

**IS THERE A NEW TESTAMENT RESPONSE TO TONY CAMPOLO'S OPEN LETTER ACCEPTING MONOGAMOUS SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS? - Sunday, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015 - Teaching #1812  
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON**

**Romans 1:18-28 - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. [24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. [26] For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. [28] And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."**

We will look at this opening text in detail next Sunday. It will set the framework for all I will be saying more directly then. But I wanted to put it up in front of us all before we actually analyze it. It's easy to forget or minimize how directly and simply God has spoken on a subject unless you honestly keep the plain words of a text alive in our ears. It's easy to assume God hasn't made Himself clear on an issue just because our **culture** doesn't accept His verdict. If we want to **reject** our Creator's words, that's one thing. But let's not pretend He hasn't spoken.

There are issues that have become landmark issues for the Church of Jesus Christ. They don't just raise questions. They change the moral landscape. They actually shift the way Christians view Scripture. They bend the way we interpret Biblical standards. They don't just appear on the scene. They sweep many Christians along under the banner of love and tolerance.

The two standard changing issues right now are **same-sex intercourse** and **transgenderism**. The issue of **same-sex intercourse** has been re-visited in recent days by **Tony Campolo's open letter revealing his reasons for accepting committed, monogamous same-sex relationships in the church**. I have already outlined what I believe to be the Biblical arguments against this acceptance in the nine part series, **"The Bible and Sexual Orientation**. That's on the front page of our web site.

I also responded to Campolo's previous hints of a change in his view. I am stunned that that response has been viewed 24,000 times on YouTube. The two earlier arguments Campolo advanced were these:

**First, young people aren't going to buy into the church's rejection of homosexuality.** To me, that's merely an **observation** rather than an **argument**. And I think it's probably a largely true observation. Considering the massive rejection of absolute revealed truth and the idea that absolute moral convictions produce nothing but intolerance, we would be amazed if the next generation **didn't** endorse same-sex relationships. That's an argument for their social acceptability. Not for God's approval.

Of course, Campolo knows better than to imagine this is the first time our culture has had a hard time with divine truth. This is not a **new factor** in terms of New Testament discipleship. Persecution and rejection were the **standard expected responses** to profession of Christ throughout most of the history of the early church. They are the **promised** responses to all genuine disciples in the New Testament. Christians of the last few centuries, and almost exclusively in North America, are perhaps the **only** Christians ever to be shocked by the unpopularity of their faith.

Campolo's second argument to which I responded was Jesus, while speaking very boldly about many sinful practices, never said anything about homosexuality. Campolo went on to admit that Paul certainly did, but Jesus didn't. And Campolo takes his moral cue from Jesus.

Of course, Jesus never said one word about sexually abusing small boys or having sex with animals. But I think it might be a sketchy hermeneutic to say He wouldn't be bothered by those things either. That argument is just too ridiculous to pursue further.

In his most recent confession of endorsing monogamous same-sex relationships Campolo has advanced two additional arguments. And seeing these are the two arguments he says changed his view I feel the need to quote a small portion of Campolo's letter of June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015. We need to see if there is something more compelling to be examined. And we need to have some kind of Scriptural response to his new statements.

Campolo writes, ***"It has taken countless hours of prayer, study, conversation and emotional turmoil to bring me to the place where I am finally ready to call for the full acceptance of Christian gay couples into the Church....For me, the most important part of that process was answering a more fundamental question: What is the point of marriage in the first place? For some Christians, in a tradition that traces back to St. Augustine, the sole purpose of marriage is procreation, which obviously negates the legitimacy of same-sex unions."***

***"Others of us, however, recognize a more spiritual dimension of marriage, which is of supreme importance. We believe that God intends married partners to help actualize in each other the "fruits of the spirit," which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, often citing the Apostle Paul's comparison of marriage to Christ's sanctifying relationship with the Church."***

Just a comment at this point. Paul does **not** make a **comparison** between marriage and Christ's covenant relationship to the church, like you might compare Harvey's and A & W. Paul's much deeper point is marriage is **defined** and **limited** and **explained** by Christ's covenant with His bride, the church. You'll see why this matter so much in just a few minutes. Back to Campolo:

***"One reason I am changing my position on this issue is that, through Peggy, I have come to know so many gay Christian couples whose relationships work in much the same way as our own. Our friendships with these couples have helped me understand how important it is for the exclusion and disapproval of their unions by the Christian community to end. We in the Church should actively support such families. Furthermore, we should be doing all we can to reach, comfort and include all those precious children of God who have been wrongly led to believe that they are mistakes or just not good enough for God, simply because they are not straight."***

That is another very loaded sentence. Who in this room would actually believe, as Campolo implies, he or she is **"good enough for God"** because he or she isn't gay? Who of us thinks he or she is **ever** morally good enough for God **period?** Campolo again:

***"As a social scientist, I have concluded that sexual orientation is almost never a choice and I have seen how damaging it can be to try to "cure" someone from being gay. As a Christian, my responsibility is not to condemn or reject gay people, but rather to love and embrace them, and to endeavor to draw them into the fellowship of the Church. When we sing the old invitation hymn, "Just As I Am", I want us to mean it, and I want my gay and lesbian brothers and sisters to know it is true for them too."***

So, for Campolo, the embracing of monogamous same-sex intercourse is based, in his own words, on two factors. **First**, the purpose of marriage is the mutual encouragement of holiness and Christ-likeness, rather than merely the procreation of offspring. In this Campolo refers specifically to the teaching of the Apostle Paul where Paul refers to marriage being designed by God to the earthly revelation of the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church.

Of course, there is a huge problem here, unaddressed by Campolo. Indeed, Paul *does* give wonderfully explicit teaching on the sanctifying divine design to Christian marriage. But not to *all* marriages. Why does Campolo not open up the passage to which he gives such glowing reference?

**Ephesians 5:25-33** - "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, [26] that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, [27] so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. [28] In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. [29] For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, [30] because we are members of his body. [31] "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." [32] This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. [33] However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

Why the quotation marks around **verse 31**? - "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." What is the source of these words quoted by Paul? Ironically, Campolo says these are the words from Paul that became very important to him. We all *know* where he got them. He's quoting the *creation design of marriage*. He's quoting the account recorded in Genesis. He's talking very specifically about the account of *Adam and Eve*, the original *man/woman marriage*.

Why does Campolo not mention Paul's description of this spiritually sanctifying marriage is found in a text full of *"husbands"* and *"wives"*? Read those wonderful verses yourself. The text is packed full of *"hims"* and *"hers," "he's"* and *"she's."* This is the kind of marriage Paul has in mind as spiritually sanctifying - one designed by the Creator to reflect *unity*, but not *sameness* - the kind of deep bond reflecting the very nature of our triune God. *This* is the kind of marriage that has glorious potential to build holiness and Christlikeness between a *male husband* and a *female wife*. To miss this is to miss the whole point of Paul's words.

One other comment, almost too obvious to mention, is Campolo's argument is only cogent if we ignore the fact that he must *assume* what he's trying to *prove*. The idea that a same-sex couple can nourish and sanctify each other while *sustaining and nourishing their homosexuality* only gains traction if you assume God accepts same-sex relationships in the first place. I mean, if God rejects the same-sex relationship in the first place it's hard to see how it can possible be said to be sanctifying in its effects on those practicing it.

I said there were *two* factors prompting Campolo's acceptance of mongamous same-sex relationships in the church. The *first* was the purpose of marriage to encourage holiness and Christlikeness. And I've tried to show why I think Campolo's approach to this from a same-sex perspective is deeply flawed Scripturally. The *second* factor changing Campolo's mind is the kind of friendships he and his wife, Peggy, have formed with same-sex couples and the spiritual quality of these relationships. Look at Campolo's words again carefully:

*"In my own life, my wife Peggy has been easily the greatest encourager of my relationship with Jesus....Each of us has been God's gift to the other and our marriage has been a mutually edifying relationship."*

*"One reason I am changing my position on this issue is that, through Peggy, I have come to know so many gay Christian couples whose relationships work in much the same way as our own. Our friendships with these couples have helped me understand how important it is for the exclusion and disapproval of their unions by the Christian community to end. We in the Church should actively support such families."*

Note carefully those words, *"One reason I am changing my position on this issue...."* Then he goes on to say he has *"come to know"* gay Christian couples and has established *"friendship with these couples."* Just so there is no twisting of Campolo's words here - he *"changed"* his position to accepting these relationships. And the *reason* for the change is the quality of relationship he and Peggy have with these gay couples.

First, we should be thankful for good friendship with these couples. Certainly this is as it should be. As Christians we're called to be gracious people, salt and light, bearers of Christ's love and gospel truth. Christians can never be haters of anyone. Isolation isn't Christ-like.

It's not the **relationships** that are troubling. It's the **logic** based on those relationships. Campolo's reasoning seems to be this. He and his wife Peggy found these gay couples to be just like themselves. He found them to be loyal friends and people of prayer and worship. He found them to believe the same creedal truths of the faith. They studied God's Word together. They ministered to the poor together. And **this**, says Campolo, was one of the key factors **changing his position** (Campolo's very words) on the issue of same-sex intercourse.

And my question is **should this change anyone's mind?** Should the practice of very orthodox Christian faith and life in a host of areas change my mind about what the Scriptures seem to say God rejects in one specific area? **Is this how the church should distinguish holiness and unholiness? Is this how the bar of revelation is set? Does everything become right because some things are right?**

Again, I can't overstress Campolo's own words regarding the fact that these relationships with same-sex couples has **"changed"** his position. I can only conclude from these words the fact that he now **accepts** same-sex relationships - and he defines his acceptance as his **changed** position - means he must have previously been either **opposed** to, or, at the very least, **indifferent** toward same-sex relationships. If this isn't so, then to speak of a **change** in his position would be meaningless.

