

# 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9C

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Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6. We've now finished looking at the first eight verses of this chapter. In these verses Paul was dealing with the sin of Christians taking each other to civil court. Some of the Corinthian believers were deliberately putting themselves in a position where they would be judged in civil court by unbelievers. But Paul gave a better approach than going to court before the unrighteous. Instead he said that we should go before the saints. In other words, all of us should be willing and ready to help our fellow Christians resolve a dispute using the wisdom that God has given to us. Unbelievers should see us loving each other instead of fighting each other in court. We need to have a good testimony before the world!

So in verses 1–8 Paul was zooming in with his camera and looking at the particular sin of Christians taking each other to court. But in verse 9 Paul zoomed out to look at a variety of sins. Look at what he wrote in verses 9–10: “Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males, no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God’s kingdom.” So we have a long list here of different types of sinners. But first Paul reminded his readers that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom. The Greek word for unrighteous is the same one that Paul used in verse 1 to refer to the unbelieving judges. But in verses 7–8 Paul used a verb that comes from the same root as this noun, and he was referring to the Corinthian believers! Some of them were treating their fellow Christians wrongly or unrighteously.

So Paul gave these people a strong warning here in verse 9. If they continued to do unrighteous things like cheating each other and taking each other to court, then they were in danger of being excluded from God’s kingdom. Instead of reigning with Jesus when he comes back to set up his earthly kingdom, they could end up being punished in hell for all eternity. That’s why Paul proceeded to command them not to be deceived in verse 9. He basically wanted them to examine themselves to see if they were in the faith. And he was helping them to do that by giving them a list of sins. If they were practicing any of these sins and did not repent, then they would not inherit God’s kingdom.

Paul started his list of sinners here in verse 9 by referring to sexually immoral people. The phrase “sexually immoral people” comes from one word in the original Greek. It’s used four times in this letter, and we’ve already seen the first three of them. They’re all found in chapter 5 and verses 9–11. Look at what Paul wrote in these verses: “I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters; otherwise you would

have to leave the world. But actually, I wrote you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister and is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person.”

So in these verses Paul gave us two shorter lists of sinners. The first one is in verse 10, and it's the shortest list. Then the second one is in verse 11, and it includes all the same terms that are in the first list, but it's a little longer. Now we have a third list that's even longer here in chapter 6 and verses 9–10. But once again we're going to see all the same terms that are found in the previous list. And one of these terms that's in all three lists is this Greek word for sexually immoral people. In fact, it comes first in all three lists for emphasis. That's because Paul started this section at the beginning of chapter 5 by stating that there was sexual immorality among them. Someone in the church was sleeping with his father's wife. But Paul used a term that can refer to a person who practiced any kind of sexual sin, whether it's incest, adultery, prostitution, or homosexuality.

You see, the Bible teaches clearly that any sexual activity outside of marriage is off limits. Hebrews 13:4 says that “marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers.” If we're going to honor marriage, then we need to start by understanding it properly instead of redefining it like many people in our society are doing. Scripture teaches that marriage is a covenant between one man and one woman to be lifelong companions. God requires us to make a long-term commitment to one person of the opposite gender before we enjoy the pleasures of sexual intimacy. But if we defile the marriage bed, then we're going to find ourselves under divine judgment. Those who practice sexual immorality and never repent aren't going to inherit God's kingdom. Instead they're going to experience his wrath forever and ever.

So Paul started his list of sinners in 1 Corinthians 6:9 by referring to sexually immoral people. Then he mentioned a second type of sinner: idolaters. The Greek word for idolaters is also used four times in this letter, and we've already seen the first two occurrences back in chapter 5 and verses 10–11, where Paul gave us his first two lists of sinners. In the first list this word comes at the end of the list after Paul mentioned the greedy and the swindlers. But in the second list this word comes third right after Paul mentioned the greedy. And this arrangement is appropriate because of what Paul wrote elsewhere. In Colossians 3:5 he said that greed is idolatry, and in Ephesians 5:5 he said that a greedy person is an idolater. Paul was warning us about the great spiritual danger that comes from wanting to be rich. In 1 Timothy 6:10 he said that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith.”

But in 1 Corinthians 6:9 I don't think that Paul was thinking primarily about greed when he mentioned idolatry. After all, he didn't mention greedy people in this list until verse 10. Instead he connected idolatry more closely with sexual immorality. And I think this connection is pointing us to the situation in the city of Corinth. When we study the historical background of this city, we learn that sexual immorality took place regularly at the pagan temples. But sexual intimacy itself can even become an idol if we're not careful. We should not let this good gift become more important to us than the giver. Nothing should ever take the place of God in our lives. That's why the apostle John ended his first letter in chapter 5 and

verse 21 by saying, “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.” So we need to make sure that we’re submitting to God in every area of our lives. This means that if we’re married, we need to love our spouse more than ourselves. We should be focused more on our spouse’s sexual pleasure than our own.

