

## “The Same Sex (Homosexuality)”

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Aside from their extraordinary contributions to human progress and happiness, what did the following people have in common: Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Christopher Marlowe, King James I of England for whom the King James Version of the Bible is named, Sir Francis Bacon, Thomas Gray, Frederick the Great of Germany, Margaret Fuller, Mary Emma Wooley, Tchaikovsky, Nijinsky, Proust, A. E. Housman, T.E. Lawrence, Walt Whitman, Edith Hamilton, Henry James, W.H. Auden, Willa Cather, and Bill Tilden?

If you identified all of these persons who contributed to the positive good of the world as homosexuals, then you were right! And why do I bring up this subject in church...on Sunday...in a sermon?

I bring it up because I believe the once unmentionable has become unavoidable. There are ministers in our nation's churches and on our nation's radios and televisions claiming, as coming from God, the judgment that gay women and men are not only different, but sinfully different; gay men and women are slandered, excluded, isolated, and kept from having recognized ceremonies to celebrate meaningful and commitment relationships. I don't know how believing, feeling, reasoning people can avoid being aware, these days, of the hurt and loneliness experienced by our homosexual sisters and brothers. I believe there has never before been a time when the unmentionable subject has become so unavoidable.

But I also bring up the subject for another reason--one that is much closer to our own backyard. There is no North Carolinian and no one living in Chapel Hill-Carrboro who can avoid it. Every newspaper in North Carolina carried the story about the involvement of homosexual persons in the Hunt campaign. And everybody who listened to the second Helms-Hunt debate heard Helms cast an accusatory finger at Hunt. The most appalling thing about that, it seems to me, is that instead of affirming and applauding the inclusion into the political process of this once excluded segment of our state's diverse and pluralistic citizenry, many reporters treated it as something the Hunt campaign should hide, or definitely play down, or even something for which the campaign should feel ashamed!

And then in Orange and Chatham counties people are confronted bi-monthly with these sorts of distorted and bigoted statements in a local aspiring news commentary: "I will kill the faggots with kindness," wrote the self-righteous editor of the paper. In another issue he wrote: "They objected to my calling them a fag."

I told them that in the real world that is what they are called,--along with many other terms like pervert, deviate, pansy, queer, and a bull dyke for the ladies...I just simply think," he wrote," being a homo is a sin...I do not want to see those people in jobs where they may prey on little children or others. I do object to seeing our governor accept money from these people when he calims to be a good Christian...!"

Now I know most people don't take that paper too seriously...but the words hurt, nevertheless! I bring up the subject today because I believe it is time for us to stand up and to publicly say: "It may be legal, but it is WRONG TO BEAR FALSE WITNESS LIKE THAT AGAINST ANY PERSON AND ANY GROUP OF PEOPLE! I believe it is time for us to stand up and publicly affirm the gay women and men in this community as our neighbors, and as our sisters and brothers!

It seems that all through history, some group or another has been singled out as unworthy to be our neighbor. We look down upon them as less than fully human, and they are robbed of their respect and the opportunities the rest of us enjoy. We ostracize them, we assault their dignity, we tear down their pride. And because we keep them at an arm's distance, and don't really listen to them, we never have to get to know who they really are as people and as human beings, who are contributing citizens of our community and our society.

If the homosexual is my neighbor, the Bible commands that I shall not bear false witness against that person. And if I am not to bear false witness against gays, then, it seems to me, I must do my best to find out the truth about homosexuality, and I must do my best to understand what the gay person is really like, so that I will not be guilty of imagining that he or she intends evil toward me or my children. It seems to me, if we claim to have any sense of religious conviction at all, then there is no way we are given permission to violate the commandment: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

The Bible has a whole lot of things to say about how we should treat our neighbor, but none of them is repeated more often and with more force and clarity than the plea to "Love your neighbor as yourself." Just to make sure that everybody understands, the biblical authors repeat the love-formula eight times--and each time it is re-stated it is accompanied by the explanation that love of neighbor is THE summary of all that God requires of us human beings! Love of neighbor--that's it! Everything else is extra! It is THE universal requirement of God! Love of neighbor takes precedent over all other ... (see SERMON on page 12)