

A Synopsis of John Stott's Booklet, Same-Sex Partnerships?

The following article is a synopsis of John Stott's arguments against same-sex union ceremonies as presented in the booklet, "Same-Sex Partnerships? A Christian Perspective" (Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 1998). This booklet can be ordered at www.amazon.com.

In his book *Same-Sex Partnerships?*, John Stott affirmatively answers the following question facing the contemporary western Church: "Is there a Christian way to combine biblical thinking about God's intention for human sexuality with an equally biblical attitude of understanding, respect, and support for persons with a homosexual disposition?" (Stott, 7)

Thus, Stott prefaces his discussion with numerous important statements: (1) We are all human beings. "However strongly we may disapprove of homosexual practices, we have no liberty to dehumanize those who engage in them" (Stott, 9); (2) We are all sexual beings with a particular sexual inclination, (though studies in the early 1990's "suggest that in the western world less than 2 percent of the male population, and less than 1 percent of the female, are exclusively homosexual in inclination and practice") (Stott, 11); (3) We are all sinners; (4) those debating this issue in the church are all Christians; (5) the question presented to the Church is not whether to bless casual sex between members of the same gender, but rather to bless long-term, loving homosexual partnerships. The basic question is whether or not these types of homosexual relationships are a Christian option (Stott, 15).

Scriptural Texts that Condemn Homosexual Behavior

Stott begins to answer this question by turning first to Scripture. There are seven Scriptural texts that refer specifically to homosexual behavior:

1. Genesis 19:1-13 (Sodom and Gomorrah) and Judges 19 (Gibeah) - The pro-homosexual position claims that the sin of these two Old Testament cities was lack of hospitality. However, Stott points out that this argument is faulty for numerous reasons: (a) strong adjectives, such as "wicked, vile," to describe the crime of the men in these cities point to more than a breach in hospitality; (b) the offer of women indicates a sexual connotation to the incidents; (c) though the verb "yada" only refers to sexual intercourse 10 times throughout the Old Testament, six of these instances occur in Genesis, including the Sodom and Gomorrah story; (d) the New Testament (Jude 7) refers to the sexual immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah (Stott, 21-22).

2. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 - "the plain, natural interpretation of these two verses is that they prohibit homosexual practice of every kind" (Stott, 24).

3. The Pauline texts - Romans 1:18-32; I Corinthians 6:9-10; and, I Timothy 1:8-11 - Pro-gay theology argues that Paul was referring to unnatural homosexual promiscuity in Romans and pederasty in the other two texts. However, the clear interpretation is that Paul is referring to individuals whose sexual behavior--i.e. homosexual behavior--contradicts God's created order for sexual expression. "Taken together, St. Paul 's writings repudiate homosexual behavior as a vice of the Gentiles in Romans, as a bar

to the Kingdom in Corinthians, and as an offense to be repudiated by the moral law in I Timothy" (Peter Coleman quoted in Stott, 28).

The pro-homosexual lobby often argues that the scriptural prohibition against homosexual behavior is based on exegetical proof-texting. And, there are only 7 texts which directly refer to homosexuality. However, "the negative prohibitions of homosexual practices in Scripture make sense only in the light of its positive teaching in Genesis 1 and 2 about human sexuality and heterosexual marriage" (Stott, 30).

Sexuality and Marriage in Scripture

Scripture makes numerous fundamental assertions about sexuality and marriage (noted below).

1. People have a need for human companionship. "It is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2 or 3:18).
2. Whether or not we interpret the creation narrative literally or metaphorically, Genesis 2 reveals that God's provision for human intimacy was the creation of male and female. "Something happened during Adam's deep sleep. A special work of divine creation took place. The sexes became differentiated. Out of undifferentiated humanity of Adam, male and female emerged" (Stott, 33).
3. The result of gender differentiation was the institution of marriage (Gen. 2:23-24). "It is the union of two persons who were originally one, were then separated from each other, and now in the sexual encounter of marriage come together again. And the complementarity of male and female sexual organs is only a symbol at the physical level of a much deeper spiritual complementarity" (Stott, 34-35). (Note that there is no indication that Stott is using the term "complementarity" to describe patriarchal male-female gender roles.)

In quoting the Genesis creation narrative, Jesus himself endorsed the Old Testament understanding of marriage (Matthew 19:4-6). Thus Christ affirmed the following (Stott, 36):

1. Heterosexual gender is a divine creation;
2. Heterosexual marriage is a divine institution; and,
3. Heterosexual fidelity is the divine intention.

"Scripture defines the marriage God instituted in terms of heterosexual monogamy. Scripture envisages no other kind of marriage or sexual intercourse, for God provided no alternative" (Stott, 39). Any sexual behavior outside of this definition, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is displeasing to God.

Refuting Contemporary Pro-Gay Arguments

1. Pro-Gay Argument #1 - biblical texts which condemn homosexual behavior are culturally bound. For example, the Sodom/Gomorrah and Gibeah stories were really addressing a lack of hospitality not homosexuality; the Levitical laws address homosexual behavior in fertility rituals; and, the Apostle Paul was addressing pederasty among the Greeks. These texts did not refer to the homosexual condition, or

orientation; and the authors could not conceive of loving, faithful homosexual relationships. Thus we cannot use these texts to address the contemporary issue of same-sex unions.

