

A Matter of Obedience

Being a critique of 'A Matter of Integrity' by Rev. Steve Chalke

We have already noticed that Steve Chalke is far from being an evangelical in our recent paper, *Error and Its Disciples*, where we showed that he has a view of the atonement, which is utterly unbiblical. He is also close to NT Wright and associated with his New Perspective on Paul and the Biblical hermeneutic that undergirds such a heresy.

Error always breeds more error because deception is a street; once you are on it you are travelling further and further away from the truth. So, it is no surprise to me that Chalke has raised a storm about gay partnerships. Normally I would ignore this with all the other myriad of errors abounding today – such things will increase – but I want to get to the heart of the matter, which Chalke's paper helpfully spells out for us.

The issue is not confusion about what the Bible says about homosexuality; there is none. Neither is the issue about inclusion (as Chalke maintains). The church has always had problems about how, why and when to include or exclude people; and some necessary choices are heart rending – but the Bible gives clear instructions about that as well. No, the issue is really about the nature of God's revelation. How are we to understand the Scriptures?

The traditional view

The historic orthodox opinion regarding the Bible is that it is the inspired word of God; infallible and inerrant in its original manuscripts. The original autographs were the precise words that God chose to express what was in his mind regarding his law for man. Then the Bible itself tells us that it is these words which are the database to determine every doctrine, every practice, and give instruction to disciples for every eventuality.

The Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:15-17

If we want to know what is right, then the Scriptures will tell us. If we want to know what is a good work and what is a dead work – studying the Bible will enlighten us because it is God's voice instructing man in correct behaviour.

As a man grows in grace and understands more of God's word, he learns more clearly what is right and what is wrong,

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Heb 5:12-14

The modern view

Now various people calling themselves 'evangelicals' have a variety of views regarding Scripture. Some effectively ignore it; especially Charismatics that prefer subjective 'prophetic' words based on inner feelings. Former errors (such as Barthianism) restrict the revelation of Scripture, not to the actual words written but, to a subjective experience of

enlightenment based upon the words. Thus the words are not inspired but the experience is.

However, the theological academic world has become infatuated with new hermeneutics (principles of interpretation) based upon supposed historic cultural discoveries about Second Temple Jewish religious circumstances.¹ These underlie the New Perspective on Paul and subsequent errors, such as Federal Vision. By using these devices (often generated by liberal scholars) new meanings are attached to Biblical texts that turn orthodox doctrines upside down.

Thus these scholars claim to represent Christianity, honour God and believe the text of the Bible; but their interpretation of crucial texts is very different from the normal Reformation understanding of it. Chalke is in this camp. This arrogant view implies that the Biblical interpreters, for nearly 2,000 years, have all been wrong and only now, in their camp, is the real truth on certain doctrines becoming published. This denies God's sovereignty in the preservation of his word and doctrine in the church.

The consequences of this approach

So, Chalke can tell us that Christians can be practising homosexuals; that homosexuals can be righteous and form civil partnerships; that these can be celebrated in a church without hypocrisy and that the church must go out of its way to approve such people or we fail to be inclusive and alienate a section of the population. Indeed he even offers a suggested liturgy for blessing a gay partnership based upon a service he conducted in his own church.

Some points from Chalke's paper to illustrate this

His watchword:

'Thoughtful conformity to Christ... should be our unchanging reference point.' (p1)

This is a laudable ambition but one he fails to obey. What he does is to distance Christ from his word and by doing this Chalke is enabled to make Scripture say what he wants it to say. Thus he actually does what his motto says he objects to – conforming to contemporary culture. Homosexual inclusivity is a contemporary worldly axiom and is forbidden by Scripture; Chalke makes Scripture reverse its position.

By adopting modern liberal hermeneutics Chalke fails to see that Christ is the Word, not only in the sense of being the expression of God from eternity (Logos), but also in the sense that the written word of God is the full expression of Christ. Christ cannot be distanced from Scripture (Lk 24:27; Jn 5:35, 46).

His view of Scripture

Chalke deals with the creation argument² in a facile manner, simply suggesting that it may not be normative in the sense of ideal or a divine ordinance. Without any proper argument he just moves on, implying that homosexuality is just like being left-handed. This is a stupid piece of reasoning that ignores the multiple verses forbidding it.

Chalke is also guilty of twisting Scripture verses to fit his agenda. Even in his passing example of the story about Sodom he lies. Denying that homosexuality was a key issue he ignores a plain statement which says that it is.

¹ *'The huge advance in the field of biblical studies over the last decades – as the result of significant archaeological finds and advances in historical, cultural and linguistic understanding – have brought with them new insights and perspectives on the interpretation of the biblical text.'* Chalke, footnote 7.