So in 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul warned us against sexual immorality and idolatry. And then he added a third type of sinner: adulterers. This word is a term that we didn’t see in the previous two lists of sinners. The Greek word here just refers to someone who is sexually unfaithful to his or her spouse. So adultery is a specific kind of sexual immorality that only married people can commit. Adultery takes place when a married person has sexual intimacy with anyone besides his or her spouse. The only person we should be having sex with is someone of the opposite gender to whom we have made a lifelong commitment. We need to be content with our spouse and find sexual satisfaction in that person alone.

But if sex becomes an idol for us, then even if we’re married, sexual immorality will be the natural result. So it’s appropriate that Paul listed adulterers right after idolaters in verse 9. If God doesn’t come first in our lives, then we’re not going to be able to honor him in our marriage, and we’ll have great difficulty resisting the temptation to commit adultery. But we need to understand that adultery doesn’t just happen out of the blue. It starts in the heart, just like every other sin. That’s why Jesus said in Matthew 5:28 that “everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” So adultery starts with looking lustfully at someone who isn’t your spouse. If we’re going to resist the temptation to commit adultery, we need to guard our heart and wage war against our sinful desires. And we know that God will give us victory when we depend on his help.

Now let’s move on to some new material and look at the fourth type of sinner in 1 Corinthians 6:9. Paul ended this verse by referring to “males who have sex with males.” In other words, Paul was talking about homosexuality here. The prefix “homo-” just means “same,” and so homosexuality refers to sexual behavior between people of the same gender. But in this passage Paul was talking more specifically about male homosexuality. Now this doesn’t mean that Paul approved of female homosexuality. In Romans 1:26–27 he listed male and female homosexuality side by side, and he condemned them both. But in 1 Corinthians 6:9 his focus was on male homosexuality. He was emphasizing that males who have sex with males will not inherit God’s kingdom. And once again he was referring to a sin that he didn’t mention in his earlier two lists.

Now the Christian Standard Bible lists only one type of sinner here, and several other translations do the same thing. The English Standard Version refers to “men who practice homosexuality,” and the updated New International Version has the phrase “men who have sex with men.” The updated New American Standard Bible just has the word “homosexuals” here. But in the original Greek text we actually have two terms here that refer to two different kinds of sinners. The old New American Standard Bible refers to those who are effeminate and those who are homosexuals, and we see the same thing in the new Legacy Standard Bible.

The Greek word for effeminate is used four times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote only this one here. The other three occurrences are found in the Gospels, and they all point back to the same event in

the life of Jesus. He was talking to a crowd of people about John the Baptist, and he asked them what they went out into the wilderness to see. Did they go out to see a man dressed in soft clothes? That question is preserved in Matthew 11:8 and Luke 7:25. Then in Matthew 11:8 Jesus made this observation: “See, those who wear soft clothes are in royal palaces.” The Greek word for soft is the same term that is translated with the word “effeminate” in the Legacy Standard Bible in our passage. But Jesus wasn’t saying that it’s a sin to wear soft clothes. He was just saying that soft clothes were expensive and normally worn only by rulers during that time.

But in 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul was clearly giving us a list of sins. And so he couldn’t have been talking about wearing soft clothes. Instead he was talking about being soft in another way. And that’s why the Legacy Standard Bible has the word “effeminate.” This English word refers to having feminine qualities that are not typical of a man. Now this doesn’t mean that there’s anything inherently wrong with feminine qualities. The issue here is that it’s not appropriate for a man to be like a woman in certain ways. God created the human race with two different genders; Genesis 1:27 says that “he created them male and female.” And he didn’t want the distinctions between those genders to be ignored or removed. He didn’t want men going around pretending to be women or women going around pretending to be men.

We see a direct reflection of this idea in the Old Testament law. In the Book of Deuteronomy Moses reviewed God’s laws for the Israelites right before they entered the land of Canaan. And in chapter 22 and verse 5 he said, “A woman is not to wear male clothing, and a man is not to put on a woman’s garment, for everyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD your God.” Moses was condemning transvestism here or what is more commonly called “cross dressing.” Now this doesn’t mean that a man should never wear a skirt or that a woman should never wear pants. The Bible does not teach any specific distinctions between male and female clothing. These differences can change based on the time and the place. The point here is that God’s people should dress in accordance with their gender as recognized in their culture. They should not try to dress in a way that misleads people into thinking that they’re the other gender.

