

AlbertMohler.com

Courage and Compassion on Homosexuality

The church's engagement with the culture involves a host of issues, controversies, and decisions—but no issue defines our current cultural crisis as clearly as homosexuality. Some churches and denominations have capitulated to the demands of the homosexual rights movement, and now accept homosexuality as a fully valid lifestyle. Other denominations are tottering on the brink, and without a massive conservative resistance, they are almost certain to abandon biblical truth and bless what the Bible condemns.

Monday, March 22, 2004

The church's engagement with the culture involves a host of issues, controversies, and decisions—but no issue defines our current cultural crisis as clearly as homosexuality. Some churches and denominations have capitulated to the demands of the homosexual rights movement, and now accept homosexuality as a fully valid lifestyle. Other denominations are tottering on the brink, and without a massive conservative resistance, they are almost certain to abandon biblical truth and bless what the Bible condemns.

Within a few short years, a major dividing line has become evident—with those churches endorsing homosexuality on one side, and those stubbornly resisting the cultural tide on the other.

The homosexual rights movement understands that the evangelical church is one of the last resistance movements committed to a biblical morality. Because of this, the movement has adopted a strategy of isolating Christian opposition, and forcing change by political action and cultural pressure. Can we count on evangelicals to remain steadfastly biblical on this issue?

Not hardly. Scientific surveys and informal observation reveal that we have experienced a significant loss of conviction among youth and young adults. No moral revolution can succeed without shaping and changing the minds of young people and children. Inevitably, the schools have become crucial battlegrounds for the culture war. The Christian worldview has been undermined by pervasive curricula that teach moral relativism, reduce moral commandments to personal values, and promote homosexuality as a legitimate and attractive lifestyle option.

Our churches must teach the basics of biblical morality to Christians who will otherwise never know that the Bible prescribes a model for sexual relationships. Young people must be told the truth about homosexuality—and taught to esteem marriage as God's intention for human sexual relatedness.

The times demand Christian courage. These days, courage means that preachers and Christian leaders must set an agenda for biblical confrontation, and not shrink from dealing with the full range of issues related to homosexuality. We must talk about what the Bible teaches about gender—what it means to be a man or a woman. We must talk about God's gift of sex and the covenant of marriage. And we must talk honestly about what homosexuality is, and why God has condemned this sin as an abomination in His sight.

Courage is far too rare in many Christian circles. This explains the surrender of so many denominations, seminaries, and churches to the homosexual agenda. But no surrender on this issue would have been possible, if the authority of Scripture had not already been undermined.

And yet, even as courage is required, the times call for another Christian virtue as well—compassion. The tragic fact is that every congregation is almost certain to include persons struggling with homosexual desire or even involved in homosexual acts. Outside the walls of the church, homosexuals are waiting to see if the Christian church has anything more to say, after we declare that homosexuality is a sin.

Liberal churches have redefined compassion to mean that the church changes its message to meet modern demands. They argue that to tell a homosexual he is a sinner is uncompassionate and intolerant. This is like arguing that a physician is intolerant because he tells a patient she has cancer. But, in the culture of political correctness, this argument holds a powerful attraction.

Biblical Christians know that compassion requires telling the truth, and refusing to call sin something sinless. To hide or deny the sinfulness of sin is to lie, and there is no compassion in such a deadly deception. True compassion demands speaking the truth in love—and there is the problem. Far too often, our courage is more evident than our compassion.

In far too many cases, the options seem reduced to these—liberal churches preaching love without truth, and conservative churches preaching truth without love. Evangelical Christians must ask ourselves some very hard questions, but the hardest may be this: Why is it that we have been so ineffective in reaching persons trapped in this particular pattern of sin? The Gospel is for sinners—and for homosexual sinners just as much as for heterosexual sinners. As Paul explained to the Corinthian church, “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” [1 Corinthians 5:11].

I believe that we are failing the test of compassion. If the first requirement of compassion is that we tell the truth, the second requirement must surely be that we reach out to homosexuals with the Gospel. This means that we must develop caring ministries to make that concern concrete, and learn how to help homosexuals escape the powerful bonds of that sin—even as we help others to escape their own bonds by grace.

If we are really a Gospel people; if we really love homosexuals as other sinners; then we must reach out to them with a sincerity that makes that love tangible. We have not even approached that requirement until we are ready to say to homosexuals, “We want you to know the fullness of God’s plan for you, to know the forgiveness of sins and the mercy of God, to receive the salvation that comes by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to know the healing God works in sinners saved by grace, and to join us as fellow disciples of Jesus Christ, living out our obedience and growing in grace together.”

Such were some of you . . . The church is not a place where sinners are welcomed to remain in their sin. To the contrary, it is the Body of Christ, made up of sinners transformed by grace. Not one of us deserves to be accepted within the beloved. It is all of grace, and each one of us has come out of sin. We sin if we call homosexuality something other than sin. We also sin if we act as if this sin cannot be forgiven.

We cannot settle for truth without love nor love without truth. The Gospel settles the issue once and for all. This great moral crisis is a Gospel crisis. The genuine Body of Christ will reveal itself by courageous compassion, and compassionate courage. We will see this realized only when men and women freed by God’s grace from bondage to homosexuality feel free to stand up in our churches and declare their testimony—and when we are ready to welcome them as fellow disciples. Millions of hurting people are waiting to see if we mean what we preach.

