

“Gay and lesbian Christians are no different than the rest of us”

by Jeff Falter (*The InterMountain*, 26 Feb 2005)

In the tenth grade, I discovered a hole in my soul called loneliness. Friends, family, people I had dated all filled that hole partially, but none could fill it completely. My spirit ached for companionship, for a mate with whom to share my life. I was desperately incomplete. Then God brought me Becky.

I am so grateful that God gave me Becky. She is warm, funny, compassionate, intelligent, creative, artistic, dedicated to her Lord and her family. She and I are two pieces of a single puzzle. Neither of us would be complete without the other. To paraphrase Jewel, “She was meant for me, and I was meant for her.”

Becky and I are not unique. We all have holes in our heart, holes which we long to fill. In my ministry, I have found this not only among teenagers and college students, but also among elderly widows, divorced men, single mothers, and almost everyone else I have met. Perhaps my most important discovery in the past few years of ministry is that gays and lesbians also have that same lonely space in their hearts. They are looking for nothing different in life than I am. They desire to have an emotionally intimate, lifelong relationship with someone who makes their life complete. They are looking to be the complete and fulfilled persons that God intends them to be.

To my shame, I did not always think this way. I could not accept emotionally intimate relationships between two people of the same sex because I believed that Scripture declared their sexual activity to be wrong and sinful. But a wise pastor challenged me to rethink that interpretation of Scripture. As I considered that challenge, I got to

know several gay and lesbian Christians in Elkins, people who have dreams and aspirations much as I do, people who want to find love and happiness to fill the holes in their hearts, people who desire to love and serve the Lord in all the fullness of their lives. I turned again to Scripture to seek God’s guidance.

Though the Biblical references to same-sex sexual activity are few, I found two specific texts that needed addressing. First, **Genesis 2** describes God’s purposes for creating human life: to care for creation (v 15), to live in communion with God, and to live in relationship with others (v 18). I had previously read the Adam and Eve story as a prescription of what God intended for all human life: for a man and a woman to live together as husband and wife. Yet now I see that passage somewhat differently: God indeed intends us to live in relationships with others, but in no way does this passage claim that a male-female relationship is the only permissible human relationship, or even the only permissible sexual relationship. Otherwise, Jesus was either less than fully human or a sinner.

The other text was **Romans 1.24-32**. Here, the apostle Paul claims that God gave up sinners to the lusts of their hearts and as a result some people began to have same-sex sexual experiences. In reading that passage, I had previously assumed that anyone interested in same-sex relationships was therefore someone whom God had “given up”. Yet as I reexamined this passage, I realized the error of this assumption. The passage says,

*IF God gave someone up,
THEN that person engaged in
homosexual sex (or other sinful*

behavior).

I interpreted this as,

*IF someone engaged in
homosexual sex,*

THEN God gave that person up.

Yet logic does not allow a sentence to be turned around like that. The passage claims that God gave some people up so that they became envious or gossipers or boastful or rebellious toward parents or foolish. If we were to turn that claim around so that anyone who did any of these things were declared to be someone God had given up, most churches would have to seriously purge their roles! Similarly, we cannot claim that anyone who has a same-sex sexual relationship is someone whom God has given up. In addition, many modern scholars think that Paul’s reference to “men committing shameless acts with men” referred to something quite different than the 21st century notion of a committed, monogamous, faithful, loving relationship of equals between two people of the same sex.

Two passages from Leviticus are often cited as absolute prohibitions against same-sex relationships: **Leviticus 18.22** and **20.13**. Yet it seems hypocritical to me that we are willing to make these passages binding on modern Christian relationships when we completely ignore others in the same section of Leviticus that prohibit eating pork, shaving, and arguing with your parents (e.g. 11.7-8, 19.27-28, 20.9, 21.9, 21.17-20).

The final two passages often used to condemn homosexuality are **1 Corinthians 6.9** and **1 Timothy 1.10**. These two passages list “sodomites” in what scholars call a “vice list”, that is, a list of what people in that society would

commonly consider vices and crimes. For us, such a list might include instead drug dealers, embezzlers, and corrupt CEO’s. Again, many scholars argue that the 1st century Greek word translated “sodomite” does not refer to the 21st century desire of two people of the same sex to live in a committed, monogamous, faithful, loving, lifelong relationship between equals.

Some people also interpret **Genesis 19**, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, as a passage related to homosexuality, yet this passage does not address the 21st century concept of same-sex relationships, but rather the wickedness of a community that wishes to gang-rape a resident’s guests, a detestable practice whether the guests be male or female.

In addition to these passages, I find three other Biblical passages significant: Jesus said, “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (**John 6.37**); “You will know them by their fruits” (**Matthew 7.16**); and “Whoever does the will of God is my brother or sister or mother” (**Mark 3.35**). These three passages remind me that not only those who think and act as I do are worthy to be called children of God. Instead, everyone who does the will of God is part of God’s family, someone for whom Christ died.

Finally, I recall the admonition of Gamaliel (**Acts 5.38-39**): “If this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail [on its own]; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow [it]—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!”

Because of my new understanding of Scripture, I no longer think that same-sex sexual activity is inherently sinful; my own personal prejudices shaped my earlier

interpretation. Instead, I believe that the physical intimacy of sexual activity ought to follow from the more profound emotional intimacy of loving relationships for all Christians, whether gay or straight. All Christians ought to have the freedom to fill the loneliness in their heart with love, and to celebrate the blessings and burdens of their relationships with their brothers and sisters in Christ. All Christians, gay or straight, are called by God to practice fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, open and honest communication, and holy love in their relationships, thereby helping Christians see the image of God in each other.

Gay and lesbian Christians are no different than the rest of us. They deserve full equality in the church and in society, for they are my brothers and sisters, people for whom Christ died.

*May the peace of the Lord be with
you!*

Jeff Falter, jfalter@meer.net