

Matthews: Homosexuals want same love and respect others seek

Contributed by Lenny Matthews
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After the passage of Proposition 8, I was both angry and hurt. I attempted to understand just who it was that voted for this proposition, and why they did. My conclusion, a variety of individuals voted yes for various reasons. Not targeting groups of individuals in a negative way is what and where I want to be. I do know that most of the money from Yes on 8 (sources available through our Secretary of State) came from conservative Christians with confused religious leaders directing their flock in a vote that should be governed by our Constitution and Bill of Rights.

I have heard over the years many quotes from religious leaders condemning homosexual lifestyle based on biblical beliefs and teachings. I don't believe many Christians know the depth of hurt, harm, destruction and death throughout the years created by their actions. I would like to end religious-based oppression directed today at homosexuals. I do know that this will be a long journey, as historically it always has.

Now is my time to heal, do my own homework on this subject that has brought us, once again, to a place of misunderstanding. I have no idea just how the love between two people can ever be an abomination as currently described by conservative Christians. I see this as simple and pure religious bigotry with a touch of arrogance attached. I also know for many, change comes very slow. Change for many never comes, with others it passes slowly, and still others find rapid transformation.

I believe that many people, including myself, have not carefully researched the biblical texts, those that often are used to condemn God's lesbian, gay and transgender children. As it appears, most people who misuse the Bible don't research the Scriptures. Individuals holding strong simply find a text that seems to support their prejudice and then spend the rest of their lives misquoting that text.

Rev Dr. Mel White says, "Even if we believe the scriptures are 'infallible' it's terribly wrong and dangerous to think that our understanding of every biblical text is without error. For example, many Christians do not know that Jesus says nothing about same-sex behavior. Also the Jewish prophets are silent about homosexuality. Only six or seven of the Bible's one million verses refer to same-sex behavior in any way, and none of these verses refer to homosexual orientation as it's understood today."

"Historically, people's misinterpretation of the Bible has left a trail of suffering, bloodshed and death," White says. "Over the centuries people have misused the Bible to defend bloody crusades, tragic inquisitions, support slavery, apartheid and segregation, persecute Jews and non-Christian people of faith, interracial marriage, the execution of women as witches and the support of the Ku Klux Klan."

Just to name a few!

"The Bible is a book about God, and we must be open to new truth from scripture," according to White. "The Bible sites hundreds of passages that today would be non-applicable."

Just to name a few …

Deuteronomy 22:13-21 "If it is discovered that a bride is not a virgin, the Bible demands that she be executed by stoning immediately."

Mark 10:1-12 "Divorce is strictly forbidden in both Testaments, as is remarriage of anyone who has been divorced."

Leviticus 18:19 "The Bible forbids a married couple from having intercourse during a woman's period. If they disobey, both are to be executed."

Mark 12:18-27 "If a man dies childless, his widow is ordered by biblical law to have intercourse with each of his brothers in turn until she bears her deceased husband a male heir."

I suspect that people today do not agree with these teachings from the Bible about sex! As we know, women were property. Bible verses should not be held onto for all time but change with our growth and knowledge.

I suspect that we miss what a lot of this book is saying! Instead we spend much of our time debating sex and homosexuality.

So let's start at the beginning with Genesis. This is a creation story about the power of God who created all. Because the text says it is "natural" that a man and a woman come together to create new life, some people then conclude that a gay or lesbian couple are "unnatural." This book is silent about all relationships that do not produce children!

One of the passages often used by Christians to justify their condemnation for homosexuals and homosexual lifestyles comes from Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Leviticus is a holiness code written 3,000 years ago. This code contains many outdated sexual laws that are accepted practice today. It also talks about eating pork or shellfish, getting your fortune told, playing with the skin of a pig, wearing garments of mixed fabric.

The verse quoted on a continuum by conservative Christians says, "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female. It is an abomination." The next verse, two chapters later, says, "A man who sleeps with another man is an abomination and should be executed."

"Abominations in Hebrew are behaviors that people of certain time and place consider tasteless or offensive," explained White. "To the Jews an abomination was not law it was a common behavior by non-Jews that Jews thought was displeasing to God. But looking deeper at the old holiness codes what does the text say about God? People of faith must be very careful not to allow their own prejudices determine what standards hold true for today. Instead of pulling one item from an ancient Jewish holiness code and using it to condemn sexual or gender minorities, standards should be set in society that please God. Standards based on loving relationships both

heterosexual and homosexual, looking for the wholeness of ourselves and others.”

