



First United Methodist Church

Points to Ponder

The Bible Pre-1946

Source: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/keithgiles/2018/06/the-word-homosexual-does-not-appear-in-the-bible-pre-1946/>

Prior to 1946, no Christian had a Bible with the word “Homosexuality” printed in it. This means that no Christians were debating whether or not someone could be a homosexual Christian or not. Why? Because their Bibles didn’t condemn homosexuality. Look at 1 Corinthians 6:9 in the King James Bible: *“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate [malakos], nor abusers of themselves with mankind [arsenokotai]...”* But if you read that same verse in any modern English translation published after 1946 you’ll read this: *“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality...”*

What happened? According to researcher Kathy V. Baldock: “The intention of the RSV team and publishers was to create a version of the Bible that was more readable and accessible in its updated language. They based their work mainly on the King James Version (1611), the ERV (1885), and the American Standard (1901).

However...”During the 1930s and 1940s, when the RSV team was doing their work, it was during a time in medical professions and in the culture where people still did not understand what same-sex attractions even meant. It was seen as a mystery, then as a pathology, and a mental illness.”

“Regarding 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, the translation team relied mainly upon a fairly recent translation of arsenokoitai and malakos as catamite and sodomite, respectively, that had appeared in the Moffat Bible (1925). “Those two words, although still problematic in the Moffatt translation, were actually somewhat more reflective of the actual meaning of arsenokoitai and malakos than “homosexual.” Today, most Christians in America are reading modern English translations that have since carried over this mistake of translating the words “malakos” and “arsenokoitai” as “Homosexuality”. This is a mistake.

As New Testament scholar David Bentley Hart points out in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:9: “A man who is malakos is either “soft” – in any number of senses: self-indulgent, dainty, cowardly...physically weak – or “gentle” – in various largely benign senses: delicate, mild, etc. Precisely what an arsenokoites is has long been a matter of speculation and argument. Literally, it means a man who “beds” – that is, “couples with” – “males.” But, there is no evidence of its use before Paul’s text.

“...It would not mean “homosexual” in the modern sense of a person of a specific erotic disposition, for the simple reason that the ancient world possessed no comparable concept of a specifically homoerotic sexual identity; it would refer to a particular sexual behavior, but we cannot say exactly which one.”

Hart goes on to mention that the Clementine Vulgate interprets the word “arsenokoitai” as those who use male concubines [prostitutes] and that Luther’s German Bible interprets the word as referring to paedophiles.

Further, he says: “My guess at the proper connotation of the word is based simply upon the reality that in the first century the most common and readily available form of male homoerotic sexual activity was a master’s or patron’s exploitation of young male slaves.” So, when we read the word “Homosexuality” in our English New Testament Bibles, we need to remember that this is not what Paul had in mind when he wrote those words that are – today – translated as such. What he meant, most likely, was either those who sexually abuse young boys, or those who engaged in pagan temple sex rituals.

What’s more, when Paul used the term “malakos” – which simply means “effeminate” – he was referring to men who shaved their beards or grew long hair, or who otherwise acted in a manner that could be culturally interpreted as being “unmanly.”

None today would agree with Paul’s conviction that a man who shaves his beard or has long hair will not enter the Kingdom of God. Rather, we should place that statement in the same basket with a few of Paul’s other statements that women should cover their heads when they pray or that everyone should greet one another with a holy kiss. These are cultural norms that Paul could ask those first century Corinthians to observe, but that we are free to disregard.