

STAYING THE COURSE
The Biblical Witness Concerning Homosexuality
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From the first General Conference of The United Methodist Church, we defined ourselves on social issues on the basis of our commitment to Scripture. This has certainly been true in relation to marriage and homosexuality.

Richard Hays, internationally recognized New Testament scholar and authority on Paul's writing, has contributed immensely to our commitment. His essay in *Staying the Course* is a clear and convincing statement of the Biblical witness concerning homosexuality. His witness is that the biblical texts that address the topic of homosexual behavior are "unambiguously and unremittingly negative in their judgement."

Early in his essay he examines Old Testament sections that address homosexual action; though few, they are unambiguously and unremittingly negative in their judgement. Then he examines some New Testament passages to show that "the early church did consistently adopt the Old Testament teaching on matters of sexual morality, including homosexual acts."

"In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul, exasperated with the Corinthians - some of whom apparently believe themselves to have entered a state of exalted "knowledge," in which the moral rules of their old existence no longer apply to them (cf. 1 Cor. 4:8, 5:1-2, 8:1-9) = confronts them with a blunt rhetorical question: "Do you not know that Wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?" He then gives an illustrative list of the sorts of persons he means: fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, *malakoi*, *arsenzokoitai*, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers" (6:9). I have left the terms pertinent to the present issue untranslated because their translation has been disputed recently by John Boswell and others.' The word *malakoi* is not a technical term meaning "homosexuals" (no such term existed either in Greek or in Hebrew), but it appears often in Hellenistic Greek as pejorative slang to describe the "passive" partners — often young boys in homosexual activity. The other word, *arsenoleoitai*, is not found in any extant Greek text earlier than 1 Corinthians. Some scholars have suggested that its meaning is uncertain, but Robin Scroggs has shown that the word is a translation of the Hebrew *mishkav zakur* ("lying with a male") derived directly from Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and used in rabbinic texts to refer to homosexual intercourse. The Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) of Leviticus 20:13 reads, "Whoever lies with a man as with a woman (meta arsenos koitén gynaikos), they have both done an abomination." This is almost certainly the idiom from which the noun *arsenokoitai* was coined. Thus, Paul's use of the term presupposes and reaffirms the holiness code's condemnation of homosexual acts.

In 1 Corinthians 6:11, Paul asserts that the sinful behaviors cataloged in the vice list were formerly practiced by some of the Corinthians. Now, however, since they have been transferred into the sphere of Christ's lordship, they ought to have left these practices behind: "This is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified,

you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” The remainder of the chapter (w. 12-20), then, counsels the Corinthians to glorify God in their bodies, because they belong now to God and no longer to themselves.

The 1 Timothy passage includes *arsenokoitai* in a list of “the lawless and disobedient,” whose behavior is specified in a vice list that includes everything from lying to slave trading to murdering one’s parents, under the rubric of actions “contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel.” (*Staying the Course*, pp. 67-68)

After a similar clear examination of Romans 1:18-32, which explains the condemnation of homosexual behavior in an explicitly theological context, Hays concludes, “From Genesis 1 onwards, Scripture affirms repeatedly that God has made man and woman for each other and that our sexual desires rightly find fulfillment within heterosexual marriage (See, Mark 10:2-9; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; 1 Cor. 7:1-9; Eph. 5:21-33; and Heb. 13:4)

Nothing is more central for our assessing The Way Forward Plans at our upcoming General Conference than Scripture. The One Church Plan eliminates from our *Discipline* our present position on homosexual action and marriage, making these issues matters of local option. This is in opposition to Scripture as understood and interpreted by a huge majority of the millions of Christians around the world.