

Sermon for March 13, 2005

Sexual Abnormality One: "Homosexual Confusion"

Although love is one of the easiest words to spell, the right ordering of love is perhaps the most difficult area of human relationships. I would suggest that the reason for this is due to the human tendency to ignore what God, through His word, has revealed to us about how we are to order our human loves. This is particularly so when it comes to the intimacies associated with sexual love. When we disregard God's revelation in this area, we easily become confused and speculate that if the desire to love another is strong, the choice to love the other is right and good, even if the coupling is outside of the bonds and marriage or between people of the same sex. But such thinking results in God's revelation giving way to human innovation in how we order our intimate relationships.

The Bible has a great deal to say on this subject. Jesus turns to this theme in the passage we heard read from Matthew 5 this morning. We need to remember that there was never a time when Jesus turned away people who were caught up in the practice of sexual deviation. Jesus drew the sexually confused to him in ways that show us how great God's love is for those who misappropriate the gift of sexual intimacy. But in drawing these precious people to himself, he loved them enough to also speak candidly. We find such candor in verses 29-30 when he says

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

I will talk more about these verses in a future sermon. What I want to highlight for this morning is the urgency Jesus expresses in the need to reform how we relate to others sexually, so this area of our lives conforms with what God has revealed to us.

This morning I want to look at the topic of Homosexual Confusion, an expression of sexual abnormality that is more charged with political, social and religious undercurrents than any other contemporary issue. I am grateful to the work of Robert Gagnon, whose essay "*Why Gay Marriage is Wrong*" is one I quote from this morning.

Advocates of homosexual practice often argue that "gay marriage," or at least homosexual civil unions, will reduce promiscuity and promote fidelity among homosexual persons. Such an argument overlooks two key points.

First, the legal and ecclesiastical embrace of homosexual unions is more likely to undermine the institution of marriage and produce other negative effects than it is to make fidelity and longevity the norm for homosexual unions.

Second, and even more importantly, homosexual unions are not wrong primarily because of their disproportionately high incidence of promiscuity (especially among males) and breakups (especially among females). They are wrong because "gay marriage" is a contradiction in terms.

I need to state at the outset that the vision of marriage found in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures is one of reuniting male and female into an integrated sexual whole. Marriage is not just about more intimacy and sharing one's life with another in a lifelong partnership. It is about sexual merger—or, in Scripture's understanding, *re-merger*—of essential maleness and femaleness.

The creation story in Genesis 2:18-24 illustrates this point beautifully. An originally sexually undifferentiated, *adam* ("earthling") is split down the "side". I know in my own reading of the word "adam" that I have viewed *adam* portrayed in this passage as a

man. We usually spell it with an upper case A-d-a-m . The more accurate spelling is with a lower case “a-d-a-m”. We need to understand that the Hebrew original presents to us the image of a binary being who has both features of maleness and femaleness. But once split down the side this “adam” becomes in turn male and female. One becomes two. Male and female. This is a better translation of the Hebrew original, than the more common word “rib”. Out of this splitting is formed two sexually differentiated persons. Marriage is pictured as the *reunion* of the two constituent parts or “other halves,” man and woman. This, by the way, is where the phrase, my other half or my better half, comes from.

This is not an optional or minor feature of the story. Since the only difference created by the splitting is a differentiation into two distinct sexes, the only way to reconstitute the sexual whole, on the level of erotic intimacy, is to bring together the split parts. A same-sex erotic relationship can never constitute a marriage because it will always lack the requisite sexual counterparts or complements.

By definition homosexual desire is *sexual self-absorption and sexual self-deception*.

There is either

- (1) a conscious recognition that one desires in another what one already is and has as a sexual being (anatomy, physiology, sex-based traits) or
- (2) a self-delusion of sorts in which the sexual same is perceived as some kind of sexual other

As one ancient text puts it, “seeing themselves in one another they were ashamed neither of what they were doing nor of what they were having done to them” (Pseudo-Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart* 20).

The modern word “*homosexual*”—from the Greek *homoios*, “like” or “same”—underscores this understanding of the pairing of two people who are the same.

Scripture, Creation, and a Two-Sexes Prerequisite

The New Testament recognizes the importance of the Genesis creation stories for establishing a “two-sexes” or “other-sex” prerequisite for marriage.

St. Paul clearly understood same-sex intercourse as an affront to the Creator’s original intention for the ordering of sexual relationships. In his letter to the Romans, Paul cites two prime examples of humans suppressing the truth about God evident in creation/nature: idolatry and same-sex intercourse (Romans 1:18-27). Paul talks first about humans exchanging the Creator for worship of idols made “in the *likeness* of the *image* of a perishable *human* and of *birds* and *animals* and *reptiles*”

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.”

In order to grasp what Paul means in verse 18 about the wrath of God we need to keep before us Jesus’ death on the Cross, the theme we will consider next week. The whole of Romans is about how God deals with his wrath against all ungodliness while at the same time maintaining his steadfast love for the ungodly. Notice that Paul says God’s wrath is revealed from heaven. You will remember I used the word revelation at the beginning of the sermon. Not only has God revealed how we are to order our human loves, he has also revealed his grief, sorrow and righteous anger when his revelation is suppressed and ignored.

