

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

A Linguistic Study

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Of the New Testament passages which are cited to directly address the problem of homosexuality in the Church, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 is both the most quoted and the least understood. A large part of the difficulty stems from the multitude of poor translation choices made regarding the two Greek words: **μαλακοὶ** (*malakoi*) and **ἀρσενοκοῖται** (*arsenokoitai*). Since the first English translations, these two words have each been rendered in no less than 10 different ways, sometimes even being combined together to form a single word or phrase where two distinctly different words were actually intended. Indeed, as will be seen, in none of these cases are the translations faithful to the original Greek.

A fairly common translation of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 can be found in the *New Revised Standard Version*:

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, **male prostitutes**, **sodomites**, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.¹

The NRSV renders **μαλακοὶ** as "male prostitutes" and **ἀρσενοκοῖται** as "sodomites;" by comparison, the KJV translates these two key words as "effeminate" and "abusers of themselves with mankind." In both cases, the choices here are wrong.

μαλακοὶ is used in the New Testament in only three places,² the first two being parallel passages in Matthew and Luke. In Matthew it actually appears twice in one verse, and here the translators of the NRSV have rendered it correctly:

What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces.³

If you're saying "but I don't see anything about *male prostitutes* or *effeminate* people here," you're correct. In Matthew, as well as in Luke, the word **μαλακοὶ** is correctly translated as the adjective

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 *emphasis added*

² Matthew 11:8, Luke 7:25, and 1 Corinthians 6:9

³ Matthew 11:8