

CONTINUING MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF G-6.0106B

In the last several years I have continued to be disturbed by the misunderstandings of the controversial standard in our constitution: G-6.0106b, concerning fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness. One common unfortunate viewpoint, deriving from both the liberal and conservative positions, is that this ordination standard primarily concerns homosexual persons. At least that is where debates are centered. In reality G-6.0106b has more to do with heterosexual persons in that it relates both to fidelity in marriage and to chastity in singleness. Any clergy person or elder who has served on a Committee on Ministry has likely witnessed the damage done to congregations by the sexual misconduct of ministers. Can we deny the impact and influence of our culture with its fascination with sex, the frequency of marital infidelity and the commonness of pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations upon the behavior of church officers and members?

A common distortion of G-6.0106b is the claim that those who hold to the traditional, biblical standard are non-accepting and uncaring of homosexual persons and are even homophobic, having an aversion toward homosexual persons. Those who hold to the biblical standard expressed by G-6.0106b are often regarded as condemning such persons. The example and teaching of Jesus most definitely emphasize inclusiveness, but inclusiveness should not be defined as approving all the behavior of those we want to include. Jesus had table fellowship with the tax collectors who were often regarded as gougers of the people. He welcomed the tax collectors, but did not approve of their ripping off the poor (Mark 2:15-17, Luke 15:1,2, Luke 19:1-10). He had table fellowship with the Pharisees (Luke 7:36-50), but did not approve of their oral tradition of a multitude of laws and their unwillingness to forgive persons such as prostitutes. We need to make decisions about whether certain behavior expresses the will of God; however, making ethical decisions should not be distorted into a condemnation of the person as a whole. Inclusiveness has boundaries that are defined by God's revelation in the Scriptures and the biblical witness in regards to sexual behavior is clear and consistent throughout the Bible.

A very common mistake made by persons with opposing views of G-6.0106b is that the central argument against homosexual sexual practice is the six or so passages that directly deal with homosexual behavior. I believe that more significant than these passages is the sexual intimacy that the Scriptures support from Genesis through Revelation, namely the caring intimacy of a man and a woman within the covenant of marriage. There is no biblical support whatsoever either for homosexual relations or for heterosexual intimacy outside a committed marriage. This mistake of focusing on the six texts was made by Mike Loudon in the Outlook's October 26th Webinar on Amendment A in his otherwise excellent presentation against approving Amendment A.

Another misunderstanding of this issue is that the difference in viewpoints has to do with different interpretations of the Bible on this matter; however, since there are no texts that support either homosexual practice or heterosexual sex outside of marriage, how can we speak of different interpretations of the biblical texts? There are no supporting texts to interpret.

We often find the argument made that the church over time has changed its viewpoint on the leadership of women in the church and, hence, it is time to change our view about homosexual

sexual practice and pre-marital and extra-marital relations. These two subjects are not at all comparable in regard to their basis. The Scriptures do have some statements that appear to deny a leadership role to women; however, on the other hand, there is much evidence, especially in the NT, of the leadership of women, e.g. Gal. 3:28, the fact that those chosen to teach the preacher Apollos the correct articles of the faith were a couple (Aquila and Priscilla) (Lk. 18:26), the fact that Lydia was obviously the leader in the church at Thessalonica (Acts 16:14,15), that the first proclaimers of Christ's resurrection were women (Lk. 24:1-10), that the disciples who especially supported Jesus and the twelve, materially speaking, were women. **By contrast there are no texts** at all that support homosexual relations or pre- or extra- marital sexual conduct.

A frequent misunderstanding of those who want to remove G- 6.0106b is that homosexual persons are born with this orientation or a strong disposition toward it and thus such practice is the will of God. However, three percent of persons are born mentally handicapped, and many are born blind or deaf or without one or more limbs and many other agonizing conditions. Are these very difficult situations also God's will? I have never heard a fully satisfying answer to that question. Who can so reason that they know with assurance God's will?

Sometimes it is argued that Jesus himself did not prohibit homosexual sexual conduct and thus, arguing from silence, that Jesus approved of it. Jesus did not say anything about incest or bestiality either. And why not? Because all of these behaviors were so strongly forbidden within Judaism of the first century CE. It was only when the Gospel was carried to the Greek and Roman worlds where homosexual relations were approved, even by a philosopher such as Plato in the case of a beloved teacher and a student, that proclaimers of the faith such as Paul had to speak out against it. Jesus approved only of sexual intimacy within the covenant of marriage, referring to the "order of creation" in Mark 10:2-9 (par. Matt. 19:3-7)

Finally, is the justice argument used in reference to G-6.0106b really persuasive? Is there anything in the NT about the "rights" of followers of Jesus? In our culture there is much emphasis on individual "rights." By contrast, I do not know of any text that sets forth the "rights" of disciples. Can anyone say he/she deserves to be ordained? The NT puts the emphasis on grace – the unearned, unmerited gifts of God.

I wonder how often these misunderstandings will be expressed when Amendment A is debated in the presbyteries.

Richard S. McConnell, HR (Th.D, Basel, Switzerland)