

Essay on Current Events: The Episcopal Church and Homosexuality

by Matt Postiff

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News Summary

Minneapolis, Tuesday, Aug 5, 2003 - The Episcopalian Church yesterday elected of Rev. Canon V. Gene Robinson to the New Hampshire Diocese. He is now the first openly gay bishop of that denomination. The vote was by the Episcopal general convention. He was previously the assistant to the New Hampshire bishop. He is a divorced father of two, currently living with a male partner.

Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, head of the church, said the bishops voted 62-45 to confirm Robinson's election. Two bishops abstained, but their ballots under church rules were counted as "no" votes. The Episcopal Church, with 2.3 million members, is the U.S. branch of the 77 million-member global Anglican Communion. The vote is causing quite a stir among conservatives of that denomination.

The Episcopalian denomination has for some time accepted gay and lesbian people into its fellowship. Listen to the same article: "Robinson said he attended a gathering of gay Episcopalians Tuesday night where some were in tears, saying their gay children had called to tell them they would now return to the church." Or, "Later this week, the Episcopal convention is expected to consider a measure on drafting a same-sex blessing ceremony."

In an interview Wednesday [August 6, 2003], Robinson said he hoped his critics would not leave the church, though he disagrees with their view that gay sex violates Scripture. "I think they're wrong about this," he said. "I think they'll come to know that they are wrong, in this life or the next one." (Election of Gay Bishop Prompts Walkout, By RACHEL ZOLL, AP Religion Writer).

Commentary

This decision is only one further step in the downward spiral that the Episcopalian denomination (among others) is taking in its apparent effort to keep up with the ways of the world: note the Supreme Court decision in June overturning Texas' sodomy laws, and recent Canadian movements toward legalization of homosexual marriage. Certainly we are in the midst of a great movement away from the truth of God, as Paul tells Timothy in 1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-5, 13, 4:3-4.

It is unfortunate that we must even talk of these things (Eph 5:12) but in the interest of declaring the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) we will reproduce here the Biblical teaching on the issue of homosexuality.

Let it be emphatically said that the critics of Robinson are not wrong. Homosexuality is clearly condemned in the Scriptures as immoral, ungodly, wicked behavior. The following paragraphs show this from five clear texts in the Bible. Note well that these are the clear teachings of the Bible, not of a radical man or denomination.

Lev 18:22, 20:13. "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination...If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their blood-guiltiness is upon them." The Mosaic law clearly prohibits homosexuality as something that is detestable. The law, as an expression of the holy will of God for the Jews, contains principles that are clearly applicable to us today. While we do not have a civil law which functions as it did in Israel, i.e. the punishment today for such behavior is obviously not the death penalty, we do understand that God hates this practice, as he hates all sin.

Rom 1:26-27. "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error."

If some should argue that the Mosaic law has passed out of force in this age of grace, they would be correct. But they would not be correct to use this as an argument supporting homosexual behavior, for it is again condemned here, in the New Testament epistles. Paul carries the principle forward "from the creation of the world" (verse 20) all the way to the present (vs. 32) where he uses present tense verbs to speak of those who "know the ordinance of God...practice such things...they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them." So, the Episcopal church has given approval to one who is practicing homosexuality. Such is a double-sin: one of allowing the sin and another of promoting the sin.

Paul is very clear in Romans that such behavior, first of all, is sourced in what the NASB calls "degrading passions." These are the evil lusts or passions which drive lesbian and homosexual behavior. These passions are only genetic in the sense that sin is genetic, i.e. all people are born with a sin nature. They are not a disease in the classic sense of that term; instead they come from the "disease" called sin.

Such behavior, secondly, is unnatural. The word used in Greek indicates that which is inborn or native, according to the laws of nature and the created order. There are plain physical indications of the order of God's creation, and homosexual behavior violates these.

Such behavior, thirdly, is indecent. This word means shameful, unseemly. These ideas do not lend themselves to support of homosexual behavior in the least.

Such behavior, fourthly, is error. This word has two related ideas. The first is a straying from truth or orthodoxy. Such behavior is indeed a departure from that which is right. Additionally, the word for "error" means deception. Many have deceived themselves into thinking that homosexuality is either natural, a preset human condition, a valid choice, or "ok for someone else but not for me." No! In fact, it is error. It is sin. Deception often comes, as in this case, by setting up a human standard (in our own autonomous minds) as opposed to looking to God's perfect standard.

Such behavior, fifthly, leads one into the judgment of God. This is indicated in the phrase "God gave them over to degrading passions" and they "receiv[ed] in their own persons the due penalty of their error." This is more than God permitting them to sin, because He had permitted sin already at the Fall. It is also more than God's withholding of his goodness, for the gospel is available to all today; none can say that God is not good. This judgment is God's confirming of the wicked in their lifestyle and His allowing them to experience the full penalty (temporal and eternal) of their error. These are indeed weighty words for those who are caught in such practice. For you Christians out there, this ought to burden your soul to witness to those caught in such behavior, to save a soul from death (James 5:20).

1 Cor 6:9. "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals..." The word for effeminate refers to pedophilia and generally to homosexuality. The word "homosexuals" is translated by the KJV as "abusers of self with mankind." This means a sodomite or homosexual. Very clearly Paul is calling out these, among other sexual sins, as violations of God's will.

1 Tim 1:9-10. "...realizing the fact that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching."

Here again the word for homosexual is used. Note that all of these deeds are paralleled with each other as being lawless and rebellious. They are all "contrary to sound teaching." Sure, teachers go about today saying cultural norms dictate that Paul is outmoded or a bigot or a homophobe. Not at all. In fact, Paul says that some of the Corinthians were saved out of such sin. He thanked God for them (1 Cor 1:4) and he sent his love to them in the final verse of his first letter (1 Cor 16:24).

Far from a homophobe, Paul was instead a sin-o-phobe. He wanted to see all men come to the obedience of the faith (Rom 1:5) and to be delivered from the power of darkness (Acts 26:18). This is God's continuing desire today (2 Peter 3:9).

The case is quite clear that Rev. Robinson is wrong. Pray for him to realize this soon.