

Questions of Sexuality

Where are we and how did we get here?

What has changed? Everything.

Our legal system used to prosecute people for homosexual behaviour now it prosecutes Christians for failing to provide services (The Mc Arthur bakery) to gay customers.

Dictionaries are having to change their definition of marriage.

Schools in Brighton and Hove are now asking children as young as three to select what sex they most identify with before starting school and parents are being urged to support their child in their choice.

The word most widely applied to the debate about gender today is fluidity.

The same sex issue and how we got here.

Change has been driven by what society regrets.

In previous generations to be identified as someone who was same sex attracted was to be a social pariah. You were fair game for revulsion and contempt.

We have been forced to revisit some of this through films like The Imitation Game, Alan Turing, the Bletchley Park mathematician's 1950 experience of being shamed and 'cured' of his homosexuality. We rightly regret that.

1980's and the AIDS epidemic.

Andrew Sullivan, a gay journalist living and working in the States wrote:

AIDS dramatically altered the cultural strength of homophobia. By visiting young death on so many it ripped apart the notion of

subterranean inviolability that forms such a powerful part of the fear of homosexuals.....what had once been a strong fear of homosexual difference, disguising mostly silent awareness of homosexual humanity became reversed. The humanity soon trumped the difference. Death it turned out was a powerful universalising experience. Suddenly, acquiescence in gay baiting and gay bashing became in appropriate at a moment of tragedy

The same article drew a parallel with the holocaust and its impact on anti-Semitism.

Change has been driven by the way we determine what is good.

American psychologist Jonathan Haidt *The Righteous Mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion.*

The factors which shape our thinking on what is right and wrong have changed.

His matrix:

- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1. Care | Harm |
| 2. Liberty | Oppression |
| 3. Fairness | Cheating |
| 4. Loyalty | Betrayal |
| 5. Authority | Subversion |
| 6. Sanctity | Degradation |

The numbers matter. The top three things are the most influential in determining the morality of a belief or behaviour for an American or (British) liberal.

The bottom three are the least influential for such people but the most influential for religious believers We deal in sanctity because

God is the giver of life and he has a view on sex. The Bible is our authority, to undermine its teaching is subversive. Those who depart from traditional sexual ethics are seen as disloyal and barred from leadership and membership.

I think Haidt's matrix helps us to get why our condemnation of permanent, faithful and stable same sex relationships gets no traction in our society today.

- Where is the harm in a loving monogamous relationship?
- How unfair to say that some people don't have the freedom to express themselves sexually

Responding with Gods definition of sin, the authority of the Bible and the need to be loyal to the standards of the Bible all fall on deaf ears because these concepts just aren't important to many people anymore.

Change has been driven by appealing to our emotions.

We tend to respond by thinking what we need is better teaching. In fact what is going on in our hearts is much more decisive for our decision making. (see John 12). Powerful emotions rather than convincing arguments tends to be the key issue.

A young person in an evangelical church may hear a good talk on gender, sexuality and marriage once a year. The rest of the time they are bombarded by You Tube clips, soap operas, films and the rest that contradict the teaching and do so in a very beautiful and appealing way.

Mike Buonaiuto's *Homecoming* 100 seconds. Made for the same sex marriage debate it quickly attracted about million views. A prominent backer of gay marriage posted the video on Twitter with the comment 'This says it all for me'

Describe / watch.

This film that says it all, actually says nothing. There are no words just images.

'Graham' has been fighting to keep you safe and you ought to get on his side. He deserves a great homecoming. As a fellow soldier embraces his wife Graham pats him on the back in a move of solidarity - 'good for you'. But you are left wondering 'what about you Graham' You have been drawn into this clip and you are concerned about fairness.

It is a great relief to see there is someone for Graham. It transpires that these 2 young men are in love and what could be wrong with that.

The credits roll: All men can be heroes. All men can be husbands. End marriage discrimination.

A few minutes on You Tube trumps years of biblical teaching because what the world offers connects with people's deepest desires for perfection, intimacy and beauty and the church is just seen as denying people these things.

Here is the same point from a slightly different angle.

Gut reaction is a key player in all this.

Imagine a widowed grandmother living alone and now in her mid 70's. She has held strong views about sexuality all her life and she doesn't see any reason to change them now. The image on TV of 2 women kissing appals her. Talk of gay marriage has her wrinkling up her nose. Ask her why she holds these views and you will be met by a strange look. Its self evident. She just knows its wrong and that's the end of the matter.

But then something happens. One of her favourite teenage grandsons comes out as gay. At first the subject is a no go area but slowly her attitudes start to change. He is a lovely boy... he has

taken a lot of bullying at school.... And he is going to get all the love and support I can give him.

To say 'this is not a thought through process' would be an understatement. There has been very little thought. Grandma has slid from right to left substituting her feeling of disgust with those of compassion supported by the slogans of today: Doesn't everyone have the right to be who they are.

Change has come about because we are obsessed with sex.

