

They Like Jesus week 3: The church is Homophobic and sexist

- This is a topic that causes a lot of tension within the church on several levels. Issues include not only the question of **practicing homosexuality** but how homosexuality and homosexuals are **addressed in and by the church; celibate homosexuals**; and the **covenant of marriage**.
- Homosexuality and bisexuality are becoming **more the norm** today in pop culture and in our **day-to-day world**.
- But unfortunately, **we have not responded well to this issue**. What is it about the idea of a homosexual couple that **gets some people so upset, when those same people ignore other sins so easily?**
- *"AIDS is not just God's punishment for homosexuals; it is God's punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals."* –Jerry Falwell
- Now I know that Jerry Falwell is **not the best representation** of the average Christian mind, but **he does represent many of them, and to non-Christians, he can represent most or all of us**.
- I have a lot of things I would like to say on the issue, about our views on this and also how we approach dealing with the issues, but as I was preparing this, **I just kept seeing quotes** that I thought would do the job so much more eloquently, and show **you what people see when they see our typical responses**:
- But before I do, I want to make it clear that I think **the act of homosexuality is a sin**. I also think the **mistreatment, persecution and intolerant way** some people treat homosexuals **is just as sinful**. **And it's time some of us repented of it**.
- *"Why don't Christians try to make me feel included? Why do you **treat me like an outcast** and **not care about my feelings** or want to **relate to me** in any way? You don't need to understand why I'm homosexual—but to **understand me as a person or as a fellow human being**. Isn't that what Jesus would do?"* -Penny
- *"It was very, very clear that the church was against homosexuality. How could you no know that? It seems that homosexuality is one of the main things*

churches publicly and consistently condemn. So picture being gay and wanting to seek counsel or spiritual advice. **Why would I go to a church? They've already condemned me before I've even walked in the door.**" -Penny

- "When I was working at the gay center. I would talk on the phone with teenagers in trouble all day and **feel I was making a difference in the world.** But then I would go to my car and find tracts **that utterly condemn me left by Christians on my windshield.** I'd look at these **heartless** words with little pieces of Bible verses quoted out of context and wonder, **'Why do they hate me so much? Why won't they even have the decency to come in and talk to me rather than leave anger and hate on my windshield and run?'**" -Penny
- One tract she remembers getting said, **"Homosexuality is the social cancer of today—Repent or go to hell."** I don't know about you, but to me that screams, "God loves you!"
- Penny grew up in church, but stopped going at age 13 because she got to hear what the Christians she knew really thought about homosexuals. She heard **coarse, unloving words.** She **respects and admires Jesus, and believes he is real.** But the **attitude of Christians** turned her away from the church.
- Karen is a 31 year old who grew up in a church. She was a student leader and is actively involved, but during her teenage years, **experienced same-sex attraction.** Listen to her quotes:
- "Growing up in a fundamentalist church, I was taught that gay people are **immoral unbelievers with a sinister agenda.** It took me a long time to come to terms with my same-sex attraction because **I couldn't relate it to the caricature that the church had created.**" – Karen
- Sometimes I don't think we realize how we portray the homosexual community to others. **If someone is struggling with this in our church, what do we make it like for them?**
- "If the church had simply viewed homosexuality as **one of the many natural sins that some people are drawn to as a result of living in a fallen world and talked openly about sexual temptations,** I would have been able to process it like any other

*temptation Christians face. But by **stigmatizing it**, the church has contributed to the problem and **this continues in the form of jokes and negative comments that Christians make about gay people.***” -Karen

- Here in lies much of the problem. We tend to do a few things when it comes to this issue:

—**We oversimplify the theology and Scriptures about homosexuality** and are not able to **intelligently and lovingly** explain from Scripture what we believe or don't believe. We just throw a quote out, condemn it, and move along **like it's not a struggle for some people.**

—**We forget that we are talking about people who are created in God's image and who he deeply loves. Sin is sin.** Disrespecting someone who is caught up in sin is just as sinful as the sin they're caught up in.

—**We put homosexuality in a category that is unhealthily focused on more than other sins.** I mentioned this a couple of weeks ago, but if you voted against gay marriage, but aren't politically active against other sins, then you're guilty of this—I know I am. I have since repented. Whether you need to repent is between you and God, but I urge you to **be honest with yourself.**

—**We don't understand (or we just plain ignore) that this is a very complex issue and how we address it as a church is critically important.**

Being able to intelligently discuss it and defend how we **feel about it is vital.** Not only so we can convince others, but so **we don't seem like mindless drones who just regurgitate whatever our leaders tell us to.** With that in mind, here are some things to **mindlessly regurgitate** on the issue:

1. Homosexuality and the Bible

- Leviticus 18:22-- **Do not practice homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman. It is a detestable sin.**
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 – **Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, 10 or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God.**

- Throughout the entire Bible there **are no positive examples** of homosexual practice being endorsed or approved of by God.
- The **actual biology** of man and woman is a case for **original intent** of sexual design.
- I tell you these things not so you can go “Aha! I knew I was right, take that sinners!” I tell you this as examples of why we believe homosexuality is a sin. **So you can discuss it intelligently and know why you believe what you do.**

2. What Did Jesus Say about Homosexuality?

• Though Jesus never spoke of homosexuality per se, what he consistently did was give the positive example of man and woman in marriage. **For someone who was breaking taboos, Jesus never tried to break a taboo of homosexual practice.**

