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GAY RIGHTS AND THE CHALLENGE OF REPRESENTING CHRIST IN A PC WORLD

by Elliot Miller

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I'm sorry to break the news; but then again, you've probably already figured this out: remaining true to Jesus Christ in our contemporary post-Christian culture will only become more challenging in the coming years. There are many reasons for this, but one of the strongest is that the rapid cultural change initiated by the gay rights movement is undoubtedly not finished yet.

The crux of the problem lies here: *an obedient servant-disciple of Jesus Christ cannot pick and choose which parts of Scripture he or she will believe and obey.* Despite the best efforts of pro-gay theologians, good biblical hermeneutics (interpretive methods) lead to only one conclusion: homosexual practice is contrary to God's will and purposes for humanity (e.g., Lev. 20:13; Rom. 1:26–27; 1 Cor. 6:9–10¹). This doctrine, however, runs counter to the one value that today's postmodern, morally relativistic, "politically correct" (PC) culture treats as if it were universal and absolute: *tolerance.*

There is little evidence that evangelicals wish to see sodomy laws reinstated (i.e., forbidding consensual adult homosexual relations). This suggests evangelicals today *are indeed tolerant*, according to the standard dictionary definition of the term. But according to the PC version of tolerance, one must also affirm that homosexual practice is healthy, natural, and God-ordained. This means, for example, that parents who aspire to be PC but can't help hoping that their child will be heterosexual will refrain from expressing that sentiment publicly (which leads to absurdities, captured on the comedy *Seinfeld* by the repeated clarification, "Not that there's anything wrong with that!"). No one should expect conscientious Christians to follow this standard.

This is not to deny that some evangelicals embrace stereotypes, overgeneralizations, unfounded incriminations, and otherwise unloving attitudes toward homosexuals. These need to be repented of, but the antidote to bigotry and homophobia is not to throw all judgment to the wind. Denial of the obvious is not open-mindedness; it is empty-mindedness. Yet this is the mindset many Westerners are cultivating with abandon, and policies shaped by it are taking effect in government, public education, the military, and virtually every other social institution.

The strategy of the gay rights movement since its inception in the 1980s (in contrast to the gay liberation movement that preceded it) has been to use the civil rights movement of the mid twentieth century as its model.² The civil rights movement led to sweeping social changes for racial minorities, and gays have deliberately framed their arguments in the same civil rights terms.³ In a rush to display tolerance and open-mindedness, much of America has uncritically accepted the analogy,⁴ enabling the gay rights movement to achieve its goals even faster than did the civil rights movement.⁵

This is demonstrated by the rapid transformation of public opinion on legalizing same-sex marriage over fifteen years of Gallup polling⁶ (from 27 percent in favor in 1996 to 43 percent in 2004 to 53 percent in 2011), its enactment into law by one state after another (from no states in 2003 to six states today, with two more on the way, and four more recognizing same-sex marriages performed in other states), and its recent (May 9, 2012) endorsement by President Obama.

As Jay Richards explains in this issue's feature on the subject (p. 38), marriage is the foundational institution in society. The readiness of so many Americans to redefine this time-honored, pivotal institution to satisfy the demands of a particular people group is therefore disturbing. But even nation-wide legalization of same-sex marriage, should it be achieved, likely will not satisfy the social aspirations of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community to be accepted as normal, and to have all the opportunities and freedoms that heterosexuals have. And our PC culture likely will find a way to accommodate some or all of those desires and demands.

Of course, homosexuals are not one monolithic group. Many are acutely aware that their sexuality is not "normal." They respect other people's right to disapprove of it and to not have it thrust into their daily lives. But other gays seemingly will not be satisfied until (1) gay public displays of affection (PDA) are tolerated just as much as similar heterosexual behaviors are;⁷ (2) their same-sex marriages are recognized not only by the state but by all of society, including the church and especially including their families and friends; and (3) any speech against homosexuality is treated as hate speech⁸ and any discrimination against people because of homosexual practices is treated as a civil rights violation.

The more the social aspirations of the LGBT community are realized, the more they will impact the lives of those who remain committed to traditional values. (1) No moral person who believes homosexuality is essentially deviant wants to be subjected to public displays of it, let alone to have his or her children view such behavior.⁹ (2) If, for conscience's sake, a Christian refuses to attend a relative's same-sex wedding, or to congratulate the couple on their marriage, he or she should be prepared to meet with disappointment and displeasure not only from the gay family member but also from heterosexual family members, including perhaps Christian relatives who are going with the cultural flow. (I have observed this in my own family!) (3) Worse still, if legislation and judicial rulings increasingly reflect the view that discrimination against homosexuality is a civil rights infringement (as it has already been treated not only in some other Western countries but also in some U.S. courts¹⁰), a minister who refuses to officiate a same-sex marriage, a Christian family that refuses to rent their garage

apartment to a homosexual couple, and a Christian ministry that refuses to hire a practicing homosexual could all eventually face the same sanctions that people who currently refuse these services and opportunities to racial minorities rightly face.

