

# The Truth About Our Gay Dilemma

**How Christians can be compassionate and biblical amid today's fierce same-sex battles**

When Adrian and Maria—both women—walked into our church one Wednesday afternoon, Adrian was covered with chains, tattoos and spiked hair. We soon learned they were a lesbian couple, raising Maria's children.

Sammy was dressed like a man when he came to our church. He had spent many years on the streets as a transgender and male prostitute.

April, whose given name was Alex, came to the church as a transsexual—he dressed as a female, had breasts and had undergone other surgical changes to his body.

Others who simply identify as gay come to our church too. We find these individuals were usually raised in the church and want to come home to it, but they want to enter into that home without judgment or condemnation—just like the rest of us.

Most of us inside the walls of the church, when challenged to present the love and truth of God to the Adrians, Marias, Sammys and Aprils in our lives, want to do it accurately and effectively. But we face serious opposition at times. The church has a reputation for being closed to the gay community. Churches like Westboro Baptist in Topeka, Kan., only strengthen that reputation, as they picket funerals and stand on street corners waving their banners that exult, "God hates fags."

What are we to make of these same-sex culture clashes? What ought to be our response? Is it possible to love our neighbors who are gay while upholding the truth of Scripture?

I would propose the answer is yes. Here's how.

## **Enter Hearts Through Love**

As early as the Garden of Eden, the Scriptures define gender as male and female, both reflecting the image of God. The Word also clearly establishes that marriage is to be between a man and a woman, which Ephesians 5 explains is a holy reflection of Christ and His church. The Bible makes clear that sexual relations outside of marriage—in act or imagination, heterosexual or homosexual—exceed the bounds of God's commandments.

Yet many people who identify as gay or have same-sex attractions view God's design of gender, marriage and sexual boundaries as irrelevant, archaic, painful, incorrect, rejecting, homophobic, bigoted or impossible. "This is just who I am," we hear. "I was born this way." To counter these standards within the church community, these individuals may shop for "gay-friendly" churches that don't adhere to scriptural standards or that even revise them to openly embrace homosexuality.

How are we to respond to the reality that those who identify as gay feel unwelcome in our churches and eagerly seek out those communities that will accept them and their lifestyle? First, we need to remember that Jesus ate with sinners. He connected with people on the basics. He fed them food when they were hungry. He gave them water when they were thirsty. He healed them when they were sick. In short, Jesus demonstrated love to the people presented to Him, just as they were.

An example of what this looks like can be seen in the story of Anna and Jill. When my church community met Anna and Jill, they were in dire need of food and money. Our church, being a place that gives out food and help to people in crisis situations, was able to pour out to them help that heals. As

emergency first responders, we were able to help meet some of their daily needs. Through this, we had the opportunity to pray for Anna and Jill—and that's when things really began to move. Rather than first being presented with a religious doctrine by which they were judged, Anna and Jill experienced the Holy Spirit as an inner reality. As these women processed their faith, they received the Lord, the infilling of the Holy Spirit and answers to their personal prayers. They continue with us in the church today, and their great gifts are used for the kingdom.

So how do we approach gay people inside or outside the church—or transsexuals or transgendered people, for that matter? We demonstrate God's love in practical ways and with genuine interest, just as Christ did. We approach them with compassion, healing and truth in the doses they can receive, just as Christ did. We move toward them as we are led by the Holy Spirit, just as Christ did.

David said that God's gentleness made him great (see 2 Sam. 22:36). We also read that the goodness of God leads people to repentance (see Rom. 2:4). As others experience God's goodness through us, perhaps they will be inspired to reach further for Him. Or perhaps not. Nevertheless, God so loved. He loves us all—good, bad, up, down, gay or straight. Jesus loved us to death—and abundant life—and we are messengers of that love. Jesus didn't come to condemn; He came to save, intervene and replace His life for ours. That's how we stand out—first, through love.

### **Challenge Hearts Through Truth**

But let's also remember that Jesus took on the offense of sinners in His striving against sin. Just as it is compassionate to love people right where they are, it's equally compassionate to tell people the truth wrapped in love.

God's love for us doesn't mean He affirms when we say, "That's just who I am." If so, why did Jesus bother with the cross? The cross levels the spiritual playing field of the world. As we embrace the cross, we die to an old life and emerge into a new one through the resurrection. God's love is transformative.

Still, there are commandments, statutes and various paths of life that have consequences, and we face a serious eternal crisis without Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Sin is real, and God doesn't hide from that reality, nor does He hide us from it.

This means we must have courage and be willing to take hits for an unpopular message. Lives and eternities are at stake. As it concerns Anna and Jill, the Holy Spirit urged us to tell them to press into their new identity in Christ, to obey the Word with regard to their sexuality and to allow God to reorder their feelings and their relationship.

I don't see a way around speaking the truth in love—for the sake of souls.

### **Influence Hearts Through Understanding**

To speak with any degree of credibility about these matters with our gay, transsexual and transgender neighbors, we need to understand their perspective—as well as God's response to those perspectives.

Many who identify themselves as gay believe that they're "born this way." This phrase is a foundational spiritual, legal and emotional pillar of segments of the gay community. It supports the view that homosexual acts and orientation can't be considered sinful because an individual is born that way—with an unchangeable condition or predisposition—and has no desire to be another way, nor is his or her orientation alterable even if that person wanted to be otherwise.

During an outreach event with my church, we talked to some gay teenagers as they waited outside a mobile AIDS testing unit on Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles who couldn't believe they weren't "born this way." But they opened up and revealed their hearts—which were full of pain—as we pressed into their lives. Even though they had a negative view of Christians, a few allowed us to pray for them.

