

Challenging Oprah in the Gay Debate

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Last week former Colorado pastor Ted Haggard hit the talk show circuit to promote the new HBO documentary about his fall from grace, *The Trials of Ted Haggard*. I'll admit I wasn't too excited about Haggard going public with the story of his relationship with a male prostitute, but there was a bright spot amid the awkward interviews. When Ted and his wife, Gayle, appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* Jan. 28, Gayle dared to defy Oprah and her audience.

Oprah tried her best to pin Ted down and get him to admit he is a homosexual. Ted balked, saying that his sexuality is complicated. He explained that he had sexual experiences in the seventh grade that confused him. He spoke of sexual impulses that he struggled with but didn't act on until he hit 50.

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Oprah told Ted, who is now 52, that he should just accept his "identity" rather than hiding it or running from it. Then Gayle, who has raised five kids and knows a lot about discipline, struck a nerve. She told Oprah that just because a person has certain inclinations doesn't mean he has to act on them.

Oprah got upset at that point. She even got out of her chair and said to Gayle: "That's where I disagree with you"-and her audience cheered. (I couldn't help but wonder if they had been

cued.)

I was cheering for Gayle-not just because she has modeled Christian forgiveness during this embarrassing scandal but also because she clearly articulated the gospel during the interview. She stuck her neck out and defied the false religion of our times.

Oprah is the closest thing we have to a high priestess of America's new morality, and she seems obligated to push the politically correct idea that it's OK to be gay. She is paid a lot of money to promote this agenda, and she's good at it. She is articulate in her arguments and velvety smooth in her affirmation. Just come to Oprah, all you who are weary and burdened, and she will console you.

Oprah's feel-good doctrine is the same one adopted in the last 30 years by mainstream psychologists, Hollywood producers, gay rights organizations and some mainline churches. It basically says that if a person struggles with any level of same-sex attraction, they shouldn't fight the urges or label this a sin or a sexual disorder. They should simply accept their gayness, celebrate their new sexual identity and then hop in bed with whomever they please (unless of course they want to settle down into a same-sex marriage, which all state governments should legalize).

This "just accept who you are" argument certainly doesn't make sense for other categories of sinful behavior or emotional dysfunction. Consider these examples:

* I've prayed with countless people who struggle with addictions to alcohol, marijuana or prescription drugs. In most cases they were using the substances to numb their emotional pain and they hated their condition. When they received prayer ministry and counseling they found the grace to break free from these addictions. Can you imagine a counselor telling these people: "Why fight it? God gave you an

addictive personality! Embrace it!"

* I know several single straight guys who struggle to stay sexually pure. They want to honor God and save sex for marriage, but sometimes they give in to the temptations of pornography or they cross barriers they shouldn't when they're dating. If I embrace Oprah's philosophy, I should just tell my friends to accept these temptations as their "identity"-as in, "Go ahead, God created you to be a fornicator! Let your hormones control you!"

* This week I met a man who spent more than 10 years in prison and is officially classified as a sex offender in police records. He found Christ during his first year of incarceration, and today he is a strong Christian. He has been out of prison for 10 years, and has had no further criminal incidents, yet he occasionally struggles with lustful thoughts. Should I tell him to stop trying so hard and just accept perversion as a way of life?

It would be absurd to discourage these people from seeking change. The very essence of the gospel is that Christ gives us the power to live a holy life. We are helpless to overcome sinful urges on our own, but when we have the presence of Jesus in our lives we discover the truth of Romans 6:14: "Sin shall not be master over you (NASB)."

God does not want us to stay the way we are! The apostle Paul told the Corinthians: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17). That is the hallmark of genuine Christianity.

The issue on the table in this debate is whether homosexuality is (1) a sinful condition that can be overcome by the grace of God; or (2) an inborn genetic quality that should be accepted like skin color or a personality trait. Oprah and the majority of the mainstream media today are obviously pushing the second

viewpoint. "Sin" is not in their vocabulary.

We cannot be silent while this debate rages. Let's tell our culture that Jesus Christ's amazing grace has the power to transform people whether they are gay or straight or anything in between.

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