Now the Bible does not directly address the issue of trying to change one’s gender through surgery and hormone therapy. But that’s just because medical practices were not as advanced during those days. I think we can use this passage in Deuteronomy to argue from the lesser to the greater. If God is against cross dressing, then certainly he’s opposed to the idea of gender reassignment surgery or transgenderism in general. We should be content with the gender that God gave to us at conception and not try to change our gender or even just refer to ourselves as the other gender. If God created you as a male, then it would be a lie to identify as a female. If God created you as a female, then you would be deceiving people if you called yourself a male. And you would not be showing contentment with the gender that God gave to you. You would be slapping God in the face instead of showing gratitude to him.

So transgenderism is sinful, but I don’t think we should conclude that all effeminate behavior is wrong. For example, I don’t see a problem with a man who likes to sew or enjoys romantic comedies. We would have a very hard time showing from Scripture that this man is in sin. And so I think that the word “effeminate” is not the best translation in 1 Corinthians 6:9. Paul was not saying here that it’s wrong for a

man to be like a woman in any way. Instead he was focused on a specific way here, and the context shows us what he was talking about. We just saw that Paul condemned sexually immoral people and adulterers earlier in this list, and so it's likely that he was still talking about sexual intimacy here. He was basically saying that it's wrong for a man to pretend to be a woman in the bedroom.

And there is one Bible translation that does a good job of presenting this interpretation. The NET Bible has the phrase “passive homosexual partners” here. Now we should be careful to understand the word “passive” accurately here. I'm not saying that a wife should never initiate sexual intimacy with her husband. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:4 that “a husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does.” And so a wife doesn't have to wait for her husband to make his body available to her. She can take the initiative in this area whenever she wants. So I think we should be thinking in terms of biology here. God created men and women with different sexual organs, and there's a sense in which the female sexual organs are more passive than the male sexual organs. But a man could pretend to be a woman by using some other part of his body in place of the female sexual organs. That's what Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 6:9.

But Paul didn't just condemn passive homosexual partners in this list of sinners. He used a second Greek term related to homosexuality at the very end of verse 9. The NET Bible translates it with the phrase “practicing homosexuals,” and the Legacy Standard Bible gives us the word “homosexuals.” But these translations are too generic. The Christian Standard Bible has a helpful footnote here that says, “Both passive and active participants in homosexual acts.” So the fourth type of sinner in this list is a passive participant in homosexual acts, and the fifth type of sinner is an active participant in homosexual acts. Paul was confronting both sides of the coin with regard to homosexual behavior.

Now the Greek word here for the fifth type of sinner is used only twice in the New Testament, and Paul wrote both of them. The other one is found in 1 Timothy 1:10, where it also occurs in a list of sinners. But what's interesting about this word is that we can't find a single use of it in any extrabiblical Greek literature that was written before 1 Corinthians. In other words, it seems that Paul created a new word here. This Greek word is pronounced *arsenokoites*, and it's a compound word that has two parts. The first part is the word *arsen*, which means “male.” It's used in Mark 10:6, where Jesus said that “from the beginning of creation God made them male and female.” The second part is the word *koite*, which means “bed.” It's used in Hebrews 13:4 to refer to the marriage bed. And so this compound word basically refers to those who take males to bed.

But Paul didn't make up with this new word out of thin air. He was basing it very closely on the Old Testament law. In Leviticus 18:22 God said, “You are not to sleep with a man as with a woman; it is detestable.” In Leviticus 20:13 he said, “If a man sleeps with a man as with a woman, they have both committed a detestable act. They must be put to death; their death is their own fault.” In the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was finished about 200 years before the New Testament was written, both of these verses have the two parts of Paul's new compound word. So in 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul was pointing us back to the Book of Leviticus and showing us that God's prohibition against homosexuality under the old covenant still applies to Christians under the new covenant. We're not under the law of

Moses as a unit anymore, but many of these laws are part of the law of Christ. They need to be obeyed by all God's people during every era of history.

Now most Bible scholars agree with the interpretation that I've just presented. They affirm that Paul was condemning both passive and active participants in homosexual acts here at the end of verse 9. And I'm not just talking about conservative Bible scholars. I'm talking about liberal Bible scholars as well. But many of these liberal scholars argue that Paul was only referring to a specific kind of homosexual relationship. They believe that he had no concept of what a committed and consenting homosexual relationship looks like. So they think that he was only talking about an abusive kind of homosexual relationship. They claim that he was prohibiting pederasty, which is sexual activity between a man and a boy. Or they say that he was referring to homosexual relations between men of different social classes.

