

“Is Homosexuality Incompatible With Christian Teaching?”

Date: July 13, 2014

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13; Romans 1:21-27

Theme: Homosexuality

Occasion: sermon series, social issues

Format: A dialogue between two person, Voice 1, Voice 2

Voice 1 (V1): Well, that settles that. Romans 1 makes it pretty clear that homosexuality is wrong. It’s immoral; it’s unnatural and it’s a sin. The Bible is very clear about this. I don’t understand why people are even discussing it. The Bible said it, I believe it, end of discussion.

Voice 2 (V2): Hold on there. Many Christians, *faithful* Christians, read the very same Bible and they’re coming to some different conclusions. Can we just talk about this? A lot of people are getting hurt by the hateful language that some Christians are using to condemn gays.

V1: Well, we have to stand up for God’s Word and defend it. If you keep changing what it says, this country is going to hell in a hand-basket. And it sure seems like it is, today.

V2: I appreciate your strong convictions about the Bible. I love the Bible too, but I read it a little differently. Did you know that in the time when the Bible was written, they didn’t have the psychological understanding that we do today about sexual orientation? Of course they were condemning what they saw as unnatural, in their period of history. Scientists today now believe that orientation may be genetic.

V1: So you’re trying to tell me that God made these people that way? I don’t believe that. I think they’re perverted and they’re just choosing to behave in an immoral way.

V2: It’s true, there isn’t a universal consensus as to what causes sexual orientation, but the people I’ve met and talked to who are gay

tell me they wouldn't have chosen this lifestyle, not with all of the hate and the judgment thrown at them. In fact, some of my friends have tried prayer and exorcisms and therapy to make it go away. It doesn't work. Even some of the Christian therapists who once thought that you could change a person's orientation have changed their mind.

V1. So you say. But I've heard people interviewed on Christian television who say they've left the gay lifestyle. So if they could change, then all the rest of them can change too.

V2. I guess people can change. But forcing people to change their God-given self and who they are is more hurtful and destructive. Some Christians now believe God made them this way. It's not a sin; it's who they are.

V1: I think they're trying to ruin our church. I'm a United Methodist, and since 1972 our Social Principles have said that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. I'll grant you that some people may have that orientation at birth, but they should still choose celibacy. They shouldn't practice gay sex.

V2: That's one way of settling the debate. But it also sends a pretty harsh message to those people. "*You* are incompatible with our church. You're not wanted here." Many of those people have grown up in our churches. They love God. They want to serve the Lord. Many of them want to be pastors. Truth is, many of them are pastors.

V1: I know that. And I think they're trying to destroy our church by forcing us to change our way of using Scripture. It's God's Word. God spoke it. We can't go changing it to make it say what we want. We can't redefine what we consider sin.

V2: But our views do change. At one time it was permissible to own slaves, and people used the Bible to support that view. At one time it was a terrible sin to get a divorce; but now it is looked upon as a necessary practice – some couples should not stay together forever. It used to be a sin to work on the Sabbath; that’s one of the Ten Commandments. Now look at how things have changed.

V1: Just because we get sloppy with some of the rules does not mean we get to change any of the rules we want. What you’re suggesting is making moral truth relative; everybody gets to decide for themselves what’s right and wrong. What happens to the authority of God’s Word?

V2: It’s still the authority for our life together as a community of faith. But we have to use other tools to help interpret the Bible, things like tradition, experience and reason. None of us reads the Bible in a vacuum; we all bring our personal experience to the reading of the text in front us.

V1: Go on. I get what you’re saying; I know the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. I’m just afraid of where you might be taking us. It seems like a slippery slope, using experience as a voice of authority.

V2: Well, I guess my views on homosexuality began to change when I began to know some gays personally. For a long time, it was dangerous to come out of the closet. But gays have been coming out – to their parents, to their families, to their churches. And do you know what they want? They want to be loved and accepted.

V1: I can love the person and still hate the sin, though. I’m not going to make peace with the Devil. Sin is sin.

V2: Maybe *you* can do that, but a lot of Christians come across as very hateful, even suggesting that gays should be killed. So-called hatred of the sin comes across as hateful to the person. They don't feel welcomed, even in the churches they grew up in. I know one mother, right now, who won't bring her son to church for fear of how he'll be treated. She fears for his safety.

V1: That's sad. But if he's gay, I really don't want his kind polluting our church. If gays aren't willing to repent of their sin, then I don't want them in our churches.

V2: Did you really just say that? The United Methodist Church has a slogan: "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors." It's meant to be welcoming to all people. But you're saying that if they don't repent of who they are, they should stay away? That sounds pretty mean.

V1: And I suppose you're going to start using that language about grace. When Jesus ministered to the woman caught in adultery, he told her to go and sin no more.

V2: He also said, "Where are your accusers? If they don't accuse you, then neither do I." The way I see it, Christians should be sharing the love of God and calling them to a life of holiness, and then letting the person work out their salvation with God. We shouldn't be deciding who gets to Heaven and who doesn't.

V1: But it's not just about getting into Heaven. I'll grant you that we're not saved by keeping the Law. Paul makes that abundantly clear. We are saved by grace. But grace doesn't mean you get to do whatever you want. The Law, as revealed in God's Word, tells us what it means to live a life of holiness – and gay marriage isn't a part of that life.

V2: Wait a minute. Marriage is a holy institution, given to us by God, so that we can grow in our likeness of Christ. If two people of the same sex are willing to covenant together, in faithful, loving, committed, intimate relationships, shouldn't they be allowed? Isn't that better than a lifestyle of promiscuous, one night stands?

V1: I'm not bending on this one, even if the State of Pennsylvania says it's now legal. There's a higher law that trumps civil law, and that's the Law of God. It's immoral, unnatural and it's a sin.

V2: You haven't changed your mind, have you? I suppose people have pretty strong views on this topic. I respect that you love the Bible as much as you do. It's just that you're coming across as so hateful and judgmental and holier than thou. It's really turning off a lot a people, both inside and outside the church.

V1: May be, but I'm not compromising on how I read Scripture.

V2: But what about other sins, you don't seem as harsh on them as you do on gays. People who are overweight may be guilty of the sin of gluttony. But I rarely hear any outcry over that sin. Maybe it's because obesity is such a complex problem. It's personal, and we don't understand all the reasons why a person is overweight.

V1: I know what you mean about that. My Mom struggles with her weight and people are so quick to make rude comments to her. They don't understand that she has a thyroid problem. But being overweight isn't in the same category as immorality.

V2: Maybe not, but what about the way we treat people? Suppose you're right, homosexuality is a sin. Can we still love the people, include them and refrain from judging them? Just like we do now with people who are divorced, they need our love, not our judgment.

V1: I will grant you that some of my friends can be pretty harsh when it comes to what they say about gays. Maybe we can tone it down a notch. That doesn't mean I approve of what they're doing, though.

V2: I understand. I didn't think I'd change your mind.

V1: I don't think I changed your mind either. But I appreciate you hearing what I had to say. You know, you're not as crazy and way-out there as I thought you progressive Christians were. But you do know, the United Methodist Church position hasn't changed, even if Pennsylvania Law has?

V2: I know. Just so the folks who have been listening to us know what that official position is, let's tell them:

Paragraph 161(f) of the 2012 Book of Discipline states:

"We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self.

The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God's grace is available to all.

We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons."

Paragraph 341.6 states:

"Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."

Paragraph 2702.1 says:

Practices declared by the United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex ceremonies."

May God help us as we move forward, for we are not all in agreement. Let us pray.