

Can We Build Bridges With People Whose Views We Oppose?

A few years ago, I spoke at Harvard University with nine other speakers. We were surprised when the gay community opposed the very idea that a Christian group would be on campus.

They concluded that we would be like every Christian group they had experienced. They thought we would use our time to bash gays and their agenda. Our conference was on the theme of community transformation.

They met with the dean of the school and did all they could to shut down the conference. They spread lies about the speakers, and I was personally targeted. They tried to tie me to some Uganda anti-gay legislation just because I been there and knew someone who had been caught up with the controversy. It was guilt by association.

The day came for the conference, and they had about 60 protestors in front of our event. Early in the process, our intercessors told us they believed we were not to fight the smear campaign but let the Lord protect us.

The conference went on as planned, and it was a good event. Not one word was ever spoken against the gay community. At the conclusion of the event, many of the organizers of the protests were in our refreshment area. A few of us invited them in to talk with us. We had a Harvard professor join us.

We let them tell us what was on their mind and why they so opposed us. We listened, and then I responded to the man who spread the lies about me by asking, "Are you aware that everything you spread about me on the Internet was a lie?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

I told him I was not involved with that Uganda legislation nor would I support it.

“Really?” he asked.

“Yes, I would never support such legislation,” I said.

We talked about it, and he concluded he had wrongfully judged me. He offered to publish a retraction in the Harvard paper, to which I said, “That would be nice.”

The Harvard professor turned to the protest organizers and said, “Gentlemen, I have just attended this conference, and there was nothing said about you. There was nothing said in the entire conference that we would not find acceptable on the campus of Harvard. You have wrongfully judged this group.”

The meeting ended with us shaking hands. We did not agree on our respective worldviews or political views, but we did gain one thing from our sitting down together: We respected each other as human beings who had a right to hold personal views without being maligned and persecuted for them.

Bridge-building requires us to support the individual even though we cannot support their agenda. It requires listening and building relationship.

That appears to me to be how Jesus did it. That’s good enough for me.

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