

Homosexuality and one's identity

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Bible Version

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(Note: All bolding of Scripture quotations for emphasis has been added by the author.)

The apostle Paul comments about homosexuality in three of his letters:

1. Romans 1:18-32: Homosexuality is a consequence of idolatry — the rejection of the one true God and of the witness to him in creation.
2. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: Continued homosexual indulgence¹ will exclude a person from eternal life.
3. 1 Timothy 1:10: Sins such as homosexuality² are contrary to the “sound doctrine” which faithful gospel preachers proclaim.

The focus of this article is on Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11:

⁹ *Or do you not know that the **unrighteous**^[a] will not inherit the kingdom of God?*

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,^[b] ¹⁰ *nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

¹¹ *And such were some of you. But you were **washed**, you were **sanctified**, you were **justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

ESV footnotes:

[a] 1 Corinthians 6:9: Or *wrongdoers*.

[b] 1 Corinthians 6:9: The two Greek terms translated by this phrase refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts.

Paul here lists certain vices, among them homosexuality.

He warns against the danger of thinking that God overlooks such behavior.

Those who believe that are deceived.

Rather (says Paul), persons characterized by these behaviors will be excluded from God's kingdom — excluded from heaven when they die.

¹ The Greek terms in 1 Corinthians 6:9 that underly ESV's phrase “men who practice homosexuality” are (1) the adjective *malakos* (Strong's G3120, meaning “soft, effeminate”), and (2) the noun *arsenokoitēs* (Strong's G733, meaning “a sodomite”). These terms denote, respectively, the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual sex.

² Greek: *arsenokoitēs*. See footnote 1.

Paul calls these people “unrighteous”.

He characterizes them as idolaters, adulterers, thieves, etc. because that’s exactly what they are.

Outward behavior says much about a person’s thought life.

There’s a famous and relevant saying: Thoughts lead to actions. Actions lead to habits. Habits become your character. Character determines your destiny.

Paul is here speaking about dominant patterns of behavior, not occasional forays into sin.

He’s describing people that have no qualms about their actions.

But Paul reminds his Corinthian friends that some of them were also formerly unrighteous — idolaters, adulterers and thieves. And some were practicing homosexuals.

But they are so no longer! How come?

There are two reasons why Paul no longer characterized them as such.

First, **Repentance** had taken place.

Repentance denotes a turnaround in one’s thinking that results in a turnaround in one’s life.

The Corinthians had been taught about God, his law, their own sin, and their liability to his judgment.

They had been taught about God’s remedy for sin in Christ.

They had asked God for forgiveness and sought his help in turning from sin.

(Repentance can be defined as a turning from sin, to God, in Christ.)

But of course, in this life repentance and transformation are partial at best. We still sin.

At times we relapse into former practices.

Our progress is partial and therefore cannot be the basis for God’s acceptance of us.

Thus, the second (and main) reason Paul could say that the Corinthians were no longer idolaters or adulterers or thieves is because God himself no longer regarded them as such.

God had done something for them, namely, **given them a new identity**.

According to Paul, God does remarkable things for sinners who turn to him:

He *washes* them: their sin and guilt are wholly removed through Christ (cf. 1Jn 1:7, 9).

He *sanctifies* them: he sets them apart as belonging to himself; he views them as “saints” (1Cor 1:2; 14:33).

He *justifies* them: he declares them to be righteous in his sight (Rom 4:5-8).

So, they are no longer their former selves — sinners under God’s wrath and destined for hell.

Christ’s own perfection is imputed to them (2Cor 5:21).

Their former ungodly selves are no more:

They are brand-new people, “born again” (Jn 3:7), a “new creation” (2Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).

There’s an obvious reference in 1 Corinthians 6:11 to Christian baptism — the symbol of God’s cleansing us and adopting us into his family (Ac 22:16; Gal 3:26-27).

In Romans 6:3-4 Paul explains how baptism denotes far more than mere cleansing:

Being “drowned” under the water portrays the death and burial of our old selves, while rising from the water speaks of resurrection and our new life and identity in Christ.

In baptism, the symbolism of BURIAL is important: our old self is both dead **and buried**.

The former sin-laden person is gone, buried forever.

As far as God is concerned our sins are “covered” (Ps 32:1; 85:2)³ and out of sight (Isa 38:17); they’re out of reach (Ps 103:12; Mic 7:19); out of mind (Jer 31:34); completely erased and blotted out (Ps 51:1; Isa 43:25; 44:22; Jer 50:20; Ac 3:19).

Our sins have been “cast ... into the depths of the sea” (Mic 7:19) — and there’s to be no fishing!

Thus, when we become a Christian, we gain a wholly new identity in Christ.

And the challenge then is to live out that new identity — **to become in fact what we are in God’s estimation**.

Paul in Romans 6:11-13 applies his baptism teaching as follows:

So you also must consider yourselves [to be] dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

In 1 Corinthian 6:13-20 Paul is urging his readers to turn away from sexual sin.

Their transformation has thus far been incomplete; some were perhaps even relapsing.

He adduces several reasons why they should repent anew:

Their bodies are members of Christ himself (6:15); they are temples indwelt by God’s Spirit (6:19); they belong to God, having been “bought with a price” (6:19-20).

Paul, here as in Romans 6, is urging his readers to become in actual fact what they already are in Christ: holy and righteous.

Conclusion

In common with every other class of sinner, a homosexual person needs a change of identity.

The problem with churches blessing same-sex relationships is therefore obvious:

Not only are homosexual practices thereby affirmed, but so is one’s identity as a homosexual.

The old “sinner”, which should have been buried and forgotten, is dragged up and reaffirmed as being good and acceptable.

But one cannot do that. Either we are new persons in Christ, or we’re just our plain old selves — sinners outside of Christ, under God’s wrath, and destined for hell.

God accepts no one in himself or herself.

Only as we are “in Christ” — united to him and identified with him, granted his righteousness and perfection — are we accepted by God and in a state of salvation.

³ The Hebrew verb for (sins being) “covered” in Psalm 32:1 and 85:2 is *kāsāh* (Strong’s H3680), meaning “to cover, conceal, hide”. The (covered) sins are thereby hidden and out of sight.