

The Journey of Faith
Abraham in the Autumn of Life - Sin God must punish
Genesis 19:1-29
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Many of you will have heard about the turmoil in the Church of England. The present dilemma centres on one issue: homosexual practice: the church of England has decided to bless relationships made up of two men or two women. We would not preaching a sermon on this subject were it not for the fact that we are making our way through the life of Abraham on Sunday mornings and have arrived at Genesis chapter 19, which records the divine destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of the sin of homosexual practice.

You will have noticed that we did not read Genesis 19 this morning, instead we read from Romans chapter 1 because in this sermon I want us to zoom out from Genesis 19 and consider together what the whole of the Scriptures teach on this matter, so that we can be clear in our own minds what to believe, and know how to respond with truth and grace.

Some of you will know that the Global “Anglican Communion” is made up of separate Anglican churches all over the world. It used to be that the western Anglican churches were the most numerous, but that is not true any longer. Most Anglican Christians today live in Africa, and because of the recent direction of the Church of England many of them are in the process of rejecting the Church of England as their “mother church” and rejecting the Archbishop of Canterbury as their leader. Our African brothers and sisters are making a lot of Biblical sense these days: "History is about to repeat itself," Archbishop Henry Ndukuba of Nigeria recently said, "The Anglican Church is at the threshold of yet another reformation, which must sweep out the ungodly leadership currently endorsing sin, misleading the lives of faithful Anglican worldwide." The archbishop of the church of Uganda, Stephen Samuel Kaziimba said much the same: “The Church of England are “offering to bless that sin. That is wrong. The Church of Uganda cannot accept that. God cannot bless what He calls sin.”

Those quotes will give you an idea of the seriousness of the issue before the worldwide Anglican communion.

As simply and as compassionately as God’s grace allows, I want to explain:

- What the Bible teaches about this issue
- Why the Bible teaches this
- How we should respond to the teaching of the Bible

What does the Bible teach?

I don't think I can do better than to read out what the Church of Uganda put out a couple of weeks ago:

Number 1, "From the first page of the Bible in the book of Genesis to the last page of the Bible in the book of Revelation, it is clear that God's design for human flourishing is that we are part of a family – a family that is defined as one man and one woman united in holy matrimony for life and, God willing, a union that produces children. God's Word has said that the only context for sexual relationships is in the context of a marriage of one man and one woman.

Number 2. Because lifelong, exclusive marriage between one man and one woman is the only context for sexual relationships, the Bible calls any other kind of sexual relationship a sin. Whether it is adultery, or fornication, or polygamy, or homosexual relationships. They are all sin and they all separate us from God.

- a. That means sleeping with your girlfriend or your boyfriend before marriage is a sin.
- b. That means that if you are married and have a "side dish," that is a sin
- c. That means that if you take a second or third wife that is a sin.
- d. That means if you engage in homosexual or same-sex sexual relationships, that is a sin.

Yes, God can forgive you, but it requires that you come before God, confess that you have done wrong, and make a commitment to change your way of life – in other words, to repent – and walk in God's ways.

Number 3. When Jesus was questioned about a woman caught in adultery, he told her to "Go, and sin no more." There is a lot of sexual sin in Uganda. I know that, and you know that. Nevertheless, we haven't changed our message. Our message is the message of the Bible, which is, "Go, and sin no more."

No-one could explain the teaching of the Bible any clearer than that, but I want to point out one very important thing about the way, the method, Scripture teaches these matters.

There are around 7 Bible verses or portions of Scripture which refer to homosexual practice as a sin, and some have used this paucity, this sparsity of references as a reason to cast doubt the Scripture's view. (To those who take the Bible seriously, of course, one verse would be enough.) But the Scripture uses a positive teaching method in these matters that parents and good teachers use all the time.

Suppose you wanted to teach a child that vegetables and fruit are healthy but poisonous plants are deadly, you would do two things simultaneously. First, and positively, you would extol, praise, big-up the nutritional value of fruit and veg, you would feed them to your kids every day, you'd make fruit and veg the major part of their daily diet, the major part of your food conversation. The other strategy would be to occasionally point out the dangers of poisonous plants like hemlock, deadly nightshade and foxglove. But if you were praising fruit and veg every day, you wouldn't need to mention poisonous plants very often.

This is exactly how the Scriptures talk about human sexuality. The Bible is voluminously positive when it talks about sex in the context of one-man, one-woman marriage: it is full of stories of marriage! Scripture opens with the literal marriage of Adam and Eve, and ends with the metaphorical marriage of Jesus Christ to his Church, and between Genesis and Revelation, we find innumerable marriages, whether Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah, Joseph and Mary and so on. A whole book, the beautiful Song of Songs, is dedicated to the love between a man and a woman! Jesus' accomplished his first miracle at the wedding of Cana, and so on and so forth. This overwhelmingly positive message about the beautiful relationship between a man and a woman fills the whole of the Bible! The Bible talks fruit and Veg! The 1200 chapters, the 31000 verses of the Bible shout "marriage is good!" That is the overwhelming message of Scripture! So the Bible doesn't need to say homosexual practice is wrong very often, seven times will suffice. That's how to understand the seven scriptures.

In summary, then, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that while sexual union between a married man and a woman is a good gift from the Lord, all sex outside marriage, including fornication, adultery and same-sex relationships are wrong sinful. Here is the

apostle Paul writing in 1 Corinthians 6, as plain as day:

“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God. Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor 6:9)

2 Why does the Bible teach this?

But let’s spend a few minutes asking a deeper question, why do the Scriptures speak so highly of marriage, and speak against the sin of homosexual practice? Scripture is not irrational, there are three deep and profound reasons:

1) *God designed human bodies and human sexuality to flourish in one particular way* God invented sex, let’s remember that, it was his grand and great idea! And he designed our wonderful bodies to flourish in a certain way, in only one way, in what we might call a natural way. That’s why Paul calls homosexual practice “unnatural” in Romans chapter 1, verse 26 and a “perversion” (a twisting of what should be), in verse 27. Homosexual practice is not how God designed human bodies to work, to put it bluntly.

