

God's Design for Marriage - Part VI: The Question of Homosexual Marriage, Romans 1:18-32
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Introduction.

On November 18, 2003, the Supreme Court of Massachusetts handed down their long-awaited decision in *Goodrich v. Department of Public Health*, the case in which seven same-sex couples sued the state, claiming that they had a constitutional right to receive marriage licenses. In a 4-3 decision the court ruled in favor of the same-sex couples, saying that to bar same-sex marriage was a violation of the state's constitution. The three dissenting justices stated adamantly that the decision whether to allow same-sex marriages should have been left up to the legislature. Now, many are calling for a Federal Constitutional Amendment in Defense of Marriage.

Opinions abound with regard to this political hot potato, and there are a lot of different ideas about this sensitive issue. What are we to make of these things as Christians? How should we respond to this question? And what does God think about homosexuality? The Bible has a lot to say on the subject, and we find some of its teaching here in Romans 1. As we reflect on the question of homosexual marriage, there are 3 matters I want you to consider: 1) the current crisis; 2) the Bible's teaching; and 3) the church's calling.

I. The Current Crisis

Sandy Rios writes in *Decision* magazine: "Neither Greece nor Rome ever legalized it. No western civilization prior to our generation has ever sanctioned it. But in November 2003, four judges in a Massachusetts court decided that thousands of years of collective wisdom were wrong and that homosexual couples have a right to marry. They were preceded by Canada and also by Vermont and California, which established homosexual marriage by another name, 'civil unions.'"¹

It seems this is an issue that will not go away, and it involves more than just gay marriage. Last week I received an email which reported on the Boulder Valley School District board meeting at which they discussed the new proposed health curriculum. The new curriculum has a diversity education component in which there is a strong message on tolerance for sexual orientation and practice which is troubling to many. It was reported to me a BVSD official was quoted as saying, "We hope this will encourage kids to challenge the values that they hear at home." I have to be honest. I have a problem with that. While harassment is never appropriate in any form and Christians should be at the forefront of combating prejudice and hatred wherever it raises its ugly head, nevertheless, we must also combat falsehood and uphold biblical truth and values.

There is a great deal of confusion and misinformation today on the subject of homosexuality. For example, many people today believe that homosexual activity and homosexual marriage is simply parallel in every respect to heterosexual sex and marriage except for the incidental difference of the sex of the partners. From the popular TV shows like *Will and Grace* to the children's book *Daddy's*

Roommate, homosexual couples are portrayed as highly attractive people who enjoy stable relationships. However, the sad truth of the matter is that studies indicate the overwhelming majority of homosexuals live a life of promiscuity, alcohol and drug abuse, and they suffer from mental and physical disorders at a higher rate than their heterosexual counterparts.

The well-known Bell and Weinberg study found that 74 percent of male homosexuals reported having more than 100 partners during their lifetime, 41 percent more than 500 partners, and 28 percent more than 1,000 partners. Seventy-five percent of the homosexuals surveyed reported that half of their partners were strangers. The numbers for homosexual women were much lower with 60 percent reporting fewer than 10 partners in a lifetime, and only 2 percent reported having more than 100 partners.²

Tom Schmidt has written, "The most poignant way to summarize the barrage of statistics and descriptions [of homosexual behavior] is to translate them into an illustration. Suppose you were to move into a large house...with a group of ten randomly selected homosexual men in their mid-thirties. According to...research from scientific sources,...the relational and physical health of the group would look like this.

"Four of the ten men are currently in relationships, but only one of those is faithful to his partner, and he will not be within a year. Four have never had a relationship that lasted more than a year, and only one has had a relationship that lasted more than three years. Six are having sex regularly with strangers, and the group averages almost two partners per person per month....

"Three of the men are currently alcoholics, five have had a history of alcohol abuse, and four have a history of drug abuse. ...five regularly use at least one illegal drug, and three are multiple drug users. Four have a history of acute depression, three have seriously considered suicide, and two have attempted suicide. Eight have a history of sexually transmitted diseases,...[and at] least three are HIV-infected, and 1 has [full blown] AIDS."³ These are the facts, my friends.

