

The Inadmissibility Of Homoerotic Expression Within The Christian Community

Opposition to a particular practice of a given segment of society is often labeled as "discrimination" and/or "prejudice." Both terms are meant to carry an inherently evil sense. The proponent of the opposition is viewed as narrow-minded, old fashioned, "out-of-step," unsophisticated, and especially unloving, by the same society that in times past may have considered the same practice repugnant. Consequently, minds slam shut, emotions overflow, and hope for meaningful dialogue degenerates into character assassination and a plethora of unnecessary "phobias." This is especially true in a pluralistic society imbued with philosophical relativism and romantic individualism which not only endorses, but systematically legislates the "rights" of each person to think and act as he or she sees fit, as long as it does not violate the rights of the next person. In such a society discrimination is demanded if anyone is to maintain a sense of rational basis for his or her own beliefs and conduct. Prejudice is not called for; prejudice is an irrational discrimination manifesting an ignorance of reality and a corrupted heart.

The Christian community must deplore prejudice [universal love is the very heart of its message (Mt 22:39)] and practice discrimination [humble submission is the very heart of its calling (Mt 22:38 *cf.* 2Jn 6)]. Otherwise, the Christian community will lose the very essence of its identity. Indeed, one may call himself or herself "Christian," but one betrays that identification by not loving his or her neighbor (regardless of lifestyle) and/or by not submitting to the authority of Scripture (regardless of preconceived ideas, emotions, or personal implication). Therefore, the case for or against any lifestyle must rest—for the Christian—solely upon Scripture.

In the dialogue concerning homosexual practices, a societal case might be built in opposition (Cameron), or a humanistic case in favor (Sheppard, who ostensibly uses Scripture, but abandons it for pure subjectivism). For the Christian, however, the final authority is Scripture. Does the Bible define the expression (act) of homoerotic desire as sinful? The term "homoerotic" (in lieu of "homosexual") is used to emphasize the raw sexual element involved over against same-sex preference or orientation common in many social relationships (*cf.* 2Sam 1:26). Additionally, the term "homosexual" is often associated with sin *per se*, while Scripture does not seem to do so. The *act* of homoerotic desire rather than orientation ("inversion") is the issue. Thus, whether one is predisposed to a sexual orientation genetically and/or environmentally is irrelevant (insomuch as sin is concerned). Neither the homosexual nor the heterosexual is allowed expression of desire outside of the parameters God has determined (male/female monogamous marriage) with impunity.

To suggest this is unfair to the homosexual is to miss the point that many heterosexuals (whether by choice or circumstance) likewise never marry. It becomes a matter of whom one chooses to serve, the self or God. Nowhere does Scripture provide a reason for sin with impunity because of predisposition. Would anyone care to suggest that drunkenness is not a sin for the alcoholic?

The so-called "rights" of the homosexual is another issue the Christian can disregard when those "rights" involve free sexual expression between two consenting adults. Because a particular culture neither legislates against nor views as morally reprehensible a particular practice, and indeed insists that such is a "right," the Christian still needs to stand opposed. This does not mean the Christian community should try to impose its view on society at large; such is an exercise in futility. But the community of believers must never compromise within itself (1Cor 5:12–13). This failure to compromise does not mean the person with homosexual orientation should be ostracized from the Christian community, neither does it mean he or she should be relegated to a second class status within. His or her sin is inadmissible, but he or she is to be welcomed in Christ-like love upon repentance and a willingness to conform to the will of God in thought and lifestyle. From a salvific perspective there is no reason to view the sin of homoerotic expression any differently than any other sin.

However, the secular influence, which has penetrated even the body of Christ, has reduced the authority of Scripture to the handmaiden of special interests. Passages that seem clear on the subject of homoerotic activities have been "reinterpreted" to fit the modern relativistic mindset. There are those who simply relegate the Scriptures to the "dead letter" file claiming they are not up to the task of addressing the concerns of modern scientific man. Others set out to provide "a theological interpretation of same-sex partnerships in a manner that both honors the authority of scripture and recognizes how other elements must interplay with scripture to inform Christian ethical discourse" (Sheppard 13). How does Sheppard "honor the authority of scripture"? The passages that relate to homosexuality are "homophobic statements" of mere human opinion conflicting with other passages attesting that "all such phobias should be nailed to the cross" (31). This interpreter unashamedly goes so far as to suggest that Scripture provides "some norms and rules in support of loving same-sex relationships" (31). There is no room for dialogue between those who view Scripture as normative and this type of hermeneutic, which has no respect for Scripture.

The relatively few passages that address this subject are not concerned with a psychosexual predisposition but rather the acts that might result from it (what I have called "homoerotic expression"). The affirmation of heterosexual union (by biological design and intent) within

marriage naturally excludes anything contrary to that model and sheds light on Biblical statements condemning those contrarities (Gen 1 – 2; Mt 19; 1Cor 7; *et. al.*).

