

When Christianity Offends

✖ Apple's decision to pull Exodus International's smartphone application this week has ignited a viral frenzy, created a media firestorm and has generated some challenging points to ponder. Last month, we launched our app, which provides mobile access to resources and information to those struggling with matters related to sexuality and faith. Apple originally approved and gave it 4+ rating, but pulled it when gay activist groups launched a petition to remove the app.

As you can well imagine, Exodus has received an outpouring of responses ranging from support to threats of bodily harm. Everyone from Star Trek's George Takei to author Jodie Picoult is weighing in and unfortunately, many who vehemently oppose us have bought the activists' faulty label calling it the "Gay Cure App." Nothing could be further from the truth. For more than 35 years, Exodus International's mission has been to help those struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction to live a life congruent with biblical teaching. A "cure" for any issue is not within our aim or our ability. We do, however, unapologetically believe that Jesus Christ changes hearts and lives and that the Bible offers life-giving truth about who we are and who we were created to be.

Exodus is certainly not the first Christian organization to go head to head with Apple over its support for biblical teaching and it will not be the last. As many will remember, last fall Apple caved to pressure from the same gay activist groups and removed the application submitted by The Manhattan Declaration deeming its support for biblical teaching on marriage "offensive to large groups of people." Chuck Colson recently said of Apple's decision to remove Exodus' app on his BreakPoint commentary:

"Some may say that losing an iPhone app for Exodus International isn't that big a deal – just like it wasn't a

big deal when Apple banned the Manhattan Declaration app!

But it's not just about apps. It's about freedom of speech, the ability to participate in the marketplace of ideas. The gay-rights groups have shown their fangs. Victory in the courts or in the legislatures is not enough for them. They want to silence, yes, destroy those who don't agree with their agenda. So they target Christian groups and corporate America to do just that.

The writing is on the wall, folks. For the sake of religious liberty and free speech, we must not remain silent. Not on this issue, or on any issue that would threaten free speech and freedom of religion."

This controversy not only goes to the heart of a Christian's right and ability to participate in a fair and open exchange of ideas, it goes to the heart of what it means to be a Christ follower. My decision to follow Christ was not an easy one. It almost never is. I remember struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions when I was very young. As I grew, I knew I wanted to live for Christ, but there seemed to be no answers or alternatives for me. Later in life, I discovered the man that God truly created me to be through the help of loving individuals in my church,. Their acceptance of me and encouragement to live biblically and know Jesus intimately changed my life. This is why I am passionate about walking with others on a similar journey. It is why I am passionate about equipping the church to break free from fear and plunge headlong into the messy, broken lives of others who may be struggling alone.

In truth, this is why the Body of Christ exists. It is our calling to walk beside those struggling with who they are and to encourage them to be who God has created them to be. It is our mission to demonstrate the love of Christ to the hurting. It is our responsibility to bring biblical clarity to a confused world and it is our privilege to proclaim the Good

News.

And while we have a responsibility to do so in a way that radiates the compassion and love of Christ to all regardless of differing views on any given subject, we must remember that no matter how tender our words or how loving our actions, Jesus predicted that the outcome may not always be pleasant. He said in Luke 6, "Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven."

We exist and therefore, we will not always be liked.

Jesus knew that and in the very same chapter, He tells us what to do when that happens. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." At Exodus, we've had countless opportunities this week alone to do just that. We've responded to angry e-mails with compassion. We've handled angry phone calls with kindness. Over the years, we've had countless face-to face opportunities to show God's love to those who have protested at our events. Some have even accepted Christ. So while we will always advocate our constitutional rights to be a part of civic dialogue, being "offensive" can sometimes provide opportunities to love those who oppose us all the more fervently.

Jeff Buchanan is the senior director of Church Equipping and Student Ministries for Exodus International—an interdenominational ministry assisting those who struggle with same-sex attraction to live a life congruent with the Christian faith.