The challenge facing Christians is not merely to resist these social changes, to adjust to those they can't reverse, and to be prepared for discrimination and possible persecution because of their beliefs. The greater challenge—one I fear we will fail based on how we are currently responding to it—is not to lose perspective as to where the true battle lies. If all of the scenarios discussed in this article for the advancement of gay rights at the expense of religious rights come true, and America irreversibly becomes a godless nation, Christians will have not lost the war. If, on the other hand, Christians succeed at reversing all objectionable legislation, court rulings, and executive branch policies, but, in doing so, treat those to their political, cultural, and religious left as enemies, then, while they may have won some skirmishes in the culture wars, they will have suffered a major defeat in the war to which they are truly called.

The Christian's calling to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) has always been challenging, and it is all the more difficult to remain loving when your once-great country is declining before your eyes, and the people leading the charge toward moral oblivion greet any effort to turn the country back on track with charges of intolerance and repression. But Christians first and foremost are citizens of the kingdom of Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:20), and Christ's kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). We are indeed called to battle, but our warfare is against spiritual powers, not against flesh and blood (Eph. 6:10–13). To our fellow humans we are rather called to be peace ambassadors—agents of reconciliation between God and lost humanity (2 Cor. 5:19–20). *If lost people believe we consider them the enemy, then we've already lost the battle.*

This means that in the struggle to preserve and restore the moral foundations of Western culture, we must never lose sight of eternity. We must never allow our opponents in the culture wars to provoke us to anger and retaliation, but rather to prayer and blessing (1 Cor. 13:4–5; Rom. 14:14, 17–21). If we find ourselves returning evil for evil or condemnation for condemnation, it's clearly time for us to take leave of the battle and return to the spiritual boot camp of our local church for a time of spiritual restoration and reorientation.

We are representatives of Jesus Christ to both heterosexuals and homosexuals, as well as to bisexuals and transgendered people. While human sin and guilt are presupposed in everything we say, not least about ourselves, people need to know that Jesus came into this world to save them from those things, not to condemn them. We bring good news, not bad; a message of hope and not of despair; and this remains true whether traditionalists win the culture or lose it. —*Elliot Miller*

NOTES

- 1 For a full biblical treatment of homosexuality see Joseph P. Gudel, "'That Which Is Unnatural': Homosexuality in Society, the Church, and Scripture," *Christian Research Journal* 15, 3 (Winter 1993): 8–15 (accessible under the title

- "The Bible and Homosexuality" at <http://www.equip.org/articles/the-bible-and-homosexuality/>).
- 2 As Jeanne Cordova, a leading catalyst for both the gay liberation and gay rights movements wrote, "Strategically choosing the concept of civil rights, rather than revolutionary assault was a more pragmatic and sexier way to sell our movement to heteronormative society." (Ruth Spencer, "Gay Rights: Five Activists Reflect on the History of the Movement in the US," *The Guardian*, May 8, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/may/08/gay-rights-activists-history-movement>.)
 - 3 See Joe Dallas, "Speaking of Homosexuality: A Christian Response to the Arguments of the Gay Rights Movement," *Christian Research Journal* 29, 6 (2006): 12–21.
 - 4 For a rebuttal, see *ibid*.
 - 5 See, e.g., Mark Z. Barabak, "Gays May Have the Fastest of All Civil Rights Movements," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/may/20/nation/la-na-gay-rights-movement-20120521>.
 - 6 Frank Newport, "For First Time, Majority of Americans Favor Legal Gay Marriage," Gallup Politics, May 20, 2011, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/147662/first-time-majority-americans-favor-legal-gay-marriage.aspx>.
 - 7 See, e.g., "Homos, Hold Hands: Some Words in Defense of PDA," *The New Gay*, January 4, 2009, <http://thenewgay.net/2009/01/homos-hold-hands-some-words-in-defense.html>.
 - 8 Actor Kirk Cameron and politician Carl Paladino both were accused of using hate speech for expressing views similar to those found in this magazine. See Sheila Marikar, "Exclusive: Kirk Cameron Responds to Critics, 'Hate Speech,'" ABC news, March 6, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/entertainment/2012/03/exclusive-kirk-cameron-responds-to-critics-hate-speech/>, and "Carl Paladino's Hate Speech against Homosexuality," Gotcha Media, October 10, 2010, <http://www.gotchamediablog.com/2010/10/carl-paladinos-hate-speech-against.html>.
 - 9 Today's youth tend to be much less offended by such displays, however; especially those subjected to sexual education programs in the public schools. I'm told gay PDA is common at my local Jupiter, Florida, public high school—something virtually unheard of in previous generations.
 - 10 See, e.g., Dallas, "Speaking of Homosexuality," 14.