

‘Something to Say? -responding to the sexual revolution.

Last Saturday was ‘Gay Pride’ day in London. Regent Street was jammed with large crowds marching to declare their support for lesbian, gay, transgender lifestyles. On the BBC website 5 out of the 10 top stories were LGBT related. Needless to say they were reported approvingly.

There is a swagger about this movement. It has turned itself from a despised minority into a majority who now occupy the high moral ground. Their arguments about being allowed to express who you are, to find love, to be free from prejudice and discrimination seem unanswerable.

What can you and I say in the face of this that isn’t going to sound out of touch and to be honest a bit nasty? And what makes this worse is the response of large tracts of the church to this cultural shift. These are churches that have said the Bible has nothing useful to say on this subject. Which is amazing when you think that much of the NT was written to Christians living in precisely this kind of culture.

So much about society that is now emerging bears an astonishing resemblance to the most prominent features of what we call the classical world – its institutions, its priorities, its recreations, its physics, its sexual morality, its food, its politics, even its religion. Often without our being in the least aware of it, the ways in which we live our rich and varied lives corresponds almost eerily so to the ways in which the Greeks and Romans lived theirs. (Ferdinand Mount: Full Circle: how the classical world came back to us)

In a section of 1 Peter headed Living Godly Lives in a Pagan Society –

Peter introduces the entire section from 2:11 – 3:7 with the general statement: Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (2:12)

And then in a section that deals with our relationship to pagan authorities it states: For it is Gods will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. (15)

The emphasis is on behaviour. Doing good.

v12 echoes Jesus words in the sermon on the Mount where he appoints the disciples as salt and light in the world. As salt they are to be distinctive, different from everyone else. And as light conspicuous by virtue of their goodness

1. Live as free people but do not use your freedom as a cover up for evil live as Gods slaves (2:16)

Freedom is the catch word of the sexual revolution. It sees itself as being liberated from the taboos and conventions of religion. It argues that it should be free to pursue its goals as long as they don’t harm anyone else. This brave new world that we have shaped for ourselves around the idea of freedom should be a particularly happy place.

But this kind of freedom only goes so far. What happens when it doesn’t get what it wants? The level of relational wreckage is significant: broken homes, broken lives – more and more people living in isolation. The truth seems to be that we are not free not to react resentfully when things don’t work out the way we want.

The Bible's view of reality doesn't have room for absolute freedom. What we understand about ourselves is we are either slaves to sin or slaves of God. We will always serve something or someone. See Israel freed from Pharaoh but unwilling to submit to God. Consequently they serve the gods of their neighbours – the fertility gods.

So what does Christian freedom look like?

Matthew 5:38-42

This is part of what it means to be salt and light.

Jesus quotes the OT law of retaliation, the law that restricted the response to the level of the injury.

He sweeps that aside and brings a different order to bear.

Free not to seek redress.

Free to be generous towards those who oppose us

Free to serve.

The LGBT community expects hostile argument. It doesn't expect to be invited round for a meal and conversation.

AIDS was an opportunity to serve the excluded and the dying.

We didn't take it.

Our society is full of bruised, injured and consequently angry children. I spoke recently to a social worker. One of the children she cared for died. He was 16. Her comment: Every adult who entered his life, left. His biological family, his foster placements, the officials.

That is what the sexual revolution has done. Our response can't simply be argument and anger. What of fostering some of these young people or even thinking in terms of adoption.

2. Show proper respect to everyone.

Honour everyone (ESV)

We are going to think about this in relation to marriage and singleness.

Marriage is in a strange place. Heterosexual marriage is often portrayed negatively. It is something to be avoided. Cool people have affairs. Marriage is dull. Yet same sex marriage is hailed as a great breakthrough.

Jesus defines marriage in Matt 19

It involves a man leaving his mother and father and becoming one flesh with his wife.

This relationship though points beyond itself.

As a man is joined to his wife so humanity is heading to the place where God will be united to his people. The Bible ends with the consummation of a marriage.

The surprising thing is we find the bible using sexual imagery to communicate the relationship of God to his people. This is true both positively and negatively.

Ezekiel 16.

8-14 positively
15ff negatively

"It is his passionate love for his people, so passionate that it is described in sexual terms recorded in passages like Ezekiel 16 that most deeply communicates God love for me. If I were not a sexual being I would not get this at all" John Piper

We ought to look like people who are waiting. We need to have realistic expectations about life in this world. Our marriages are temporary our relationship with God is eternal. Our desire for perfection and intimacy and beauty are met in him not in one another. We need to invest in that relationship as much as or more than the one with our earthly marriage partner.

