

- Talk given at evening service on weekend before General Assembly debated proposal from Legal Questions committee that ministers conducting services of recognition of Civil Partnerships be exempt from disciplinary action

Readings

- 2 Timothy 3:14-4:4
- Matthew 12:15-23
- Genesis 2:18-25
- Ezekiel 22:23-31

Part 1: The Presenting Issue: Civil Partnerships

- What is being proposed - quote from "A Step Too Far":
- *"The Legal Questions Committee (Reports, page 6.4/9) is proposing that the Assembly should pass a Declaratory Act (page 6.4/15, Appendix H) permitting ministers to 'conduct a service marking a civil partnership', while making clear that ministers will not be obliged to take such services against their consciences. The Report is being brought to the Assembly as a result of the change in the civil law last year. But that law does not require religious ceremonies › indeed, the whole point about all civil ceremonies is that they must EXCLUDE any religious component. The Report recognises this (section 15.8), but then goes on to propose a Declaratory Act of the General Assembly whose sole measure concerns ministers conducting (or refraining from conducting) religious services in the context of a civil partnership. The Report notes that the parliamentary Act does not contain a presumption that civil partners are in a sexual relationship. But the Act does not allow civil partnerships for caring relationships within a family (such as a niece caring for an aunt), or for heterosexual co-habitees. The link between civil partnerships and same-sex unions is perfectly clear, as the media have not been slow to point out. Partnerships are quite understandably described by many people as 'Gay Marriages.' The committee offers no view on whether ministers themselves should be entitled to enter into such partnerships. But this Act would, by default, open that door. Sometime in the not-too-distant future would come the claim of civil partners to live in manses as of right.*
- Consistent witness of Scripture:
 - in different cultural settings, from Bronze and Iron Age early Israel, nation building after the enslavement by Egypt, through the exile in Babylonia, to the Jewish state within the Roman Empire right through to the Gentile churches of Greece and Rome!
 - creation ordinance - not just "natural", but created by God
 - consistent place for the expression of sexual love is in marriage - which is consistently male-female
 - Moses/Law, prophets, Jesus himself, the apostles...

Proof texts

- Leviticus 18:22 - "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable."
- Matthew 19:4-6 - "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."
- Romans 1:27 - In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.
- The booklet from "One Kirk", unfortunately, focuses in only on these specific verses - the tips of the iceberg

Unity of Church

- Additionally, it is being raised by liberal wing, provoking disunity in the church -

arguably exposing existing disunity

- Compassion for those directly affected...
 - see Matthew passage - issue of not being able to marry, ever...

Part 2: The Underlying Issue: What role for Scripture

- The issue behind all this is:
 - where does authority for what we believe come from?
 - if we can exclude Scripture from ruling on one area of life then we can exclude Scripture from ruling on any area of life...
 - this is a fundamental break with the founding, biblical principles of the church!
 - "take the Bible seriously" is not the same as "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."
- These deliverances prevent me from believing that this church, including its disciplinary code, is under the authority of Scripture:
 - there may be a conscience clause for me not conducting a civil partnership ceremony...
 - but there is no real conscience clause since it will be happening in the church of which I am a part, and I cannot appeal to Scripture to arbitrate!!

Conclusion: The Implications

- What then of our position?
- We have "lived" in a flawed church since ever any of us became Christians:
 - and that will never change (Matthew 13:24-30; parable of weeds among the good seed)
 - we will never create a perfect church!
- However, that doesn't mean that what the church says officially doesn't matter:
 - it matters for God's glory - His word, His truth
 - and it matters for people's salvation - won't trust Scripture if we can make it say what we want it to mean

But how do we draw the line?

- over time - compare with Disruption
- if its important, it is worth fighting over - too long have we let the non-Christian parts of the church have the main stage
- begin to think about how we, as God's people thrall'd to the Scripture, would respond to a church that is setting its face against the Scripture...
- state for the record my own conviction that if this continues then I would have to leave the Church of Scotland; from here still sense the call of God to this parish and people; sell flat and buy a house in Fintry? Helen work? Would others here leave too? Perhaps have to walk away from these buildings, from the security of my pension plan?

What now?

- Prayer and **fasting**
 - repentance
 - grace and wisdom
 - God's glory!

Fasting

- suggest a couple of meals
- not for anyone who is diabetic or heart condition or some other medical conditions
- drink - water, fruit juices, maybe avoid tea/coffee (caffeine)
- If you can't fast from food, fast from something else:

Various Civil Partnerships & the Scriptures **Fintry, 21/5/2006, pm**

- its not magical, its about focusing and directing our praying!
- perhaps TV, newspaper, radio...
- or decide to spend time doing something that will help you pray - go for a walk rather than stay in the house, or stay in the house rather than go for a walk!