2) *God designed marriage to be fruitful.* God said to Adam and Eve “Be fruitful and increase in number.” (Genesis 1:28), There was the potential, at least, for Adam and Eve to have children. That cannot be true of a man and man or woman and woman relationship. The judgement of God on Sodom and Gomorrah turned the whole place into a sterile landscape, without life-giving vegetation (Genesis 19:25); Sodom and Gomorrah became as sterile as the salty dead sea; a metaphor for their wicked behaviour.

3) *God designed marriage to reflect the love of Christ for his bride the church* Everywhere in the NT, the church is thought of as a she, a bride, and Christ a he, the bridegroom. One day, at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19) the bridegroom will marry the bride: *“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” (Rev 21:2)*

From all eternity God had planned this great Marriage redemption, his Son, the Bridegroom, would sacrificially give up his life out of love for his bride unto death... and when God came to design human marriage, he patterned it after that infinitely greater relationship. A (male + male) or a (female + female) relationship simply cannot express this glorious heavenly marriage! Only a husband and wife relationship can reflect, albeit faintly, this glorious heavenly eternal marriage!

Are you with me brothers, sisters and friends? There are deep and profound reasons why the Bible extols marriage but speaks against sexual immorality of all kinds.

#3 How should we respond?

And now for the most important part of this talk, how should we respond appropriately and graciously to this teaching?

1. This is the historic apostolic teaching of the church. Let me start by saying that the teaching I've given this morning from the Scriptures has been the historic teaching of the church. No Christian church, no Christian Creed in all of history has thought or preached differently. The Church of England is in error on this one, not by 99%, but a full 100%. We must humbly but firmly hold to God's Word on this teaching, for it is the teaching of Christ, whatever the cost. And we must firmly resist all attempts to call this view "homophobic," as if we hate people who accept or practice homosexual behaviour. Just because we hold a view different from the world on this issue does not make us homophobic—that is a slur, and a slanderous one at that!

2. We are all sinners who need to repent. Let's remember that we are *all sinners* in need of God's grace, we are all sinners called to repentance. Let's not isolate this one sin and neglect the rest. The apostle Paul lists this sin along with eight others: "*Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God. Do not be deceived: Neither the (1) sexually immoral nor (2) idolaters nor (3) adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor (4) thieves nor the (5) greedy nor (6) drunkards nor (7) slanderers nor (8) swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*" (1 Corinthians chapter 6)

I watched a Louis Theroux documentary some years ago—not all of his documentaries are edifying, by the way—about a church group in America that had singled out the sin of homosexual practice to preach against. They would wave the most distasteful placards on the streets. But what about the common American sin of worshipping

money or possessions which is idolatry? Or adultery, because the divorce rate in the America is between 40 and 50%?

We are all sinners, none of us is more righteous than another. We must daily repent of our sins. My Bible reading on the morning of sermon preparation, was Psalm 119:33-40, which includes the words: “Turn my eyes away from worthless things..” In a sex-soaked culture how do we all keep ourselves free from sexual temptation?

3. *We should show the compassion of Jesus to everyone.* Thirdly, we should show the compassion of Jesus to everyone. Do you remember the time when the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in sexual sin? “They made her stand before the group.” we read in John 8. No attempt to understand her background or the circumstances which led her into this sorry sin. Was it an abusive or cruel ex-husband? We’re not excusing sin here, by the way, we’re just trying to understand her. “Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. They wag with their fingers in frenzied anger, Jesus writes patiently in the sand with his. They kept on questioning him, we read. But Jesus isn’t in the business of condemning or shaming people, he’s in the business of saving them. So while they damn her, he is silent. Eventually he tells them “if any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” And one by one they all drifted away. Now, without the embarrassment of a crowd, he could speak to her one-to-one and say, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? No-one sir, she said. Then neither do I condemn you, Go now and leave your life of sin.”

We must show compassion to everyone, because we are all messed up by the fall recorded in genesis chapter 3. Our *bodies* got messed up with diseases and ailments of all kinds. Our *minds* got messed up with lies. Our *souls* got messed up mistrusting and walking out on the God who loves us, and our *sexuality* got all messed up too—Adam and Eve suddenly realised they were naked and made fig leaves to cover themselves up. And so in a fallen world, it’s quite possible, occasionally, for a woman to discover she’s not attracted to men, but to women, and occasionally for a man to discover that he is not attracted to women but to men.

Around ten years ago, a godly Church of England pastor in Oxford, told the whole evangelical world that he was attracted to men, and not attracted to women. But that he understood that this attraction was a wrong attraction, a product of being messed

up by the fall. And that he would never give in to it, but remain celibate all his life, by God's grace, and that this would be one of the crosses Jesus talked about when he said "If any man would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." We're all messed up in one way or another, and for that reason, we need to show compassion to everyone.

4. All are called to faith and repentance. But finally and supremely Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world but to save the world! There is hope for fornicators, for adulterers, for homosexual offenders, for thieves, for idolaters, for slanderers, for drunkards, for swindlers! *"That" Paul writes, "is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:9) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that **whoever believes** in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)*

Today, this morning, God calls us all to believe in Jesus Christ and to repent of our sins and if we do, we shall experience his full pardon and forgiveness.