

Was Franklin Graham Right to Call for a Disney Boycott?

As soon as the news broke last week that Disney's new *Beauty and the Beast* movie would feature an "exclusively gay moment," Franklin Graham called for a boycott of Disney in a Facebook post that has since been shared almost 100,000 times.

The next day, a drive-in theater in Alabama announced that it would not show the movie, while, even before Franklin Graham's comment was posted, the conservative group One Million Moms called for a Disney boycott, with a clear warning: "Alerting all parents! In a first for the Disney Channel, a Disney XD show subtly displayed several gay kisses in an episode that aired a couple of days ago."

Over at LifeSiteNews, a petition to boycott Disney has already amassed over 100,000 signatures in just five days, carrying this headline: "SIGN THE BOYCOTT: Tell Disney 'NO' to LGBT agenda in Beauty and the Beast – #BoycottDisney."

Should we applaud Graham and the movie theater and One Million Moms and LifeSiteNews? More specifically, should we join the boycott?

Writing an opinion piece for USA Today, Jonathan Merritt, known as a more moderate conservative (and himself admittedly same-sex attracted), addressed what he described as the "flaming hypocrisy" in evangelical calls for a Disney boycott, also arguing that, "Avoiding the subject of homosexuality will not prepare kids for the real world."

He wrote: "Conservative Christian outrage over any positive portrayals of LGBT people in film and television is a tale as old as time, but this effort seems particularly misguided. It risks making Christians look like antiquated bigots, and it reeks of moral hypocrisy. And worse, it diverts energy from a

more worthwhile effort: teaching Christian children to co-exist in a pluralistic society.”

John Pavlovitz, a left-leaning pastor who often confronts the “white evangelical church,” rebuked the boycotters in very harsh terms, speaking of “the naked hypocrisy of a Christian Disney boycott.”

In his words, “Conservative Christians have crawled out of the church pew woodwork to rend their garments and beat their breasts, at word that Disney’s live action adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast* will feature an openly gay character.”

He speaks of us as “opportunistic, self-righteous Bible-thumpers” who are guilty of “unprovoked jerkery,” stating that this “is what we now expect from the American Religious Right, who have long since jettisoned the loving, compassionate, redemptive justice work of a poor-loving Jesus—and gone all in with the glossy, homophobic pulpit bullies who arouse their passions.”

Over at the Huffington Post, Brittany Mancuso states that, “Boycotting ‘Beauty and the Beast’ Is Not What Jesus Would Do,” explaining that, “I’m all for freedom of religion.... What I’m not for is freedom to hate and that is exactly what you are doing by feeding your children some [obscenity] lines that our law tolerates the ‘gays’ but God’s law does not. Gay people are people.”

How should we respond?

For me, the issue is not whether a boycott will “work” or not (which some of these writers also discuss). Instead, the issue is whether a boycott is right and fitting and proper. As Martin Luther King once remarked, “Cowardice asks the question, is it safe? Expediency ask the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question, is it popular?

“But, conscience asks the question, is it right? And there

comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because it is right." (In quoting King here, I am not claiming that the decision about boycotting this movie is on a par with the challenge of injustice during the Civil Rights movement; I'm simply evoking the principle of doing what is right because it is right.)

That is the question we need to ask ourselves: As followers of Jesus, it is right for us to boycott Disney in general or *Beauty and the Beast* in particular?

Before answering that question, let me address the question of hypocrisy. Are we, as professing Christians, being hypocritical in calling for a boycott of this film (or of Disney in general)? My answer is absolutely yes, but not for the reasons that Merritt and Pavlovitz and Mancuso allege.

Merritt questions how anyone who voted for Trump could turn around and boycott this movie, but he fails to realize that: 1. Many of us who voted for him were primarily voting against Hillary; 2. We believed that he was becoming more conservative than he had been in his prior, hedonistic days (of which he is not proud); and 3. We were voting for someone who would be tough-nosed enough to take on the Washington establishment and other major strongholds, meaning that this human wrecking ball might also have some serious shortcomings.

