

Romans 1: 18-2:16: Homosexual Behavior and Paul's Teaching

Oct. 18, 2009, University Pres. Church, Steve Varvis

I. Relations Between and Echoes from Old Testament and New Testament Texts on Sexuality and Homosexual Acts:

Gen. 1-2, 19: Creation, Image of God, Male and Female, Marriage/One Flesh

- Quoted by Jesus, see Mark 10: 5-9 (lectionary for Oct. 4), Marriage as Norm
- Reflected in Leviticus, Romans (Creation, Male/Female) and throughout Scripture

Leviticus 18-20: Prohibition of Incest, Bestiality, Same-sex Acts; Ten Commandments; Holiness in Contrast to Egypt and Canaan.

- Reflected in Romans 1 (Idolatry/Shameful/Indecent), I Corinthians 5-6 (Incest/Same-sex Acts), I Timothy 1 (Ten Commandments)

Acts 15: 19-29. Background for Paul and Romans, Relation of Followers of Christ to Jewish Law/Circumcision, Ritual and Moral Purity

- "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us"
- No food sacrificed to idols, keep from blood and the meat of strangled animals, no sexual immorality

II. Some Historical Perspective and General Interpretive Comments:

On Ritual vs. Moral Purity, Leviticus/Holiness Code and elsewhere. Reformation Confessions, Presbyterian Book of Order and others:

- Second Helvetic Confession: (5.081) distinguishes ritual from moral purity (and law of nature and politics); (5.085) Christ did not abolish moral law, useful and to be read in the Church; (5.177) ritual law canceled or revised ("abrogated"), baptism and Eucharist replace circumcision and Passover.
- Westminster Confession: (6.103) distinguishes moral from ceremonial, ceremonial prefigures Christ and is canceled; (6.105) moral forever binding; 6.106, not a covenant of works but a rule of life (long explanation).
- Similar distinction in Church of England, Thirty-nine Articles, Article VII (see Seitz in list of references).

Homosexual Behaviors as Secondary Reference in these Texts

- None of the New Testaments texts which explicitly mention same-sex acts are primarily about same-sex behaviors, homosexuality per se, or homosexual

orientation. This might be said about Old Testament references as well. These acts are referred to among other prohibited or proscribed behaviors in response to a particular problem the church is facing (I Cor.) or in a larger argument or teaching (Rom, I Tim). They are, however, recognized as distinctive of Jewish and Christian teaching in comparison with other cultures (Greece, Rome, and Canaan).

- These New Testament texts stand within the teaching of Genesis and Leviticus (and the rest of the OT and NT) on marriage, human sexuality, the created order, natural order, and holiness. That is, the teaching of the relation of male and female in a covenant (or ordination, or sacrament) of marriage is primary and is accepted as the standard or context in and by which sexual activity is understood.
- Each of the New Testament passages stands in continuity with the Old Testament texts we have reviewed (Gen, Lev and others). And the history of the interpretation of these texts, throughout the denominations of the Church, and including Jewish tradition has exemplified remarkable unanimity on understanding these behaviors as proscribed, despite inter-denominational hostility, until the very recent decades, and then in a sub-set of churches that continue to be divided on the issue to the extent of schism/division. The Presbyterian "The Confession of 1967" reflects the continuity of this teaching and some of the current social environment that shapes our questions:

The relationship between man and woman exemplifies in a basic way God's ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created mankind. Anarchy in sexual relationships is a symptom of man's alienation from God, his neighbor, and himself. Man's perennial confusion about the meaning of sex has been aggravated in our day by the availability of new means for birth control and the treatment of infection, by the pressures of urbanization, by the exploitation of sexual symbols in mass communication, and by world overpopulation. The church, as the household of God, is called to lead men out of this alienation into the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ. Reconciled to God, each person has joy in and respect for his own humanity and that of other persons; a man and woman are enabled to marry, to commit themselves to a mutually shared life, and to respond to each other in sensitive and lifelong concern; parents receive the grace to care for children in love and to nurture their individuality. The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by man when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time. (9.47)