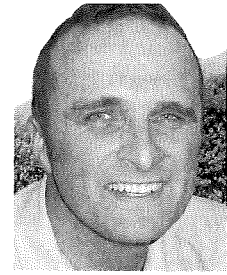


Christianity Explored — Presenting the Gospel as it is



In the media recently we heard of a debate amongst professing Christians at the Auckland Anglican Diocese Synod over the ordination of homosexuals*. One side of the argument founded its defence on the principles of justice and equality whilst the other side founded its defence on the Word of God.

Cam Gracey

I have to confess I was taken aback when I saw the lines of defence that were drawn up against one another. On the one side we had justice and equality and the other the Word of God. I was perplexed. Can there be a mismatch between the Word of God and justice and equality? Can you have one without the other? And if there can be such a mismatch; aren't we implying that God is neither just, nor equal? Can the Word of our God who, by his own admission, is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger as well as abounding in love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:6), cause injustice and inequality? And if so who on earth in their right mind would want such a God? Or are we here passing off our own wickedness, rebellion and sin (Exodus 34:7), as the injustice and inequality of God? I suspect the honest truth is that if we claim that "justice and equality" are on our side but not the "Word of God" that is exactly what we are doing. Sin is just too confrontational and if there's one thing the kiwi culture avoids like the plague — it is confrontation. But if we try to palm off our own sin back onto God not only are we calling God unjust, which is bad enough, we are ignoring the great news that this gracious God is also a forgiving God (Exodus 34:7). This is the best news ever and we ignore this great news of redemption to our own eternal detriment.

Looking at all this Auckland debate from afar my opinion is that this is symptomatic of a wider problem in New Zealand. My prognosis is that for too long established Kiwi churches have balked at confrontation. Rather than preach a gospel which by its own admission is offensive they have become enslaved to a false gospel which is more societal apologetic than it is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It appears to be more about affirming mankind than proclaiming God. And whilst it attracts the affirmation of society at large, it dishonours God and is inconsistent with his Word.

To be honest with you I'm tempted to tell this gospel too. I hate offending people. I love to be affirmed. I also have sins I'd like to re-categorise.

But I think the elephant in the room in this argument — is whose affirmation do you truly seek — God's or man's?

It all came to a head for me when over ten years ago a friend of ours invited us along to a Christianity Explored course at an Anglican church in London. My wife and I were in the UK on our OE at the time. We were having a blast. We were young professionals with great jobs, a great lifestyle — we were living the dream. I was proud of what I'd achieved — I'd worked hard to get where I was. Affirmation from others had been the driving force for me all the way along — affirmation of society was a big deal to me. I conformed to the ideals it placed upon me. By its standards I was successful. That was where I got my significance.

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In the midst of this we had a Christian friend. We respected our friend. Even though she was a Christian she was really decent to us. She commended the Christianity Explored course to us. So we went to the course. They just let the gospel tell the gospel. It was brilliant yet brutally honest (so refreshing compared to the glib speakers that prevail in our culture). I had no church background at all so it was all new to me. I got to meet real credible caring Christians. We were able to ask any question we liked. We went through the whole gospel of Mark. It really was life changing. It was like God took me into a dark room and turned the lights on. It all made sense.

* <http://www.anglicantaonga.org.nz/News/TIKANGA-PAKEHA/Auck-sees-no-bar-to-same-sex-ordination>

I saw clearly who Jesus was — God's anointed king, I understood why he came to pay the price for my sin by dying on the cross so that I could be forgiven, and I wanted to turn from the fake affirmation that I'd sought everywhere else as I grasped hold the only affirmation that really mattered — God's. How come I had to come half way round the world to hear that I thought? This is good stuff — we've gotta get this down to New Zealand and give other people the opportunity we had.

"My fear for my home country which I love dearly is that churches don't functionally trust the Word of God. We think societal apologetics are the way we will reach people. They are not. Harking back to my own pre Christian Kiwi perspective I can tell you that when churches engage in such behaviour... no one gives a kiwi's gall bladder — they make themselves even more irrelevant as they are just conforming to the affirmation of society. They are not salty at all if anything they are sugary sweet — but worse than that they communicate mistruths. Faith comes through hearing the Word. That ain't changed...never will. We need to be preaching the gospel — plain and simple."

Since we came back to New Zealand this is what I've been involved in. As from 1 August I now work full time for Christianity Explored Ministries, equipping and encouraging kiwi churches to pick up and run a course that simply lets the gospel tell the gospel, so that many others can have an opportunity to hear the true gospel of Jesus from the gospel of Mark and like me find the affirmation that really counts.

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Please don't be tempted to engage in Societal Apologetics like those fringed on by members of the Auckland Anglican Diocese. Humbly, faithfully minister the gospel to those whom you are called to love. To end I'd like to quote Englishman Thomas Lever who in 1559 wrote a letter to Swiss Reformer Henrich Bullinger after returning to London (from exile following the Bloody Mary era) to preach the gospel. "The preaching of the Gospel is more effectual to true repentance and wholesome reformation than anything that the whole world can either imagine or approve". The beautiful thing is that this still holds true today 450 odd years later.

Preach the gospel.

Cam Gracey
Christianity Explored Ministries