Loader, *Sexuality in the New Testament: Understanding the Key Texts* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 30, mentions that "the word group appears in sexual contexts . . ."

<sup>14</sup>Robert A. J. Gagnon, "The Scriptural Case," 84.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Thiselton, 449.

<sup>16</sup>In his book, De Young devotes an entire chapter to the discussion of the term (175–214).

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Köstenberger, 216.

<sup>18</sup>Gagnon, "The Scriptural Case," 87, states: "Indeed, there is no evidence in ancient Israel, Second Temple Judaism, or rabbinic Judaism that any limitation was placed in the prohibition of male-male intercourse."

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Thiselton, 448–450; Via and Gagnon, 83. Springett, 136, suggests: "If Paul was condemning only a crude form of homosexual activity here, by implication allowing other types, he surely would have been more explicit." Paul comes from a Jewish background, and the Jewish verdict on homosexuality is unequivocal. On the other hand, Jones, part 4–12, acknowledges that *arsenokotoi* "almost certainly" has to do with homosexuality, however, "of an exploitive sort."

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Via and Gagnon, 82. De Young, 192, states: "Such researchers as Wright and Henry Mendell have definitely shown that *arsenokoitai* must be defined broadly. One cannot limit *arsenokoitai* to pederasty or to active male prostitution. It also includes same-gender orientation, condition, and mutuality."

<sup>21</sup>David E. Malick, "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993): 492.

<sup>22</sup>Thiselton, 452. In the meantime, polygamy has been legalized in Kenya and in some countries it has been discussed whether or not to repeal incest laws.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Matt 5:27–30.

<sup>24</sup>One should remember that in Romans 1:26, 27 not only male homosexual activity is mentioned but also female.

## SCRIPTURE APPLIED

### In Quest for Meaning

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

At an exhibition in Switzerland the sculptor Tinguely presented a gigantic and strange machine. It consisted of metal bars, fly wheels, sheet metal, chains, and gear wheels. A crowd of visitors surrounded the strange construction. When the sculptor was asked what the machine would produce, he responded, "Nothing." The artist had manufactured a kind of symbol: in our world so many wheels are spinning that it can be frightening. We live in a system that proceeds with an immense speed. There is always motion, action, noise, and intoxication.

But there is no real aim, meaning, and fruit. Why am I here? What is the meaning and purpose of my life?

## I. Wrestling with the Quest for Meaning

### 1. Ignoring the Quest

- It is important to ask this question, otherwise our life may become meaningless. Victor Frankl, the Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, held that “the search for meaning is the ‘primary motivation’ of human life.”<sup>1</sup>
- However, some people believe that ultimate meaning cannot be found. But meaninglessness creates emptiness, boredom, and a vacuum. And a vacuum will be filled with other things that again cannot create meaning: anger and hatred, busyness and conformity, pleasure and entertainment, power and monetary success.

### 2. Preliminary Answers

Some people have found preliminary answers, but these answers do not solve the problem. Rather the problem of meaning has been moved to the next level.

- Some claim that to live for their nation, their family, or their profession would give meaning to their lives. However, such meaning is at most preliminary, because the next questions would be: *What is the meaning and purpose of the existence of a nation and of humanity? What is the meaning of the lives of my family members? If I do not know why I live and why others live, why should I, for instance, become a physician and help others to live?*
- In an obituary it was stated that the deceased person’s life consisted exclusively of work and taking care of his beloved ones. This is poor. It could be an obituary for a horse, as someone said. What is the meaning of life?
- Some people claim that the only meaning of life is to enjoy it to the fullest.  
Ecc 2:10, 11      Already Solomon recognized this to be meaningless and chasing after wind.

### 3. Searching for Answers

We have to search for good answers to really live a fulfilled and happy life. A young man said: “What I have is not life: Monday mechanic, Tuesday mechanic, Wednesday mechanic, Thursday mechanic, Friday mechanic, Saturday soccer, and Sunday theater and girlfriend. Monday mechanic, Tuesday mechanic, Wednesday mechanic . . .” He was right.<sup>2</sup>

## II. The Quest for Meaning and Its Consequences

### 1. False Values and Desperation

- If we do not know why we live, we tend to have wrong priorities in life. We tend to have a false value system and become desperate. As soon as people have enough to live, they find out that they do not know what to live for. Those who manage to find meaning live a fulfilled life; those who do not end up in despair.
- If life is meaningless, what difference does it make if I die today instead of in ten years?

### 2. Utmost Seriousness

- We have one life only. This life counts. Therefore we must be dead serious.
- One’s paper that the professor has marked with red ink all over can be thrown away; one can start again. But not so with life! Because life is irreplaceable, we have to handle it with utmost seriousness.
- Matt 24:38, 39      These people were content to have their private peace and prosperity. But is it sufficient to work, eat, have some fun, and when death comes, all is gone?