That being said, there's nothing hypocritical in people voting for Trump as president while not wanting their impressionable kids and grandkids to be exposed to an "exclusively gay moment" in a Disney movie. (Regarding Merritt's argument that we need to expose our kids to gay relationships because they're all around us today, so also are things like polygamy and polyamory, not to mention fornication, adultery, drug use, rape, racism and so on. Do we expose our kids to all those things at the most tender ages possible, since they'll inevitably encounter some of them later in life? The question

answers itself.)

As for Pavlovitz's charges, I find them reeking of the very sanctimonious, broad-bushed, overstated hypocrisy of which he accuses others, something for which some of his readers have strongly (and rightly) taken him to task. (For the record, he has never responded to my invitations to discuss his positions with me on the air, but John, if you're reading this, let's have a civil but candid discussion on my radio show.)

As for Mancuso's statement that she's for "freedom of religion" but against "freedom to hate," it is not hate to say, "I don't want my kids to witness a gay kiss or a gay romance," any more than it is hate for a Jewish atheist to say, "I don't want my kids to listen to a rabbi's sermon," or for a gay parent to say, "I don't want my kids to be exposed to Bible verses that speak against homosexuality."

Why must all moral or spiritual differences be attributed to hatred? This is one of the most glaring (and self-disqualifying) aspects of LGBT activism: It is so blinded by the alleged rightness of its own position that it cannot see any rational reason for anyone to oppose it.

Why, then, do I believe that many of those calling for a Disney boycott are being hypocritical?

It is because so many of us are morally compromised in other ways, watching all types of foul entertainment (with lots of gratuitous violence and sex), allowing the TV (or internet) to babysit our kids, practicing no-fault divorce in the church and not lifting a finger to address other, pressing social ills (like abortion, for one). But when it comes to one gay scene (which some involved with the film are claiming has been overhyped and overstated), we are up in arms.

That being said, I don't believe the boycott is wrong.

After all, we're talking about impressionable kids, and we're

all too aware of a very intentional, hardly covert, LGBT agenda in Hollywood. (As Elizabeth Taylor famously remarked, "If it weren't for gays, honey, there wouldn't be a Hollywood.")

Just consider how much Hollywood has already influenced our culture in terms of acceptance of LGBT activism and then ask yourself if we're not overreacting when a children's movie will subtly (or openly) promote homosexuality?

Two influential gay strategists writing in the late 1980's called for the "conversion of the average American's emotions, mind, and will, through a planned psychological attack, in the form of propaganda fed to the nation via the media," and their strategy, which reflected wider gay strategies of the day, worked with stunning success. (I document this in detail in *A Queer Thing Happened to America*.)

Disney has already introduced gay couples into its TV programming, and when the producer of *Beauty and the Beast* announces that "there will be a surprise for same-sex couples," how should we respond? It's quite natural that many parents and grandparents will say, "Let's sit this one out." My only critique would be to say: Don't stop here. Be consistent in your convictions across the board, and be sure to have teachable moments with your kids when it comes to LGBT issues and people.

I'm quite aware that boycotting companies that support gay causes would basically mean that you can't drive a car, fly on a plane, use a credit card or own a cell phone—just to give a few examples—and the goal is not to put Disney out of business. But when a company loudly announces its immoral or amoral stance—for example, let's say your cell phone provider makes a big announcement that it will now give 1 percent of its profits to support Planned Parenthood—that's the time you say, "In conscience, I'm going to take my business elsewhere." (For a related principle, see 1 Cor. 10:27-30.)

Other Christian voices, representing the older generation (like Tom Gilson) and the younger generation (like Liberty McArtor) have suggested different ways to respond to *Beauty and the Beast*, with Gilson writing that “in our public conversations we have to keep pointing back to the better way [meaning the way of Jesus]. We need to learn to paint the picture better, to show the truly beautiful way, the way of strong and lasting marriages that unite in godly love to build the next generation.” And McArtor reminds us that, “The only way to really change culture is by fulfilling the Great Commission and introducing sinners to Jesus, which must be a neighbor-out, not corporation-down initiative.”

I absolutely affirm these words and this approach. At the same time, I support those who say, “I’d rather pay money for my kids to be exposed to something else right now.”

Whatever we do, though, let’s do it with consistency. Otherwise our critics will have every right to call us hypocrites.

Surely, in Jesus, that is not who we are. {eoa}