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LGBT People In Church: Top 5 Questions Asked By Opponents Of LGBT Inclusion

Posted: 9/24/11 08:30 AM ET

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In my 30 years as an advocate for God's love for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, I've had countless conversations with those who think differently than me about God, Scripture and the place of the LGBT faithful in the church.

Throughout these years, I've heard, read and have been asked many of the same questions -- and by a wide variety of people. Today, I share with you the five questions I most commonly hear, as well as my answers to them. I do this in the hopes that others share their responses as well and we continue to learn from each other.

Question 1: "How can you ignore the clear meaning of Scripture and all of Christian tradition that says same-sex love is a sin?"

Christian history is a flowing stream of new insight. Our understanding and interpretation of Scripture has changed over time, and continues to change, as our understanding of the world God has made for us expands.

For instance, there are single Bible verses such as, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything," ([Colossians 3:22](#)), that have been used in our history to justify acts now considered repulsive -- like slavery or forcing women to remain silent in church. As we learn, we grow, and our understanding and interpretation of Scripture changes.

We should take solace that our knowledge of God is always being reformed through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And the fountain from which new inspiration springs is the dialogue between our different interpretations of Scripture. There have always been and always will be disagreement in the church about what the Bible means. Some Christians read the Bible as saying same-sex love is a sin. Other Christians read the stories of David and Jonathan ([1 Samuel 18-2 Samuel 1](#)) and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) as affirmation of gay men and therefore a foundation for including LGBT people within God's love.

I choose to participate in the full life of Christian history, sharing the inspiration the Holy Spirit gives to me. And since Scripture teaches me that Jesus has drawn all people to Himself ([John 12:32](#)), I therefore see God's embrace of LGBT people as the clear meaning of Scripture and the present culmination of the whole arc of Christian history.

Question 2: "How can you be sure that you aren't just making stuff up to justify something that is culturally trendy?"

That I actually perceive God correctly and am doing God's will is a matter of faith. This is true for every single one of us, regardless of our interpretation of Scripture. Christians live by faith in Jesus' love, not by certainty (we need only look at the state of the world to know we live by faith in God's love).

This being said, we have good direction on how we know whether we are doing Jesus' will (culturally trendy or not). He said, "You will know them by their fruits (Matthew 7:16)." And Paul outlines the best fruit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness and self control (Galatians 5:22)." Nurturing these virtues everywhere I can assures me that I am doing God's will and not making stuff up to be culturally trendy.

Experience has taught me that God's inspiration can come from an infinite number of messengers, including both Scripture and culture. So what I give myself to, as a Christian, is to begin every day committed to love God and my neighbor and to be as attuned to the Holy Spirit as I possibly can in order to know how to do that.

Question 3: "Don't all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people violate the Biblical requirement of monogamous marriage between a man and a woman?"

In the Bible's story of creation, God declares everything good, until this moment: "Then the Lord said, 'It is not good that man should live alone; I will make him a helper as his partner (Genesis 2:18).'" There is nothing in Scripture that requires who this companion will be. In fact, the whole of Scripture (including the apostle Paul) looks upon women as the subservient property of the husband (and most of the time with full acceptance of owning multiple wives). Marriage in ancient Hebrew and Greek meant the man taking the woman as his property. This actually contrasts with our modern understanding of marriage, which is based on a commitment of love between equally mature and willing adults.

We have the testimony of many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Christians who tell us that God has bound them to a person of the same sex as their partner for life. And we have seen the marvelous fruits of the lives of these believers who contribute to their families and communities with greater power and joy because of the loving partner who is at their side.

LGBT people in loving partnerships have all the qualities that we value in marriage. These qualities are the essence of fidelity in marriage espoused by Scripture. And let us not forget Jesus' warning, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6, Mark 10:9). Again, with no stipulation as to whom God has joined.

Question 4: "How can any Christian, in good conscience, engage in or condone sexual practices that are both unnatural and dangerous?"

I see the line between safety and danger running through the lives of all people, not between straight people on one side and LGBT people on the other. All sexual activity includes inherent possibilities of danger. The best protection against these dangers is to engage in sexual activity after there is intimacy on other important levels of life -- to be assured of mutual love and consent between mature adults. This holds for all couples.

For those who shun and make outcasts of LGBT people, they create a self-fulfilling prophecy. A son or daughter will come out as LGBT in some communities and be met by an environment that is hostile. They watch as their family and church ties get severed. Their moral support structure -- that which guides the making of good moral choices -- disappears and they are left to navigate the world on their own. Some who are lucky find a community that is open and affirming and can prosper, while others do not find moral support and wind up making a series of bad decisions.

Now imagine for a moment if more people in our communities and in the church were welcoming and affirming of LGBT people. If instead of shunning and turning their backs on their child or neighbor, they could continue to encourage good, safe, moral choices that also allowed them to be who they were before God. The outcome, and our world, would be wonderfully different: safe and overall better for it.

Question 5: "How can you dismiss the way Jesus can heal people who suffer from an affliction like alcoholism or same sex attraction?"

No Christian would deny that Jesus healed those who suffered from affliction. What I dismiss is the assumption that same-sex love is an affliction. I do this because I trust the witness, in word and deed, of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Christians and of those who know their love and gifts.

Sadly, I know many LGBT people who began their understanding of themselves where tradition and religion taught them: They believe for years that they are defective, sinful and need to be healed. They beg Jesus for that healing for years. And His answer to them is that they are whole and good as they are. Period. Their souls have been tried in the refiner's fire and I trust their discernment of God's will. The goodness of their lives since accepting God's love shows they are right.

Yet, some in our society try to "heal" these children of God through reparative therapy (efforts to change LGBT people to being "straight"). They hold up a very small select few as examples of "success" and don't like to discuss the damage done to so many others. The hurt that is inflicted by those programs is an egregious assault on the souls of the LGBT people who go through them. They need to be stopped.

Yes, Jesus can heal people of their afflictions -- but if there is no affliction then there is no need of healing.

Finally, I must comment on the equation that some try to make between alcoholism and being born gay which disturbs me greatly. My mother was an alcoholic. She died well before her time from throat cancer related to drinking and smoking. Alcoholism is a terrible, deadly progressive disease that affects one's own body, mind and spirit. As the disease consumes the alcoholic's attention, it also eats away at the relationships with all who love them. For those who live openly and honestly as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, the damage to body, mind and soul comes from outside, not from within. It comes from those that shun, cast away and turn their backs on their family, friends or neighbors who have the courage to come out. Trying to equate the two demonstrates a misunderstanding of both.

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Thanks in advance to those who share their own answers to these, and to those who sincerely ask these questions and honestly comment on my answers.

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