The three primary passages of the Old Testament (Gen 19 *cf.* Jud 19; Lv 18:22; 20:13) have been clearly understood as opposed to homoerotic expression until modern times. D. Sherwin Bailey (Wright 292) pioneered the non-sexual interpretation of the sin of Sodom, and others have followed uncritically: "(the) larger judgment appears to be against social injustice and inhospitality to strangers (see Ezek 16:49–50)" (Nelson 272). But Jude (7) implies otherwise, and the weight of scholarship follows him.

The Levitical texts belonging to the "Holiness Code" clearly denounce homoerotic acts. Boswell—who even implies homoerotic relationships between Saul and David, Ruth and Naomi!—dismisses these prohibitions as applicable only to the Jews on the ground that early Christians did not invoke such authority to justify Christian morality (105). Presumably, these laws applied only to Jews needing to disassociate from Canaanite religious practices. But one need only consider if these prohibitions could stand apart from Canaanite cultic practices. That is, would adultery, child sacrifice, and bestiality (all in the same context) be lawful if not contaminated by Pagan affiliation?

In the New Testament there are also three primary passages that address this issue (Rm 1:26–27; 1Cor 6:9; 1Tm 1:10). The homosexual lobby has attempted to counter what seems to be the definitive statement opposing homoerotic expression (Rm 1:26–27) in at least seven ways:

1. "Natural" is basically determined by historical (cultural) context and not a "fixed 'moral' or 'natural law.'" Thus, *today* same-sex love is capable of establishing a covenant blessed by God (Sheppard 27 – 30). Against this view, however, it must be noted that "natural" is set in a creation (not cultural), and therefore, universal (and non-temporal) context. Homoerotic expression is set off against "the intention of the creator" (Cranfield 125); it is "a violation of the natural order" (Koster 273).
2. *Heterosexuals* ("natural") committing *homosexual* acts (*i.e.*, not homosexuals committing homosexual acts) is all that is condemned (Boswell 109, Nelson 272). This approach is deceptively misleading. Heterosexuals (by definition) do not "burn in their desire" (vs. 27) for those of the same sex. The "natural" was not merely exchanged in *act*, but in *desire*. Additionally, this interpretation reads back into Paul a twentieth century distinction of homosexual "inverts" (same-sex orientation by disposition) and "perverts" (same-sex practice by heterosexuals). Boswell contradicts his own interpretation here by admitting: "It is unreasonable to infer from the passage there was any motive for the behavior other than sexual desire" (108).

3. The condemnation is of the Gentile rejection of monotheism not "homosexuality (which) is simply a mundane analogy to this theological sin" (Boswell 108 – 109). The problem here is that Paul's "mundane analogy" would be meaningless if there were no sin inherent to it.
4. The condemnation is of homosexual acts in connection with Roman idolatry, cultic rituals, etc. (Boswell 108, citing and rejecting Herman van de Spijker). Boswell defeats this interpretation. First, why limit this to homosexual temple prostitution when heterosexual prostitution was more prevalent? Second, the sexual behavior itself is objectionable to Paul and not just its associations. Third, these are not "cold blooded, dispassionate acts performed in the interest of ritual or ceremony." The motive is clearly sexual desire (108).
5. The condemnation is of pederasty only (Scroggs 116). However, pederasty has no female counterpart. There is nothing in the context to justify this limitation.
6. The condemnation is Paul's personal opinion only (1Cor 7:12, 25) (Geisler 258 –259, citing and rejecting 263). Paul's appeal to creation demonstrates this is not just his opinion. But see also 1Cor 14:29.
7. Paul refers to promiscuous behavior, not committed loving homosexual relationships. The exchange in context is from "natural" to "unnatural," not committed and loving to uncommitted and unloving.

In 1Cor 6:9–10 (*cf.* 1Tm 1:10) Paul states that neither μαλακοί (*cf.* Mt 11:8) nor ἀρσενοκοῖται (among others) will inherit the kingdom of God. Literally, μαλακός means "soft" or "soft to the touch" and came to mean "effeminate, esp. catamites, men and boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually" (BGD). They "played the passive role in homosexual intercourse" (Stott 24). The latter term literally means "ones (masculine) who lie/sleep with men" (Peterson 187). "Greeks used this expression to describe the one who took the active role" (Stott 24). Accordingly, the Jerusalem Bible accurately, albeit indelicately, translates 1Cor 6:9 "catamites...sodomites." Of importance is the verbal sense of the noun ἀρσενοκοιτής delineating *action* rather than *orientation*. The word is new with Paul, who probably derives it from the Levitical prohibitions in the Septuagint (Lv 18:22; 20:13) concerning homoerotic expression in general (Wright 126 – 127). Both Wright and Peterson have contributed much to the discussion that Paul's condemnation rests upon ALL who participate in any such activities apart from the modern concept of "orientation" and the ancient practice of pederasty exclusively.

The Scriptures declare that homoerotic expression is sinful. Therefore, those who participate in such activities, regardless of sexual orientation, cannot be fellowshipped within the Christian community.

Certainly some sins have more ramifications than others, and some may be more distasteful to the community at large. But, this does not mean that those who have been guilty of such sins are to be treated with disdain, nor is sexual reorientation a necessary condition upon acceptance into the community of believers. The Spirit of Christ loves and embraces ALL who set their minds in heavenly places and conform their lives according to His holy image.

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