Homosexuals and Communion **[1]**

Submitted by Wessel on Monday, 29 March 2010 - 08:59



Read time: 3 minutes
Recently the BBC News website ran a story which made me think a bit about certain secular and church attitudes. The story was published on 28 February and was about protests in the Netherlands to allow homosexuals to partake in Communion [2]. In brief, the story is about a recent upheaval in the Netherlands against the Roman Catholic church's policy of denying practising homosexuals Communion (also known as the Eucharist). I want to get my thoughts about some of the things which I read about in the article out in the open.

What is Holy Communion?

Firstly it should be said that I am not Roman Catholic and am not going to claim to know the scope of "Holy Communion" as the Roman Catholic church defines it. Indeed, nearly every Christian denomination views Communion differently. But, as I understand it, Roman Catholics believe that, during the process of taking Communion, the wafer actually becomes the body of Jesus Christ, and the wine actually becomes His blood (this is known as *transubstantiation*). Violating Communion in any way is considered desecration/blasphemy.

In most Reformed churches, we do not believe that any such actual transformations occur: we understand Communion simply as *symbolism*; continuing a tradition which was instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper. While eating the bread and drinking the wine, one should reflect on the suffering of the Messiah which He underwent so that we may be made clean of our sins. Sometimes it is asked that non-Christians attending the service should not take Communion.

Note that, as I already said, there are many different views on Communion, including (but not necessarily limited to) transubstantiation (e.g. held by the Roman Catholic church), memorial (most Reformed churches), real presence (Calvinists) and sacramental union (most Protestants). These differences arise from different interpretations of many New Testament verses, such as Matthew 26–28, Mark 14:22–24, Luke 22:19–20, 1 Corinthians 10:16 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–30. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss these various points-of-view. But what I want the reader to understand is that I write this article with the understanding that Communion is a ritual or tradition which *points* to Jesus: it was His actual crucifixion and resurrection which enables people to have their sins forgiven and to have eternal life.

Remembering the Cross

What does it mean to be made clean of one's sins? This isn't a simple matter either, but in short it means that,

1. if one acknowledges the sin in one's life,
2. accepts the forgiveness which Jesus offers for these sins, and
3. acknowledge Him as ruler over your life and submit to Him,

then you will not be held accountable for your sins at Judgement Day. All people sin, even Christians, as everyone is all too well aware of. Choosing to follow Jesus does not mean to stop sinning, but to start a protest in which you detest sin, especially in your own life. You start a process where you wish to remove sin from your life, but this process will continue until the day you die: no-one can escape sin completely.

"Practising Homosexuals"

It is with this understanding that I come to the first point of contention: the Roman Catholic church (emphasis added)

> practising homosexuals.

Is Homosexuality a Sin?

A trend which is becoming more and more common with churches these days, is to tolerate homosexuals as long as they do not engage in homosexual acts. A sore point in contemporary debates is "is being homosexual a sin"? Let me quite clearly point out what I believe in this regard: I believe that God is eternal and unchanging. This means that the God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament and is the same as the God of today. Further, I believe in the Bible. This same Bible says the following:

> You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.
>
> Leviticus 18:22 (ESV)

This tells me, quite clearly, in black and white, that homosexuality is a sin. Leviticus 20:13 echoes this verse, listing homosexuality as a capital crime under Mosaic Law. Critics would now be quick to point out that these verses are part of the old Jewish law and is therefore not applicable to Christians, but remember the following verses (emphasis added):

> **Therefore my judgement is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from** the things polluted by idols, and from **sexual immorality**, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.
>
> Acts 15:20–21 (ESV)

The context of this verse is the apostles deciding whether the Jewish Law should be imposed on gentile Christians. They chose not to, except for these commandments. Leviticus 18:22 is part of a long list of sexually immoral acts, which include incest and bestiality. It was therefore also included in what the apostles meant in Acts 15.

Much more remains to be said on the sinfulness of homosexuality, but the goal of this article is not actually to discuss that. But I hope that I have at least now clearly asserted that, if you believe in the Bible, you'll recognise homosexuality as sin, regardless of secular arguments.

Tragic Religiosity

But the church is exactly a place for sinners, some would argue. Indeed, Jesus Himself said that He came to seek and save the lost[1]. How dare we, as Christians then, banish homosexuals from our churches? Technically this is the correct argument, but in a moment I'll discuss why this argument is applied wrongly most of the time. But assuming this argument, the church the can freely fling open its doors to homosexuals: come, join us, and hear the Good News of Jesus Christ! You are welcome to worship alongside us, *as long as you do not commit any homosexual acts*. This is the tragedy of many churches: it has fallen into religiosity. What makes Christianity unique, is the claim that people are saved *by grace alone*. You cannot *earn* (whether by doing or not doing) a place into heaven. A person is considered fundamentally bad and condemned to hell. It is only through *faith* in Jesus that one receives amnesty and, indeed, reward. But when people are let into churches conditionally, then we are introducing works and rites into the faith: something which the New Testament does not preach! You are not a Christian "as long as you don't sleep with people of the same sex", you are a Christian because you *repented* of your sins and *accepted* Christ as Lord.

Do's and Don'ts

And so it is clear that Christianity is not about doing, but believing. Why is Christianity not about do's and don'ts? In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Jesus tells us what we must do to get into heaven. In summary, we need to be perfect. If you live a perfect life, you can earn your way into heaven. The problem is, though, that we have one chance: a single mistake condemns us to hell. The truth is that we've all failed the test before we even knew we were writing it. Look, for example at this excerpt from the Sermon on the Mount:

> You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'[2] But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
>
> Matthew 5:27–28 (ESV)

The point being made is that sin is not what we *do*, but what we *are*. It is our internal corruption that drives us to sin.