As we look at verse 19, pay attention please to Paul’s wording.

He first says that what may be known about God is manifest **in** them and it has also been manifest **to** them. The rest of this passage is the fleshing out of these two ideas as defined by the prepositions “in” and “to”.

Verses 20-23 pick up on the second thought. That which has been manifest **to** them. What has been manifest to them? Creation itself.

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

What Paul is saying here is that creation itself reveals something of who God is, particularly His eternal power and his place at the centre of creation. This is what I think the word "Godhead" means in this context. But even though creation declares the glory of God. people did not acknowledge him as God, nor were they thankful to him. Look what the consequence of this was and still is. It effects both the heart and the mind. In Jewish and Christian thought the heart is the very essence of who we are. Paul is saying that when we choose to ignore and reject God, the core of our existence becomes darkened and we can no longer think straight, depicted here by the vivid phrase, "futility in their thinking." As a result, rather than worship God and give first place to him in our lives we end up worshiping things that either God has made or things we make. This is called idolatry. When we become idolatrous in how we live, we no longer recognize that we were created to imitate God. Instead we try to remake ourselves in the image of other people or are driven by addictions and passions that disorder our lives and loves. This is what Paul says next:

24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

I want to highlight the phrase “God gave them up to uncleanness in the lusts of their hearts.” Here the word “lusts” is used as a noun. In the passage we heard from Matthew, Jesus uses the word lust as a verb. In that context he says: “27”You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not commit adultery.”¹28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

The verbal form of this word means to have a desire for, longing for things which are forbidden. Jesus says here that to lust after a woman is forbidden because you are wanting to be joined, at the level of your heart, with someone who is not your rightful other. We know this because Genesis two concludes by saying: “This is why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two become one flesh”. The sexual re-union is intended for the covenant of marriage. When a man lusts after another, he is desiring to be joined with one who is not his wife. Such a desire is contrary to God’s revelation and is to be abandoned, as verses 29 and 30 make abundantly clear.

Paul in the passage we just read uses the noun form of this same word. When our hearts become darkened, the lusts of our hearts govern how we live and we end up expressing sexual preferences and orientations that are dictated from the essence of our being, our darkened heart. This is why, I would suggest, the attraction for some to be joined in same sex couplings is so powerful and seems so right. Their hearts have become confused and the truth of God is exchanged for a lie. This is why Paul speaks about the dishonouring of their bodies in verse 24. When the heart is darkened and governed by lust we will live out our lives in ways that contradict both what God has revealed about the sexes based on our physiology and his word.

This is the point in the passage where Paul picks up on what is said in verse 19 when the Apostle says that “what is known about God is manifest **in** them.” What Paul means by this phrase “manifest in them” has to do with sexual ordering. God has shown us by

how he has made us as sexually differentiated beings that men were made to fit sexually with women. This is further made clear by the fact that human life can only be created when there is the uniting in heterosexual love. But just as people reject that creation shouts to us "There is a God" so too, people will reject that the nature of our physiology is significant in determining how we relate sexually.

And so he goes on to say at verse 26: "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."

You will notice that both lesbian and male to male bondings are mentioned here. Paul is further developing what he said earlier about how such interaction is against nature because it is against what God has revealed in us. But as people give themselves to such relationships without restraint, the desire becomes ever stronger. This is why Paul says they "burn with lust for one another" And the penalty they receive is confusion in their understanding of the God given ordering of sexual love which plays out in ways too numerous to mention now.

You will notice that Paul has before Him Genesis one when he writes these verses in Romans 1:

Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis succinctly teaches is that we have been made to reflect the image of God and we do this by working with God in the ordering of creation as we see in creation God's signature. This is to be done as male and female are joined together.

What Paul makes clear is that when our hearts are darkened and our thinking becomes futile we can no longer understand, nor do we desire to live, according to God's original purpose. When people engage in same sex intercourse it is an affront to the Creator's stamp on gender as Genesis One and Two both make clear. Paul is resolute in what he says here. Idolatry and same sex intercourse constitute a frontal assault on the work of the Creator in nature. Those who suppressed the truth about God transparent in creation are more likely to suppress the truth about the complementarity of the sexes, also transparent in nature, choosing instead to gratify contrary innate impulses.

As followers of Jesus Christ, and as Anglican Christians it is important for us to understand why the Bible speaks as it does concerning same sex relationships. It does this because the character of God and our relationship to him is understood and influenced by how we understand these passages from Genesis and Romans.

I would suggest you study the Romans text in detail so that you can be comfortable with argument Paul is presenting here. I know that the society we live in is opposed to taking the Bible seriously but we cannot join them. God has spoke with a clarity about same sex couplings and if we are to honour the creator we are called to uphold this biblical view of homosexual relationships.

If you would like to discuss what I have written here, please e-mail me at staugcal@aol.com or call me at (403) 279-3105.