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Can a Homosexual be a Christian?

by Charles J. Kunert

The jarring noise of the phone that disrupted my contemplative mood was not nearly as startling as the news the phone bore. My friend of many years was calling to report that the upset stomach he had been experiencing these past few months had been diagnosed as cancer. The "Big C." You read about it. In the back of your mind you know it is always out there lurking like some kind of shadowy demon. But when it strikes someone you know well, its reality is overwhelming. Like a ton of bricks.

The call, however, was not made merely out of friendship, but to obtain my advice as a person somewhat knowledgeable in recent advances in biotechnology and medicine. The friend had been given three options by the doctors: a new, experimental treatment, surgery, or no treatment. The form of cancer he had was usually fatal, even when treated. New treatment protocols using the latest tools from the lab had been somewhat promising, but had been used on fewer than twelve individuals across the nation. The advice I gave was to go with the best science had to offer. He did. Less than a year later, he was dead.

It is therefore with tremendous humility that I approach the topic of the intersection of the Christian faith and the homosexual. What may be somewhat unique about my experiences is that they are framed in the protective embrace of the church. Each of the people in the examples above is or was a devout Christian...probably atypical for a randomly selected group of homosexuals. And that makes the issues even more interesting. How can people, baptized into the faith as children, participants in the Lord’s Supper on a regular basis, and diligent students of God’s Word be so tormented by their condition? All of the individuals of whom I speak have pleaded with God to take this burden from them. Are their pleadings insincere? Is this simply a case of insufficient yielding to the will of God in their lives? My personal guess would be that is not the case.

But it would only be a guess. And that for me is the bottom line. I cannot imagine for a moment why another male would be sexually attracted to a man, or a woman to a woman. It is as foreign to my way of thinking as for a human to be sexually attracted to a tree. Only recently has it occurred to me that, for the homosexual, my desire for a member of the opposite sex is just as unnatural. I cannot pretend to know how sincere or insincere
the struggles being expressed by my homosexual friends are all too real, rather than some superficial attempt to look good to society or the church. When I consider my own struggles with life and my feeble attempts to remain faithful to my Lord, I am constantly reminded of Paul’s words: “The good that I would, I do not…” (Rom 7:19) And James writes further, ”Don’t be too eager to tell others their faults, for we all make many mistakes” (Jas. 3:1). What then, gives me the right to presume to judge others in the faith?

Scripture, however, does not let us off the hook entirely at this point. It would be great to stop here, but we are told, “It isn’t our job to judge outsiders. But it certainly is our job to judge and deal strongly with those who are members of the church, and who are sinning in these (sexual) ways.” (I Cor. 5:12). So within the teachings of Scripture we are reminded of our own shortcomings, yet encouraged to deal forthrightly with those in the church who are sinning. This is, indeed, a very fine line, and one fraught with much danger. For if we act in an overly judgmental way, we run the risk of quenching the smoldering wick of faith in the weak, but if we fail to act, we run the risk of allowing the weak to be overtaken in their sin.

What then, as a Christian, is the prudent course? If we are to take someone to task, we had better be certain that the person is doing something that is interfering with his or her relationship with God. We must avoid making judgments about things sometimes categorized as "adiaphora" (concepts not directly and clearly spoken to in Scripture). For example, many have been judged in the past because of card playing or dancing. I am even aware of churches who felt it was inappropriate to pray in any language except German. The Lutheran Church in Kankakee, Illinois had an inscription carved into its altar that read, “Unser Gott is ein deutscher Gott!” (Our God is a German God!) The question then becomes one of interpretation of the Bible. For example, many have been judged in the past because of card playing or dancing. I am even aware of churches who felt it was inappropriate to pray in any language except German. The Lutheran Church in Kankakee, Illinois had an inscription carved into its altar that read, “Unser Gott is ein deutscher Gott!” (Our God is a German God!) The question then becomes one of interpretation of the Bible.

Interestingly, Paul points out that not only is sexual sin evil, but so also “the feeling that everyone else is wrong except those in your own little group” (Gal. 5:20). Instead, Paul calls upon us to, “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Col. 3:12). This determination to be “right,” or to have the “correct” interpretation of the Bible, creates insurmountable walls between Christians. It is evidence of our own weakness as Christians that we are not willing to truly allow the Holy Spirit to do His work of sanctification in the lives He touches when the Word is shared.

It is somewhat interesting to me that persons who proudly proclaim that they are the caretakers of correctness often fail to heed the instructions of Jesus and Paul in the manner of correction. For both Jesus and Paul indicate that correction is a one-on-one function to be approached humbly. Jesus tells us, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you” (Matt. 18:15). And Paul encourages the Christian to approach the fallen in meekness: “If a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path” (Gal. 6:1).
It occurs to me that if this methodology were followed, a much deeper understanding of the dimensions of the dilemma would accrue to those involved in the discussion. It is much easier to be judgmental of ideas disassociated from the persons affected. When a real face appears as the object of the judgment, and when real hurts and struggles are capable of being felt, hasty judgments tend to vanish. Instead of pronouncements from a pulpit or statements in support of ballot measures, Christians should be willing to bear one another’s burdens in love. And to do that requires involvement. Christ was the perfect example for us. He did not shun those who were different from Him but rather embraced them. He talked with prostitutes and drank water with the Samaritan woman and feasted with crooked tax collectors. Ultimately it was the transforming power of His love and not the judgment of the law that changed those in need of change.

So who is, after all, right in this matter? I don’t really know, but I am willing to allow God’s Spirit to enlighten me as I attempt to deal in love with those around me hurting in soul and spirit over the issue of homosexuality. They are my sisters and brothers in the Lord. Their struggle is ultimately my struggle. To cut them off would be to amputate part of me, for we are one in the Spirit.

To a person who prefers clear-cut answers, this discussion is less than satisfying. But my need for black-and-white is surpassed by others’ need for compassion and hope. For if I am incapable of empathizing with the plight of the homosexual, I have truly missed the message of the Gospel. Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9:12-13). And are we not all in need of that healing touch? Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.