

model for churches to follow? As early as the 1990s, conservative Christian leaders began to welcome, but not affirm, the open involvement of people with same-sex attraction into church life. Along with a sincere welcome, tragically, too many times fear of disease (HIV/AIDS), public condemnation, homophobia, and pressure for behavior change through unproven and often harmful therapies overwhelmed any sense of welcome.

There is some evidence of progress. A new Pew Research Center survey found that less than 1 in 3 LGBT respondents reported feeling unwelcome in a place of worship. Even fewer reported that this unwelcome feeling occurred within the past 12 months.

Christians and the church can do much more beyond welcome. About half of LGBT adults surveyed report no religious affiliation. While the ones who did attend worship felt welcome, the Pew survey found that most LGBT respondents view major religious groups (Christians, Jews, and Muslims) as "unfriendly."

News:

The area-wide singing in Bisbee is on Friday, August 30. Be talking about it and if there is interest, there may be motivation for some car-pooling.

Diane Cocke's sister, Dorothy, has diabetes and has developed a bad infection in her foot. Along with other efforts, doctors are resorting to surgery to remove the infection. Dorothy is scheduled for surgery Tuesday at 9:30 to remove another part of her foot. She is understandably concerned about how she will get around after having a large part of her foot removed. We are praying doctors will be able to save enough of her foot to afford some degree of walking.

Gerry Clark's nephew, Travis Parkinson, is in the hospital with a very serious infection on his head from a surgery that required a shunt. Please keep him in your prayers. He is very sick. He is a fireman and has 4 adorable children that he needs to get back home to. They live in Lubbock, TX.

Please continue to pray for Tatyana's daughter Olga who is undergoing treatments for cancer.

Prayer List:

Healing: *Jerry Robinson's mother Norma. Mike and Sandy Cavasos, Ben Atchley, Faye Atchley, Nicolas and Annie Self, Jonda Gardner, Dave Morse, Richard Tuey.*

Travels: *The Cunninghams.*

Back issues are posted at
<http://saffordchurchofchrist.org>



Safford Church of Christ

3888 S Hwy 191, Safford, AZ 85546

18 August 2013

Sermon Topics

A.M.: The Body, The Church.

P.M.: A Message of Comfort

Isaiah 40

Wednesday: Jeroboam's Golden Calves

1 Kings 12:25

Pulpit Evangelist

Ken Knowlton: 428-5974

Elders

Ben Atchley: 428-2246

Greg Briggs: 428-8756

John Cunningham: 428-0895

Services

Sunday Bible Class	10:00 A.M.
Sunday Morning Worship	11:00 A.M.
Sunday Evening Worship	6:30 P.M.
Wednesday Evening Class	6:30 P.M.
Thursday Ladies Bible Class	10:00 A.M.

God's Big Plan

A Study of Ephesians 1:3-6

Marcus Maxwell

The pattern of God's grace evoking a response of love and faith lies behind the extended outburst of praise that follows the opening greeting. 'Blessed be the God...' reflects a Jewish formula of blessing directed towards God as a result of his great works, and can be found throughout the Old Testament and in later Jewish worship (see for example, 1 Kings 8:15). This *berakah* (blessing) has a Christian slant, of course, for it defines the God who is blessed as the father of Jesus Christ, and the grace he bestows is explicitly the salvation that Jesus brings.

God has given to his people all that he has to offer. Every blessing that is to be found in the spiritual realm is now theirs. In the [...] Pauline epistles, there is an equal stress on the unimaginable riches of God's grace (see 1 Corinthians 2:9), but much of this lies in the future. Here our author stresses the present experience and availability of those riches. They are

blessings which are to be found in Christ. They are thus for those who by faith are 'in Christ,' and they come to the world from God 'in Christ.'

They are the outworking of God's choice of his people from the very beginning (v. 4). In later Christian theology, this [language evoked] a debate that has still not been resolved. It can be read as a statement that God, even before he created the universe, decided who was to be saved and who was not. Or it can be read as a statement that God decided beforehand that the Church would exist and be blessed: that is, what was foreordained was the blessing rather than the individuals who would receive it.