Now it's true that these sorts of relationships were common in the Roman Empire and that these relationships were often abusive. But not all of them were. Some ancient writers talked about pederasty as a loving relationship that was not exploitative. So Paul certainly would have been familiar with the differences between abusive and non-abusive homosexual relationships. And yet he did not make any distinction between them here in 1 Corinthians 6:9. He was opposed to all kinds of male homosexual behavior. And we can find even stronger evidence of this view in Romans 1. Look at what he wrote about unbelievers in verses 26–27: “For this reason God delivered them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. The men in the same way also left natural relations with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.”

So in this passage Paul didn't just address male homosexuality. He also condemned female homosexuality or lesbianism. But he spent more time on male homosexuality because it was more prevalent at that time. And notice how he described it here. He said that men were inflamed in their lust for one another. In other words, Paul wasn't talking about an abusive relationship where one man exploited the other for his own sexual pleasure. Instead he was referring to a consenting relationship. He described a situation in which two men were lusting for each other. They both wanted this relationship! And yet Paul condemned it and said that they were committing shameless acts. A more literal translation there is “the shameless act.” Paul spoke about homosexuality as the worst of sins.

But even during Old Testament times I think that people understood the difference between abusive and non-abusive homosexual relationships. Earlier I read Leviticus 20:13, where God said that the penalty for homosexual behavior was death. And that was true for both people in the relationship. Now if God was only prohibiting an abusive relationship, why did he say that both people needed to die? In Deuteronomy 22:25 Moses said that if a “man encounters an engaged woman in the open country, and he seizes and rapes her, only the man who raped her must die.” And verse 27 gives the reason: “When he found her in the field, the engaged woman cried out, but there was no one to rescue her.” So if the woman didn't consent to the relationship, she wouldn't be punished. And I believe that we can apply the same logic to a non-consenting homosexual relationship. The two people needed to die only if both of them consented to the relationship.

So Scripture is clear that all forms of homosexual behavior are sinful. And thankfully most conservative Bible scholars agree with this conclusion. But many of them think that there's nothing wrong with homosexual desires as long as we don't act on them. They believe that some people are born with an orientation toward homosexuality. In other words, these people are romantically attracted to those of the same gender and not to those of the opposite gender. And people who hold this view say that we shouldn't condemn those who have this orientation since they were born with it. But the problem with this view is that we're all born with an orientation toward sin in general. It may take different forms for different people, but all of us were naturally inclined to commit a wide variety of sins before we were saved. Yet we were under divine condemnation because of those sinful inclinations! And the same thing is true for anyone who has an inclination toward homosexuality.

You see, the Bible teaches that it's not just sinful behavior that is wrong. The desire to sin is also wrong! Otherwise the last of the Ten Commandments would not prohibit us from coveting what belongs to someone else. Stealing is wrong, as we see in the eighth commandment, but so is coveting or the desire to steal. That's why Jesus said in Matthew 5:28 that "everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." It's not just the act of adultery that's wrong. It's also the desire to commit adultery. Now we should be careful to recognize the difference between sinful behavior and sinful desire. The behavior is certainly worse than the desire. Adultery is what disqualifies a man from church leadership, not lust. But both of them are wrong.

However, we need to understand that there's also a difference between experiencing temptation and giving in to that temptation. It's not wrong to be tempted, because otherwise Jesus sinned when he was tempted in the wilderness by Satan! Hebrews 4:15 even says that Jesus "has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin." So when we're tempted to sin, we need to make sure that we resist that temptation immediately. The longer we entertain that temptation in our hearts, the more we risk giving in to that temptation. As soon as we desire to do the thing that we're being tempted to do, we've fallen into sin.

So Christians who experience ongoing temptation in the area of homosexuality need to guard their heart fiercely. They must constantly say no to that temptation and refuse even to desire any homosexual relationships. And they should pray for God's help to change their inclinations away from homosexuality. This doesn't necessarily mean that God will give them a desire for a relationship with someone of the opposite gender. But with discipline and patience they can use God's Word to train their heart away from homosexual desires. And that's really what we need to do with every sin that we're tempted to commit. We all struggle with the desire to commit various sins. That struggle is easier now that we are a new creation and have the Holy Spirit living in us. But we still need to put evil desire to death along with everything else that belongs to our earthly nature, as Paul said in Colossians 3:5. Let's pray and ask for God's help to do that.