

*Ethics and Homosexuality*  
From a sermon by Dr. Dennis Sullivan

Imagine a warm summer evening. The sky is crystal clear and there is just a slight wind to cool the skin. David, the shepherd, is caring for his flocks on a quiet Israeli plain under a black velvet sea of stars. He looks up and sees the constellation Cygnus (the Swan), although he would not have known it by this name. There is a brilliant, luminous band of light running through Cygnus and on to the south. We now know this as our Milky Way galaxy, bursting with more stars than the eye can count. I believe it may have been a sight like this that inspired the Psalmist David to write Psalm 8.

Although it may seem an odd passage to turn to in a discussion on ethics and homosexuality, Psalm 8 actually provides the “big picture” I feel we need to gain perspective on the issues. Psalm 8 reads:

- 1     *O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth,  
      Who have set Your glory above the heavens!*
- 2     *Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength,  
      Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.*
- 3     *When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
      The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,*
- 4     *What is man that You are mindful of him,  
      And the son of man that You visit him?*
- 5     *For You have made him a little lower than the angels,  
      And You have crowned him with glory and honor.*

While seeing the summer sky on a clear night may make many of us feel small, it made David feel big. David is talking here about the great value we have in God’s eyes when he asks, “What is man that You are mindful of him?” Knowing that God sees us as valuable causes one to ask, “How does God confer such high value on you and me?” For the answer we must turn to the creation account found in Genesis 1:26-28.

Here God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...” (26). Verse 27 reads, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Two words are used here that confer value on us as human beings: image and likeness. Often used interchangeably in Christian ethics, the clear implication is that mankind resembles God, intellectually, morally, and socially. These verses also make it clear that our gender is even wrapped up in our imaging of God! Just one chapter later God introduces the institution of marriage. Genesis 2:23-24 reads, “The man said, (in referring to this newly created woman) ‘This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.’ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” God makes it clear from the beginning that men and women are sexual beings and that is part of what it means to be an image bearer. He also makes it clear that marriage is part of the way we were made. In expressing our intimate relationships within the marriage bonds, we act as image bearers and represent God to others.

Walter Brueggeman writes, “There is one way in which God is imaged in the world and only one: humanness! This is the only creature, the only part of creation, which discloses to us

something about the reality of God” (*Genesis*, 1986). Because of this truth, we bear a huge responsibility: to bear the image of God to a lost world. This includes our interaction with those who misunderstand their sexuality and express it in homosexual relationships. But we must be careful as we do so, for our disagreement is with *fellow image bearers* and so we should act accordingly.

With these truths as our foundation, it is good to evaluate an ethical response to homosexuality. We live in a culture that is attempting to normalize homosexual relationships. The media would have us believe that 10% of our culture is homosexual while actual data places that number much lower, somewhere between 1-2%. As believers, we know that the Bible affirms heterosexual relationships within marriage. But as believers, how do we biblically convey this to those who differ from us?

Back in the 1990’s, before I came to Cedarville University, my family and I served as missionaries in the Central African Republic. We became very familiar with driving on African roads, roads covered with red clay that were deeply rutted from the torrential rains. The roads were narrow, with deep ditches carved by the rains on both sides. The only way to drive was carefully in the center of the road to avoid the ditches on either side. As I look at the ethics of our sexuality, I see a comparison to these roads. There are ditches on both sides of this issue. The “right” and the “left” have ditches that they often fall into as they debate. As believers—when approaching this issue—we must proceed carefully and stay in the center of the road!

The ditch on the right side of the road includes the tendency towards intolerance. While tolerance has become a “battleground” word in recent years, tolerance, as defined by Voltaire in his *Essay on Tolerance*, is actually “thinking for yourselves and letting others enjoy the privilege to do so too.” According to this ancient definition, it is okay to have strong opinions as long as we allow others to disagree. Here, we on the right have sometimes crossed this line. Too often, we have the attitude that those caught up in the homosexual lifestyle are not worthy of the same grace that you and I have received. Or perhaps even worse, our goal becomes only to make a homosexual person “straight.” We sometimes communicate that our only goal is to lead homosexuals to Christ, but we have no interest in befriending those same people. And we wonder why those on the left do not like us?

