

A Response to Exodus: Don't Apologize for the Truth

Two weeks ago at a church in Pennsylvania, a young man came to me seeking prayer. I'll call him Enrique. He needed to make an honest confession. He admitted to me he had been experimenting with gay sex with two different guys.

The Holy Spirit had convicted Enrique that his behavior was wrong. His eyes were moist with tears as he bared his soul. He said he didn't want to live in a homosexual lifestyle. He wanted help. I could have offered my new friend three very different responses:

1. Harsh judgment. I could have stepped back, scowled with disgust ("You did what? That's sick!") and told Enrique homosexuals go to hell—leaving him feeling condemned and without hope.

2. Lenient sympathy. I could have told Enrique not to feel guilty. I could have affirmed his behavior by saying, "Lots of people have same-sex attraction. Some are born that way. If you are attracted to men, just explore your sexuality. God loves you just the way you are."

3. Loving counsel. I could have put my arm around Enrique, led him in a prayer of repentance and reminded him that Jesus can help him overcome sinful urges through the power of the Holy Spirit. I also could have reminded him that gay sex is unhealthy, and I could have encouraged him to join a compassionate support group.

If you know me at all, you know I chose response No. 3. And I'm not apologizing for that.

Last week, the blogosphere was ablaze with comments about Exodus International, the Christian ex-gay ministry that has

offered prayer support to people who struggle with unwanted same-sex attraction. The ministry was in the news because Alan Chambers, the organization's president, changed his approach to homosexuality and issued a dramatic apology to the LGBT community. His decision led him to close Exodus.

Chambers believes Christians have been too hateful—and I would agree with him on that point. Response No. 1 should never be our reaction. We have no business calling people “queers” or “fags”; we shouldn't treat gay people like lepers; and we shouldn't put homosexuality at the top of our sin list when Christians are guilty of adultery, greed, racism, domestic violence, easy divorce and child abuse. Our hypocrisy has become notorious.

Chambers told the *Orlando Sentinel*, “Most people know the church because of what we're against, and I want to be known because of what we're for.” I can agree with Alan that our religious negativity is a turnoff. But I can't follow the reasoning that suggests we throw out 2,000 years of Christian tradition in order to correct our judgmentalism.

It makes absolutely no sense to tell a person who wants freedom from homosexuality that prayer can't help them. What about the person who struggles with drug addiction? Do we just give them syringes? What about a woman who is having sex with five men? Do we tell her God made her this way and that she should just keep a big supply of condoms and live with her fornication problem?

Exodus was ridiculed by some people in the gay community because its leaders believed Christians can “cure” homosexuality through spiritual therapy. They even chided the ex-gay movement for trying to “pray the gay away.” Some LGBT critics claimed the number of people who actually felt “cured” of homosexual feelings after receiving help from Exodus was dismally low. And Chambers himself has admitted that he still feels some level of sexual attraction to men even though he is

happily married to his wife, Leslie.

But a Christian view of homosexuality is not based on one man's experience, and God certainly never promised that conversion would end temptation. The Bible actually compares the Christian life to an ongoing battle between flesh and spirit, and it invites us to discover supernatural victory by focusing on Christ and relying on His indwelling power to help us fight our sinful tendencies.

I know many Christian men and women who struggle with various levels of homosexual temptation. Some are in happy heterosexual marriages and have found the grace to resist sinful urges. Others lived in gay relationships until they repented and broke free—and now they are celibate. Their goal is not so much to be “cured” of their feelings or to be transformed overnight into heterosexuals. Their desire is to honor God by abstaining from sexual sin.

The apostle Paul said he asked God three times to remove a “thorn” from his flesh. We don't know what that thorn was—it could have been a physical ailment, an emotional burden or even a sexual flaw. We don't need to know Paul's specific weakness. The answer God gave Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9 applies to anyone's struggle: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (NASB).

That power is still available today. God's grace is as amazing as ever. Even though Exodus has closed its doors, God still offers His forgiveness and healing to anyone who wants to overcome sexual brokenness.

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