Another matter we should address with regard to the current crisis has to do with the question of whether or not people are born gay. It has been said that if a person can't help the way they are, if people are born gay, then we have to support them in their lifestyle. Some have called this debate the issue of "nature verses nurture". The fact of the matter is that the research is inconclusive, and the theories of causation are just that - theory. Some of these questions are unanswerable with the current research we have. A case can be made on both sides of the ledger.

But for the sake of discussion, let's admit for the moment that there is a biological cause or genetic predisposition to homosexuality. Does that therefore mean that the behavior is acceptable because it is biological? There is also current research today that suggests that there may be a biological cause to alcoholism and that there may be a genetic predisposition to alcohol abuse. Does that, therefore, mean that the alcoholic should give in to his/her predisposition and live a life of addiction? No. We counsel the alcoholic to flee the tendency to drink and choose rather a life of abstinence and sobriety instead.

When you come right down to it, whatever I may attribute my problems to - be it my genes, or my parents, or my experience, or my culture - none of them can force me to engage in any activity, homosexual or otherwise. My will is involved, and it is in precisely such moments that as a Christian I must choose obedience and faithfulness to Christ and His Word regardless of my inclination, tendency or even orientation.

As Christians we need to study the facts and make informed decisions as it relates to the question of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. We cannot stick our heads in the sand and avoid the call of God to deal with these things. And we need to study the Bible and discover what God has to say on the subject.

II. The Bible's Teaching.

Some people criticize the Bible and say it's an ancient book and that it has nothing relevant to say to us today, especially on the subject of sexuality. They say the moral standards of Scripture were tied to the ancient world. Things have changed, and we need a new morality today. However, the historical context into which Paul wrote in the 1st century AD was not all that different from today. For example, it was common in Rome at the time of Paul for a man to be married to a woman, have a mistress on the side, and have a homosexual lover as well – all at the same time.

In addition, Nero, the emperor of Rome, was notoriously gay, and he made a big deal about celebrating his marriage to his gay lover. In fact, Nero and his lover made an Imperial Tour visiting the great cities of the Roman Empire to celebrate their union. Far from being a book that isn't relevant, the Bible is as relevant as the daily newspaper, and it offers the truth of God to a confused and broken world just as much today as it did in the 1st century AD.

Nowhere in the Bible is homosexual practice mentioned in anything but a negative light. We see it in the historical narrative of Genesis (and in the books of 2 Peter and Jude) involving the destruction of the city of Sodom. There the people of the city came to Lot's house and demanded that Lot send out the two strangers he had taken into his home that they might "know" them, a reference to sexual intercourse. We also see Scripture's condemnation of homosexuality in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy where the OT law prohibited homosexual practice, and God commanded the people of Israel, "You shall not lie with a man as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Lv. 18:22). And finally, we see the Bible's attitude toward homosexuality in the lists of sins in the NT, such as here in Romans 1, where homosexual practice is included with other kinds of behavior which deserve God's judgment.

The Bible views same-sex relations as a deviation from the created good of marital unions between a man and a woman. The biblical perspective on homosexuality is that although homosexuality is practiced by human beings, this practice is not condoned by God, and it should not be pursued if one seeks to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. Stanton Jones has written, "There are only two ways one can neutralize the biblical witness against homosexual behavior: by gross misinterpretation or by moving away from a high view of Scripture."⁴

However, I believe that the strongest biblical argument against homosexual practice is not the actual verses that mention it. Rather, I believe the biblical account of creation and the establishment of the complementarity of the sexes is the most compelling argument. John Stott has written that three fundamental truths emerge from the account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2.⁵ The first truth is the human need for companionship. "It is not good for the man to be alone" (1:18). God has created us as social beings, and He has given us the capacity to love and be loved. The second truth is the divine provision for this human need. Having affirmed Adam's need for a partner, God made a special provision in the creation of Eve, the only part of creation that was made from an existing living thing. And Adam responded with an emotional connection and affirmation in saying, "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (2:23). He recognized the goodness of God's provision.

