

Discerning Same-Sex Marriage in the PC(USA)

Session 6

Homosexuality and the Bible:

Two Views

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Gagnon

New Testament

Galatians 3:27-28

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

New Testament

Acts 10:9-16

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Gentile Inclusion & Gay Marriage

Via does not use the following arguments in his discourse of our discussion, but the following has been argued by many in the church regarding gay marriage.

- Jews regarded Gentiles as unclean and not a part of the covenant people of Israel.
- In Acts 10, God is giving Peter a vision that the Gentiles were now being engrafted into the covenant community.
- Paul becomes the primary evangelist to the Gentiles and refutes the Judaizers (who required Gentiles to subscribe to the Mosaic Law – circumcision and dietary restrictions in order to become “Christian”)

Gentile Inclusion & Gay Marriage

- As Via has argued throughout the course of his interpretation of the Old and New Testament Scriptures – homosexuality is an issue of ritual purity (being unclean).
- Therefore, as Gentiles were considered unclean and rejected by the covenant community; God has now made clean, through the power of the Holy Spirit, all who were previously left out.
- As Gentiles were not required to adopt Jewish practices to become Christian, homosexuals are not required to become heterosexual in order to be in a covenantal relationship in marriage.

Slavery, Women, & Gay Marriage

- Our nation's history is marked by oppressive chattel slavery. The Presbyterian Church of the South was pro-slavery and used scriptural texts to justify it. Although some pastors rejected slavery as it pertained to God's word, many were defrocked by the presbytery in retaliation for their strong criticism of slaveholders.
- Likewise, the issue of women in ministry and particularly being ordained as pastors, elders, and deacons was a tumultuous issue within the Presbyterian Church. It wasn't until 1956 that the PC(US) ordained the first female pastor – Margaret Towner.

Robert Gagnon

Analogies:

Gagnon refutes the cultural debate claims that associate homosexuality in the context of slavery, women in ministry, and divorce and re-marriage, as well as Gentile inclusion.

Gagnon continued...

Gagnon argues that the analogy of Gentile Inclusion is not a good analogy:

Just as the early church changed its mind about circumcision when it saw the Spirit's work in uncircumcised Gentiles, so too the church today should change its views on homosexual practice as a result of the Spirit's work in the lives of homosexual believers. This analogy involves a series of category confusions:

The Inclusion of Gentiles involves...

Gentiles were born Gentile (ancestry)

Incidentally linked to sinful behavior

Not requiring a positive ritual act (circumcision)

Welcoming people

An action that has O.T. precedent

An act with uniform N.T. approval

The Acceptance of Homosexual Practice involves...

Homosexual orientation is subjective and not directly inheritable.

Directly linked to sinful behavior

Accepting a negative moral behavior (same-sex intercourse)

Affirming behaviors

An action that has no O.T. precedent

An act with no N.T. approval

*The early church learned to accept uncircumcised Gentiles into the faith, but without accepting the sexual behaviors that Scripture deemed immoral (Acts 15; I Thess 4:1-8)

Gagnon continued...

Slavery:

- He claims that there is not a scriptural mandate to enslave others, nor does one incur a penalty for releasing slaves.
- There is, however, a scriptural mandate to limit sexual unions to heterosexual ones, with a severe penalty (in this life or the next) imposed on violators.
- Scripture nowhere expresses a vested interest in preserving slavery, whereas Scripture does express a vested interest in requiring male-female dynamic in sexual relationships.

Gagnon continued...

Women in Ministry:

- Being a woman is not a mutable condition like the existence of homosexual passions. Being a woman is not linked to sinful behavior, as is homoerotic desire.
- There are a number of precedents for putting women in leadership roles, but there are no precedents for endorsing homosexual behavior in the Bible.
- Galatians 3:28 – “there is no ‘male and female’” affirms the equality of men and women in the new creation. Paul did not intend it as grounds for eradicating gender differentiation and affirming every kind of sexual attraction.
- As with the antislavery impulse in Scripture, the Bible’s view of women was reasonably affirming in relation to its cultural world. But the Bible’s view of same-sex intercourse stood out as uncompromising.

Gagnon continued...

Divorce and Remarriage:

- Scripture has a limited diversity of opinion on divorce, unlike its uniformly strong rejection of same-sex intercourse. The O.T. position on divorce is mixed. Jesus did away with the tension by coming down solidly against divorce, thereby removing the concession to male ‘hardness of heart.” Matthew and Paul interpreted Jesus’ position as allowing for narrowly defined exceptions: adultery – a breach of the marriage (5:32; 19:9) or when an unbelieving spouse insists on leaving (I Cor. 7:10-16). ***While dissolving a marriage is a serious offense, it is seen as a lesser offense than entering into an unnatural union.***
- Divorce and same-sex intercourse are both forgivable sins for those who repent. The church works to end the cycle of divorce and remarriage, just as it ought to work toward the goal of ending a cycle of same-sex intercourse. ***The serial, unrepentant character of much homosexual behavior sets it apart from the divorce issue.***
- Divorce can occur more or less against one spouse’s will. ***For all the talk about involuntary homoerotic impulses, consensual same-sex intercourse is ultimately a voluntary act.***
- Mainline denominations take a dim view of candidates for ordination who have had a string of divorces. Why, then, should they look the other way when a candidate has not only engaged in same-sex intercourse in the past but also plans to continue such practice in the future? The church needs to maintain current standards on divorce and remarriage.

Gagnon continued...

Gagnon maintains that the best Analogy is Incest:

He says that no analogy is perfect, but that this is a good analogy because both incest and homosexuality match the elements of the Bible's opposition to consensual sexual behaviors that are pervasively, absolutely, and severely proscribed in both Testaments of Scripture, at least implicitly. Both are:

- Regarded by authors of Scripture with similar revulsion as extreme instances of sexual immorality.
- Capable of being conducted in the context of adult, consensual, long-term monogamous relationships.
- Wrong partly on the assumption that they involve two people too much alike.
- Wrong partly because of the high incidence of scientifically measurable, ancillary problems. Incest: high rate of procreative abnormalities and intergenerational sex. Same-sex intercourse: higher rates of STD's, mental health issues, multiple partners, short term relationships, intergenerational sex, gender identity disorders.

*In a functional sense, persons with repressed incestuous desires may find themselves in the same position as persons with repressed homoerotic desires: unable to enter a committed sexual relationship with the person they love.

Gagnon continued...

Who would argue that...

- A person can't be held morally accountable for acting on innate incestuous passions?
- Maintaining an absolute and strong stance against incest is to forsake grace for law and love for intolerance?
- The Bible's proscriptions of incest should be treated as outdated purity rules?
- The Levitical requirement of the death penalty on incest is reason enough to disregard it?
- Since Jesus said nothing explicit about incest he did not think incest was a major offense?
- If a parent and adult child, or two adult siblings love one another, it is none of the church's business?
- Intense opposition to incest makes one an "incestphobe"?

**Yet similar arguments are employed to validate homosexual practice.*