

CONFRONTING CULTURAL CONTROVERSIES 11

“Homosexuality and the Bible”

This morning we continue looking at cultural controversies that affect our lives and permeate our culture. Are any controversies more prominent than this one in our culture right now? I doubt it. Though I personally believe it pales in comparative weightiness to issues like abortion, euthanasia, and even the death penalty; it seems to be on everyone's top ten lists of cultural controversies. It's an issue that has affected our UM Church since 1972, and will require a sermon of its own next week. It's an issue that dominated recent Academy Award discussions; with the multiple movies recently released that portray various experiences of homosexual behavior. It is a subject that is making its way through our legal and legislative systems as we debate the merits of licensing homosexual marriages. It is a subject that has gained momentum in the media, on the television, in the courtroom, and even in our education systems. Therefore, it is an issue that affects our lives as human beings, as Americans, as United Methodists, and most important of all...as followers of Jesus Christ!

One cannot begin any discussion of this subject without attempting to address the question:

What Causes Homosexuality?

The conventional and historic belief, born through centuries until just recently, was that the practice and orientation of homosexuality (which are two different things) has been a person's willful choice. Most people prior to this century looked at homosexuality as an abnormal expression of human sexuality, practiced by a small number of people, in relative seclusion and secrecy.

In recent decades, (largely since the 1960's) the practice of homosexuality has moved out of the closet and into the forefront of American and Western European mainstreams. In most other countries it still remains largely taboo.

With this emergence, and because of the growing exposure to this lifestyle, modern medicine has rightly taken on the task of trying to define what causes this orientation in some individuals. The answer to this question is crucial to understanding the boundaries of this controversy. If homosexuality has a physiological beginning point; whether genetic, biological, chemical, or hormonal; then those who are homosexual, discover themselves as such...through no fault of their own.

If on the other hand, science and medicine find no physiological causation for homosexuality, then those who find themselves as such, bear greater responsibility for owning their orientation and subsequent behaviors. Do you see the parameters?

I claim no special medical or scientific wisdom, but from my limited study there seems to be a growing body of evidence that suggests that most homosexuals have the orientation they do through no choice of their own nor any failure on the part of their parents to socialize them properly. I know there are exceptions to this and though the research is not 100% conclusive, (and that must be stated decisively); it appears that more and more research is suggesting that in a large number of cases (though not all of them); homosexual orientation is inborn. Granted, the scientific evidence is not conclusive, but its preponderance is pointing to genetic factors as the primary cause of homosexuality. I am not suggesting that ALL homosexual orientation is the result of hormonal factors; just admitting what the empirical data is currently suggesting and discovering. Now pay close attention.

In my opinion, homosexuals are the way they are because all of nature is fallen out of whack. I personally believe that all homo sapiens were meant to be heterosexual, but that does not change the fact that in this sinful and fallen world, the orientation of many homosexuals is most likely the result of natural biological factors. This leads us to the second great question of the morning.

What the Bible Says about Homosexuality?

Don't think that just because we have announced and arrived at this juncture, our task is going to get easier, or the answers will become any simpler, they won't.

On one side of this issue are those who claim, rightly so, that Jesus never addressed this subject, instead calling on all his followers to welcome, touch, heal, and generally minister to all people, regardless their background, circumstance, situation, or lifestyle. Jesus even answered the burning question about the greatest commandment; by responding...love God and love your neighbor as yourself!

On the other side of the coin, are those who, rightly so, point to the fact that though the Bible doesn't present an extensive "theology" of homosexuality; all the passages that do mention this practice are unanimous and consistent in their disapproval, even condemnation of this practice. It must be noted that the passages that speak against this practice come from both the Old and New Testaments, and though some of the various verses are merely re-renderings of original ones, each of them dismisses homosexuality as abnormal, as an abomination, and especially as sinful.

It must also be noted that attempts to define or redefine specific words, and situations found in these various scriptures by scholars and skeptics through the years still cannot deny the overwhelming weight of the cumulative "Biblical Evidence" regarding this subject. Nor can we simply or casually dismiss the ancient Word, because modern science, technology, or even the mass media machine are flooding our airwaves, and our minds with the subtle subversions designed to chip away at the underlying truth contained in God's Word. We as followers of Jesus must balance Jesus' silence, with His lifestyle, teaching and ultimate example, along with the rest of the Biblical evidence;...or stop calling ourselves Christians! It cannot be an either or simple solution. Before leaving this question for the final one, I want to share with you the passages, and especially one, that cannot be easily dismissed.