The third truth of Genesis 2 concerns the resulting institution of marriage and the gift of sex. When God created Adam and Eve, He established the 1st marriage, and He gave them the gift of sex. The Bible says, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" (2:24). Heterosexual intercourse is much more than a union of 2 bodies; it is a blending of complementary personalities through which, even in the midst of brokenness and alienation in a fallen world, the rich, created oneness intended by God can be experienced. And the complementarity of male and female sexual organs is only a physical symbol of a much deeper spiritual complementarity. God gives us the privilege of "fleshing" out on a physical plane what is a truth emotionally and spiritually.

Scripture teaches that heterosexuality in marriage is not only good, but it is exclusively good. And homosexual acts, and any other expression of sex outside the context of the marriage covenant, cannot realize the fullness of God's intention in the creation of this gift. That is why they are prohibited in Scripture. Paul suggests in Romans 1 that homosexual behavior is "revolting", not because heterosexuals find it to be so, but because it epitomizes in sexual terms the revolt against God. It is sinful because it violates the plan of God established at creation when He made us male and female in His own image, established the first marriage, and gave humanity the gift of sex.

The clear teaching of Scripture is that homosexuality is less than God's best for humankind, and to engage in this kind of behavior, as Paul says here, is to exchange the truth of God for a lie and choose the way of the creature rather than the Creator. These are strong words I share in this matter as it relates to homosexuality, but hear me out, for now I want to talk about compassion and the church's calling as it relates to this issue. Remember, truth and love must always be held in tension together.

III. The Church's Calling.

When I think of homosexuality, I think of Jim, a fellow student at the University of Georgia who was a close friend. He wrote a screenplay that I produced and directed for a television project in college which talked about the grace of God. After we graduated he enrolled in a Masters program in creative writing, and he moved away. Later I came to find out that the last 2 years in college he had led a double life and was heavily involved in a gay lifestyle. He eventually cut off all contact with his Christian friends from college, and I lost touch with him.

I think of Sonny, a friend from childhood who was a little different from the rest of the boys in our neighborhood, and he seemed to march to a different drummer. When I caught up with him as a young adult, he was successful in the theater, and he had a homosexual lover.

I think of my mother's former next door neighbors who are a gay couple. They are two of the kindest and most thoughtful men I have ever met, and they were always looking out for my mom.

I think of a young man who came into my office some time ago for an appointment. He told me he was gay, and he wanted to know what he could do to deal with his homosexual feelings.

When we talk about homosexuality, and when we talk about homosexual marriage, we are talking about people. Tom Schmidt has written, "They are people with faces, people with names, often Christian people, and whatever we conclude about the larger issues their stories represent, we must never lose sight of their individual struggles, their individual pain, their faces. If we neglect [their] faces, we neglect the gospel."⁶

Before any of us position ourselves to stand in judgment and prepare to cast stones of reproach in the direction of practicing homosexuals, let me remind you of the passage in Romans 2 which follows chapter 1. Those of us who applaud the message of Romans 1 must also listen to the message of Romans 2 which thunders up from behind: "Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself" (2:1). Of this Tom Schmidt writes, "This shoe fits every heterosexual who reacts with disgust at the broadcast of a gay rights demonstration and then turns the channel to stare uncritically at adultery in a drama, [or] the trivialization of sex in a sitcom, [or] fornication in a music video.... Are these sins acceptable because they are the sins of the majority? For surely the sins of homosexuals are, in terms of quantity, specks in the eye next to the logs of heterosexual sin. Neither is excusable, but what is most damnable according to Paul [and Jesus]...is to look for the speck without noticing the log."⁷

There was a Newsweek photo some years ago which showed a man brandishing a sign that proclaimed, "God Hates Fags." I wonder if his hatred isn't darker than the sin he was protesting. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not about looking at sexual sin in another person but about looking at sexual sin in the mirror. The God who knows our thoughts and our deeds also knows that we need forgiveness, every single one of us, and that we are broken people to the core.

