

Are We Putting Impossible Burdens on Gays and Lesbians?

Jesus once said of some Pharisees, “They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger” (Matt. 23:4). Is that what we are doing to gay and lesbian seekers when we tell them that if they want to follow Jesus, they must either change or remain celibate?

Books have been written by professing gay Christians calling conservative believers “Pharisees” (in the worst sense of the word), and just this past weekend, on social media, a gay man called me a Pharisee for holding to biblical holiness and morality.

Is there any truth to these charges?

From a scriptural standpoint, I can honestly say that I have not yet encountered a single powerful, Bible-based argument supporting committed homosexual relationships. Not one—and I have amassed a significant collection of books by gay theologians and their straight allies and have interacted whenever possible.

But while I find the scriptural arguments to be contrived, erroneous and terribly weak, I find the emotional arguments much more powerful.

In the first chapter of my book *Can You Be Gay and Christian?*, I quoted a number of professing gay Christians and their supporters, seeking to sensitize other believers to the unique struggles experienced by those who identify as gay and lesbian.

Straight ally John Shore put things bluntly, telling conservative Christians, “What you are truly and actually

saying is that you want [gays and lesbians] to condemn themselves to a life devoid of the kind of enduring, romantic, partner-to-partner love that all people, Christians included, understand as just about the best part of being alive.”

Gay Jewish academic Jay Michaelson quoted gay New Testament scholar Dale Martin, who wrote that “any interpretation of Scripture that hurts people, oppresses people or destroys people cannot be the right interpretation, no matter how traditional, historical or exegetically respectable.”

Michaelson then stated that “to be responsible members of a faith tradition, we must first open our hearts, allow them to be broken by the heartrending stories of gays who have suffered from exclusion, plague and self-loathing, and uplifted by inspiring stories of integration, love and celebration. ... Any pretense of theological disposition that does not include in its procedure a long period of listening is morally bankrupt and borders on the blasphemous.”

How do we respond to arguments like this?

More specifically, how do we respond to *people*—to sincere gays and lesbians who are in committed relationships when they come to our congregations, or to young singles who say they really want to serve God but don’t feel they have the gift of celibacy?

Although I see no possible scriptural support for committed homosexual relationships, I have agonized over these situations before the Lord and have asked Him to give me a broken heart of compassion for those who identify as gay and lesbian and want to follow Jesus, and years ago, He answered that prayer very deeply.

All of that to say that I do not write these things lightly.

So please take this to the Lord, especially if you believe you can follow Jesus and engage in committed homosexual

relationships.

First, we must remember that no one is more loving than our Lord and that no one is more compassionate than our Savior, and since He plainly lays out in both the Old and New Testaments that homosexual relationships are in all circumstances forbidden, we must trust Him explicitly and declare that His ways are best.

Second, we must listen to the testimonies of those who came out of homosexuality, including both those who are celibate and those who are in blessed heterosexual relationships. When they urge us to hear their stories, to believe them about the wrongness of homosexual relationships and about the dealings of God in their own life to turn away from the flesh, we need to listen carefully. They bring a crucially important perspective.

Third, in contrast with the religious leaders whom Jesus rebuked, we must get actively involved in the lives of gays and lesbians who want to serve God, carrying their burdens with them, helping them through struggles, praying with them, crying with them, standing with them, and helping them to take hold of the grace and goodness of God.

Fourth, as painful as this is to acknowledge, there are times when a committed relationship must be broken up in order to honor the Lord. (This happened in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah; see Ezra 9-10.) If we love Him, we must obey Him (John 14:15).

You might say, "That's easy for you to say. You're heterosexual and you have no idea what it's like to be gay."

I agree, which is why I quoted Pastor Sam Alberry in *Can You Be Gay and Christian?*

Pastor Alberry is same-sex attracted but says no to those desires and is living a holy life before God.

He writes, "I am to deny myself, take up my cross and follow Him. Every Christian is called to costly sacrifice. Denying yourself does not mean tweaking your behavior here and there. It is saying no to your deepest sense of who you are, for the sake of Christ. To take up a cross is to declare your life (as you have known it) forfeit. It is laying down your life for the very reason that your life, it turns out, is not yours at all. It belongs to Jesus. He made it. And through His death He has bought it."

When asked, "But isn't it much harder for you?," he states "[the] fact is that the gospel demands everything of all of us. If someone thinks the gospel has somehow slotted into their life quite easily, without causing any major adjustments to their lifestyle or aspirations, it is likely that they have not really started following Jesus at all.

"And just as the cost is the same for all of us, so too are the blessings."

Yes, Jesus really is enough, and He will either transform the romantic desires of gays and lesbians or He will fill their lives to the full with His presence and goodness.

And when we point people to Him and then help them follow Him, we are doing the opposite of what the religious hypocrites did.

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