Errors in Argument #1 - "Modern loving homosexual partnerships are incompatible with God's created order (heterosexual monogamy). And since that order was established by creation, not culture, its validity is both permanent and universal. There can be no 'liberation' from God's created norms; true liberation is found only in accepting them. This argumentation is opposite of the 'biblical literalism' of which the gay lobby tends to accuse us. It is rather to look beneath the surface of the biblical prohibitions to the essential positives of divine revelation on sexuality and marriage. It is significant that those who are advocating same-sex partnerships usually omit Genesis 1 and 2 from their discussion, even though Jesus our Lord himself endorsed the teaching of those passages" (Stott, 43-44).

2. Pro-Gay Argument #2 - The acceptability of a relationship, homosexual or heterosexual, depends on whether it is just and loving. A homosexual relationship "can be just as rich and responsible, as liberating and fulfilling, as a heterosexual marriage" (Stott, 51). Thus, we should embrace and bless such homosexual partnerships as a Christian expression of sexuality.

Errors in Argument #2 - There are numerous problems with this line of argumentation. First, the concept of life-long, quasi-marital fidelity in homosexual partnerships is largely a myth, a theoretical ideal which is contradicted by the facts" (Stott, 51). [For more statistical information see Thomas Schmidt, PhD, *Straight & Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexual Debate* (IVP, 1995), and Jeffrey Satinover, MD, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*, (Baker, 1996).]

Secondly, when discussing biblical ethics, love cannot be separated from truth. Christ did not abrogate the law; rather he fulfilled it. Surely homosexual relationships can be loving, but this does not justify them. "Although the loving quality of a relationship is an essential, it is not by itself a sufficient criterion to authenticate it" (Stott, 54).

3. Pro-Gay Argument #3 - Like women and African Americans, homosexuals have been oppressed and discriminated against. They have been the victims of homophobia. Jesus embraced the oppressed and offered them justice. Thus the church should follow Christ's ministry of justice and celebrate homosexual unions.

Errors in Argument #3 - Treating homosexuals with rejection, hatred and discrimination is morally wrong. Yet we must distinguish between true discrimination and what is often labeled as homophobia. "If the 'wrong' or 'injustice' complained of is society's refusal to recognize homosexual partnerships as a legitimate alternative to heterosexual marriages, then talk of 'justice' is inappropriate, since human beings may not claim as a 'right' what God has not given them. The analogy between gays and the liberation of slaves, blacks, and women is inexact and misleading. In each case we need to clarify the Creator's original intention. Thus, in spite of misguided attempts to justify slavery and racism from Scripture, both are fundamentally incompatible with the created equality of human beings. Similarly, the Bible honors womanhood by affirming that men and women share equally in the image of God" (Stott, 57). Finally, true gay liberation is the freedom to live a life of obedience to Jesus Christ.

4. Pro-Gay Argument #4 - The heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that God loves and accepts us just as we are. Thus, the church must accept homosexuals as they are and bless their loving relationships with one another.

Errors in Argument #4 - It is true that God accepts us just as we are; there are no stipulations for receiving God's love. However, God does not condone our continued sinning. God longs to transform our lives, as God loves us too much to leave us the way we are. Thus, "it is true that we must accept one another, but only as fellow penitents and fellow pilgrims, not as fellow sinners who are resolves to persist in our sinning" (Stott, 59).

The testimony of Scripture and the refutation of contemporary pro-gay arguments lead us to conclude that homosexual relationships deviate from God's created intent for human sexuality. Yet the discussion cannot end here. What can and ought the church offer individuals with a homosexual condition? Faith, Hope, and Love.

Faith, Hope, and Love Applied to Homosexually-Oriented People

1. "The Christian Call to Faith:" Christian faith accepts God's standards. God's standards for sexual expression include only fidelity in a covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or celibacy in singleness. "Sexual experience is not essential to human fulfillment. To be sure, it is a good gift of God. But it is not given to all, and it is not indispensable to humanness" (Stott, 70). Thus, homosexually-oriented individuals must choose whether they will submit to the lordship of Christ, with the loving support of the church community, or to the messages of contemporary culture. Furthermore, faith accepts grace; therefore, celibacy is possible!

2. "The Christian Call to Hope:" at least some degree of change for the homosexually-oriented person is possible. Many individuals claim that they have experienced change in their sexual behavior, identity, and even orientation over time. The degree of orientation change varies from individual to individual and some homosexually-oriented individuals learn to manage their sexual temptations. None of us, heterosexual or homosexual, experience complete healing and wholeness in this life. However, we are assured of complete transformation when we stand in the presence of our Lord!

3. "The Christian Call to Love:" "We are not at liberty to urge the Christian homosexual to celibacy and to a spreading of his relationships [developing non-erotic same-sex relationships], unless support for the former and opportunities for the latter are available in genuine love.' I rather think that the very existence of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement is a vote of censure on the church" (Stott, 80). The Church must recognize and repent of her failure to love homosexuals. The Church must begin to offer pastoral care for homosexuals that represents both the love and truth of Jesus Christ. The Church must become a healing community for these women and men.