

****Queergedacht – Chapter 22 (René Gehring)****

****Werner E. Lange: The Paradigm Shift Regarding Gentile Christians****

The author first addresses the council from Acts 15. It primarily dealt with the question of whether Gentile Christians still need to be circumcised. This is used as a model for the question of the validity of the Old Testament sexual legislation regarding same-sex marriage.

It is correctly shown that the council's decision summarizes the divine requirements from Leviticus 17 and 18, even in the exact order given there. The term “fornication” in the decision text of the council summarizes the sexual legislation from Leviticus 18 and declares it binding for Christians as well. Included in this is the prohibition of same-sex sexuality! Whether this is permissible is therefore answered clearly enough, one might think.

However, this is completely overlooked in the further argumentation. Instead, the focus shifts to the introductory words of the apostolic decision, “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit...” If one were to follow this principle in current Adventist disputes, the author claims, many questions would be quickly resolved. For example, the question of the ordination of women. The Holy Spirit has long proven the worthiness of female pastors to be ordained through their blessed ministry.

This thought is transferred to same-sex partnerships. It is demanded that we “stop arguing over the interpretation of individual biblical texts regarding the acceptance of monogamous, same-sex relationships.” Instead, we should “ask how the Holy Spirit has already decided this question.” The “marks of conversion and spiritual rebirth” are also recognizable in queer Christians. Furthermore, they possess “some gifts and abilities that heterosexual Christians rarely have.” In this way, the Holy Spirit has long decided in favor of homosexual partnerships—so claims the author. As if a person's conversion and gifting biblically allowed them to live out any sexual feelings from then on!

There is also a side note indicating that only born-again, Spirit-led Christians can understand the legitimacy of homosexual monogamous relationships. For they would not make traditional views on same-sex relationships the measure. In other words: Those who do not share the presented view are not born-again Christians but completely trapped in traditional views. Those who reject homosexual relationships are unconverted, not born again, and unspiritual individuals who cannot speak on this topic at all.

Furthermore, it is claimed that the widespread rejection of homosexual partnerships in the church CANNOT be derived from biblical texts. Rather, it results from a lack of personal experience with such individuals. If one were to know queer Christians and their monogamous relationships well enough, one would no longer reject them.

At the end of the chapter, local congregations are called to boldly move forward in recognizing same-sex relationships. They should not wait for higher church bodies or even the world church. The church, it is said, will only change its official stance in favor of queer people when it sees that many such same-sex relationships are blessed by the Holy Spirit. In other words: Facts must be created to bring about changes in the theological understanding of our church.

What we find here is nothing short of an open call to rebellion. The unity of our church in theology and practice is consciously torpedoed to impose a personal conviction that is in open contradiction to clear biblical statements.

When reading the history of the apostolic council, it becomes clear how important the theological discussion and the final, collective decision were. No apostle or congregation simply marched ahead stubbornly to force others to accept a new understanding. This theological discourse is presented in the article as dispensable, as congregations are urged to create new realities right now. This is not the biblical way.

We have often experienced in our congregations that individuals who outwardly met all the expectations of a born-again Christian and appeared to be very Spirit-led and blessed secretly harbored serious sins.

Did the Holy Spirit approve of this and confirm the actors as sincere Christians because they appeared so spiritual and were such loving people? Many of them possessed special gifts and gained influence in the congregation. Their gifting and friendly demeanor should not obscure the fact that they have committed serious sins. These can exclude them from heaven if they do not sincerely repent and change their lives. Did the Holy Spirit approve of other sexual sins because the individuals practicing them were successful and blessed? Should the congregation have accepted their actions instead of condemning them? Certainly not! Why should we view the issue of homosexuality any differently? That would be inconsistent.

Even if individuals perform great miracles, that is no proof that God approves of their way of life. Jesus is very clear when He says in Matthew 7:21-23: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness!'" Literally, it says there: "you who do lawlessness." Jesus emphasizes the standard for Christian living, which we find from the beginning to the end of the Bible. It is an unchanging, eternal principle: Whoever is a child of God also keeps His commandments (1 John 5:2-3). This includes, of course, the commandments regarding sexual relationships, as we find them in Leviticus 18 and 20.

As Adventists, we apply Revelation 12:17 to ourselves. We believe that we are the remnant church that keeps ALL the commandments of God. Therefore, especially we must set a good example on this issue and uphold the sexual laws that God has given to His people. External signs, whether it be a friendly demeanor, successful work, special gifts, or even miracles, are not the measure of whether God approves of a person's way of life. False prophets performing great miracles are predicted to be the greatest deception of the end times, as seen in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 and Revelation 13:13.

Therefore, the bitter conclusion remains that the author abuses a process of the early apostolic church led by the Holy Spirit based on biblical foundations. He legitimizes open rebellion in the church as long as it comes from friendly individuals who are ideally also

missionarily successful. Theological arbitrariness and a radical departure from the Word of God as the standard of life practice are thus opened wide.