² That marriage is between a man and a woman for life (Gen 2:4-3:24; Matt 19:5).

And they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them *carnally*.' Gen 19:5

The story of Lot and Sodom highlights the fact that the men of Sodom, in great numbers, sought carnal knowledge of Lot's visitors, 'the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house' (verse 4). There is a reason why the act of homosexuality was identified as 'sodomy'. But Chalke denies all of this, passing off the sin of Sodom as a more general sin that includes heterosexuals. God's word highlights the sins of Sodom by focusing on sodomy; Chalke denies this and says it was a general sin of selfish indulgence and social injustice (p2) affecting every sexual persuasion. This is eisegesis - twisting the text to suit your agenda.

Then he ignores the statements in Leviticus, which are very clear and unambiguous, by saying that they are cultural (i.e. irrelevant today) and ambiguous. He gives no clear argument, just making an unproved statement. This implies that not only Leviticus but all the Mosaic law has no application to Christians today, again denying the clear words of Jesus that it does (Lk 24:44; Jn 5:46) or ignoring 1 Cor 10:11, to say nothing of the book of Hebrews. Suggesting that God is set against the disabled is beyond belief; it is just scaremongering and beneath scholarly discussion.³

Clear statements in the NT are also simply dismissed by suggesting that different commentaries give differing explanations. Even this is untrue since the vast majority of evangelical commentaries for centuries were united in condemning homosexuality. A few modern liberal commentaries that take a different view cannot overturn this; however, they do show where Chalke's loyalties are.

The argument that the NT proscription of homosexuality only regards wild promiscuity is also facile. Chalke adds insult to injury by seeking the support of Roman acceptance of pederasty. Thus Chalke re-writes Romans to suggest that Paul is merely condemning 'sexual experimentation, promiscuity and shrine prostitution' rather than mere homosexuality (p3). This beggars belief and is not worthy of further critique. Every sane believer reading Romans 1 simply, and bearing in mind Paul's understanding of Mosaic Law, can see that this is false. Drawing attention to Paul's condemnation of idolatry in this passage is another smokescreen; Paul is condemning idolatry AND homosexuality.

Chalke's citing of the failure to accept Copernican astronomy is also pointless since a) the problem with Luther and Melancthon was their fixed astronomical presuppositions not their general hermeneutics and, b) the errors of certain great men do not permit us to make similar errors.

His claim that, 'the Bible does not provide the final answer to a whole number of issues to do with inclusion with which Christians have subsequently wrestled' and that 'the Bible ... does not provide the final answer to the issue' (p4) is also false. If this is true then what's the point of it at all? The Bible itself claims that Scripture provides all that a man needs for righteousness (Ps 119:9, 11; 2 Tim 3:16), either directly or by necessary deduction from Biblical principles. Furthermore, evangelicals have always testified to the truth of this in their confessions (e.g. *Westminster Confession* 1:64). For Chalke to deny this is proof that he is

³ Lev 21:16-23 has to do with the confines of ritual purification in the Tabernacle having nothing to do with personal acceptance by God. God later had fellowship with lepers, disabled people and even foreign lepers.

⁴ 'The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word; and that there are some

not evangelical. [Aside: contra Chalke, 1 Tim 3:11 does not approve of women deacons but refers to a deacon's wife.]

Chalke goes so far as to aver that, '*The Bible does not always speak with one voice*' it contains, '*an array of perspectives, not a few tensions, and even some apparent contradictions*' (p5). Such a view is not Christian but liberal. If we cannot discern the consistent mind of God running throughout Scripture then we have no hope. If there are contradictions, how can we be sure of any doctrine; how could we be certain of our salvation? Such a view as Chalke's is modernist rubbish.

Chalke goes on: '*the Bible ... is a conversation where various, sometimes harmonious and sometimes discordant, human voices contribute to the gradually growing picture of the character of Yahweh ... a conversation that, rather than ending with the finalisation of the canon, continues beyond it*' (p6). This is further proof of liberalism. For Chalke the Bible is not the word of God inspired in men but discordant voices contributing to a bigger picture which we add to today. Such a view comes under the condemnation and curse of God (Prov 30:5-6; Rev 22:18-19). Make no mistake; Chalke's view is accursed by God's own word.

His view of homosexuals

His overarching concern is the need for inclusion and the nature of that inclusion. Dealing with homosexuals is one of recognising our neighbour and loving them: '*I do believe that the Church has a God given responsibility to include those who have for so long found themselves excluded.*' (p2).

