

All You Need is Love?

Pauline Ethics and the Debate on Homosexuality and Gay Adoption

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Introduction

America's views on homosexuality are changing—*dramatically*. In a June 23, 2001 (Gay Pride Day) article, ABC News anchor Carole Simpson muses optimistically that “. . . [America] seems to be adjusting to different sexual orientations”¹ She credits mainstream media and pop culture for this phenomenon, stating that gay characters are “frequently portrayed as bright, witty, and likeable At least as far as prime time television is concerned, it's like, ‘What's the big deal [with being openly gay]?’”² Her assessment of the media stance on homosexuality (albeit self-fulfilling, since she *is* a prominent member of the media) is accurate. Prime time TV viewers see homosexuality portrayed in a “what's the big deal” fashion on popular sit-coms, such as “Friends” and “Will & Grace,” on a weekly basis. According to a June 2001 Gallup poll, this pop culture portrait of homosexuality is having an impact on how people view the gay lifestyle:

- 55% of those polled say that homosexual relationships between consenting adults are not inherently immoral.
- 45% (a plurality) doubt that gays can willfully change their sexual preferences.
- 52% believe that homosexuality is a valid alternative lifestyle.³

As acceptance of homosexuality grows, the debates centering on the issue are taking on a higher degree of particularity. Rather than questioning the legitimacy of *homosexuality itself*, the discussion now focuses largely on whether or not homosexuals should receive

¹ Carole Simpson, “Out of the Closet: This Gay Pride Day, Homosexuals Have Something to Cheer About,” *ABC News*, June, 23, 2001, n.p. Online: <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/wnt/DailyNews/onmymind010623.html> [28 April 2002].

² Ibid.

legal sanction to participate in institutions such as marriage or parenting. Ms. Simpson acknowledges that the legalization of both gay marriage and adoption still meet with considerable resistance, but American culture is now shifting its views on this front as well.⁴

In a March 14, 2002 interview with ABC's Diane Sawyer, daytime talk show host Rosie O'Donnell publicly announced that she is a lesbian. When asked about her rationale for "coming out of the closet," she replied that it was an avenue for advocating gay adoption:

I don't think America knows what a gay parent looks like. I am the gay parent. America has watched me parent my children on TV for six years. They know what kind of parent I am.⁵

Indeed, O'Donnell has peppered her show with cute vignettes and film clips of adorable adventures with her adopted son, Parker. To her audience, Ms. O'Donnell is no longer a single mother raising adopted children in a fun and loving atmosphere; she is a "positive" example of a gay parent. According to O'Donnell, this was precisely her strategy in discussing her "family" with Diane Sawyer on prime time television:

So when you think of gay parenting, you don't have an image to hold onto. I will be that image, because I am a gay parent.⁶

Her strategy appears to have had a documentable impact. Shortly after the Rosie O'Donnell interview, ABC News conducted a poll, asking Americans if gay adoption

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Drudge Report. Online: http://www.drudgereport.Archives.com//data/2002/03/14/20020314_235654_mattro.htm [28 April 2002].

should be permitted. 47% said yes, while only 42% disagreed.⁷ This marks a sharp turnaround from a Time/CNN poll conducted just 8 years ago, where a 65% majority said no to gay adoption.⁸

As I have observed the recent flurry of media activity supporting gay adoption, I have been troubled by a seeming lack of satisfactory Christian response. Knee-jerk reactions and hyperbole certainly abound, but I have yet to hear a thoughtful, Biblical response proffered to our culture through Christian media outlets.⁹ Coincident with my own recent graduate studies in Pauline theology, this has prompted me to re-examine the Scriptures concerning homosexuality and related issues such as gay adoption. I have therefore sought to address homosexuality and, to a lesser extent, gay adoption from the perspective of Pauline ethics.

The Fundamental Logic of Pauline Ethics

Others have already done an excellent job of summarizing and explaining Pauline ethics. Their work has demonstrated that Paul's understanding of Christian morality is both systematic and multifaceted. Space does not allow for an exhaustive treatment of

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Daniel Merlde, "More Americans Support Gay Adoption," *ABC News*, April 4, 2002, n.p. Online: http://more.abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/gayadopt_poll020402.html [28 April 2002].

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ This is not to say that one has not been made. There are plenty in the church who are more qualified than I to speak to this issue, and I am sure that they are doing so on a continuing basis. However, in my own estimation, a large scale Christian response has been lacking.