3. How Should the Church Respond?

- By **evaluating our attitudes, words, and personal jokes we may make—**and **repenting** if we have been callous or unloving toward homosexual people
- By evaluating whether our church is **a safe place** where a person who has same-sex attraction feels they can **talk to someone** about it. Is the church **prepared** to direct people to those who can adequately counsel and walk with someone who has same-sex attraction?
- By knowing what we believe and **being willing to discuss it in a loving manner, full of grace, humility and respect for the person—because God created them and loves them.**
- I want to be very clear on something, though:
 - **It is vital that our church—and other churches—become known as places that welcome all sinners, regardless of the sin.**
 - **We can be clear that we don’t agree with nor affirm their choices, but welcoming them as children of God should never, ever be an option.**

3. Now we'll talk about another group that we are seen—rightly or wrongly—to treat poorly and disrespect: **Women**

- So what do people think on this issue?
- *"I feel the church is very sexist, yet I don't believe that Jesus was sexist. From what I have observed, women in the church **basically sit on the sidelines and are only able to work with children, answer the phones, be secretaries and serve men.** They seem to be given no voice. The church seems pretty much like a boys' club for adults."* -Alicia, does not identify herself as Christian (or a woman's rights advocate)

1. **Women in the Church**

- Imagine a scenario where an **educated, young professional female** who is just beginning to get interested in church and Jesus opens a Bible and reads:
 - 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 *Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."*
 - 1 Timothy 2:11–15 *A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing."*
- At surface glance these passages seem to indicate that (1) **a woman should not say anything in church, only men can**, (2) **that a woman cannot teach the Bible to men in any way**, (3) **that a woman is only saved through childbearing**.
- How do we respond to these passages and **how would you answer the questions that an educated, young professional female would have about the verses as she reads them?**
- There are **two primary views** that the church has developed on how to view these passages and the role of women in the church:

- **Egalitarian**—believes that women are able to teach and be pastors, elders and leaders within their churches
- **Complementarian**—believes that women are gifted in many, many ways, but their function in a church is limited to where **they cannot have authority** over men in such roles as elders, pastor, preaching.
- There are strengths and weaknesses to each theological position and often there are variations of each position within many churches. **So resolving issues may not be as “cut and dried” as we would like.**
- We need to **honor and respect godly, Spirit-filled pastors, scholars, and people who hold differing views** on the role of women in ministry than the one we as a specific church hold. And if you’re wondering, the First United Methodist church (and the UMC in general) is **Egalitarian**.
- Galatians 3:28—28 There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

2. How Our Churches Can Respect and Honor Women

- We want to be modeling our hearts and actions after the life of Jesus.
- How DID Jesus see women? You might be a little surprised to learn that women have often held **very important roles** throughout the Bible—even non-Hebrew and non-Christian women.
- For example, look at the **Samaritan woman** in John 4:
 - She was **Samaritan (unclean to Hebrews)**
 - She had multiple men she was with **and not married**
 - She was the one who **first discovered** Jesus’ identity
 - She was the **first evangelist to tell others both men and woman about Jesus**
- Other ways Jesus showed special respect to women:
 - He **taught them**—which no other rabbi did. It was the husband’s job to teach his wife in that culture.

- They were **the first to see Christ resurrected** (despite their **word as witnesses not being valid** legally speaking)
- Then we see his attitude beginning to sweep over the early church in Acts:
- **Priscilla and Aquilla – Acts 18:24-26** Apollos is taught by Priscilla and Aquilla.
- Almost every time you see Priscilla and Aquilla mentioned, **Priscilla’s name is first**. In that culture it would mean that she **was seen as the lead** in what they were participating in.
- **Romans 16:1-2** Phoebe represented Paul and carried his letter to Rome. **Phoebe was a house church leader.**
- I understand that men and women—on average—are **gifted differently**. But **differences do not preclude equality**. **I can be different and yet equal with another man...why not a woman?**
- **How can we be sure that we’re showing those outside the church that we do indeed respect, honor and see women as equals in church and life?**
- By asking ourselves **as a church** how are we honoring and respecting females.
- A great example is the UMW—but be aware that **some will see this as the opposite of respect**. They will view it as a way for us to **“give the women something to do” without them meddling in ‘real’ church affairs**. Like when your 5 year old asks to help you fix the shed so you have him hold the hammer while you’re not using it.
- Some will see the UMW’s that way. We must make them understand that we **see them as an important and vital aspect of our church**. And that falls on us **as men to respect it**, and also on **the women to make sure the things they do are legitimately serving God’s purpose**. **It won’t matter how much we respect women’s role in ministry if they don’t respect their work the same way.**

- Another way we respect and honor women is through **their role on the administrative team**. There are many church boards that have never had a female on them. **I'm proud to be in a church that has plenty.**
- By asking ourselves **as individuals** how we are honoring and respecting females
- This one is up to you personally, but **check your attitude often and sincerely**. Repent and change if you must. This isn't something we're **doing as an option to make non-Christians feel better**. **Women ARE equal. The Bible is very clear on that.**
- So to recap today, I want to challenge you to rethink how you see **people**.
- Both in the **homosexual community**, and the **women in our own community**—and outside of it.
- **Neither is an option**—I want to be clear. Jesus called us to **lives of love first**. We cannot continue to **focus on homosexual issues and give them special treatment**—**SINNER, does not mean second class person.**
- Nor can we afford to be seen as a church that only gives women **unimportant and patronizing roles**.
- By treating **homosexuality like what it is: another sin; another result of a fallen world**, and not some special case that we must **attack**, and by treating **women as equals** in this life—**individuals capable of as much and sometimes more than men (just as men are sometimes capable of more than women)**.
- Then we can go from being seen as a church that is **Homophobic and oppressive to women**, and be seen instead as **a community that treats all—Christians and non-Christians, men and women—equally, with respect and love**.
- Close.