If we have to make a choice, the best is surely the one that does justice to the preaching of the gospel with its call to repentance. In other words, to say that God decides beforehand who is saved and who is not would empty the gospel proclamation of meaning. Therefore it seems safer [!] to say that the salvation of the people of God is part of his plan from the beginning, but who is a part of that people (and it could in theory include all people) is left to our response to his call. The destiny of those who respond to that call is to be able to stand before God as a people who are truly his and whose sins are finally wiped away – they will be holy and blameless. Here in verse 4 the word 'holy' has the sense both of belonging to God and of moral purity.

God's plan from the start was that the Church, the people of God, should be adopted as his children (v. 5). This, says the writer, was God's plan all along – that people should relate to God as his children. The lengthy phrase 'according to the good pleasure of his will' is typical of the author of Ephesians, who never uses a single word when a whole phrase will do. It stresses almost over-emphatically the fact that all this originates in God's purpose.

For those who take seriously the biblical story of fall and redemption, this may seem to raise a problem. Does it mean that God willed human sinfulness in order that he might bring about a greater salvation? However, the author of Ephesians is not expounding that idea. Probably it didn't actually occur to him. What he is stressing, once again, is the overarching grace of God, which God has always intended should be enjoyed by human beings.

The purpose and end result of that grace is that people may praise God for his free and overwhelming gift (v. 6). The purpose of creation is to praise God, not because God demands or needs such praise but because creation finds its meaning in a relationship with God, and the only meaningful relationship with God is one of praise and worship. It is as human beings go about the task of being human, the task of giving and loving, caring and sharing, that they reflect their creator, and so praise him in the same way that a work of art reflects on the artist. Since they are thinking beings,

people who know God will also consciously offer him thanks and praise for their existence, for his love and for his self-sacrifice in the salvation brought by Christ.

All this is possible only to those who have accepted the gift of salvation, recognized God as their creator, and ultimately been transformed into the image of Christ. In that sense it lies in the future, but as those who have already been brought into union with Christ, it is already to some extent a reality in the life of the saints.

A Prayer: Lord, may my life reflect you, and so give you praise.

"Ephesians to Colossians and Philemon." *Daily Bible Commentary*. Hendrickson: Peabody, MA. 2002. 188-189.

Welcome a Same-Sex Couple to Church?

Timothy C. Morgan, Christianity Today

Minnesota and Rhode Island recently became the 12th and 13th states to allow same-sex marriage. With the favorable U.S. Supreme Court rulings in June, there will be more same-sex marriages nationwide for years to come. The 2010 federal census estimated there are already more than 150,000 same-sex couples legally married or in legal civil unions. It reports some states experienced a 50 percent or more increase in households with same-sex couples from 2000 to 2010.

For generations, Christianity has encountered unions outside the one man-one woman Christian ideal. During the colonial missionary era in Africa, many Christian churches had zero tolerance for a new convert with multiple wives. If these men wished to be baptized, join the church, and follow Christ, they had to dismiss all but one wife.

But missionaries soon realized that this policy of zero tolerance created enormous hardship on abandoned mothers and their children. It also absolved the polygamous husband of providing for dependent children of his former wives, according to Sunday Agang, academic dean at ECWA (Evangelical Church of West Africa) Seminary, Jos, Nigeria.

Over time, indigenous churches developed more than one response. Some churches accepted the entire household of a husband who desired to become a Christian yet had more than one wife. Many churches, however, did not permit these new converts to preach or teach or lead in the church.

Yet, the goal of churches remained the same. Once a person accepted Christ, Christians invited the individual into joyful, church-based fellowship and a lifelong journey of discipleship and sanctification.

Many church leaders are confused over the most appropriate response to state-recognized same-sex couples.

But for churches committed to the biblical teaching about heterosexual marriage and compassion for all, is there a solidly biblical approach or