Pauline ethics herein, so what follows is a summary of the *fundamental, core basis* for the ethical system espoused by St. Paul.¹⁰

***The Ethical Importance of the Christian* κηρυγμα**

In his study of the primitive apostolic message, C. H. Dodd notes that there is a distinction in the NT (New Testament) between κηρυγμα (preaching) and διδαχη (teaching).¹¹ κηρυγμα is properly understood as the proclamation of the basic content of the Christian message—the Gospel—which calls men to faith-response in Christ.¹² διδαχη is the doctrinal or ethical instruction given to those “whose apprehension of the Gospel is sufficiently firm.”¹³

By surveying the Pauline corpus, Dodd has pieced together the following summary of the kerygmatic germ:

The prophecies are fulfilled, and the new Age is inaugurated
by the coming of Christ.
He was born of the seed of David.
He died according to the Scriptures, to deliver us out of the
present evil age.
He was buried.
He rose on the third day according to the Scriptures.
He is exalted at the right hand of God, as Son of God and
Lord of quick and dead.
He will come again as Judge and Savior of men.¹⁴

The Christian κηρυγμα, as Dodd has reconstructed it, sets forth the brute facts of God’s redemptive activity through Jesus the Messiah. Thus the κηρυγμα is concerned with

¹⁰ For the summation which follows (and, to a large extent, its structure), I am especially indebted to unpublished notes on Pauline Ethics by Dr. J. Lyle Story, Professor of New Testament and Biblical Languages at Regent University.

¹¹ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, (New York: Harper & Row,), 7.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴ Ibid., 17.

what God has done, i.e., the objective evidence of His activity in history through Jesus Christ.

Although distinct, κηρυγμα and διδαχη are utterly interdependent. The force of Christian ethical and doctrinal instruction hinges upon the historical veracity of the confessional content of the κηρυγμα.¹⁵ In turn, the κηρυγμα—a statement of what *is*—carries with it a specific set of implications concerning ultimate reality (doctrine and theology) and personal conduct (ethics). Here we see the relationship between the *indicative* and the *imperative*.¹⁶ The commands of Scripture (imperative) flow from the “Nature of God and His saving acts” (indicative).¹⁷ In the simplest of terms, the *ought* flows from what *is*.¹⁸

The Old Testament Foundation of κηρυγμα and διδαχη

Before proceeding any further, it is important to note that the is/ought dynamic between κηρυγμα/διδαχη is not a uniquely Pauline or NT development.¹⁹ Paul’s theological journey began in the rabbinic Judaism of the 1st century, so we should expect that his thinking is heavily influenced by the OT (Old Testament).²⁰ In fact, he states outrightly that the OT Scriptures are the inspired word of God, “profitable for teaching,

¹⁵ “Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; *if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching (κηρυγμα) is in vain and your faith is in vain.* We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:12-17, RSV, italics mine).

¹⁶ J. Lyle Story, “Pauline Ethics,” TMs [photocopy], 2002, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA, 1.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ This language, coined by the author, will be used frequently herein in order to facilitate brevity and eliminate redundancy. The *ought* may be understood as the equivalent of the imperative (i.e., διδαχη, the instructions of Scripture pertaining to Christian ethics and praxis), whereas the *is* refers to the indicative (i.e., κηρυγμα, the confessional content of the Christian message which delineates the reality of God’s nature and activity).

¹⁹ Story, 1.

²⁰ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 512.

for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tm 3:16-17).

The fundamental indicative of the OT is God Himself. For example, the holiness code (Lev 17-26), which contains commands to Israel concerning both moral and ritual conduct, is littered with phrases such as “I am Yahweh” (Lev 18:5, 6, 21) or “I am Yahweh, your God” (Lev 18:2, 4, 30). In the case of Lev 18:30, an imperative (“Thus you are to keep My charge”) is linked with the indicative (“I am Yahweh, your God”). The aforementioned is/ought relationship is present:

IS (κηρυγμα or indicative)	OUGHT (διδαχη or imperative)
Yahweh’s existence as Creator and Sovereign over creature.	Man (Israel), as creature, must obey what Yahweh commands.

In this way, all of the commands in Leviticus 18 are grounded in the reality of God Himself and His relationship to Man as Creator and Sovereign.

God’s nature and action in salvation history are necessary corollaries to His existence; as such, they too have relevance for the is/ought relationship between κηρυγμα and διδαχη. We find in Lev 11:45 the phrase, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” Here the call to ritual purity and holiness (imperative) stems from the existential holiness of God Himself (indicative). Similarly, the Decalogue uses God’s act of grace in delivering Israel from their bondage in Egypt as the basis of the commandment against idolatry:

IS (κηρυγμα or indicative)	OUGHT (διδαχη or imperative)
I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (Exod 20:2).	You shall have no other gods before Me (Exod 20:3). ²¹

²¹ Story, 1.

Thus the OT foreshadows the indicative nature of the basic elements of Christian theology. The apostolic κηρυγμα reflects the continuity of God's redemptive handiwork, leading up to and including the Christ-event.

Paul's Movement from κηρυγμα to διδαχη

Using Dodd's reconstruction of the κηρυγμα as a framework, we can see in greater detail how the *ought* flows from what *is* in Pauline ethics.