So, by his own testimony, his fellowship with same-sex couples **changed** his view. He was **against** and is now **accepting** of monogamous same-sex relationships. And now the work we have left to do is to consider the question - **is this proper Scriptural processing? Is this Christ-pleasing reasoning for a disciple?** Can we justify such a change in a moral conviction about same-sex couples because of favorable insights observed in other areas of their Christian holiness?

How will we even begin to answer this question? We certainly need something more to base our answer on than my opinion. We need to see if God's Word speaks to this motive for changing our views on something previously considered sinful. And remember, by Campolo's own words, he **changed** his view once he saw the positive characteristics of befriended same-sex couples. And that can only mean Campolo changed his view on same-sex relationships to positive from negative based on the Christian character he observed in these same couples. Can this motive for a change in moral ground be justified?

I'm going to answer, **"No, it can't."** And here's why:

**Mark 10:17-22** - "And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" [18] And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. [19] You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" [20] And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." [21] And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." [22] Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

Consider what we're beholding in this account. We're looking at Jesus' response to a man who **desired** to follow Him. This man **came** to Jesus. Jesus didn't **go** to him. So there's a sincere hunger in this man. He **"ran"** to Jesus. He honestly desires to be a disciple of Jesus. But that's not the most important detail for our consideration this morning.

Consider this. We're looking at a man who did almost **everything** right and only **one** thing wrong. I said he did only **one** thing wrong because, amazing as it seems, that is our all-knowing Lord's assessment. Nowhere does Jesus say this man's self-assessment as a righteous keeper of God's laws is dishonest or exaggerated. This is truly an incredibly devout man.

Then the story takes a strange turn. For all the wonderful things this man did perfectly, his one point of rebellion made him 100% unacceptable as a follower of Jesus Christ as Lord. In other words, one point of **embraced** rebellion - one point of **justified** rebellion - one point of **accepted** rebellion - doesn't, according to our Lord, leave this man 99% acceptable. One point of **justified** rebellion makes this man 100% **unacceptable** as a follower of Jesus.

Please notice Jesus' **love** for this man didn't change the terms of **acceptability**. Jesus knows **love** and **moral indifference** are not the same thing. In fact, Jesus **loves** this man too much to **tolerate** non-devotion in any single area of life.

I need to wrap this message up very carefully. I know there will be some who will misunderstand what I'm saying here. I'm **not** saying only sinless people can follow Jesus. Not at all. And, even more emphatically, I'm **not** saying Jesus only accepts perfectly righteous people. What a terrible lie that would be!

"Well, pastor Don, now I'm confused. You just said about the ruler who came to Jesus that one point of rebellion made him 100% unacceptable." To which I would reply, I said no such thing. I said one point of **justified** rebellion made that man 100% unacceptable.

You don't have to be unfailingly righteous in **everything** you do. But what you can't be unrepentantly sinful in **anything** you do. And here's why this is so. Righteousness is a matter of **heart** not **rules**. It isn't **legalism** that makes same-sex relationships sinful. If we were justified by keeping more commands than we break - if same-sex relationships became sanctified by expressions of devotion in **other** areas of discipleship, then Campolo's logic would work.

But legalism isn't the Christian way. God looks for hearts that long to please and follow Him in **every** part of life. Not just the ones that fit in to my own sexual commitments or orientations. The one area of disobedience isn't sanctified by the many other areas of purity and devotion.

Is this good news or bad? Does it make discipleship easy or hard? And I want to conclude saying this kind of single-hearted righteousness is the best news ever. I will never, in this life, be perfect in **any** area of my heart. And the closer I get to my Lord the more I will feel the weight of each failure. But there is always grace and compassion and restoration.

That is, there is always grace and mercy and compassion and restoration as long as I'm not **unrepentant** or **deceived** in **any** area of my heart. There is always pardon and grace as long as I don't justify unrepentant sin in **one** area by cancelling it out with righteousness in many **other** areas.

**Psalm 139:23-24 - "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! [24] And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"**

David knows he can't be his own heart's judge. Many sins don't **feel** like choices at all. The whole heart must be searched by God as a **whole**. The whole heart must be offered to God on His revealed terms. However imperfectly, all portions of the being I call "myself" must be lived out on terms not my own. And the whole body of Christ must come to Jesus on these same terms. Please, Tony, don't train precious souls to justify sin in one area by piling up acts of righteousness in others. Don't act so unlovingly to precious lives needing God's grace on the same unreserved, complete terms, just like the rest of us.

More on this next Sunday.