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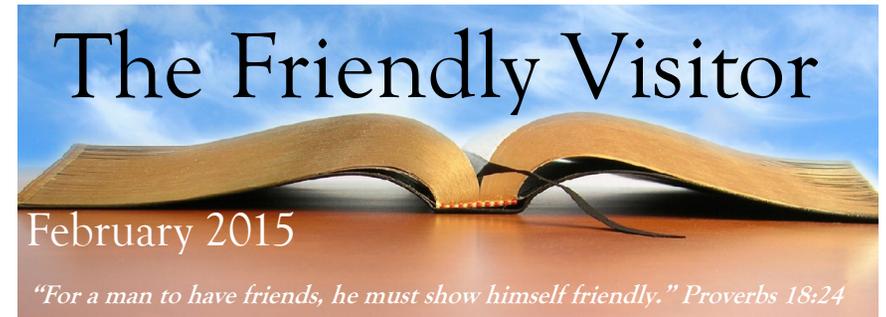
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7pm - Bible Study

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Bent Toward Inclusiveness?

by John R. Gibson

Several years ago *Newsweek* had an article on homosexual marriage with the following quote from one proponent of redefining marriage to include the unions of homosexual couples: *"The religious argument for gay marriage is not generally made with reference to particular texts, but with the general conviction that the Bible is bent toward inclusiveness."*

Do we see that statement for what it really is? In attempting to defend a life the Bible describes with the words vile, against nature, shameful, error, and the result of a debased mind (Romans 1:26-28), a lie has been told by the use of words that sound reasonable and even biblical.

Yes, this defense of "gay marriage" will seem appealing to many because the New Testament is in fact a message of inclusiveness. Over and over again the inspired writers tell us that God has broken down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile and desires that the two be as one in the body of Christ (Eph. 2:11-18). In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, for all who put their faith in Jesus Christ are the spiritual descendants of Abraham (Gal. 3:26-29). In Col. 3:9-11 the promise of the blessings in Christ is extended to the barbarian and Scythian, which is to say that Christ's church is inclusive of people of all countries, races, ethnicities, etc.

The blessings of the New Testament also include every socio-economic group, for in Christ there is no distinction made between slave and free

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(Gal. 3:28), and first century churches often included both slaves and masters (Eph. 6:5-9).

Further, the inclusiveness of the New Testament reaches both male and female (Galatians 3:26-29). While certain roles are off-limits to women (1 Cor. 14:34, 35), and for that matter to unmarried men (1 Tim. 3:2), the Bible does not exclude women from the blessings of salvation, and it teaches that every member plays an important role in the building up of the body (Eph. 4:16).

We might also note that among the writers of the New Testament two men were described as “uneducated and untrained” (Acts 4:13), while one who was a physician (Colossians 4:14). The inclusiveness of Scripture reaches all educational levels.

And the inclusiveness of the Bible doesn't stop with the breaking down of ethnic, gender, socio-economic, or educational distinctions, but reaches out to include the vilest of sinners. In 1 Tim. 1:12-17 Paul thanked Christ for the grace extended to him, the vilest of sinners, and added that his salvation was intended to be a pattern to provide hope for other sinners who would put their faith in Jesus Christ. The promise of remission of sins in Acts 2:38 was made to men so vile as to have been guilty of killing the

Christ. The most wicked of sinners who come to Jesus in penitent faith and allow themselves to be baptized into Christ (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3, 4) are assured that God's grace is broad enough to encompass them.

So it is true that the “Bible is bent toward inclusiveness,” but does that legitimize homosexual unions? Hear the words of the one who said his conversion was proof God would accept sinners:

“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, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Cor. 6:9, 10

While the next verse makes it clear that every one of these is forgivable, verses 9, 10 tells us that these sinners must turn from their sin or they will be excluded from God's eternal kingdom. God is as willing to forgive the homosexual as He is the thief and the drunkard, but just as the thief must steal no more and the drunkard must cease his drinking, the

God is as willing to forgive the homosexual as He is the thief and the drunkard, but just as the thief must steal no more and the drunkard must cease his drinking, the homosexual must stop his sins against nature.

homosexual must stop his sins against nature. The Bible is both inclusive and exclusive when it comes to homosexuality: it excludes from salvation those who continue to practice the sin, yet the church our Lord loved and gave Himself for includes those who formerly practiced the sin of homosexuality but have ceased their sin and been washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

We need to appreciate the areas of inclusiveness in the New Testament and be just as inclusive in our dealings with others, but let's not allow ourselves to overlook the fact that its inclusiveness comes with some requirements. The One who came to this earth to open the way of salvation to all insisted that He was the exclusive

approach to the Father (John 14:6; cf. Acts 4:12). He also warned that not every person calling Him Lord would be included in those receiving the blessing of eternal life (Matt. 7:21-23). Most who will read this article knew before they began to read that the Bible did not include homosexual marriages in its lists of approved behaviors, but do we realize we could end up equally excluded from the blessings of Christ because of covetousness or reviling or a host of other sins? Are we really committed to doing the will of God, a will that involves much more than the avoidance of homosexuality?

Let's all honestly assess our own situation to determine if God's conditional salvation includes or excludes us.

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“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Matthew 7:13, 14