“Holiness codes have been a part of the human culture, changing with the times throughout our history. Both Jesus and Paul said the holiness code of Leviticus does not pertain to Christian believers,” said White.

Nonetheless, there are still people who pull the two verses about men sleeping together from this ancient holiness code and conclude that the Bible condemns homosexuality, and as with Leviticus 20:13 they should then be executed!

OK, on to Sodom, Genesis 19:1-14. Jesus and five Old Testament prophets spoke of the sins that led to the destruction of Sodom. And you know what? Not one of them even mentions homosexuality. Just what does that say about homosexuality today? Nothing.

It was common practice for soldiers, thieves and bullies to rape a fallen enemy, thus asserting their victory. This act was about power and revenge, not about homosexuality or homosexual orientation. And guess what – this behavior is still happening today! The sexual act that occurs in the story of Sodom is a gang rape. That is why the story of Sodom says a lot about God’s will for us. It says nothing about homosexuality as we understand it today.

Now, what about Romans 1:26-27? In this the Apostle Paul describes non-Jewish women who exchange “natural use for unnatural use” and the non-Jewish men who “leave the natural use of women, working shame with each other.”

But let's go back 2,000 years when it was written. Paul was writing this letter to Rome after his missionary visit to the Mediterranean. What he saw was wild sex orgies with Goddesses of sex and passion instead of the one true God the apostle honors. The Bible is clear that sexuality is a gift from God to be honored and celebrated. The Bible is also clear that when that passion gets out of control we are in deep trouble. Were these homosexuals? No! These were people who abandoned God and sank into sexual depravity. That is not our lesbian and gay population of today! Getting to know a lesbian or gay man might help you to realize that is unjust to equate the love they have for each other today with the wild sex parties described in these biblical passages.

Now onto 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. Both are intense and still debated today. What do these texts say about homosexuality? Nothing. They are about using children for sex! However with the confusion of the text and conversion from Greek and Hebrew, in 1958 for the first time in history a person translating that mysterious Greek word into English decided it meant homosexuals, even though there is no such word in Greek or Hebrew. But that translator made a decision for all of us to put that word homosexual in the English-language Bible for the very first time. Same time frame that, guess who, the Knights of Columbus put forth the beginning of legislative change for our Pledge of Allegiance, adding “one nation under God.”

Biblical authors are silent about homosexuality as we know it today. They never even comment on the responsible love a gay man or lesbian feel for another. The Bible is completely silent on the issue of sexual orientation. And no wonder. Sexual orientation wasn’t even known about until the 19th century. It remained “in the closet.”

In 1864, almost 3,000 years after Moses, German social scientist Karl Heinrich Ulrich was the first to declare that homosexuality was a distinct class of individuals. He concluded what we know as homosexuals today, we aren’t just heterosexuals choosing to perform same sex behaviors! We are a class of people whose same sex intimacy is at the very core of our beings from the very beginning of our lives.

The authors of the Bible are authorities in matters of faith. Many believe they can be trusted when they speak about God. But it should be quite obvious to anyone that they knew nothing about sexual orientation any more than they know about our universe, space travel, gravity, etc. etc. Paul thought that the earth was flat with the sun moving up and down!

So what is the greatest commandment? “To love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” Second, “To love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

There is a growing body of evidence from science, psychology, history, psychiatry, medicine and personal experience that leads to a clear verdict. Homosexuality is neither a sickness nor a sin. Unfortunately, the church has always been slow, if not the last institution on earth, to accept a new truth.

Just look at the history of the church and change. In 1632 scientist Galileo supported Copernicus from the 15th century that the earth revolved around the sun. He was then placed, by the church, under house arrest for the remainder of his life! Of course 359 years later Pope John Paul II finally admitted the church had been wrong to interpret the Bible literally and apologized!

Just imagine the changes and the end to both death, torture and suffering homosexuals continue to experience today if conservative Christians just said, “We don’t understand your views about homosexuality but we love you and trust you for you also believe in God and seek God’s will in your lives ... you are welcome here.”

This has been a hard road for me to take. I come from a place of wanting clear separation of church and state, and would like to leave it at that. As it appears, from the last vote on Proposition 8, I am in the minority.

I leave you now asking these questions: Can we support full civil rights for all, even if we disagree? Can we love and respect each other, knowing we are all God's children? That is all I and other homosexuals are asking for.

Lenny Matthews lives in Lucerne.

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