So if Christianity is not about deeds, does this mean we are free to do what we want? Of course not. Indeed, Christians have many guidelines (given throughout the Bible, including the Ten Commandments and Jesus' teachings) where to live by. But they cannot be followed with religiosity: you have to *desire* to live a life which is pleasing to God. If you want to live a life pleasing to God, why is it necessary to tell you not to steal from your neighbour? Yet we have guidelines like these to point us towards the way (it is not that we cannot see because of fog, because our eyes are misty).

The point that I am trying to make, is that if you want to *truly* worship at the cross, you have to *recognise* your sins and repent of them. If you still want to cling to old parts of your life, you are not serious about Jesus and, quite frankly, probably wasting your time. This is true for all sin, not just homosexuality. Coming to the cross, however, is as much a process as a single act: you *accept* Christ as your Lord and Saviour, and you also start dealing (in the long term) with sin which has been poisoning your life for your whole life.

A man who sleeps with a woman who is married to another man is just as sinful as a man who sleeps with another man. A man who lusts after a woman who is not his wife, is just as sinful as a man who lusts after another man. Just the lusting, without the sex, is already a sin. At no point should someone think that this is OK. You have to recognise wicked desires and deal with them directly. Simply restraining yourself and withholding yourself from the actual act is not good enough. The church cannot, obviously, close its doors to people who sin; but it should only consider someone as a Christian if the person in question has a sincere desire to do away with the sin in his or her life. A person who has homosexual desires, but truly hates that sin (and the other sins) in his or her life,

should be welcomed into the church.

To Whom Should Communion Be Served?

We are now brought back to the original dilemma: should Communion be withheld from some people? Communion is a ritual (whether perceived to be divine or symbolic) mostly instituted by organised churches. Very few people (in religious tolerant nations, at least) hold Communion in private, I believe; rather they go to a church to receive Communion. Who gets to receive Communion, then, is the prerogative to the specific church or denomination and they should administer it as they see fit. If the Roman Catholic church believes

> [...] that someone 'conscious of grave sin' should not receive communion unless they have confessed their sin.

Then whoever wishes to receive Holy Communion from a Roman Catholic church should comply[3]. All that I can say is that I do not perceive unrepentant sinful people taking Communion as a desecration (as the Roman Catholic church might; see this [3] BBC article for another recent row concerning Communion and the Roman Catholic church), but that it would be symbolism without meaning for the one partaking in Communion[4][5].

The points which I rather tried to make in this post thus far, are summed up as follows.

- Churches must be weary not to fall into hallow religiosity: it's not about deeds, it's about faith and repentance.
- When considering someone's sin, you must not look at [just] their actions. Every person is tainted with sin on the inside. (Addressing these underlying sins will lead to a life less marred by sin later than someone who tries to ignore it.)
- If people want to find any real value in Christianity, they must recognise their sin and repent of it. Otherwise, you are putting up a show which isn't getting you anywhere. If this sin is homosexuality, then you must find a way to deal with it.

Strong-arming Religion?

In closing, I want to discuss a feeling which I got from reading this story. I cannot justify this, but the feeling was that the protesters were protesting because somewhere, some homosexuals were being denied Communion. Many of these protesters were not interested in the matter; they were simply showing solidarity. Perhaps I am wrong—I am open to that possibility—but I don't know how many religious homosexuals there can be in the Netherlands, seeing as how only a reported 27.8% of the general population attend church at all, while only 11% do so regularly[6]: the general population isn't interested in Christianity, why are homosexuals? I understand that there is a strong sense of kinship amongst homosexuals, but were (at least some) of these protesters protesting something they don't actually care about? If that was the case, then this story has less to do with the *rights* of homosexuals (as the church is, in some matters, exclusionary of other groups as well), but more with *shaming* a major religious institution by trying to secularly forcing a policy change.

One cannot join an exclusive men's cigar club if you are a woman or do not smoke cigars... you simply do not meet the requirements. Similarly, you cannot claim to be a veteran of some war and enjoy a bond or kinship—which is often typical amongst war veterans—if you did not fight in that war. If you are trying to join a religion which says "you are unrepentant of what we hold as sin", how can you try and change the religion?

Conclusion

The thoughts which this recent row in the Netherlands over Communion has provoked in me, are:

1. Homosexuality is not okay. It is not okay for a person to think that he/she is okay being a homosexual, even if they remain celibate. And it is a grievous error for a church to think that.
2. Today, homosexuality is socially acceptable in a secular society, while religion is often looked at disdainfully as an exclusive and (mostly historic) oppressive force. But it is not right for government or secular movements to try and influence churches on fundamental beliefs.

- 1. Matthew 9:12b—13; Luke 19:10
- 2. Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18
- 3. Indeed, little of what I said is directly applicable to the Roman Catholic church, as I wrote from a mostly Reformist point-of-view. The Roman Catholic church, as I understand, does not completely teach salvation through repentance, but salvation through repentance and deeds (rites, piety, formalised penance, "good deeds" etc.).
- 4. Churches normal do not interrogate the people who attend the services, so it is impossible to know whether everyone who receives Communion, whether Roman Catholic or otherwise, is truly repentant or not anyway.
- 5. But see 1 Corinthians 11:27.
- 6. Source: http://www.cbs.nl/ [4].

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