

The Problem with Liberalism

It is perhaps unfortunate that one of Canada's ruling parties is called the Liberal Party, since this may give the impression that a discussion of liberalism is merely a discussion of the practices and policies of the Liberals. The party is only a manifestation of an ideology that goes far beyond politics and has its origins outside Canada.

At the heart of North American liberalism as a political theory and ideology that is the concept of freedom. Nothing can stand in the way of one's absolute freedom to create the world as he/she wants it. The philosophy of liberalism is expressed, for example, in this saying: "I don't care what you do when you grow up, my child, just as long as you are happy." This statement assumes that each child may choose his or her way of life, determine his or her own future. The child is told that the right to self-fulfillment is supreme. The courage to stand alone is applauded as a good thing. Nothing is said about moral absolutes and being responsible. The opposite of liberalism is: "You have a duty to perform, my child, and that is to give generously of your talents to the society which has nurtured you," or, "You know your place, my child. Don't overstep it." And as the late John Diefenbaker, conservative Prime Minister, once said, "Freedom is the right to be wrong, not the right to do wrong."

Liberalism denies that there are moral restraints. Its ideology rests on the belief that the individual is supreme and more important than society. Liberalism experiments with the mores and values of society. It practices social engineering, shaping society unhindered by any conception of good that puts limitations on human actions. Dr. George Grant said that in liberalism, "What matters is that men shall be able to do what they want, when they want...." "Value judgments" are subjective. In other words, man in his freedom creates the valuable. The human good is what we choose for our good.

This liberal ideology was quite evident in Ontario's same-sex benefits bill, which was defeated in the mid-1990s in a free vote. The debate on this bill was highly emotionally charged and rancorous. In essence, it would have altered the traditional concept of the family, it would have also given special status to same-sex relationships. Homosexual couples want more than tolerance, they want official recognition and society's acceptance. Opponents are called homophobic and unloving. Since the debate on the issue won't go away, we should take a careful look at the arguments and develop a Christian response.

"Good" by What Standard?

Do we have the right to create our own values and call good what we choose for our good? A pamphlet funded by the City of Toronto Department of Public Health and published by The AIDS Committee of Toronto has gay teenagers say, "For us, having safer sex means feeling good about who we are as gay men." In a feature article in the *Globe and Mail* (June 11, 1994), gay author and playwright Jerry Bartram declares that being gay is a gift of God, not a curse. And Bartram says, "That gift needs to be acknowledged and proclaimed." Toronto Star's columnist Tom Harpur accuses the Roman

Catholics of perpetuating discrimination. And he asks, "Why should they (the homosexuals) be forbidden the same physical expressions of tenderness and love most people enjoy, particularly when they do so as a committed, faithful couple?"

The question we should address is, "What is good?" Can a same sex relationship ever be called "good"? The word good can be used in non-moral ways. We talk about good food or good weather. The word good can be used, in the sense of praising the excellence of something. However, good also conveys a moral value when someone says, "He is a good man" or "she does a good deed." The man is praised for the goodness of his character and the woman for the good she is doing. What are people saying when they call a homosexual life style "good"? The answer to the question "What is good?" depends on one's basic beliefs. For example, modern hedonism (the doctrine that pleasure is the highest good) equates the term "pleasure" or "happiness" with the good. The liberal mindset would argue that if it can be shown that a certain act or lifestyle produces happiness, society should approve it.

The New Democratic Party's campaign in Ontario for same-sex benefits shows how far our society has drifted away from the high ethical standards of Scripture. When the Bible is no longer accepted as the authoritative norm of God's will, our society no longer has an abiding moral standard. But when revealed Scripture remains the central and controlling factor in life, the sin of Sodom will be seen as an outrage to God. For the Christian then the meaning of the word "good" rests completely and absolutely in God's will for our private and public life.

Goodness and God's Will

The Bible teaches that God is good. He is holy and therefore perfect (Lev. 11: 44ff; Ps. 100:5). Jesus affirms that "no one is good but God only" (Mark 10: 18). Of mankind, Paul says that "there is none good, no not one" (Rom. 3:12). Christians, therefore, define good in terms of God and not man. God alone determines what is true and beautiful, good and evil. God's revealed will in the law determines what is good. Evil is whatever opposes God's will and word. The law itself is a provision of God's goodness, Micah claims this in the words, "He showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8). The psalmist admonished us to "depart from evil, and do good, seek peace, and pursue it" (Ps. 34: 14). Paul identifies God's law as "holy, righteous and good" (Romans 9:12).

Goodness as defined by Scripture is the only answer for our society, which is dying for lack of moral vision. As A.W. Tozer so aptly remarked, "That God is good is taught or implied on every page of the Bible and must be received as an article of faith as impregnable as the throne of God. It is a foundation stone for all sound thought about God and is necessary to moral sanity."

When we keep in mind the Biblical definition of goodness we can't go along with the philosophy of gay teenagers who say, "For us, having safer sex means feeling good about who we are as gay men." And we disagree with the statement that "being gay is a gift from

God." The Bible limits sexual relations to male-female marriage. Homosexuality is described as wrong, shameful and sinful (Lev. 18:22-30; 20:13; 1 Kings 14:24; Rom. 1:24-32; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 1 Tim. 9:10).

Who is the good person? The one who lives in fellowship with the Lord and acts according to His will. No one can produce good fruit unless, he is made good by the Spirit. A Christian is called the "lover of good" (Titus 1:8). The parable of the Good Samaritan is a powerful illustration of the goodness God expects of His people. This means that we should also show goodness and compassion to homosexuals in the hope that they will respond to the Gospel of grace and find God's forgiveness and healing from their sin. They will also need our help to deal with their temptations. We have a pastoral responsibility.

Our duty is not only to oppose those who want to legitimize homosexuality, but also to show God's goodness. We are called to act upon the dictates of the Bible, which equips "the man of God ... for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17).

Johan D. Tangelder