

SERMON PASSAGE – Romans 1:16 – 3:24

SERMON READING

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? (Romans 2:1-4)

Romans 1:18 – 3:18 makes for uncomfortable reading – 1:18-32 / 2:5-16 / 3:9-18

- 'wrath ... no excuse'
- false worship
- sexual immorality
- destructive behaviour
- not even one who is righteous

THE ISSUE OF HUMAN SEXUALITY & BEHAVIOUR

Context - The Sexual Climate Today

- a sex-obsessed and sex-saturated society (no fulfilment without sex?)
- the impact for non-sexual friendships, singleness, faithfulness, & celibacy before marriage; the bible calls all people to sexual purity
- devotion to the Lord must take precedence over everything else (Deut 6:5)

Why this has become such a significant & difficult issue

- the deeply emotive nature of the issue [a little history lesson]
- the reality that no one's thinking is neutral – recognising our own 'prejudice'
- the 'politicisation' of human sexuality (sexuality as defining identity)
- the poisoning of the debate by extremists on both sides (some appalling departures from the way of Jesus by some church groups – what is God's heart for a gay man / lesbian woman?)
- the apparent silence from Jesus & the comparatively small number of biblical texts which speak to the issue (shouldn't we concentrate on things which really matter – justice, poverty?)
- the potential pastoral consequences – an example from pastoral experience

So why this sermon?

- scripture sets it before us
- a very current hot potato – the liberal agenda within the church forces a response, whatever reticence we feel
- the nature of authority & obedience – Scripture or Reason?
- at the heart of the matter are 3 questions

- nature or nurture
- marriage or promiscuity
- orientation or practice

So what does the bible say?

Genesis 2:18-24

- the incompleteness of the male without the female (2:18)
- the 'dismembering' of the male to create the female (2:21,22)
- the act of sexual union as 're-remembering' – 'they shall become one flesh' (2:24)

St Paul

three main texts (& their contexts, which is key)

- Rom 1:18-27 (creation)
- 1 Cor 6:9-11 (kingdom)
- 1 Timothy 1:9-10 (law)

And how should Christians respond?

- *Resisting the temptation to judge (Romans 2:1-4)*
- *Inviting the Holy Spirit to change our hearts (Romans 2:25-29)*
- *Responding to God's call to holiness (Romans 3:5-9)*
- *Acknowledging our own failings in the area of sexual purity (Matthew 5:27)*
- *Being thankful for God's forgiveness in Jesus (Romans 3:21-25)*

At the heart of the homosexual condition there is a deep loneliness, the natural human hunger for mutual love, a search for identity, and a longing for completeness. If homosexual people cannot find these things in the local 'church family', we have no business to go on using that expression (John Stott, Issues Facing Christians Today, Marshall Pickering 1984)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

1. What for you is the central issue raised by this sermon? Can you be honest about how the sermon made you feel? Did you agree with it? If not, where and why not? Do you have any gay / lesbian friends? If not, why not? How can you share Jesus with them while at the same time holding to biblical teaching?
2. Should Scripture remain the ultimate authority for the christian? What areas of the bible are you most likely to ignore or reject?
3. How would you respond to someone who confided in you that (s)he was gay or a lesbian? How do John Stott's words challenge the life of our 'Church Family'?

Paul Langham, May 2010