

Homosexuality and the Church

1. Introduction

a) Anglican Debate

- Appointment of Canon Jeffrey John, May 2003- appointment met with severe opposition.
- 2003 Episcopal Church USA appointed active homosexual Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire.
- 2008 Boycott by some bishops of the Lambeth Conference.

b) Evangelical Alliance/Courage Debate

- “Courage takes the view that the Biblical condemnation and prohibitions of homosexual practice were not written with pastoral care of Christians who are homosexual in mind. On the contrary the passages concerned sought to confront selfish and abusive behaviour in a very different context. ‘Courage’ also argues that while the Bible is consistent in condemning homo erotic sexual practice whenever the matter is considered, it is wrong however to assume that those scriptures necessarily preclude all homo erotic sexual practice in the context of long term committed, loving, same sex relationships where mature partners conscientiously believe before God that this is appropriate to their relationship.”
- The Evangelical Alliance position on homosexuality as outlined in Faith, Hope and homosexuality is as follows:

Evangelical Alliance’s position on homosexuality

(Outlined in Faith, Hope and Homosexuality):

1. The Alliance affirms that monogamous heterosexual marriage is the form of partnership uniquely intended by God for full sexual relations between people.
2. We affirm God’s love and concern for all humanity, including homosexual people, but believe homo erotic sexual practice to be incompatible with his will as revealed in Scripture.
3. We call upon evangelical congregations to welcome and accept sexually active people, but to do so in the expectation that they will come in due course to see the need to change their lifestyle in accordance with biblical revelation and Orthodox Church teaching.

4. We repudiate homophobia insofar as it denotes an irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals. We do not accept however that to reject homo erotic sexual practice on biblical grounds is in itself homophobic.

2. Arguments from the Anti-Gay Lobby

a) Examples of Sodom and Gomorrah- see Genesis 19 v 1-29; Ezekiel 16 v 49; Jude v 7

b) 1 Timothy 1 v 8-10

c) Jesus- we have no statements from Jesus that loosened the Old Testament's Laws demands for sexual purity, but we do have statements where Jesus closed remaining loopholes in the Laws sexual commands by further intensifying God's demands- adultery of the heart, divorce and remarriage. The trend of Jesus' teaching on sexual ethics is not toward greater license but toward fewer loopholes.

Jesus' reading of the creation account in Genesis indicates that he assumed marriage did not include same sex couples (see Matthew 19 vs 3-12, Mark 10 vs 2-12).

d) Romans 1 v 26-27

Bishop N.T Wright

The main thing to realise about Romans 1:26 and the following is that it isn't just a swipe out of the blue. Paul's argument at that point is grounded in the narrative of Genesis 1, 2 and 3. He's drawing on it at various stages. He sees the point about being human as being to reflect God's image, which he says in a number of places in his writings. He clearly sees that in Genesis 1 it is male plus female who are made in the image of God. He chooses the practice of homosexuality, not as a random feature of "look, they do all sorts of wicked things." His point is that when people in a society are part of an idolatrous system -- not necessarily that they individually are specifically committing acts of idolatry, but when the society as a whole worships that which is not the true God -- then its image-bearingness begins to deconstruct.

An obvious sign of that for Paul, based on Genesis 1, is the breakup of male-female relations and the turning off in other directions. Then it's important to see how that is stitched into the argument that he mounts later on in the letter about how humankind is restored. When in chapter four as he talks about Abraham, he states that Abraham specifically did the things which in chapter one, other human beings did not. In chapter one, they refused to know God, to honour God as God, to acknowledge God's power and deity, and all the rest of it.

Abraham acknowledged God and God's power, recognized that God had the power to do what he promised and gave God glory. All this is the exact opposite word-by-word of what Paul criticises in chapter one and the result was that Abraham and Sarah were able to conceive children even in

their old age. It's a specific reversal, the coming back together of male plus female, and then the being fruitful, which is the command of Genesis 1: "Be fruitful and multiply."

e) 1 Corinthians 6 v 9-10

f) Old Testament Law- Lev 18 v 22; Lev 20 v 13

- Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement

The Old Testament prohibitions against homosexuality in the Book of Leviticus and Deuteronomy are essentially provisions of the Jewish Law. Those Christians who base their disapproval of homosexuality on them must be prepared to state whether or not they are prepared to keep the other provisions of the Jewish Law.

- We are to uphold the law. We must therefore ask the question how the Law points to Christ and how it is fulfilled in him. We must then determine the application of the Law in the New Testament context.

3. Arguments from the Pro-Gay Lobby

a) Paul was unaware of the distinction between sexual orientation (over which one has apparently little choice) and sexual behaviour. Paul is condemning those who are heterosexual and who, by definition, are acting contrary to nature.

However some pro-gay activists assert that being gay is an identity that is socially determined and involves personal choice.

b) New Testament texts are describing the kind of exploitative, lust-driven sex which was characteristic of idolatrous religions in the First Century. But there is no reason at all that his condemnation would extend to other expressions of homosexual affection which unlike pagan orgies are within the love paradigm.

However, several homosexual scholars doubt this interpretation.

"However well intended, the interpretation that Paul's words were not directed at bona fide homosexuals in committed relationships...seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of the same-sex relations, under any circumstances. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian."

Louis Crompton

4. Closing remarks

- Can the Church speak with two voices on this issue?
- The Pragmatic Issue of Evangelism amongst gay people
- "The model of humanness is Jesus. I know many homosexuals who are radically human. To desert them would be a desertion, I believe, of our Master, Jesus Christ.

And that I will not do, no matter what the cost. I could not possibly return to my diocese and face them, these homosexual persons, many of whom look upon me as their father in God, their brother in Christ, their friend, were I to say to them, "You stand outside the hedge of the New Israel, you are rejected by God. Your love and care and tenderness, yes, your faltering, your reaching out, your tears, your search for love, your violent deaths mean nothing! You are damned! You have no place in the household of God. You are so despicable that there is no room for you in the priesthood or anywhere else." There are voices in this country now raised proclaiming this total ostracism in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. What will be the nature of the response to this in the House of Bishops?"

"Now that this issue has become one that none of us can dodge, what will be the nature of our response?"

- It is said very often today that the exclusion of homosexual practices from permissible forms of sexual activity in the church amounts to a contradiction of the free and unmerited grace of God, and constitutes therefore a denial of the all-inclusive claims of the gospel. But the dynamics of New Testament ethics drive toward the sanctification of human life, not to the indiscriminate approval of any form of conduct. Why have all New Testament authors, who are after all the very origin and source for our knowledge of God's mercy and grace, insisted that there are necessary boundaries to Christian freedom outside of which freedom turns into enslavement? The Jesus who turns to sinful people is also the great healer who restores sick life to health and as the healer he has also instructed his community with a conduct becoming to discipleship. None of us can claim freedom from sin, and none of us has the right to hurl condemnations at sinners as though he or she had any ground for faith but the sheer mercy of God. But the healing community of the great healer would abandon the mission if it did not diagnose sickness for what it is, and call for the rejuvenation, indeed the regeneration, of life in the discipline of faith."