

# Calling for Tolerance for Homosexuality

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"God, please don't let me be gay. Everyone knows I can't be gay and be a faithful servant of yours. Everyone knows what scripture says about people like me. Please God this can't be who I am; it is too difficult and it can't really be to your purpose, can it? Oh God, please take this burden away from me, transform my life, make me something else, anything but this, Lord. Of all the people I could be in love with, why am I in love with a beautiful, intelligent, charismatic, evangelical, conservative Christian youth minister? Why is she in love with me? Please, speak to me Lord. Show me what you would have me do about my life. Am I yours? Or am I your disappointment?"

I prayed this prayer all last spring and summer while involved in my first relationship with a woman. I don't think that I really began to listen to God's answer until recently. The answer is clear to me now. "Rye you are a beautiful child of God and I created you. I created you gay. I have a purpose for you. Rye you are loved by me. Others may hate you, but I love you. Your mission is to serve by challenging hatred and intolerance when you encounter it."

I have accepted this challenge or mission and I challenge you to do the same. The world is ripe with "Christians" and others who wield scripture as a weapon of hatred, judgment and intolerance. They assert that homosexuality is an aberration of sin and that all homosexuals are doomed to eternal damnation. While all Christians do not hold this worldview, it is a common view held by conservative and evangelical Christians. While many other

Christians do not hold such bigoted beliefs, some conservative Christians tolerate bigotry and remain silent when others are attacking homosexuals. The time for change is now. I appeal to everyone at the University of Richmond to educate yourselves, youth, religious institutions, colleagues and your friends about the truths of homosexuality. Additionally, I encourage you to closely examine the scriptural interpretations of intolerant Christians and their views on homosexuality. I think you will find that such views are grounded in myth, misinterpretation and hearsay.

Anti-gay "Christians" often use scripture verses including Deuteronomy 23:17-18, Genesis 19:4-11, Leviticus 18:22, 1 Timothy 1:10, and Romans 1: 26-27 to prove that homosexuality is an abomination to God and that God did not create homosexuals. They use these scriptures to argue that homosexuality is a choice a person makes and not a biological reality or a creation of God. These interpretations are literal and shallow. Furthermore, anti-gay "Christians" are imposing a 21st century theological viewpoint on scripture written before Freud, the scientific revolution, the industrial revolution, the development of psychiatry and psychology as disciplines, and before the creation of the Christian church. More specifically, they fail to present that the homosexual acts in the above scriptures only describe homosexual and heterosexual rape, lust, violence,

male prostitution and sexual abuse. I think most Christians would agree that such actions are indeed sinful. What is important is to note that these scriptures in no way describe committed, monogamous, consensual, or loving same sex relationships.

Why is this information important? It is important because through accurate interpretations of scripture, Christians can decry ignorant literal interpretations of the Bible that are used as weapons of hate, guilt and shame against gay Americans.

Other myths and common stereotypes about sexually diverse people include the beliefs that: all homosexuals choose to be homosexual, homosexuals can change

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their sexual orientation, homosexuals are perverted, homosexuals are child molesters, homosexuals have some sort of mental or psychological disorder and that all homosexuals are psychologically wounded or unstable.

Such stereotypes are common throughout American society and many Christian denominations. All of these beliefs about homosexuality are false.

The American Psychological Association in its Statement on Lesbian and Gay Issues (1994) offers the following statements based on a variety of research studies. The APA wrote: "Psychologists do not consider sexual orientation to be a conscious choice that can be voluntarily changed ... The research on homosexuality is very clear. Homosexuality is neither a mental illness nor moral depravity. It

is simply the way a minority of our population expresses human love and sexuality ... Groups who try to change the sexual orientation of people through so-called conversion therapy are misguided and run the risk of causing a great deal of psychological harm. In the United States, 90 percent of all sexual abuse is committed by heterosexual men. The molesters are almost always family members, close family friends or the mother's boyfriend," and finally "the APA encourages all mental health professionals to work to help persons of all sexual orientations to accept and integrate their inner feelings and to overcome their prejudices and false beliefs..."

Friends, the message is clear. Disarm your bibles and stop using them as weapons against gay people. Stop perpetuating homophobic attitudes. Most likely someone you love is gay. If not, then most likely you work, are in class, are taught by or you worship with someone who is gay. You have an obligation to love, to respect, to live in peace, to advocate truth and to protest injustice against gays because we are all in the same community.

You may be asking, what can I do about homophobia? If you are part of a student religious organization, then open your arms to homosexual members; if you teach, then listen to the concerns of your students. For others, teach your children well...teach them not to hate, educate yourself, join Safe Zone or at least emotionally support your family members, friends or colleagues who are gay. A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. Would you take that step with me?