

EDITORIAL: Speak biblically, clearly, lovingly about homosexuality_81103

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Homosexuality has leaped out of the closet and landed in America's living rooms.

This summer, significant issues revolving around homosexuality have grabbed headlines in national media. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled Texas' sodomy law unconstitutional, President Bush affirmed legal restriction against homosexual marriage and the Episcopal Church confirmed the election of its first openly gay bishop.

Many Americans-especially traditional Christians-find discussion of homosexuality embarrassing. It's like when parents talk about sex and their children want to put their fingers in their ears and chant, "Too much information; too much information ..." until somebody changes the subject. But nobody's going to change this subject; not this time. Homosexuality is a fact of life in America, whether it's the orientation of the newest Episcopal bishop, the subject of constitutional amendments or a theme of seemingly every-other TV program.

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So, what's a Christian to do?

Baptists and other people of biblical faith begin with Scripture. The Bible is clear: Homosexual practice is sinful. From the early pages of the Old Testament, God commands: "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable" (Leviticus 18:22). Similar condemnation of homosexual acts can be found in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul includes "homosexual offenders" among the "wicked (who) will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9). He also insists "men (who) committed indecent acts with other men" are among those who received "due penalty for their perversion" (Romans 1:27).

Some advocates of homosexual practice try to interpret the Bible to their advantage. For example, they say the men of Sodom (Genesis 19) were guilty of “inhospitality.” Homosexual rape is rather inhospitable. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness. Elsewhere, the Bible unequivocally condemns homosexual activity. (See Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:18; Romans 1:27, 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10.)

Careful Bible study reveals God specifically condemns homosexual practice, but condemnation follows sin, not temptation to sin. This is why we must differentiate between homosexual activity and homosexuality. Can a person be a homosexual and not commit homosexual sin? Absolutely. A chaste person resists temptation and does not sin sexually, whether that person is tempted to commit fornication, adultery or a homosexual act.

Earnest Christians of good will debate whether homosexuals choose to be homosexual or have it thrust upon them by birth or traumatic circumstances. Some homosexuals, both practicing and non-practicing, testify they have not and would not choose their orientation. Others have adopted the lifestyle from among a rainbow of libidinous experiments. We will not resolve that debate.

However, the debate really is beside the point, because the Bible speaks to behavior, not desire or even inclination. And homosexual behavior is prohibited. Even if we grant that homosexual orientation is genetically derived, we must acknowledge that acting on those impulses is sinful, according to God's word. That means living within limits, whether or not those limits seem fair. Think of someone born blind or deaf. She would give anything to see, but she lives without light. He would give anything to hear, but he lives without sound. A homosexual may be willing to give almost anything to express himself or herself sexually, but the divine limitation within this inclination is chastity. Some homosexuals say this is unfair, that it prohibits them from being all God made them to be. Well, blindness and

deafness are unfair, but they are limits within which people live, often for a lifetime.

When heterosexual Christians think about homosexuality, we often misconstrue God's wrath and righteousness. Because the practice seems repulsive and heinous to us, we hone in on how God must feel revulsion at the perversion of his created order. And it is true that God calls homosexual activity an abomination and detestable. More importantly, however, we must recognize God's response to all sin is indignation mixed with grief and alarm. Like a parent who responds swiftly and firmly when a toddler strays into the street, God reacts to our sin out of concern for how the sin itself harms us and impacts others. God hates our sin because God loves us.

And that brings us to Christians' response to homosexuals. Almost without fail, we speak of "hating the sin but loving the sinner," and most homosexuals I've ever known don't buy it for a minute. For one, we say more than we realize when we speak of "hating" before "loving." Moreover, most of the time, our actions are anything but loving. Of course, exhibiting love—an intense, intimate emotion—is awkward and difficult when we're talking about care for people whose actions run counter to our own inclinations. Still, the challenge for Christians in a world that seems to flaunt homosexual activity more day by day is to find ways we can be loving and caring to people who, after all, also are made in God's image.

That doesn't mean we forfeit our right to stand on principles of sexual morality. Christians do well to support the biblical and traditional definition of marriage—one woman and one man united faithfully for life. We also do well to say we will not endorse practicing homosexuals in positions of religious leadership. Since homosexual activity is sinful, we should not promote unrepentant sinners as leaders. And we do well to address the media, who seem to have an agenda for making homosexual practice normative in America; we do not agree, and we will not enrich those who promote and sponsor such an agenda.

But we also should heed the biblical teaching, cited by President Bush: "We're all sinners." For 2,000 years, Christians have been advising others on how they can remove the splinters in their eyes while we're blinded by the logs in our own eyes. We need to remember our own sins are a stench in God's nostrils and, but for the grace of that same God, their sins might also be our own.

I've never been able to figure out why Christians seem to emphasize the heinous nature of sexual sin. Is it because we feel secure, that we will not succumb to those shortcomings? Or is it because we are frightened, and so we yell most loudly at that which scares us the most?

Homosexual sin is not the unpardonable sin, nor the only sin. We must speak with biblical and moral clarity. We also must endeavor mightily to speak with love.

-Marv Knox

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