

HOMOSEXUALITY, SAME-SEX MARRIAGE, AND JESUS

A look at the divided views of Christians

Homosexuality and same-sex marriage aren't going away. Quite the opposite, in fact; they've already been established as legal rights, and the pressure is on to have them socially validated, too, as acceptable practices throughout the culture.

Christians, meanwhile, flop all over the spectrum as far as their response. A case in point was a meeting of ministers from several denominations in my hometown that convened to discuss the pros and cons of same-sex marriage. Half of those present condemned same-sex marriage on moral grounds and the other half condoned it on compassionate grounds. There was no meeting of minds, it was either condone or condemn.

But Jesus neither condoned nor condemned when faced with a woman caught in adultery. I wonder, then, if his verdict would have been any different had the woman been caught in a homosexual act, instead. All he said was, "I don't condemn you, but go and sin no more." At no point did he condemn the woman to the fires of Hell, but neither was he soft on sin.

In the meeting of ministers discussing same-sex marriage, however, it was like hearing one half of Jesus' statement, "I don't condemn you," from one half of the room, and the other half of Jesus' statement, "go and sin no more," from the other half of the room. No one put both Jesus' statements together.

Which is a pity because instead of witnessing to Jesus' perfect balance between compassion and a call for repentance, the Christian Church's witness on homosexuality and same-sex marriage is divided into two separate camps. Each camp has a point in its favour, but to preach only one half of Jesus' statement is like preaching only half a witness to him.

It's also raising serious questions in the minds of those observing the Christian Church in action, because on the one hand the Church appears to have no feeling and on the other, no guts.

Jesus, however, had both. "I don't condemn you," he said, showing his enormous compassion for the predicaments we humans get ourselves into, but he also said, "go and sin no more," because he wasn't backing down for one moment in telling the lady that her sin must be stopped. He didn't condemn, but he didn't condone, either.

So, is that how Jesus would've dealt with homosexuality and same-sex marriage today?

Well, why not? Homosexuality is still as much a sin as adultery, so why should it be dealt with any differently?

But that's the big question, isn't it, because right now the Church is divided in its answer. When homosexuals or same-sex couples want to attend a church, what response will they get, then? Or better put, what response should they get, for that church to be an effective witness to Christ?

The Church is a witness to the power and desire of Jesus to heal a broken world. The Church is in the business, then, just like Jesus was, of healing and restoration. So, how does one do that job effectively?

Well, we have one of Jesus' case histories, the woman caught in adultery, to give us a clue. It was a delicate balancing act between heartfelt feeling for her human weakness and strong admonition to change her life for the better. He didn't say, "I don't condemn you madam, please carry on sinning," like some Christian churches do today, who allow people to continue in their sin in church. But nor did he say, "You're going to Hell, lady, because of your sin," like other Christian churches do, who don't allow some types of sinner to enter the church at all.

Jesus did neither; he neither condoned nor condemned.

And that, to me, is a perfect illustration of how broken human beings are healed and restored. It's a combination of compassion and a call to repentance; of not condemning but not condoning, either. In combination they work wonderfully. Tip the balance too far either way, however, and problems result. Leaning too much toward compassion, for instance, can cause a church to become soft on sin - and that's no help to people when sin lies at the root of humanity's problems. But leaning too much toward morality can cause a church to become hard on sinners - and that's no help either, when love lies at the root of humanity's solutions.

I imagine, then, that if Jesus was the minister in a church and he was approached by a homosexual or a same-sex couple, his first response would be compassion, because these are hurting people who've been messed up by sin, just like everyone else.

I believe he would also let them know they are entering the church to recover from sin, not continue in it. Why? Because the Church exists to heal a broken world, and to heal a broken world needs both compassion and a gutsy call to repentance together.

It's both, not one or the other.