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## **The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion - In Crisis - Part V**

Before we consider what St. Paul says about homosexual practice, I want to summarize my argument thus far. At the end of this series I will suggest some reading that has been most helpful to me.

Our Church is in trouble. The General Convention meets this month and considers both the approval of the Bishop elect of New Hampshire, a man who divorced his wife and left his children for the sake of a homosexual relationship, and the development of rites for same-sex unions. The Anglican Communion elsewhere has seen the passage of such a rite for same-sex unions in the Diocese of New Westminster, Vancouver, and the appointment of a practicing homosexual, now celibate, in the Diocese of Reading, England, who has since withdrawn his appointment. Our communion is actually divided, with Bishops around the world declaring that they are not in communion with those who have proceeded down this barren path.

Christians of all kinds of churchmanship, Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical, have denounced, respectfully and with compassion, the advocates of same-sex unions. This church wide denunciation is made not on the basis of opinion or social convention, but rather on the foundation of the revelation of the Bible, the coherence of which lies in the revelation of God in Christ.

The Holy Scriptures are clear. In the Old Testament, the practice of homosexuality is considered an abomination (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13). These passages from Leviticus retain moral force in our day for three reasons. First, they presuppose the creative will of God recorded in Genesis, an intention that was and is a complementarity of male and female. Second, these prohibitions are seen to be universal, along with other improper sexual activity, such as adultery, incest, and bestiality. Third, these prohibitions are confirmed and given an even deeper significance in the teaching of St. Paul.

When we turn to the teaching of Jesus, we find a doctrine of marriage that is wonder-fully consistent with the original intention of Genesis. The mode of human sexuality is given in creation, and the union of male and female is not to be disrupted. Indeed, the union Jesus intends for human sexuality is so complete that it extends to the sphere of the imagination. While Jesus says nothing explicit about the practice of homosexuality, he does regard porneia, which is every form of unlawful sexual intercourse, as sinful.

Now we come to St. Paul. The texts of Paul that speak directly to the practice of homosexuality are Romans 1:26, 27; I Corinthians 6:9; and I Timothy 1:10. Read Romans 1:18-32; I Corinthians 6:9,10; and I Timothy 1:8-10.

The text from Romans is the most explicit condemnation of the practice of homosexuality in the Bible. In Paul's argument, the fall of man involves the turning away from the knowledge of God, given in the order of creation, to an arbitrary mode of human life.

There is, first of all, a suppression of the truth. And with this rejection of the truth of God comes a fashioning of idols, a projection of man's arbitrary will into a form of self-devised worship. Idolatry is, therefore, an extension of the fallen self.

But, second to this, in giving up the knowledge of God as Creator, man gives up the originative idea of God in nature, and in the nature of man himself. And so as man falls away from a clear relation to God in knowledge, so also he falls away from a clear relation to himself in nature. Homosexual practice is a primary form, though not the only form, in which human life denies the knowledge of God the Creator and replaces it with an estranged imagination and activity.

St. Paul writes, "For this reason God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature. And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet."

What God had revealed man and woman to be in the complementarity of their anatomical structure, they denied. And the practical outcome of their denial was to change the natural, God-given, activity of human sexuality for that which is contrary to nature. The end result, says Paul, is that they received in themselves a recompense for their behavior.

It is this self-inflicted recompense that is so pernicious. Fallen Man is not only alienated from God, he is also alienated from himself. This is, of course, true not only for the sin of homosexual practice but for all sinful behaviors.

And yet the gravity of this particular sin is that it strikes man at the very heart of man's created being. Self-alienation finds its expression first of all in the improper use of sexual identity. This is what many churchmen recognize, if only intuitively, as the heinousness of homosexual practice.

In Genesis, man is made in the image of God, and therefore capable of communication with God. In his bodily form man is male and female, which is the anatomical structure given for procreation, and for the means of intimate pleasurable union. Man's creation as male and female is received along with the communication of God as to man's responsibility to live within God's world, to procreate the species, to enjoy human friendship, and to exercise dominion, all of which is a kind of derived creativity. It is profoundly true that with the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the initial sign of their alienation is that

they believe they are naked. The fall of man's soul away from God has its first effect in sexual consciousness.

Thus, for St. Paul, the actuality of the fall of man is revealed paradigmatically in homosexual practice. Man exchanges what is given in nature for that which is contrary to nature. Man is alienated from himself.

I Corinthians 6:9, 10 does not involve the same context of creation, revelation, and fall as in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. In I Corinthians, Paul is speaking of the kind of habitual sin that endangers the spiritual health and future of the soul. Those who persist in these sins will lose their inheritance in the Kingdom of God. Advocates for same-sex unions argue that the words Paul uses here do not refer to committed homosexual relationships. But their argument will not do. An analysis of St. Paul's language will follow.

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