

April 4, 2013

Just a few weeks ago, a Calvary member asked Pastor Bestul to explain for some confused family members a Christian's understanding of the "gay marriage" issue in America and how we as Christians ought to speak of it. While it was too late to include this in the newsletter, it's important – especially in light of the recent Supreme Court hearings – that all Calvary members understand the Lord's will and are equipped to confess it to family, friends, and neighbors.

Homosexuality in America: "Rights" vs. "Right"

"I have the right to do everything," you say – but not everything is beneficial." (1 Cor. 6:12)

As the Supreme Court has recently heard arguments regarding the legality of "gay marriage" (and, as American public opinion prepares to rule in favor of "gay marriage"), how does a Christian respond to the increasing American demand for "equality in rights" for those who identify themselves as homosexuals? There are multiple layers of answers, both in the Church and in society.

First, the underlying question: "What is the issue at hand, and why is it an issue?" Great deception has been played to convince many that this is an issue of "rights" – "Homosexuals should have the same right to live and marry as any other individual!" But, this is actually a conflation of issues. No public figure in America is claiming it should be *illegal* for people to engage in homosexual activity. The "right" to *live* in a manner that defines one's life by his/her sexual activity is already in place. Furthermore, hospital patients may see anybody they desire to see in their hospital rooms – visitation "rights" are already in place. To be sure, if society desires, government may set in place laws that give homosexuals the same tax and financial advantages as others. But, the real issue at hand in society is the issue of marriage. Does society have the "right" to change the definition of marriage to include homosexuality?

The Christian rightly confesses that marriage is not a product of man's ingenuity, but of God's design. When society believes it has the right to redefine marriage, it attacks the very truth of Scripture, which thoroughly defines marriage as a God-given institution for the purpose of joining together one man and one woman, and "what *God* has here joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. 19:4-6).

Thus, a Christian must choose to agree with God or with a pagan society. For, one cannot claim to be a disciple of Christ and at the same time refute Christ's own words (*Christ* was the one speaking in Matthew 19). So, who is the God in this picture -- Jesus? Or "rights" to please the flesh?

Such a 'line in the sand' brings up another underlying issue: The objective reality of Truth. The American claim to "rights" is based on the notion that the American philosophy establishes Truth. But, as soon as it can be argued that a society can *establish* Truth, Truth becomes subjective to society's desires. Much of America's social argument is over the question of whether Truth is *subjective* ("What is true for me is true for me") or *objective* ("X is true, no matter whether one believes Y is true instead.") The argument over Truth is not merely a postmodern question: Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "What is Truth?!" (John 18:38). The Christian knows that Truth lies with Christ, for in His own words, Jesus says, "I am the Way, *the Truth*, the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6).

So, if Truth lies with Christ and His Scriptures, the Christian is no longer foremost concerned about "rights according to society," but "what is right in the sight of God?" And, what is right in the sight of God *is* to be the foundation of civil

government, which is instituted by God (Romans 13:1-5), not to act in a 'secular' manner, but to legislate in ways that uphold the will of God for society. But, in the event that the government transgresses God's will, the Christian knows, for example, that it is right not to murder, even if society gives people the "rights" to murder (abortion, euthanasia). Likewise, sexual activity outside of marriage (*any* type of sexual activity – homosexual, heterosexual, premarital, extramarital, rape, consensual) is *not* right, even if civil government claims people have the "rights" to engage in it.

With a Christian being rightly concerned about what is right in the sight of God, does this mean the Christian is "close-minded", "hard-hearted," and "condemning" towards homosexuals? Not at all! Homosexuality is a sin; it is no more or less a sin than any other sin. Homosexual temptation is very real; in terms of sin after Adam's Fall, it is just as common a temptation as other temptations. And, as all other sins, homosexuality is to be repented of and, where there is repentance, "God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). In fact, Paul reminds the Corinthians that some of them were engaged in homosexual activity before being washed, justified, and sanctified (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) by Christ. Thus, the Christian – who himself knows the depth of his own depravity – hates the sin, but loves the sinner, and desires the sinner to repent and be forgiven, that he/she too may share in the promised inheritance of Christ.

The unique difficulty with homosexuality as a sin in the 21st century is that society has encouraged those who engage in homosexual activity to define themselves by it; increasingly they become resistant to the idea that it needs to be repented of, or even *can* be repented of. Homosexuality has become their identity in a way no heterosexual individual bases his identity on his sexual activity. And, once one claims that *it* (the sexual activity) is who *they* are, then "I ought to have rights based on my sexual activity!" Or, said in a manner consistent with the will of God, once one claims that his/her sin is who *they* are, then he/she rejects the call to repentance, stands his ground in his sin (improperly believing that it's who he/she "naturally is") and endangers his soul.

Thus, the devil goes further, and he entices society to claim that "homosexuals were born that way." No scientific data has ever proven such a case. For the sake of the argument, even if it were proven, the same can be said about those born with a sinful disposition toward alcohol, sexual promiscuity, laziness, anger, gossip, etc. Society has no concept of original sin; thus, "natural" is seen as *good*, rather than "natural, according to the Fall into sin." Instead, Scripture says we are by birth and nature sinful and unclean, *by nature* children of wrath. In short, God's Law is not that we would be "natural," but that we would be "holy."

Thus, no matter what sin we are "naturally born with," God's Law demands that we not be sinners. Such is obviously impossible for *every* sinner (whether Christian or not)... thus, our **only** help and comfort is the Christ sent into the world to die the sinner's death upon the cross of Calvary and thereby earn our salvation. That He did, and He now applies that salvation through the right distinction of Law and Gospel. Through His Holy Law, He brings us to repentance and, by His Gospel delivered, He grants us His forgiveness through the Word and Sacraments – in baptism clothing us in His righteousness, in the Lord's Supper forgiving sins and strengthening faith *in* Christ and *against* temptation. Those who are impenitent toward their sins stand in God's judgment, no matter how much society has granted them the "rights" to do so. But, by God's grace, Gospel promises are just as true for those who repent of homosexuality as they are for those who repent of _____ (insert *sin* here).