

First Epistle to the Corinthians

9 – Essay Two: Sex – Theology of Sexual Practice: Kingdom Ethics (2.2)

1 Corinthians 6:9-12

1. Organizational alternatives for this text
 - a. *ESV Study Bible*
 - i. A Report of Sexual Immorality and Legal Wrangling (5:1–6:20)
 1. Incest, arrogance, and the need for discipline (5:1–13)
 2. Trivial cases before unrighteous judges (6:1–11)
 3. Sexual immorality and the body's resurrection (6:12–20)
 - b. *Reading the New Testament: 1 Corinthians*
 - i. A: Separation for the Sake of Salvation : Sexual problem (incest) (5:1-13)
 - ii. B: The Costs of Going to Court: Problem of lawsuits (6:1-11)
 - iii. A': Keeping the Bedroom Attached to the Rest of the House: Sexual problem (fornication) (6:12-20)
 - c. *New International Commentary, New Testament: The First Epistle*
 - i. In Response to Reports (1:10-6:20)
 1. Immorality and Litigation: Test Cases of the Crisis of Authority and Gospel (5:1-6:20)
 - a. The Case of the Incestuous Man (5:1-13)
 - b. A Case of Litigation (6:1-11)
 - c. On Going to the Prostitutes (6:12-20)
 - d. Bailey¹ (Essay Two Subject: Men and Women in the Human Family)
 - i. Immorality and the Church (4:17-6:8)
 - ii. (Three Road Blocks: Leaven, Immorality, and the Law Courts [5:6b-6:8])
 - iii. Theology of Sexual Practice: Kingdom Ethics (6:9-12)
 - iv. Theology of Sexual Practice: Joining the Body (6:13-20)
 - v. Sexual Practice in Harmony with the Gospel (7:1-40)
2. Earlier Summaries
 - a. Paul sees arrogance among some of the Corinthians believers as the primary issue
 - i. Sexual immorality is a symptom of arrogance
 - ii. The rest of the community has failed to address the problems
 - iii. Paul calls on the community to publicly remove the offender thus showing what is honorable and shameful to the community
 - b. Paul addresses three objections Corinthian believers might raise
 - i. Leaven: It's just a small thing
 1. Paul: But it will infect the whole church if allowed to remain
 - ii. Associations: We're free to do anything as long as we keep away from non-Christians
 1. Paul: Freedom in Christ is freedom to carry out mission, and Christian community must be a responsible member of society so as to not compromise the power of Christ
 - iii. Lawsuits: The church can't agree, so we'll let outside courts decide
 1. Paul: To relinquish responsibility to maintain internal order is to admit defeat and to pose a danger to Roman society

¹ Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, loc. 1777

Table 1: Bailey, location 2034

1 Corinthians 6:9-12 (ESV)		Motif
1	^{6,9} Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?	The Unrighteous Not inherit
2	Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [catamites] [nor sodomites,]	Five sins (sexual)
3	¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers	Five sins (nonsexual)
4	will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you.	Not inherit Like some of you
5	But you were washed, [but] you were sanctified, [but] you were justified	a b c
6	in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by [in] the Spirit of our God.	a' b' c'
7	¹² "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything.	a b a b'

3. Rhetoric

a. 7 parts

- i. (4) ABBA [ab – 12345 – 12345 – ba]
 1. Kingdom of God
 2. Five vices
 3. Five vices
 4. Kingdom of God
- ii. (2) CC [abc – abc]
 1. Three effects of entering Kingdom of God
 2. Three sources of entry into Kingdom of God
- iii. (1) D [ab – ab]
 1. Corinthian believers' assertion
 2. Paul's response

4. List of vices (6:9-11a)

a. Preliminary thoughts

- i. We must ask: what was Paul's purpose in including this list?
- ii. Five items: a standard literary practice of the time
- iii. Two lists of five = ten
 1. Some scholars see an allusion to the Decalogue; others see no significance
- iv. In the first set (of sexual sins), some modern translations combine "catamites" and "sodomites" into a single "men who practice homosexuality"
 1. Catamites → malakos: "soft," usually interpreted as passive partner in a homosexual act
 - a. Its meaning is uncertain since it is not used to refer to sexual behavior outside of Paul's writings²
 2. Sodomites → arsenokoites: usually interpreted as the active partner in a homosexual act
 - a. Earliest occurrence of this term in preserved literature³
 - b. Paul either invented this word, or it was so offensive (like the F-word in English) that no earlier author would put it in writing
 - c. Later authors used it reluctantly, particularly in relation to homosexual activity⁴

Greek literature provides evidence for homosexual activity among both males and females. Plato's Symposium regards homosexual love between males as alone capable of satisfying a man's highest and noblest aspirations. The love of a man and a woman is inferior, a purely physical impulse whose sole object is the procreation of children...

In Rome there were two streams of thought. On the one hand, traditional Roman values opposed homosexuality among citizens... Homosexual activity had been illegal since the Lex Scantinia (either 223 or 149 bc), but the law was usually invoked only for political purposes. On the other hand, some Romans copied the Greek idealization of homosexuality...

To summarize, in the Greco- Roman world homosexuality embraced both men and women. It involved prostitution, older man/younger man liaisons, woman/woman encounters, and also homosexual marriages. When negative opinions were expressed about the practice, they were not directed just against pederasty.