The Fulfillment of Scripture

With the coming of Christ, the new age has been inaugurated.²² The κηρυγμα asserts that the age of eschatological fulfillment has begun. Paul expresses this reality in his assessment of the wanderings of Israel in the desert. "Now these things happened," he writes, "as an example, and they were written for our *instruction*, upon whom the *ends of the ages have come*" (1 Cor 10:11, italics added). Here the indicative (Israel's wanderings in the desert/the ends of the ages have come) gives way to διδαχη (instruction). The fulfillment of Scripture in the present age has implications for how the community of faith is to live here and now.

The Incarnation

Most notable is Paul's appeal to the Philippians to follow Jesus' example of "humility and selflessness," as demonstrated in the condescension of the Lord (Phil 2:5-

²² Dodd, 17.

11).²³ Paul also employs the same logic in 2 Cor 8:9. The condescension of Jesus in the Incarnation (indicative)—described by Paul as the willful exchange of riches for poverty—should prompt the Corinthian believers to be generous in their own practice of giving (imperative).

The Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ

Romans 6 speaks of a faith-union between the believer and Jesus Christ. Through this faith-union, believers share both in Christ’s death and His resurrection. Paul states that by virtue of this faith-union, “our old self was crucified with Him . . . that we should no longer be slaves to sin” (Rom 6:6). Furthermore, even as Christ Himself was raised from the grave, believers “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). These affirmations, based on kerygmatic material, give way to the imperative:

- “. . . [Consider] yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (v. 11).
- “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts” (v. 12).

The Ascension of Christ

In Paul’s lofty hymn praising the “cosmic” Christ (Eph 1), he states that Jesus’ resurrection culminated in a supreme elevation at the right hand of God, “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named And He put all things in subjection under His feet” (Eph 1:21-22). Just as in Romans 6, where Christians are united by faith in Christ’s death and resurrection, believers also share in His ascension:

²³ Story, 3.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus . . . (Eph 2:4-6).

Here the *is* (sharing in Christ's ascension and exaltation) calls the believer to the *ought* of thanksgiving and remembrance (Eph 2:11)—Christians should recall that they were once “separate from Christ, . . . having no hope and without God in this world,” but now they have graciously “been brought near” by God's redemptive action in Christ (Eph 2:11-13).

Christ's Return as Judge

Jesus' role as the eschatological judge of all mankind has ethical implications for everyday Christian life. Without exception, all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ (indicative) according to 2 Cor 5:10. From this certainty flows the imperative—a believer's chief ambition should be to “please God” and to “persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:9, 11).²⁴

Summary

By moving from κηρυγμα to διδαχη, Paul clearly takes the whole of God's gracious activity in history into account—it is upon this blessed foundation that the *ought* of Christian conduct ultimately rests. Christian ethics are not arbitrary or legalistic in nature. Rather, genuinely Christian conduct is the product of a believer's obedient and heartfelt response to who God is and what He has accomplished.

²⁴ Story, 4.

The Role of Love in Pauline Ethics

Finally, the kerygmatic basis for Christian morality can be summarized in terms of *love*. Paul reminds us that the Christ-event was first and foremost a demonstration of God's love for sinful men (Rom 5:8). By virtue of this indicative, Paul calls us to "be imitators of God" by walking in love, patterning our own lives after the sacrificial example of Christ (Eph 5:1-2). Thus Christian morality transcends mere obedience or adherence to a code. In response to God's love, expressed through Christ, Christians lead lives of purity because of their own love for God and man (Eph 5:3).

Pauline Ethics Applied to Homosexuality

Direct mention of homosexuality is infrequent in the NT, and the majority of references to it occur in the Pauline corpus.²⁵ Paul mentions homosexuality on three distinct occasions (1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tm 1:10; Rom 1:26-27). Since 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 exemplifies the indicative/imperative relationship explored above, we shall focus on this reference.

Paul states that "the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 9). He then particularizes "the unrighteous" with a vice-list, which includes those who are "effeminate" and "homosexuals." Some interpreters dispute the notion that Paul even has homosexuality in view here, arguing that there is no technical term in Greek or Hebrew that is equivalent to the word "homosexual."²⁶ The word "effeminate" (*μαλακοι*) is not a

²⁵ D. F. Wright, "Homosexuality," in *Dictionary of Paul's and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 413.

²⁶ Peter J. Gomes, *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1996), 147-148.

technical term of this sort, but it does refer to “men and boys who [passively] allow themselves to be misused homosexually.”²⁷ The other word, αρσενοκοιται, is a compound term based on the language of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 in the LXX:

Whoever lies with a man as with a woman [μετα αρσενες κοιτην γυναικος], they have both done an abomination.²⁸

Paul borrows his language and logic from the prohibition against homosexuality in the holiness code (which, as we have seen in the above discussion, bears the stamp of the is/ought dynamic between κηρυγμα and διδαχη). Clearly, homosexuality (as we define and use the term today) is in view.

