

# A Plea for Ministerial Clarity

Almost 20 years ago on CNN, Larry King hosted a discussion with some of the nation's "most influential evangelical" leaders, spending a good portion of the show discussing gay issues. Some of the leaders answered King's questions with clarity, not ashamed of the testimony of Scripture, even if their delivery could have been more sensitive. But others left me scratching my head. "What do they actually believe?"

One of these leaders was Brian McLaren, at that time a rising star in the Emerging Church movement.

When asked directly by Larry King where he stood on the question of whether homosexual practice was sinful, he responded, "Well, Larry, I think there's so many pressing issues facing us. And I think it's tragic for the Christian and evangelical community to be known as a community who are angry about one or two issues, and proportions don't make a lot of sense to me. I think, as Franklin Graham said, we believe Jesus came to forgive our sins. We also believe that he came to help us reconcile with one another. And I think one of our great challenges is how we're going to treat one another when we don't agree on this issue. And the Christian community is struggling with how we can treat one another with love and respect even when we disagree. I hope we can make progress in that."

In other words, "Larry, I'm not going to tell you or your audience exactly where I stand."

In another context, McLaren responded to a question about same-sex relationships with this equally ambiguous line: "You know what, the thing that breaks my heart is that there's no way I can answer it without hurting someone on either side."

Unfortunately, with this kind of obfuscation, one thing is guaranteed: You will definitely hurt people on one side, if not both sides. And you will definitely dishonor the Lord.

Pastors and leaders, your people need guidance and help. What do the Scriptures teach? What is the will of God in these difficult matters? How should we respond and how should we live? To fail to give wise, Word-based guidance is to be a spiritually negligent shepherd. Did Jesus leave us any doubt about where He stood on the essential issues?

Time Magazine, which in 2005 listed McLaren as one of America's 25 most influential evangelicals, singled out the very statement just quoted, commenting, "You might call his a kinder and gentler brand of religion."

By all means let us be kind and gentle and gracious in our demeanor and presentation, but not at the expense of telling the truth. How the world loves Christian compromise!

In light of this, I wasn't the least bit surprised when, about 10 years later, it was announced that McLaren had presided over his son's same-sex "wedding" ceremony.

But of course. His ambiguity only shrouded his growing uncertainty on the issue, if not his outright capitulation.

Recently, while dialoguing privately with a Christian leader, I pressed him for a clear statement on this same issue, asking a simple question that every Bible-believer, let alone gospel minister, should be able to answer without any effort at all. "Is homosexual practice always sinful in God's sight, no matter how loving the relationships?"

There was nothing tricky in my question, and it was certainly not a trap. To the contrary, it was one of the most important and basic questions that could be asked today.

Yet with all my pressing, seeking clarity from every possible

angle, he refused to answer. (For the record, we consider each other to be friends, so I was not being viewed as some heresy hunting critic.)

The only direct response I got was this: "There are times when ministry preempts clarity." And this from a Christian leader! What an outrageous and inexcusable dodging of this life and death question.

To be sure, I understand there are many issues which require extreme sensitivity. We are walking through spiritual and emotional minefields, and we must weigh our words carefully. This is part of our gospel calling, and we must exercise sensitivity, wisdom, and compassion, all grounded in biblical truth.

But that does not mean that we are intentionally ambiguous. That does not mean that we refuse to clarify our positions. That does not mean that we leave people wondering what we actually believe.

A grieved couple wrote to our ministry this week, saying they just left their church home of many years, frustrated that their pastoral leaders would not clarify their views on same-sex relationships. This was of particular concern to them because their 15-year-old son was still serving in the youth ministry.

Worse still, they actually felt that the real views of the pastors were being hidden from the flock.

What kind of responsible shepherds would do such a thing? And for what purpose? Is it to avoid the offense of the cross? Is it to avoid taking a clear stand out of fear of alienating people? Whatever the reason, it is not a valid one.

My own ministry is flooded with broken-hearted requests for help from families and individuals devastated by LGBTQ situations.

- What do I say to my 16-year-old daughter who suddenly thinks she's a boy?
- How do I respond to my husband of 20 years when he tells me he is really gay and wants a divorce?
- What do I tell my first-grade son who asks me the meaning of genderqueer (which he just learned about in school)?
- What should I do when the hospital where I work requires me to fill out admission forms based on the patient's perceived gender even if I know it is contrary to biology (and could therefore hinder a proper diagnosis or treatment)?
- How do I help my adult grandson who says that he will kill himself if he can't get sex-change surgery?
- My seminary professor says that the Bible does not forbid loving same-sex relationships, and now I'm confused. What does God's Word actually say?

This is the tiniest tip of the very top of a massive iceberg, but it gives a small sampling of what Americans (and others) are struggling with today. Kids in particular are being bombarded with all kinds of LGBTQ indoctrination that shouts at them in the loudest and clearest possible terms. And some in the body of Christ itself are becoming deeply confused because of this constant bombardment.

Yet so many of our pulpits still remain silent or, even more dangerously, intentionally unclear.

Believers are crying out for help, and some leaders respond, "You know, help is an interesting word. What helps one person hurts another."

Pastors, this is not what they need to hear.

This is about people, not just issues, about people for whom Jesus died. And when God has entrusted us with leadership positions in the body, it is imperative that we speak with

clarity.

As Paul said in another context, “Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?” (1 Cor. 14:7–8)

So I ask my fellow-leaders today: Will you play a clear tune for us? Will you sound a clear note? Will you give us a black and white answer? Both the church and the world need clarity and guidance. If we do not offer it, who will?

The so-called progressive voices and revisionist voices and modernist voices and “woke” and “enlightened” voices and compromised voices are not holding back or camouflaging their views. They are shouting out their answers in the clearest possible terms, quite proudly at that, while we hide safely in the closet of ambiguity.

 May God help us to stand! Grace that is not mixed with truth cannot save any more than truth that is not mixed with grace.

As leaders in the body, then, let us speak and act with grace and truth, with compassion and clarity, remembering that one day we will stand before God and give account.

Let there not be blood on our hands. Let it not be said that when the Lord called us to raise our voices like a trumpet, we chose to sing a lullaby instead. {eo}

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