I also talked to Edward, a man in our church who claimed he was a gay man, even though a Christian. "No," I said to him. "You are a man of God, period." Even if Edward doesn't make godly choices in his life every time—just as any other believer—and even though he'll find that longtime emotional patterns, conflicts and physical responses are not quickly resolved or overcome, my point was to leave the worldly definitions and conclusions behind.

No one is defined in Scripture by sexual orientation, nor is one's sexual orientation an excuse not to obey. However a person feels he or she is born does not negate God's design, His redemptive power or that we are all sinners one way or another.

Additionally, feelings and desires don't just *happen*. Homosexuality as a state of being—"I was born gay"—isn't recognized in Scripture. A person's conduct, desires and responses are the product of many factors. Some might argue that a person is inclined or predisposed in a certain direction, but that isn't the equivalent of being born gay or the result of a gay gene or even an inevitable or unchangeable lifestyle.

No two people are born with the same emotional history or natural temperament, yet God's Word declares that we're all born sinners and require a Savior. Isn't Jesus clear when He says we must be born again (John 3:3)? If someone believes he was born gay or has been attracted to the same sex from a young age, that doesn't mean God designed those desires or

that it was His intended plan. Nor does it cancel the clear promise of Scripture where Paul declares, “Such *were* some of you” (1 Cor. 6:11, emphasis added).

Any orientation we have toward life consists of emotional patterns gleaned from our families, memories and inherited temperament—some good, some bad, some generational, some imprinted into our very cells. However, engaging in a homosexual act requires a choice, no matter how predisposed an individual is—just like any number of other behaviors. Despite the ease with which a person falls into any sin or pattern of living (called “non-choice choices”), that predisposition still reflects a heart the Lord wants to heal, restore and forgive.

### **Understand Hearts Through Awareness**

Lastly, we need to understand the impact that a person’s emotional, generational and spiritual history can have on their sexual orientation and identity.

For example, Brenda was an openly gay woman who attended our church. She had claimed her homosexual orientation as a young teenager, after having been raised by a distant and critical mother and been the victim of sexual abuse. I am sure Jesus wept as her heart died. Brenda had been fighting shame and pain her whole life, rather than the fight of faith. And though pain, damage and need are not sin-related, they can develop a roaring hole in a person’s heart that can be—by choice—addressed in sinful ways.

Here is where compassion and understanding must enter into the picture again—we must look into people’s hearts and know their stories, not missing the inside for the outside. Lack of nurture in formative years, lack of affirmation in gender identity, the loss or emotional distance of a same-sex parent, pain, grief, neglect and delayed or awkward growth—each of these can open the door to homosexual desires and behaviors.

Additionally, self-protective detachment, “disidentification” with one’s gender, disruption in the formation of gender identity, and a flight from pain and shame are some of its results. All of these relate to perfectly legitimate needs that must be filled or areas that require processing, truth, healing, restoration and deliverance.

Generational curses can also draw people into a sinful generational pattern (see Ex. 20:5), causing them to act out of brokenness and desire. You may hate something, through no goodness of your own, that deeply attracts another person and vice versa. Besides homosexual behavior, other examples of patterns of sin passed down from generations include alcoholism and other addictions, abuse, fornication, control, pride, occult power and activity, bitterness and fear. This isn’t about assigning blame but the potential to bring about deliverance through the cross.

Lastly, unclean, familiar and perverse spirits operate in the sexual realm, and these spirits promote sinful behavior. I’m not saying everything is “demonic,” but spiritual forces can be involved in a person’s desires and behaviors. Therefore, just because a person feels a same-sex attraction doesn’t mean those feelings originated from God or even that person. Spiritual forces draw people into traps, and only spiritual forces can release them—which is why prayer is so crucial to living in victory.

### **Transform Hearts Through Our Spiritual Position**

The people of God have been called to encourage and help others enter into relationship with Jesus and find their identity in Christ—rather than other outlets such as the gay lifestyle. The church can only do this through love, the power of the Holy Spirit and the power of community. Although we can’t rush Brenda, Anna, Jill or Edward, we must be proactive to heed the Holy Spirit and to pray—and, by all means, to gain understanding.

Remember the transforming power of the cross. It is the work of the cross to dismantle ungodly patterns and responses, to help us repent of sins, and to forgive and release others. It is the work of the cross to break curses, expel demons, heal injuries, process grief, restore developmental gaps, break ungodly ties and covenants and release pain. This is the work of the cross for everyone. Life in Christ is a releasing, reordering and renewing process, and we have the privilege of inviting our neighbors—gay, straight, transgender, transsexual, male or female—into such a life through the work of the cross.

We can also offer healing, deliverance, repentance, growth and the formation of a new life by faith in the Word of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead of fellowship with the world, we offer fellowship with believers in godly relationships, plus godly help and counsel. The power of the cross and of new birth enable believers to grow in the nature and nurture of Jesus Christ, instead of through the adaptations, responses and choices that have led to a particular lifestyle.

Penetrating hearts is going to require prayer, intercession and love for the lost and hurting. The apostle Paul wrote of “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). Hearts will not be won without a spiritual fight.

Today homosexuality has become an identity and lifestyle with its own theology, history, legal status, emotional justification and other validations that harden the position of those who self-identify as gay. It is difficult to back out of an identity—any identity—because our identities comprise our emotional, spiritual, social, sexual and physical lives. Yet all of us must break out of our old identities and take on our new identity in Christ, which comes with His character and holiness.

Gay or straight is not the issue. The existence of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ declares the potential for new life to those who believe in the fullness of that life and want to work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

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**Nancy Eskijian** *is senior pastor of Bread of Life Foursquare Gospel Church in Los Angeles. She is the author of Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Sex and Gender and the Bible (Creation House) and Restoration Now! (Signalman Press), a book on inner healing and deliverance.*