Consequently the church should not make sex in marriage an idol.

We are not to seek marriage simply as a means of having sex

Not all marriage is good. As godly a man as John Wesley had a terrible marriage.

Self sacrifice is necessary in every area of life

Christian marriage is a call to self sacrifice: Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church.

Live such good lives....

At the very least that means saying no to sex outside of marriage and saying yes to patience, kindness, generosity in the realm of our imperfect relationships.

It means lovingly persevering with situations that are tough. Our culture views all suffering negatively. It is to be avoided, removed, compensated for. George Mathieson's fiancée ended their planned marriage on discovering he was going blind. (Oh love that wilt not let me go)

Raymond and Edith Hewitt

We should be seen to care about other people's marriages

Nehemiah said to the people of his day: fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.

We are to be ready to fight for other peoples homes and families.

No undermining talk, no agreeing with those who want to leave.

Not saying what people want to hear but rather what they need to hear.

We should contend with Government over their policy on marriage.

Governments show concern for child poverty. The single biggest thing they could do for children is to support marriage. Co habitation is bad for children. All the statistics tell the same story.

Singleness

Our society has alleged that it impossible to enjoy life without sex.

When did you last see a film that presented someone as a contented and fulfilled spinster or bachelor?

The implication is that single people are waiting to find Mr or Miss Right for life to

begin.

When we use language like my 'better half' we imply we are incomplete until married.

Single people become the subject of our pity – such a pity they can't find a marriage partner. So sad to see them left on the shelf.

Do you feel sorry for Jesus or Paul when you read of their lives in the Bible.

Singleness is not a burden, an unwanted sentence. It's a calling. Those who are single whether same sex attracted or heterosexual bear witness to the faithful nature of God's love by their resolve to abstain from sex outside marriage. They are not waiting for marriage they are waiting for the Kingdom.

Luke 7:33,34

John fasts, Jesus feasts. Both are looking to the same reality. John's abstinence pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah when it would be the right time to feast.

The expectation on young single people is they will engage in the opportunities to pursue sexual pleasure. (virtually or casually) To refuse on the grounds that you are waiting for something better is a powerful testimony to God and his goodness.

3. Love the family of believers.

Rightly so we care about the health of our families. But the NT moves our attention off our biological family and onto the church family.

Tim Chester is provocative but correct when he writes: 'I shocked someone recently by asking them to name one occasion on which Jesus speaks positively about families. Every time Jesus talks about families he sees them as competing for loyalty to him and his community.'

Love the family of believers.

Living out is a website of Christian men and women who are same sex attracted and have determined to live celibate lives. One of the testimonies on it simply says:

"Walking into church on a Sunday is a bit like coming home. Its like walking into a family living room." (Tracy)

What a powerful testimony to a fragmented and disordered world.

Intimacy is not confined to sex. Paul had a close and intimate relationship with Timothy. He called him his son

It raises the issue of friendship.

Self sacrifice is woven through marriage but also friendship

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down his life for one's friends. (John 15:14)

This is a good thing to set before the world. But it involves cost. Think of Jonathan and David, the friendship of the Bible and observe the level of self sacrifice it involved. Jonathan deferred to his friends destiny that cut across his own expected progress.

Facebook Friends are not friends they are just people we swap bits of information with. Friendship requires encounter

Friendship lets people get a glimpse behind the curtain.

I was speaking to someone recently about whether they should or shouldn't get involved in a relationship. "I'm too proud. I don't want them to see my sin"

But actually we need people to speak into our sin.

Proverbs: Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

(27:6) Welcome rebuke, beware flattery.

We want to move on, not stay as we are.

Some of us are not only too proud to let people see our sin we are too proud to let people serve us.

Friendship involves giving and receiving.

This friendship is not fashioned out of shared interests or similar likes and dislikes but rather out of heading for the same destination. Its not too precious to give up for a time. Maybe for the sake of church planting. Self sacrifice runs through the whole thing.

We have got something positive to say to our society.

Jeremiah instructed the exiles to seek the peace and prosperity of the society I have carried you into. Pray to the Lord for it

Its time to recover our confidence in the Christian vision for sex, marriage and family because this will bring benefit to all.

We need to contend for strong marriage because they are good for the emotional and psychological development of children. This is also good for the poor who bear the brunt of failed marriage.

We need to do it for the sake of women because the Christian vision of husbands who love their wives as Christ loved the church outlaws the abuses of psychological control and aggression.

We need to do it for the sake of young men who inhabit the world of Peter Pan where you never grow up.

We need to do it for the sake of all those who lives have been hollowed out by porn or promiscuity or trafficking and by the fruitless pursuit of self fulfilment.