## III. Toward Meaning in Life

What is the meaning of life? We offer two responses that belong together. Without the first the second becomes pointless. The meaning of life is:

- (1) to become children of God and live with Him and
- (2) to live for others.

### 1. The Meaning of Life is to Become Children of God and Live with Him

- Gen 1:27      In Paradise Adam and Eve lived fulfilled lives. What gave them meaning was being created in the image of God. This implied intimate relationship with God and as God’s representatives on earth they took care of God’s creation.
- Gen 3:8      God would walk in the garden. Before the Fall Adam and Eve lived in the presence of God.
- Ps 63:1      Sin ruptured this relationship and robbed humanity of meaning. While we are still God’s creatures by nature, we are not automatically His children. Since then we have been searching for something ultimate gives perspective to who we are and what we do. As water is the element for a fish to live and to swim in, so being connected to God is our element as humans. As a fish without water is destined to die, so we ruin ourselves, if we try to live without God. Augustine: “You [God] have created us



for union with yourself, and our hearts are restless until we find rest in you”<sup>3</sup>

Gen 3:15 God, knowing that with sin and separation from Him our lives had become meaningless and would end in eternal death, stepped in. He promised that the Messiah would come and make things right again.

John 10:10 When Jesus lived among us, died for us, and showed us God the Father, he brought life in fullness.

John 6:35, 47 Meaning of life is found in Jesus (see also John 14:6).

John 1:12 We receive ultimate meaning and a future beyond death through a decision for the One who is the life and by constantly living with Him. Then we are God’s children with all the privileges coming along with this status.

A young man has just graduated from high school. His uncle asks him about his future plans. “I will study law,” the young man answers.

“Good,” says the uncle, “Then what?”

“I will become a lawyer or a prosecutor.”

“Good,” says the uncle, “Then what?”

“I will marry and start a family.”

“Good,” says the uncle, “Then what?”

“Hopefully I will become famous.”

“Good,” says the uncle, “Then what?”

“I will get older and will retire.”

“Good,” says the uncle, “Then what?”

“I will move to a nice area, build a new home, and plant strawberries.”

“Good,” says the uncle, “Then what?”

The young man gets angry. “One day people die.”

“So,” says the uncle, “Then what?”<sup>4</sup>

What is the meaning of my life? First, the meaning of life is to become a child of God and live with Him.

## 2. The Meaning Is to Live for Others

Second, if we live with God and Jesus lives in us, then living for others is very meaningful and rewarding.

Acts 10:38 This verse summarizes Jesus’ earthly life. It was about doing good, caring for others. And He left us an example that we are to follow and emulate.

Albert Schweitzer: “It is not enough merely to exist. It’s not enough to say, ‘I’m earning enough to support my family. I do my work well. I’m a good father, husband, mother, wife, churchgoer.’ That’s all very well. But you must do something more. . . . You must give some time to your fellow human beings.

For remember, you don’t live in a world all your own. Your brothers and sisters are here, too.”<sup>5</sup>

Matt 25:40 Living for others! At the end of our lives we have to leave behind all material possession, power, and fame. What we can take with us is our own character and the persons who have found the Lord through us. What lasts should have top priority in our lives.

Matt 28:19, 20 Jesus’ Great Commission

John 15:8, 16 Bearing fruit

Matt 4:19 Fishers of men

2 Tim 2:2 The chain of witnesses through which the gospel has reached us needs to be continued by us. We are links in this chain, to pass on to others the good news of salvation, fellowship with God, and meaning of life.

## Conclusion

In a small German town at Lake Constance, a pastor and a deaconess were involved in a conversation. Suddenly she pointed to the water and said, “Here my life took the decisive turn.” In the water old tombstones were seen. Obviously they had been removed from their places and thrown into the lake when space for new graves was needed. She continued, “When I was a young lady, I stood here in this very place. I noticed a specific tombstone. The name was already gone, but the dates were still readable: 1789–1821. And then it happened. It became clear to me that an entire human life is just a line between two numbers—so little. I also understood which enormous responsibility we have to make the best of this little line. So I committed my life to the Savior and decided to place it into His service.”<sup>6</sup>

Why am I here? What is the meaning and purpose of my life? The ultimate meaning of life is to become children of God, live with Him, and live for others. We could also express it differently: The ultimate meaning of life is to live with God and glorify Him (John 17:4; 1 Cor 10:31; 1 Peter 4:11), or as Jesus has expressed it: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30, 31). What are you going to do with your life?

<sup>1</sup>T. H. West, *Jesus and the Quest for Meaning* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 2.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Wilhelm Busch, *Jesus unser Schicksal* (Galdbeck: Schriftenmissions-Verlag, 1971), 59.

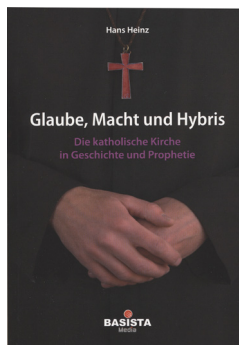
<sup>3</sup>Philip Hefner, *Technology and Human Becoming* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 86.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Wilhelm Busch, *Jesus unser Schicksal*, 48, 49.

