

APPENDIX 3

How Should the Church Respond to Sexual Identity?

Mother Teresa is quoted as saying, “Love one person at a time.” The key, the attractant to a group of people called the church, is love.

Before I became a follower of Jesus, I was invited to a rather Pentecostal church. I had never stepped foot inside such a place. The level of praise, excitement and shouting took me way out of my comfort zone toward nervousness and a desire to run. I had no idea what would happen next. It was all new to me.

As I look back at that experience, I no longer remember the oddness of the moment or the persons who grabbed me and shook my hand vigorously or the people dressed in jeans and others in three-piece suits. But what I do remember, what profoundly sticks in my memory is the love I felt. Hug after hug, all given in love. Everything took a back seat to what I was feeling deeply and had not felt in a church setting ever before.

No one judged me for not singing. No one judged me for not raising my hands and no one judged me for not saying, “Praise the Lord!” They just loved. It attracted me to the One they loved.

That is the power of love. Love draws out the beauty of another. Love accepts without judgment or condemnation. Jesus loved and paid close attention to anyone who sincerely sought Him. He loved His neighbor as Himself.

This is where the church starts and ends—love. We love because He first loved. It is also where we mess up because

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sometimes we get judgement in front of love, and no one is attracted to judgment. It's not a condemning voice that draws anyone to repentance. Jeremiah wrote, "With loving kindness I have drawn you" (Jeremiah 31:3). Romans tells us that, "God's kindness leads you toward repentance" (Romans 2:4).

When you or I claim to follow Christ, then love must be our means to a confused soul. If they do not know our love, they will not receive our message.

A welcoming community

The local church must welcome the broken. If any community in any culture could offer a safe place, it should be the church. It is our job to care for, receive, counsel and love the broken. These persons need a family, a spiritual family who accepts them for who they are and where they are, with great faith for where they can someday be.

We all need a place to belong. We all need genuine friends—a place to connect. In loving those who are broken down by life's burdens, we do not have to be professional counselors. We do need to share with them the love of the Counselor.

For years I worked with a man who was diagnosed as "paranoid schizophrenic and depressed." Very few persons knew how to relate to him and even fewer wanted to. But the Spirit of God gave me a deep compassion for this "unlovely" man. He knew who accepted him and he knew who ridiculed or belittled him. He knew who to talk to and he knew who was "safe." Everyone, even this very disturbed man, is worthy of the love of God and, therefore, worthy of our love.

The book of I John says something that relates: "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For

whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister” (I John 4:20, 21).

One evening our local news revealed that a man in my wife’s home church shot and killed his wife, his daughter and then himself. I laid in bed that night telling my wife that a man who commits double homicide and then suicide has just entered hell. He was an elder in his church and a well-known believer in Christ. I will never forget the words I heard in my spirit just as I made that statement. “How do you know where he is? How do you know his state of mind? And how do you know his heart?” I was stunned. The obvious answer was that I did not know.

Regardless of the struggle in people’s lives, we do not know their hearts. I have counseled plenty of persons who lived with life-controlling sins and at the same time claimed Jesus to be their personal Savior. God knows their heart.

The senior pastor of a Foursquare church in Los Angeles, CA, Nancy Eskijian, said concerning those who attend her church, “So how do we approach gay people inside or outside the church – or transsexual or transgendered people, for that matter? We demonstrate God’s love in practical ways and with genuine interest, just as Christ did. We approach them with compassion, healing, and truth in the doses they can receive, just as Christ did. We move toward them as we are led by the Holy Spirit, just as Christ did.”¹

No compromise with God’s Word

At the same time, we do not compromise the Word of God. If someone is living life in error and not obeying the Word, we fully love them but do not place them in leadership in the local church. We dare not compromise the Scriptures

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for the sake of acceptance. We are not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation for all. (Romans 1:16)

I will be forever thankful for leaders in my life who confronted my sin scripturally and in a healthy way. I will forever be thankful that my heavenly Father is a Father who disciplines and will not compromise His Word. In the book of James, we have a promise that connects to exactly what we are talking about. James reminds us to confess our sin to one another and to pray for one another. James promises that prayer, the prayer of a righteous person, is powerful. He then writes, "My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

What an amazing promise. When we walk in humility and take a mature position, longing for the one in error to leave their error, we can, "save them from death and cover over a multitude of sin." That is the church in prayerful, loving action.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.... Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.... Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.... Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited (Romans 12:9, 10, 13, 16).

ENDNOTE

1. Nancy Eskijian, "The Truth about Our Gay Dilemma," *Charisma*, February 2013, <https://www.charismamag.com/life/culture/16574-the-truth-about-our-gay-dilemma>.