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THE SILENT WITNESS - A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO THE CHURCH AND HOMOSEXUALITY

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THE SILENT VOICE

There are several ministries within the church who believe Scripture opposes homosexual relationships. We vary in emphasis, but have one thing in common. The majority of Christians contacting us have rarely, if ever, shared their homosexual struggles with other Christians. They believe their choice as Christians has to be celibacy in terms of homosexual relationships and marriage in terms of heterosexual ones. Christians in this situation are seldom heard in the current debate. Although we may be a tiny minority within those of a homosexual orientation in society, we are not so in terms of the same group within the church.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

The spectrum of human sexuality is much more complex and changeable than we are often led to believe. Our position on the so called spectrum of sexual orientation may be influenced by our genes, but is mainly determined by early relationships with parents or parental role models. The messages we receive about our self worth are especially important from our same sex parents. It must be emphasised that circumstances and misinterpretations also encourage a deficit in feelings of self worth. Our sexual desires are heavily influenced by these feelings and are different for each person. Homosexual desire is usually linked to the person I would like to be or have been. Some people's sexual feelings change, probably the majority remain the same in orientation, but may increase and decrease in intensity and expression throughout life.

We believe Scripture clearly states that all sex outside heterosexual marriage offends God. Rom 1:18- 2:1 gives male and female homosexuality as one example, along with many others, of mankind's disobedience. 1 Cor 6:9-11 lists homosexual behaviour alongside other immorality, but clearly affirms God's redemption in a powerful way. In Matthew's Gospel (Mat 19:11,12) Jesus clearly affirms the celibacy of unmarried disciples.

VOICES WE SOMETIMES HEAR

The liberal voice we often hear in the church frequently comes from Christians finding self worth from affirming their homosexuality and homosexual relationships in a positive way. They find fulfilment in homosexual expression within loving relationships and believe the feelings of love must be in accordance with a God of love. Some have struggled with celibacy for years and a monogamous relationship seems a more godly option than promiscuity. A few Christians have found homosexuality is no longer an issue at all and they feel safe to speak about 'their past'. With the help of the Holy Spirit and other Christians they sometimes have been enabled to experience heterosexual feelings.

VOICES WE DO NOT HEAR

Christians secretly struggling with homosexual temptation and sin are usually afraid to admit it, unlike the Apostle Paul (Rom 7:7-25). They can be church leaders, friends, relatives and ourselves. Why are we afraid to admit we are sinners, especially sexual

sinners? We have an excellent model of honesty in Paul, who knows of his redemption in Christ because of his sinfulness.

HOW CAN WE ENCOURAGE A BREAK IN THIS SILENCE?

A change of attitude

We need to stop conforming to the world.

We demand answers for all life's problems and act as if we believe God's ways are always conformed to human logic and reason. We therefore believe that God says homosexuality is wrong because it is not good for us. We argue from a mainly sociological basis, rather than a theological one.

We believe a sexual relationship is a vital part of personal fulfilment, though we are reluctant to admit it. Marriage is seen as the only option for this fulfilment, so we do all we can to ensure we can be married. If our homosexuality is the stumbling block for this ideal, we strive to seek a change in orientation.

How do we change attitudes?

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways', declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' (Isaiah 55:8,9)

We accept God's mysteries and apparent paradoxes. For example, God hates sin but allows it, for a time. God's ways will often not conform to human logic.

We accept that God is offended by sex outside marriage, not simply because of any damage it may do to us but because of His divine intention for the sexual act, within a one-flesh marriage relationship. Perhaps this 'mystery' involves some symbolism and celebration to remember His act of Creation (Gen 2:21-24).

We understand sexuality as more than sex, but at times a desire to find love and acceptance. Sometimes it is an attempt to end the pain of loneliness in terms of low self acceptance and identity as well as a longing for a special relationship. Sexuality should therefore direct us more towards finding that sense of value and self worth from our Creator, God. A sexual feeling or desire can tell us a lot about ourselves and therefore many others. When we sin sexually it should lead us more towards God's love and forgiveness, rather than away from it. (Rom 5:20)

We repent of perfectionism that demands of ourselves, others and God that only a change of sexual orientation towards heterosexuality will be acceptable as growth and healing. We learn to accept the value of our unique stories, good and bad, as one special way God speaks to us and through us to one another. This must include our unique sexuality, whatever it may be. In other words, we learn to accept the whole process of working at overcoming problems but balance this with the need to see the value when this fails as well as when it succeeds.

Hope for our lives must be based on God's eternal love for us and the direction, purpose and value He brings to our lives, not on what He may or may not do for us, especially in terms of changing homosexual feelings. As a Christian with homosexual feelings, I cannot envisage returning to a gay lifestyle. The 'narrow road' of following Christ may

not at times seem the easiest of options, but it is the only one to bring real direction, purpose and meaning to my life, eternally.

The silence must be broken by Christians who, like me, know they are loved and valued by God and His Church, not despite the struggles with their homosexuality and Christianity, but because of it. Christians whose homosexual celibacy is their choice for Christ are a vital part of their value within His Body, rather than a handicap.

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