<sup>5</sup>G. Marshall and D. Poling, *Schweitzer: A Biography* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 299.

<sup>6</sup>Wilhelm Busch, *Unter Menschen* (Stuttgart: Quell-Verlag, 1958), 70, 71.

## BOOK NOTES



Hans Heinz, *Glaube, Macht und Hybris* (Mundelsheim, Germany: Basista Media GmbH., 2013), 133 pp. EUR\$7.90.

Hans Heinz, Th.D., spent forty years in the classroom teaching theology students in Austria (Bogenhofen) and Germany (Marienhöhe and Friedensau). He has published several books and written many articles on theology and church

history. His dissertation *Justification and Merit* dealt with the conflict between the Roman Catholic doctrine of merit and the biblical doctrine of Righteousness by Faith.

His latest book *Glaube, Macht und Hybris (Faith, Supremacy, and Hubris)* has the subtitle “The Catholic Church in History and Prophecy.” It addresses the contrast between the spiritual and secular power of the Catholic Church and Christ’s renunciation of power and supremacy. The book is well written and well documented; it has a prologue, three chapters dealing with the growth of Catholicism in history and the biblical prophecies dealing with these developments, and an epilogue. The preface was written by Daniel Heinz, the author’s son, who is professor and director of the Adventist archives at Friedensau University.

The prologue raises the question how Christian the Catholic Church is, in view of the contrast between the pomp and glory of the Roman church and the simplicity of the church of Jesus at the beginning of church history. Chapter 1, titled “Roman Catholicism: Continuity and Change,” chronicles the changes that have taken place in the Christian church over the centuries. The papal church that arose in the fifth century was, in many respects, no longer the same as the church in the first few centuries (p. 18), and it continued to accept and adapt non-biblical teachings, such as the sinlessness of Mary (1854) and the infallibility of the pope (1870).

The author spends some time reviewing the Second Vatican Council (1963) that was hailed as a new Pentecost by reform-minded Catholics and as the greatest calamity of the century by traditionalists (p. 34). The Council made great progress in the areas of religious freedom and ecumenism. No longer are the

Reformers and their followers described as heretics; now they are called “separated brethren,” and Catholics are encouraged to participate in ecumenical events and organizations. Likewise, the mutual ban between Rome and Constantinople from the year 1054 was lifted at the end of the Council in 1965 (pp. 32, 33). Nevertheless, in the years following the Council, tendencies to modify or reverse some of the decisions of the Council made themselves felt. Some of the reformist Catholic theologians were disciplined or lost their jobs and Pope Francis I in 2013 reiterated the concept that there is no salvation outside of the church (p. 50). The author, therefore, comes to the conclusion that in spite of the reforms of the Council, the nature of the church remains the same (*semper eadem*); its teachings and the claim of the infallibility of the pope when he speaks *ex cathedra* have not changed. Hence, the critic on this hubris remains valid (p. 51).

Today, the church still understands itself as the living Christ on earth (*Christus prolongatus*) who continually acts through the Scriptures and the sacraments. Consequently, it sees itself as the only salvific institution in the world. The fact that it claimed to have the authority to change God’s commandments and persecuted those who refuse to submit is based on this understanding of being the living Christ. Therefore, a truly ecumenical church will never happen because it will always be constrained by the conditions and conceptions of the Roman Catholic Church.

The second chapter, “The Claims of Rome: Prophetic Judgment and Historical Evidence” traces the apocalyptic vision of history in the books Daniel and Revelation. The focus is on the little horn, the papacy, and its activities in history. The chapter chronicles the prophesied apostasy, the deadly wound in 1798, and its healing in the twentieth century. It concludes with a reference to the prophetic word as a light that shines in a dark place (2 Peter 1:19). We need this prophetic word to be forearmed against the dangers and deceptions of the endtime (p. 88).

The third chapter investigates the teachings of the Catholic Church in light of the gospel. Addressed are such topics as salvation, the papacy, Mary, the mass, saints and reliquaries, and the issue of indulgences. The book concludes with a short epilogue summarizing the contrast between the spirit of Jesus and the claims of the Catholic Church to be God’s representative on earth. “No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11 NKJ).

On the basis of the prophetic word, Seventh-day Adventists have always had a clear understanding of the role of the Catholic Church in history. This understanding, unfortunately, has diminished or been lost completely in most Protestant churches today. *Glaube, Macht und Hybris*, written by a preeminent Adventist theo-

gian who has studied the Catholic Church for decades, deserves a wide circulation. It is hoped that an English translation will appear soon, so that the wider Adventist membership, as well as non-Adventists, can benefit from this important volume.

Gerhard Pfandl, BRI

## NEWS

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