

AlbertMohler.com

The Church Must Move Beyond the Bible?

Thursday, May 18, 2006

No issue stands alone. The debate over homosexuality is inextricably tied to issues of biblical authority, hermeneutics, the gospel, the identity of the church — and the list goes on. This becomes clear when those advocating the normalization of homosexuality actually have to deal with the Bible.

Given the fact that the Bible is unequivocal in its condemnation of all same-sex sexual activities, those pushing this agenda are left with only two possible moves. The first move is an attempt to argue that the Bible has been misread for twenty centuries. That move is running out of steam, since the plausibility of these arguments is utterly lacking. Paul wasn't really concerned with same-sex orientation? The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was merely inhospitality? These arguments lack credulity among the intellectually serious.

The second move is more honest and more audacious, but it is all the advocates of homosexuality have left — argue against the authority of the Bible. This is the leading edge of the argument now. Those pushing for the normalization of homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and the ordination of homosexual ministers are now more commonly arguing that the church must grow beyond Scripture.

A leading example of this argument is found in the current edition of *The Christian Century*, where [Frederick J. Gaiser](#), who teaches Old Testament at [Luther Seminary](#) in St. Paul, Minnesota, argues that the church must correct the Scripture by a “new thing,” a new prophetic word, that would allow the normalization of homosexuality.

In making his argument, Gaiser turns to Isaiah 56, asserting that Isaiah is here correcting Leviticus 21:18-20 and Deuteronomy 23:1. Here is the substance of his argument:

Enter the prophet of Isaiah 56. Speaking for God, he announced: “Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will surely separate me from his people’; and do not let the eunuch say, ‘I am just a dry tree.’ For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths . . . I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. And the foreigners who . . . hold fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer . . . for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (56:1-7).

Throw open the doors, said the prophet. In saying this, he set himself against biblical legislation that clearly argued otherwise. It says in the book of Deuteronomy, “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to he assembly of the Lord” (23:1). A similar passage in Leviticus declares that “no one who has a blemish shall draw near” the sanctuary, including one with “crushed testicles” (21:18-20).

Thus, Gaiser argues that this is a precedent for “a radical reinterpretation or even abrogation of a previous divine word,” a pattern he sees as continued in the ministry of Jesus.

What Gaiser seems to miss is that every time Jesus uses the formula, “You have heard . . . but I say to you . . .,” He raises the bar — He never lowers it. Jesus himself said “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void” [[Luke 16:17](#)].

God's right to speak to his people through his prophet Isaiah is altogether different from any claim that the church now

has the right to move beyond the Bible. Gaiser's argument comes into clear shape in this paragraph:

What might this mean for the present discussion about the place in the church of homosexually oriented believers? Might the contemporary church hear itself and its situation addressed by a surprising prophetic word that, in the name of God, calls previous words of God into question? That is to say, might God be calling the church to a "new thing" in which not even earlier words of God—good and proper for their own time—can stand in the way of the broader community God now has in mind?

Just consider what this paragraph really means. The church is now to expect that God will call his own Word into question? God's "earlier words," understood to be "good and proper for their own time," are now to be superseded by "the broader community God now has in mind?"

Gaiser opens his article with this introduction:

If those in the church who are in favor of changing long-held attitudes and ordinances relating to homosexuals were merely cultural relativists with no regard for the Bible or tradition, the debate would be easier. The same would be true, of course, if those wishing to retain those attitudes and ordinances were merely diehard homophobes who used the Bible selectively to their own ends. But neither is the case. Though there may be some people who more or less fit those categories, the hard truth is that Christians of good will—more, Christians of good faith—for whom the Bible remains the source and norm of faith and life sincerely disagree about whether or how biblical passages regarding homosexual behavior relate to the current situation. In other words, exegesis—important as it is—will not solve the problem.

One simply cannot get away with making the claim that this is a debate among faithful Christians "for whom the Bible remains the source and norm of faith and life" and then proceed to argue that the Bible's words must give way to an extra-biblical word that will now presumably correct the Bible's now outmoded view of sexuality. Once one makes this argument, the Bible is no longer the norm.

Professor Gaiser's article, "[Open-Door policy: Homosexuality and the Message of Isaiah](#)," published in the May 2, 2006 edition of *The Christian Century*, is a shorter version of "[A New Word on Homosexuality? Isaiah 56:1-8 as Case Study](#)," published at *Word & World*.

Content Copyright © 2002-2010, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