In Leviticus, (18:22, and 20:13) during a recitation of the Holiness Code, specific instructions were given regarding various sexual practices, including the prohibitions against homosexual behavior. In Genesis, (19:5) and again in (Jude 1:7) the story of Abraham and Lot in Sodom; God strikes blind and blatantly condemns the men of the city who sought to rape and abuse the male visitors to their city. In (I Corinthians 6:9-11, Gal. 5:19-21, Eph. 5:3-5, I Timothy 1:9-11) Paul the Apostle, lists various 'sins' that left unrepented, will disqualify a person from entrance into heaven. In those lists he includes various sexual sins, including adultery, prostitution, immorality, pornography, homosexuality, orgies and telling dirty jokes...I'm not kidding! You'll have to look those verses up by yourself, but I want you to see the primary passage of scripture in the Bible that deals with our subject this morning. Romans 1: 24-34

“So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies. They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.

Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. They know God’s justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.” Romans 1: 24-32

The weight of these verses becomes even more significant when we consider that the culture in which the NT was written generally accepted homosexual practice. Some have suggested that scriptures related to homosexuality are culturally bound and thus limited in their effect; like scriptures related to slavery, for instance; and thus may be disregarded. The scripture before us does just the opposite.

Slavery was a practice in biblical times that was a dominant cultural, political, and economic factor of life, and the Biblical authors could not conceive of a world without slavery, hence they merely gave guidelines for how slaves should live and how masters should treat their slaves. The authors in a sense, were blinded by their culture, and could not imagine life any differently. Though Jesus did speak of the equality of 'slave and free'; as a result of His redemption and salvation; even Paul, who advocates a different relationship for slaves and masters following their conversions to Christ, still could not overcome completely the influence of the predominant culture regarding the subject of slavery.

But when it comes to homosexuality, Paul adopts a thoroughly critical stance toward the surrounding culture. Homosexuality was commonly practiced in the Roman world. It was an acceptable part of the culture of the day, and yet Paul includes it as something that, despite approval from the culture was not God's will. I think we are going to have to learn this as well! Now to our last question of the morning.

What shall we do to try and resolve this issue?

My answer may not be very palatable for some of you because of its simplicity, but here it is: "Turn down the heat, turn up the light; turn on the grace!" I'll readily admit that I believe I have done good scholarship, studied hard to prepare this message, prayed long and intently, and listened quietly to God's voice in preparation for this message...but I'm not 100% convinced I've got it all figured out, nor that I'm 100% right in even what I've preached today. But this is what I wish. I wish both sides on the radical fringes of this issue would turn down the heat. It's stupid for people who call themselves Christians to demonstrate at the funerals of service men and women because they believe God hates 'fags' and is punishing Americans because of our "pro-gay" acceptance.

It is equally stupid for the extremist advocates to push their homosexual agenda (whatever that is) on the rest of our society, culture and country. I predict we are at a saturation point.

It is equally stupid for us followers of Jesus, to blindly limp along, hoping this issue will go away soon...it won't. We could greatly be benefited by increasing our knowledge, learning about the issues, shedding the light of God's countenance in all the dark places of our world, including our culture.

But I am also an advocate that we turn on the grace, and here is what I mean. You cannot read Romans 1 and ignore Romans 2. Do you want to know what it says? Immediately after, immediately after his recitation of the objectionable sins he records these insightful words:

"You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these same things. And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things? Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?" Romans 2: 1-4

And that is the key which will send us on our way today. It is God's kindness that turns us from our sin. It is not blatant condemnation from some wayward self-righteous phariseeism that will initially or ultimately convince some person struggling with the sin of homosexuality to suddenly want to get to know God. It will be humble, caring, compassionate followers of Jesus, fully aware of our own sinfulness, who willingly walk hand in hand, side by side, with stumbling young believers as they walk their way out of whatever sin has bound them, into whatever glory God has for them.

It is God's Kindness that turns us from our sin. It is no overt attempt to redefine what constitutes sin, by defining homosexuality according to some skewed social dictionary; that will free men and women from a life of homosexuality. No, it will be God's kindness.

Jesus took the lame man's face in his hands, long after he had healed him and said: "Now you are well, so stop sinning..." Jesus took the woman caught in adultery, raised her tear stained cheeks to his own, and pronounced: "Neither do I condemn you...Go and sin no more."

You see it? Neither condemnation, nor redefinition will solve this problem, or help anyone come to know God. Grace must abound. Though the scientific evidence is pointing to natural causes for this behavior, the scriptural evidence points out that nature itself is fallen because of sin. Though the preponderance of Scripture points to the perversity of this (and many other sins) Jesus loves me, Jesus loves you...can we do any less?

Turn down the heat...turn up the light...turn open the flood gates of grace...it's our only hope!...in this and a multitude of other cultural controversies. Let us pray!

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What the Bible Says about Homosexuality?

What shall we do to try and resolve this issue?

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Genesis 19:5

Jude 1:7

I Corinthians 6:9-11

Gal. 5:19-21

Eph. 5:3-5

I Timothy 1:9-11

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