Another pitfall on the right is homophobia. We are often accused of it, but what exactly is it? It is *not* an uncomfortable feeling in the presence of a homosexual person. Those who are straight are bound to feel ill-at-ease around a gay person. Homophobia, or the “fear of homosexuals,” occurs when a person allows that uncomfortable feeling to get the best of them, and it adversely affects their behavior toward homosexuals.

So sometimes those of us on the right are intolerant and sometimes we are homophobic. We sometimes treat those caught up in the gay and lesbian lifestyle as subhuman. We forget that as God’s creations they too are fellow imagers of Christ. We also forget that we all struggle with sin, and that homosexuality is just one of those sins. Instead we should ask ourselves, “What issues do I struggle with in my life?” and then respond to homosexuals as fellow strugglers in need of God’s love and grace.

There is also a ditch on the left side of the road, and many have veered from the center into it as well. Those on the left advocate same-sex marriage. Yet marriage is not defined by you and me; it was ordained by God at Creation. The complementarity of marriage between a man and a woman is built into the very fabric of our human nature. There are also health aspects and social benefits to heterosexual marriage. Healthy children come from healthy marriages—there is

no substitute for a father and a mother in an intact home! Same-sex marriage removes all meaning from marriage as a civil institution.

The ditch on the left also holds the pitfall of lobbying for minority status for homosexuals. Yet homosexuality is a behavior, not a racial category. All Americans are entitled to equal protection against discrimination and injustice.

If the right is often guilty of “intolerance,” it is fair to say that the left ditch holds the pitfall of “tolerance.” The liberal left desires to eliminate any differences between people. Their new definition of tolerance means eliminating any strong opinions. With this definition, we must allow for every single thing conceived in the heart of man.

Ironically, while waving the banner of tolerance, the left becomes extremely intolerant towards those trying to turn from their homosexual behavior. They are so committed to a biological model of homosexuality that they resist the idea that God has intended us to be different. They do not believe that it is possible to resist sexual temptation and live morally pure lives. In the February issue of *First Things*, Ryan Anderson writes about a college student friend who struggles with same-sex attractions. He writes:

[If they knew his struggle] his roommates and friends wouldn't know how to take it. Others on campus would encourage him to embrace his true self: They'd label him a homosexual and call him gay. But he's not—and neither does he want to be: Sexual attraction, he thinks, doesn't define a person . . . All he wants is to live chastely and try to make progress in addressing the causes of his same-sex attractions. But at the modern American university, this is anathema. For all their celebrations of diversity and pledges of tolerance, this choice is *not* to be celebrated or even tolerated.

This intolerance on the part of the left is a real tragedy, for they do not see the redemptive value of suffering. Dealing with and overcoming temptation is something the liberal left does not wish to acknowledge. Anderson ends his story as follows:

In the end, I found myself feeling grateful . . . for the chance to see [my friend] carry a cross he did not choose. Offering up his daily struggles, he strives for holiness, refuses surrender, and resists temptations . . . I am witnessing my friend's unique path to holiness: a remarkable instance of grace working through a broken earthly vessel, making all things new, and leading to fullness of life.

So there you have it: two ditches so easy to fall into as we journey down this road called life. On the right we sometimes forget our own evangelical message and God's grace. We struggle with intolerance. The left would have us change the very nature of God-ordained marriage by seeking a special status for same-sex marriage. And in their battle-cry for tolerance, they have actually become intolerant in their own way.

Tonight, if the sky is clear, take a moment to look up into the heavens. As the Psalmist David did so many centuries ago, take in the beauty of the constellations and marvel at our Milky Way galaxy. And as you go to sleep, reflect on the reality, as David did in Psalm 8, that the same God Who created all of this made you and me! He created us male and female, to represent Him. We are made in His image and our sexuality reflects His nature. Then, as we wake up in the morning and go out to interact with people and live our day, let us live out our lives as image bearers of our Creator God!