After listing homosexuality among the vices of the unrighteous (vv. 9-10), Paul says to the Corinthians, “And such were some of you” (v. 11). Paul sets this former estate of the believers at Corinth in contrast with several statements describing the effect of God’s grace in their lives:

BUT —you were washed.
—you were sanctified.
—you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and in the Spirit of our God.

In this way, Paul places the former life, characterized by sins such as homosexuality, in diametric opposition to the experience of God’s saving grace through Christ. The indicative (you were washed, cleansed, and justified) implies the cessation of the behaviors named in Paul’s vice-list (vv. 9-10)—including homosexuality. The *is* of God’s grace demands the *ought* of refraining from homosexual activity. On these grounds we may conclude that homosexuality is incompatible with genuine expressions of Christian

²⁷ William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New*

faith and piety, and therefore it is an unacceptable practice. However, we must bear in mind that (1) the dearth of references to homosexuality in the Pauline corpus “is inconsistent with its being incomparably execrable,” i.e., homosexuality is not a sort of “super-sin,”²⁹ and (2) God’s care and concern is extended to homosexuals—even while engaged and entrapped in sin, they are the objects of the love God has expressed in the Christ-event (Rom 5:8).

Pauline Ethics Applied to Gay Adoption

Extending Paul’s system of ethics to the modern issue of gay adoption is challenging, since the Bible does not make any direct mention of such a phenomenon. Given the preceding examination of 1 Cor 6:9-11, it seems reasonable to argue that since homosexuality is a sinful practice, overtly gay couples should not be allowed to adopt and raise children. Some will charge that this is simplistic logic, but it is nevertheless Biblical. Moreover, if it was found that prospective adoptive parents were unrepentantly practicing other sins named in Paul’s vice-list (e.g., fornication, theft, alcoholism), this sort of home environment would almost certainly be deemed unfit for raising children.

We might formally construct a Christian ethic concerning gay adoption after the is/ought model we find in Paul from Col 3. In his discussion of household codes, Paul exhorts Christians to serve the Lord wholeheartedly in all they do:

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus . . . (v. 17).

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord

Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 488.

²⁸ Richard B. Hayes, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 382.

²⁹ Wright, 414.

rather than for men It is the Lord Christ whom you serve (v. 24).

Verse 17 precedes the household codes concerning the family, and v. 24 appears in the midst of Paul's instructions for slaves. However, they express the same thought:

Everything we do, whether it is in the role of husband, wife, child, or slave, is ultimately an issue of how we serve the Lord. The fact that "it is the Lord Christ whom we serve" (indicative) should impact the way we fulfill our duties (imperative). Service to the Lord, therefore, is the overarching paradigm for relationships within a family. On this basis, given the sinfulness of homosexuality, it should be excluded from the family dynamic. 1 Cor 6:9-11 tells us that it is impossible to build a family "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col 3:17) while willfully engaged in sin that is diametrically opposed to the sanctifying effects of the grace received through the same Lord.

Conclusion

We have seen that Christian ethics in Paul are not arbitrary, self-contained injunctions. Instead, they are the outflow of God's existence and His redemptive interactions with humanity, especially through the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. In the church's public dealings with the issue of homosexuality and, more recently, gay adoption, the tendency has been simply to denounce such things as inherently sinful and contrary to God's Word. Since so many view homosexuality and gay adoption as an issue of love, this is not received well by our culture. According to such logic, consenting adults who love each other (even if they are of the same gender) should be allowed to be together. In the same way, gay couples who are in a "loving, committed relationship" are

perceived to provide a stable, loving environment for children who would otherwise be stuck in an orphanage or foster care—why shouldn't they be allowed to adopt? As a result, the harsh rhetoric emanating from some segments of the church is perceived as ardent, insensitive dogmatizing without much of a rhyme or reason; on that basis, it is most often dismissed as the lurid rambling of “fire-breathing, fundamentalist radicals.”

Many Christians would counter that the truth is often inflammatory, and such reactions are only to be expected from a sinful world. I agree, but with the one important qualification: In promoting Christian morality, we *must not* divorce the *ought* from the kerygmatic *is*. If the church is to reverse recent trends in public opinion on homosexuality and gay adoption, then we must ground our explication of Christian ethics in κηρυγμα, as Paul has. Dodd notes that it is by the foolishness of κηρυγμα, *not* διδαχη, that God has chosen to save men.³⁰ Only as we proclaim and uphold God's loving and saving action in Christ as the underlying rationale behind the ethics we espouse will we reclaim moral ground in America.

³⁰ Dodd, 7.

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