Unless we acknowledge that we are all in need of God's grace and healing in our sexuality, we will continue to prevent homosexuals and others from listening to us, because they will hear only our fear and revulsion, not our love and similar need. Our heterosexual sin includes sins of hatred toward homosexuals, and whenever we say or tolerate slang terms, or demeaning jokes or derogatory offhand comments, we send a strong message that these people for whom Christ died are the outcast of society, and we make a mockery of the love of Jesus.

Stanton Jones writes, "The homosexual people I know are very much like me. They want love, respect, acceptance, companionship, significance, and forgiveness. But, like all... sinners, they choose the wrong means to pursue what they yearn for. And we in the church have the opportunity to demonstrate in our

words and in our lives God's love for the homosexual person. Are you willing to pray with, eat with, hug and comfort, and share life with a woman or a man who has homosexual feelings? Many times we already do that but don't know it. And just as we share meals with gluttons, shop with the greedy, share compliments with the vain, and vegetate with the slothful, so we share life, knowingly or unknowingly, with the homosexual. But we need to do so knowingly and lovingly. ...If you cannot empathize with a homosexual person because of fear or revulsion, then you are failing our Lord."⁸

The good news of the gospel is that there is hope for the homosexual person, and there is grace. One of the amazing passages of the NT is found in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. There we read, "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. 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." And that is what some of you were. Some of the believers in Corinth had been homosexuals; there were ex-gays in the church in Corinth! There were Christians there who experienced the healing of Jesus Christ, and they found grace to lead them out of the gay lifestyle.

Tell me, my friend, are you gay? Do you find yourself in conflict with your sexual orientation? Have you pursued the lifestyle and wondered if there is a way out? Then hear me when I say there is hope for you. There is a way out, and you can find healing and wholeness in Jesus Christ. I'll be honest; it won't be easy, and sometimes it will be 2 steps forward and 1 step back, but there is a way out. Maybe you've tried before and failed, but I want you to know that today can be a new beginning for you. The God who raised Jesus from the dead can restore the life that has gone from you, and you can find grace to help you become the person that down deep you want to be. There is a great ministry to homosexuals and their families within our church called "New Heart." Jim Vratney and his wife Terry, who are elders in our church, started this ministry, and they would love to help you in any way they can. There are brochures in the literature racks of the church about their ministry if you would like to talk to someone. There will also be a time of healing prayer with our pastors and elders at the conclusion of this service. We would love to pray with you, if this would be helpful.

Conclusion.

I want to close by telling you about Michael and reading a letter he wrote. Early on in his life Michael realized that he was physically attracted to men. He felt he could never tell anyone, especially other Christians, about his secret. He writes, "I desperately needed to find a way to become normal, to like girls. But I fought my most intense battles alone, in the dark, without a lot of hope. I remember thinking that nobody was willing to accept where I was and offer a helping hand to guide me where I wanted to be."

He continues, "I'm not asking the church to be perfect or to compromise biblical principles. I'm not even asking that the church understand how I got this way or how I struggle daily. But I am asking for compassion and support. I would love to hear sermons that encourage sinners to be open about their struggles...to talk openly to teenagers about sensitivity to people with homosexual desires and how they

can find help if they have those feelings...to be in a church which is recognized...as one that truly 'loves the sinner and hates the sin' rather than one that offers only condemnation."⁹

May we be that church. May we be a church that speaks the truth in love and holds in tension both conviction and compassion. May God grant us the grace to follow the example of Jesus who said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." To Him be the glory. Amen.

¹ Sandy Rios, "The Assault on the Family" in Decision magazine, January 2004, p. 12.

² Schmidt, p. 106.

³ Schmidt, p. 127.

⁴ Stanton L. Jones, "The Loving Opposition," in Christianity Today, July 19, 1993, p. 20.

⁵ John Stott, "Homosexual Marriage" in Involvement: Social and Sexual Relationships in the Modern World, pp. 24,25.

⁶ Tom Schmidt, pp. 11,12.

⁷ Tom Schmidt, p. 54.

⁸ Stanton L. Jones, p. 25.

⁹ Taken from an article written by Susan Maycinik entitled, "Will They Know Us By Our Love?" in Discipleship Journal, Issue 73, 1993, p. unknown.