Early Christians continued the Old Testament and Jewish perspective on homosexuality [an abomination]...

Among the early Christian fathers two things may be noted. First, the apologists criticize Greco- Roman homosexuality... Second, there is a very similar note to that already sounded in the Old Testament, ancient Judaism, and the New Testament. The Didache says, "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not corrupt boys."⁵

3. How much and what can we definitely conclude about Paul's views on homosexuality? How much and what should we leave unanswered?

² NICNT: *First Epistle*, entry on 1 Cor 6:9-10

³ NICNT, entry on 1 Cor. 6:9-10

⁴ NICNT, entry on 1 Cor. 6:9-10

⁵ *Reading the New Testament*, entry on 1 Cor. 6:7b-8, 9-10

- v. Reminder: no vice is worse than any other – both heterosexual and homosexual sins; defrauding and abusing others seem to be the main point of the second five
- vi. Reminder: the lists are not meant to be checklists
- vii. Greedy, drunkards, revilers
 1. This set may point forward to the disorderly Eucharist/Communion which Paul anticipates addressing soon

... Watson (First Epistle, p. 56) makes the insightful observation that if there is a prevalent point between the items Paul has chosen to include in this listing, it is the common characteristic of "ruthless self- gratification, reckless of other people's rights." Such an attitude, which produces deplorable behaviors, is the ungodliness Paul is concerned to criticize; he is not aiming at ranking or rating sins.⁶

- b. Context
 - i. "Kingdom of God" bookends the list
 - ii. Some of the Corinthians believers (the arrogant ones) had an over-realized eschatology; i.e., they believed the kingdom of God had already come in its fullness and, therefore, were free to do anything because they could no longer do any wrong
 - iii. And/or some of them may have subscribed to dualistic belief where only the spirit was good and would be saved, so anything they did in the body wouldn't matter
 - iv. The specific issue that triggered this essay was sexual immorality
 - v. Social, economic, racial, national, and religious divisions exist in the Corinthian church
 - c. Back to the question: What was Paul's purpose for this list?
 - i. To show the Corinthian believers why their theologies are wrong
 - ii. Paul is saying, "If you were really in the fullness of the kingdom of God, these activities would not be found among you"
 - iii. Paul adds, "And such were [imperfect tense] some of you"
 1. Paul distinguishes between activity and identity
 2. Even though some Corinthian believers are behaving improperly, that does not make them idolaters, or adulterers, or thieves, or swindlers, etc.
 3. Some of them made these things habitual practice in their *past* lives
5. The reality (6:11b)
- a. "But..."
 - i. Paul reminds them of what they have already experienced
 - ii. "You were washed... in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ"
 1. Possibly an allusion to baptism (some scholars think so, others don't)
 2. Regardless, it points to a cleansing that happened in the past
 - iii. "You were sanctified... in the Spirit"
 1. The Spirit has already set apart each believer by gifting them (*charisma*) for service
 - iv. "You were justified... in our God"
 1. You are already a member of God's community
 - v. Another example of a Trinitarian understanding
 - b. An implied imperative: Therefore, you have the power and responsibility to act in ways that bring honor to God and his community
 - c. And an accusation: Instead you are shaming him

⁶ *Understanding the Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, entry "Additional Notes" 1 Cor. 6:10.

The Corinthian problem was not with their experience of the Spirit, but with their misunderstanding of what it meant to be Spirit people. Our problems are usually of another kind. The Spirit belongs to the creed and to our theology; but he is all too often left there, so that his genuinely transforming and empowering work is often left until the Eschaton, rather than experienced in the present.⁷

6. Proper attitude (6:12)

- a. "All things are lawful for me"
 - i. Assertion by some Corinthians
 - ii. It may be a statement Paul originally made, but which has now been misused by the Corinthians
 - iii. Their idea of "freedom" in Christ – no restrictions whatsoever

Truly Christian conduct is not predicated on whether I have the right to do something, but whether my conduct is helpful to those about me.⁸

b. Paul's response

- i. What he doesn't do: reinstate laws, regulations, and punishments
 - 1. Doing this would deny the gospel
 - 2. He doesn't move from one ditch to the other
- ii. First: genuine freedom is limited by regard (love) of others
- iii. Second: genuine freedom does not allow itself to be cancelled out by becoming a slave to itself

When one loves God, *all things are permissible*; but when one loves God, one loves what He loves. This means love for all others, for they are loved by God; and conduct will be regulated by this love.⁹

7. Summary

- a. Paul corrects the Corinthian believers' misunderstanding about the kingdom of God
- b. Paul reminds them of their reality and identity – the kingdom is not yet fully realized, but they are indeed full members of God's community, and they have the power and responsibility to bring honor to God
- c. Paul corrects their misunderstanding of freedom as a member of God's community – freedom means the ability to do good for others
- d. Modern Christians tend to get hung up and stuck on the vice lists and minimize or ignore what Paul considered more important

⁷ NICNT, entry on 1 Cor. 6:11.

⁸ NICNT, entry on 1 Cor. 6:12.

⁹ *Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries: 1 Corinthians*, Orr/Walther, p. 202; quoted by Bailey, location 2096