Promiscuity is condemned (homosexual or heterosexual) but permanent and stable gay relationships are considered acceptable: '*That's the point. ... the Church's historical rejection of faithful gay relationships ... shouldn't the Church consider nurturing positive models for permanent and monogamous homosexual relationships?*' (p1). '*In autumn 2012 I conducted a dedication and blessing service following the Civil Partnership of two wonderful gay Christians ... Our service also gave them the opportunity ... to publicly recognise their dependence on God and their need to be part of a supportive Christ-centred community*' (p1-2).

Stigmatising homosexual relationships is considered, '*an injustice and out of step with God's character as seen through Christ*' (p2).

A simple observation needs to be made here that Chalke ignores. It is well known, and equally well documented, that homosexual men, especially young men, are extremely promiscuous. It is part of the nature of homosexuality that promiscuity comes with the territory. Having lived in Brighton for thirty years, and known and worked with many homosexuals, I can confirm this to be true. Faithful, monogamous, stable, homosexual partnerships do exist, of course, but they are by far in the minority.

A final matter concerns Chalke's reference to the high rate of suicide in gay people. He uses this as a spur to the church to actively include such people and make them feel included, and less likely to depression. This is not an exaggeration; he says that he is passionate about this issue, '*because their lives are at stake*' and the church, '*drives these statistics*' (p6). The truth is that this sin is hated and condemned by God who stated that as well as final judgment in the future, temporal judgement now includes a physical penalty being experienced (Rm 1:27).⁵ This is why there is a high rate of disease experienced by

circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.

⁵ 'Receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.'

homosexual activity. Clearly HIV / AIDS are forms of this penalty but before these struck gay people were constant victims of Hepatitis A,⁶ or venereal disease.⁷ Homosexuals are three times more likely to have alcohol or drug abuse problems; 14 times more likely to have syphilis, and 23 times more likely to contract venereal disease. The average age of homosexual men dying with AIDS is 39 and the average age of homosexuals dying of all other causes is 41. The average heterosexual married man lives to 75; only 1% of homosexual men live to be 65 or older. Clearly, there is a physical penalty to being an active homosexual and God's word is proved right.

His view of Christ

There is a strong implication in Chalke's paper that the key to the issue (such as choosing the right hermeneutic) is adopting a stance that is in conformity to Christ.⁸ Of course this is an excellent position. The problem is that Chalke does not know Christ in the way that all sound NT interpreters throughout history have known him.

Chalke seems to think that conformity to Christ must involve toleration, softness, acceptance, inclusivity and love towards all. This fails to adopt a godly view of sin or an understanding of the wrath of God against iniquity. The Son is the expression of the Father and in agreement with everything the Father does and Scripture demonstrates that God has a holy hatred of sin and sinners. Those outside the elect face a terrible condemnation for their sin based on their eternal reprobation by God. Thus God hates sinners (Ps 5:5-6; 11:5). The idea that God will tolerate, love and accept those that his word condemns is sheer folly. Chalke has a false view of Christ.

The Biblical view of homosexuality

I do not need to give much detail here since the position is fairly well understood by all thinking believers. For detailed information on homosexual issues see my paper, *'Is there pride in being gay?'*

The essential position is that God condemns homosexual feelings and behaviour as sin. Practising it is forbidden. It is no different to bestiality or witchcraft. If we take Scripture at its word and let it stand on its own authority without twisting it, the position becomes very clear.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived.

Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites. 1 Cor 6:9

Far from Chalke's claim that Scripture does not have words to describe the current form of homosexuality, here we have: 'homosexual' – *malakos*: an effeminate person; a catamite; a boy kept for homosexual relations with a man, a male who submits his body to unnatural lewdness; of a male prostitute. In modern parlance, a 'rent boy'. Greece had its share of these just as today. Then we have 'sodomites' – *arsenokoites*, those who defile themselves with men; one who lies with a male as with a female, sodomite, homosexual [lit. 'male sex'].

We could multiply the verses that forbid homosexuality, but this verse is enough to show that the kingdom cannot include such people. This verse shows that:

- Homosexuality is unrighteous.

⁶ In San Francisco, gay city of USA, the rate of infectious hepatitis A is twice the national average.

⁷ Despite only about 2% of the US population being homosexual, they carry more than half of the venereal disease of the country.

⁸ *'It is thoughtful conformity to Christ – not unthinking conformity to either contemporary culture or ancient textual prohibitions – that should be our unchanging reference point. Only this approach can provide us with a hermeneutic which is robust enough to deal well with the ethical challenges of a forever changing world.'* Page 5. *'Christianity is not about a book, but about a person.'* Page 6.

- Homosexuals cannot inherit the kingdom of God.
- Those who teach that they can are deceived.

Thus Steve Chalke, by the statement of the Bible, is deceived in this matter.