Today both inside the church and outside we are preoccupied with sex. One Christian anthropologist has described it in this way: *When I was growing up sex was all stick and no carrot; we were told to abstain from premarital sex because of the parental and divine punishment that would ensue. Today the stick is still there but there is a carrot - the less you sin before marriage, the hotter the sex after marriage.*

In too many churches today the Christian sexual ethic of no sex before marriage is only being presented as the way to have better sex after marriage. Sex remains our idol. Society's obsession is simply re-located in the right context. And because we have started to communicate that sexual fulfilment is essential to the good life denying it to a certain sector of the population seems utterly unreasonable.

The Transgender issue

What is transgenderism?

This way of thinking makes a sharp distinction between your sex (something that is biologically determined) and your gender which is regarded as a social construct. In 2014 Facebook went from offering 2 gender options to over 70.

The Department of Health funded a 2007 booklet which made this statement: Before we start it is important to understand that sex is between your legs and gender is between your ears. Sex is to do with your chromosomes, genitalia, hormones etc. Gender is to do with your internal sense of self and how you choose to express yourself.

The transgendered are those who claim a gender that is different from their biological sex. *I am a girl in a boy's body*

Gender dysphoria is the latest diagnostic label for the psychological distress arising from the experience of there being a disconnect between a person's biological sex and their gender identity.

Once we decouple gender identity and (binary) biological sex, we are free to believe that there are many genders. Gender identity becomes fluid. Everything comes down to choice.

You can see how this chimes with the individualism and the slogans of today about being true to yourself.

What is today's response?

But there is a twist to this. Not all transgender people are happy with this idea of gender fluidity. They believe that the disparity they experience between their biological sex and gender identity is not something they have chosen but rather has been forced upon them by elements beyond their control. They want alignment. In other words they feel they have been given the wrong body and they want it changed.

Since 1980 there has been a shift in medical practice. Distress over gender identity was regarded as a psychiatric illness and treated from that perspective. Now it's regarded as a 'condition' and the aim is to change their appearance through hormones and anatomy.

Children are being diagnosed with gender dysphoria at a younger and younger age. In the past year, 3 pre-school children and a total of 167 children under the age of 10 were referred to the Tavistock and Portman Clinics in London and Leeds.

There is huge debate around what is appropriate. Some children are prescribed puberty suppression drugs as a means of making sex reassignment less traumatic in later adolescence. It is though reckoned that 84% of children who experience gender identity issues resolve those issues prior to adulthood.

A group of American paediatricians have spoken out against this practice: *Young children and been permanently sterilised and surgically maimed under the guise of treating a condition that would resolve in over 80% of cases. This is criminal*

Others will go down the surgical route (SRS) Sadly the instance of sex change regret is disturbingly high and it seems to do little to address the high suicide rate among transgender people. (over 40%)

What of our concern?

Compassion towards those struggling with gender dysphoria. This is not about a condition its about people, some of whom struggle hugely with the issue.

This is a real and highly distressing disorder. They are worthy of our heartfelt compassion and deep sympathy. As are their families and friends. However probably what they don't need is to be encouraged in their disordered thinking and empowered to engage in serious and irreversible self harm

The real danger of all this is the way it affects the youngest and most vulnerable.

Gender identity theory is being promoted in schools

- 38,000 pupils took part in UK diversity week, organised by the charity 'Just Like Us' with the aim of making schools better places for LGBTQ+ pupils
- Stonewall has been given government funding to promote tolerance in schools.
- Educate and Celebrate another LGBT support and advocacy organisation delivers LGBT+ inclusive training to staff, support staff, departments, leadership teams and governors (in all kinds of educational establishments) Birmingham City council have arranged for Educate and Celebrate to make their training available in all their schools

Where should all this leave us?

It should leave us humbled. Not all these changes are bad. There was a time when you could have put a notice about the door of the church that said 'If you are a homosexual don't come in here' I think we have learned that homosexual orientation and homosexual practice are not the same thing. I think we sat in judgment on people who struggled massively over these issues. We are all wounded sexually. And as far as AIDS is concerned most of the church walked by on the other side. We have much to repent of.

We have to do some serious thinking. Whilst our culture has concluded that you change peoples minds by going for their emotions, operating by your emotions will usually end in tears. We need to think deeply and biblically about these things. We will post some books on the website to help us do this.

Haidt's moral matrix has things to say to us. For instance if we are involved in the transgender debate we need to talk in terms of the potential harm SRS does rather than making a blanket condemnation of the practice.

We need to become a lot better at friendship. You don't need to be sexually fulfilled to enjoy life to the full. All of us who are married have learned that the sinner we are married to does not complete us. Christ completes us.

Churches ought to be places that put as much effort into people's singleness as they do into marriage. The church family is a mix of people. Some single and some married, some one race some another, some who struggle with their sexual orientation some who don't, some who are content with their sense of gender and some who are not. We are all broken and we are all wounded but we have been brought together to serve one another and put on display the wisdom of God that can fashion family out of such a diverse community.