

On the Dilemma of Civil Rights

--From *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate*, by Thomas Schmidt, Ph.D., InterVarsity Press, 1995:

The key issue in the link with civil rights is the issue of choice. Is homosexuality something that you *are*, like being black or elderly or handicapped or female, or is it something you *do*, like adultery or polygamy or incest? Those who practice these latter behaviors have certainly been discriminated against, economically and otherwise, but they are not linked to the civil rights movement.

The difference in the case of homosexuality has to do with public perceptions of the *inevitability* of the behavior. On what basis do we decide what is, or is not, inevitable when it comes to sex? ...When an adult solicits sex with a minor, we don't say, "Let him be--that's just the way he is." Is the homosexual "just that way," and does this imply that we should extend the same civil rights--even affirmative action--to homosexuals that we extend to minorities and women?

Enter the nature-nurture debate;...for public tolerance dramatically increases when people are convinced that a

desire for same-sex intimacy is biologically driven. Even though most scientists dispute the accuracy or the relevance of the research to date...even though very few experts on homosexuality limit causation to biological factors...even though the homosexual community itself is divided over causation--still the mass media persistently portrays, and the public increasingly adopts, a view that homosexuals do not *do*, but *are*.

...There are at least two factors at work [here]. One is the popular myth that science deals only in absolute, objective truths...

The second factor at work in changing public opinion is the simplification of issues for mass consumption, especially in television...Few people have the patience for a thorough presentation of a complex issue, even if such a presentation is offered. Instead ... statements are measured for their value as sound bites.

Whether or not it is calculated, such reporting has a powerful, cumulative effect. It creates the impression that science is serving the cause of civil rights against... bigotry ... " ■