The matter is simple. Does God forbid homosexuality? Clearly the OT and the NT agree that he does (Lev 20:13; Rm 1:26-27; 1 Tim 1:9-10). What could be more plain than, 'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination' (Lev 18:22). God also says,

He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 1 Jn 2:4

Thus anyone who admits to being a homosexual is not keeping God's commandments and cannot be a true Christian. This is axiomatic. Those poor souls who think that they are and suffer for it need to be properly counselled. Such counsel must be based on the truth and not based upon mollifying their condition.

Finally, Chalke focuses on monogamous gay relationships and mentions celibacy but accepts homosexual sex in a committed relationship. The issue is not with accepting gays who are not having sex, and neither is it with homosexual monogamous relationships. The very thinking of gays is sin. Lust is a sin and homosexual lust is a sin. There is nothing holy about a monogamous homosexual relationship even if it is celibate. The very relationship is sin and contrary to God's law.

Chalke's position

What leaders, like Chalke, fail to understand is that homosexuality is a deception and he is deceived himself. We know this for certain since God's word condemns homosexuality absolutely. Faced with the traumatic stories which Chalke presents us with to support his openness we must treat gay people as deceived folk in trouble who need help by understanding the Gospel properly, not by accommodating their sin. Many long-term homosexuals have been transformed by their conversion to Christ and have thrown off their former sexuality, becoming heterosexual. This should be seen as the norm. The problem facing the sad 'Christian homosexual' described by Chalke was not the need to justify his sexual condition and include him in church, but that he was not counselled properly. This is not unfeeling; it is the truth.

Chalke's position is exceedingly worrying. Essentially it is using sophistry to claim that the Bible accommodates homosexuals and that they can be identified with the church without moral change. Where do we draw the line on this proposition? What about paedophiles? They claim exactly the same things as homosexuals, that they were born with this proclivity, that they can't change and they need their desire satiated. What about bestiality? Why not include that along with homosexuality? Are we now to include transvestites (Deut 22:5) and transsexuals,⁹ or even sado-masochists; all becoming more popular in current media?¹⁰ In fact, surely churches can also, by Chalke's argument, now include witches who are 'much misunderstood'? Make no mistake; daft as it seems, there are witches who claim to worship Christ just as there are homosexuals, transvestites and paedophiles who claim to do the same. Chalke seems to be considering widening his

⁹ A new word has been coined recently, 'transphobia' to describe discrimination against transsexuals. This is the first stage to gaining social acceptance - by demonising the opposition, just as was the case with 'homophobia'.

¹⁰ Dr Sally Hines, a transgender expert and director of the Centre of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies at Leeds University said: 'There is already a very vocal trans movement which has been arguing for years for rights and recognition. Paris is talking about a tipping point - and she's right. The numbers in the past have been very small - that's not the case anymore.' Channel 4 news website; 18 January 2013.

inclusion: *'we need to do some serious thinking around our responses to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities'* (Note 6).

Chalke seems to be driven by the need to accommodate gay people who claim to be Christian and wish to be a part of the evangelical church. His arguments for inclusion of these can easily be stretched to include witches, sado-masochists and practitioners of bestiality. Instead of starting with God and the revelation he gives to man, Chalke has started with the homosexual and his need for association. This is a flawed formula.

Conclusion

It is an inescapable conclusion of looking at Chalke's views that he is veering further and further away from orthodox Christianity. He does not believe in the central doctrine of Christianity – substitutionary, penal attainment; something the Christian is to celebrate every week in the Lord's Supper. His view on Scripture is liberal. He has a completely false view of Christ. He holds other unorthodox ideas. He has been influenced by worldly philosophy and now he advocates inclusion of homosexuals in the church (possibly extending to other perversions as well). It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Chalke is not a Christian at all in the traditional orthodox sense of the word.

Christians need to be warned to avoid this man and his unbiblical ideas.

Regarding homosexual people, they are to be treated like every other sinner. They should not be singled out for special vilification (unlike some ministries) and should be viewed as candidates for the Gospel. As with anybody else, they should be told that their position is sinful and that conversion to Christ includes repentance of this sin. Those unable to do this alone, but who wish to convert, need to be given special help and counselling. In terms of neighbourliness, gay people should be treated like everyone else and loved as neighbours and helped where necessary. Just to prove that this writer is not an unfeeling wretch, who hates gay people, he can confirm that he has known gay acquaintances in the past, gay colleagues at work and has assisted gay neighbours in need.

The crux of this debate is not about love, nor tolerance, but what does Scripture actually say? Is Scripture the word of God to man, full of authority and equipped to instruct in every need, or is it something changing with new theological fads and archaeological discoveries? Is it able to be understood by faithful readers? Is it something relative that has to be added to each generation or is it the verbally, infallible, inspired word of God? Only the latter holds out any hope for our salvation and instruction in righteousness.

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