

[How Should We Respond to Homosexuality? Part 1](#)

Speaker: Joe Dallas, Focus on the Family.org, March 18, 2008

(Full Transcript Below)

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(Beginning 5:10) How then should we respond? Oh, so many issues, so much information, pain, so many opportunities come up. When we hit on the issue of homosexuality, it’s hard to know where to begin. I find it easier to know how to respond to a singular issue, one that you can isolate. [It’s] much more difficult to respond effectively to an issue that brings up so many sub issues: psychological issues, theological issues, sociological issues, and so forth; it can be overwhelming finding an appropriate response. I learned that the first time I was asked to address a congregation on this subject back in 1987 when I was asked to give my testimony and address the issue of homosexuality from a Christian perspective. And the understandably nervous young pastor approached me beforehand and said, “Now Brother, there are going to be people here who are very conservative and don’t think you ought to address a subject like this in mixed company. But we do have some liberal theologians here who are going to think you’re far too conservative. And we have some parents here who have gay teenagers, but there are teenagers coming who cannot stand gays, and we just got word that there are gonna be some AIDS activists who are gonna show up and heckle you. But please remember when you speak, don’t offend anybody” (Laughter)

I think that says it all. It is virtually impossible to take a position on homosexuality without offending someone. It is easily one of the most controversial subjects that the Church is trying to address today. Well, goodnight if it’s controversial. Why bother with it? I like the way the late apologist Walter Martin put it when he said, “Controversy for its own sake is a sin. But controversy for the sake of the truth is a divine mandate.” I love the way Paul put it in Ephesians when he describes the Body of Christ as His workmanship...the Greek word for that being “colima,” of course from which we get our word “colon” meaning that, in essence, God seeks to express His heart and His mind through His people much as a poet seeks to express herself or himself through her or his poetry. So that, ideally, if a non-believer wanted to know what the God of the Bible felt towards

homosexual people, that non-believer need look no further than God's colima, His workmanship, and would be able to say, well, this is how these people feel about homosexuals. Therefore, that is how God feels towards homosexual people.

Three primary responsibilities I see that God's workmanship has:

1. We have the responsibility to be consistent. God's workmanship must live what it preaches. We have the responsibility to be consistent.
2. We have the responsibility to be compassionate, especially towards those who oppose us. We have the responsibility to be consistent to live what we preach, to be compassionate to love those who we preach to and
3. We have the responsibility to be clear. Our culture should know that we have a message. Our culture should know what that message is.

The responsibility of God's workmanship is to be consistent, to be compassionate and to be clear. And I believe should God's workmanship fail to be any or all of those three, God would call His people to repentance and to recommitment. So first I believe God would call us to repent of whatever immorality exists within our own ranks and recommit ourselves to biblical standards of holiness. Remember Samson. Very buff, authoritative, and evidently his strength didn't lie just in his muscularity but in his adherence to his vow of separation to God. And you'll notice as long as he stayed faithful to that vow of separation, he retained his strength. It was only when he compromised that vow of separation—part of which included a vow not to get a haircut. When that vow was compromised, his strength was compromised. He was both disempowered and discredited. Should the Body of Christ compromise her vow of separation, she is disempowered. That is, she does not have the influence or the power in her culture she ought to have and she is discredited! She is seen as being hypocritical!

How we ring our hands over the sins of our culture. How adept we are at saying, what can be done about our cultural decay— what can be done about the high divorce rate, what can be done about the evil of pornography, what can be done about these scandals we have in leadership that are such a disgrace? And indeed it is a legitimate question. Yet, if it is true that, as Barna says, the divorce rate among conservative Christians hovers slightly higher than the divorce rate in the secular culture, if it is true as *Christianity Today* proposes that 3 out of 7 pastors is using pornography on the Internet, if it is true as *New Man* magazine proposes that 1 in 10 born-again Christian

men is sexually addicted to pornography on the Internet, when we have scandals in our own leadership that rival anything we have seen in Washington, if that is the case, then the appropriate question is not what can be done about this moral state of the culture but, rather, what can be done about the moral state of the Church??

Living in a sexually idolatrous culture, it is virtually impossible not to experience, at times, severe and on going sexual temptations. But what is not admitted is not dealt with. What is not dealt with remains in the dark and eventually overtakes the individual. And I think it brings up the broader problem in the Body of Christ: we seem so reluctant to be honest with each other not only about who we are, but what we wrestle against.

When I began working on my degree in counseling, I waited tables. And if you've ever worked as a food server you know that part of the job normally includes going into the bar and filling drink orders. And as I began doing that, I saw what you see in every cocktail lounge and that's the "regulars"—the people who come to drink together at the same time of day, most days of the week. And, initially, in seeing the regulars, I thought oh, how sad, nothing better to do in the middle of the day than swill alcohol. But, as time went on, I began to see something that they had with each other that I really came to envy, and that was their easy camaraderie with each other, their comfort with each other. They could walk through the doors of the cocktail lounge, look at each other and say, "Oh thank God, it's just you. With you I can be honest. With you, I can say what's on my mind. With you, I can admit how frustrated I am. With you, I can admit how much I hate my job, how depressed I am, how angry I am. With you, I can really be myself. And I began to think, why can't the Body of Christ be more like a bar?? (Laughter) You know, in some ways.

Would it not be a sign of real reformation in the Church if when we walked into our sanctuaries we could look at each other and honestly say, "Oh, thank God, it's just you. All week long, I've had to deal with pressure and attack and temptation and struggle, an unreasonable public, a demanding boss, kids that are driving me crazy. Here, at least, I can be myself. This is a place of safety." Not so I can be given permission to sin, but so I can be honest about my temptation to sin so that the sinful act that I would give in to will be aborted by my being honest and being held accountable for that. There, I believe, is the next reformation that must happen within the Body of Christ, introducing the element of safety into our congregations so that we

make a mutual commitment to a safe environment in which it is safe to confess our struggles. As James said, “Confess your faults one to another—not your just needs, those are easy. I can confess my need for a physical healing, or for more finances, or for a loved one of mine to be saved. That’s easy. That’s safe. But confess your *faults*, he said, one to another and pray for one another that we might be healed.

You know, it could well be that much of the healing that should take place in the Body of Christ isn’t taking place because we’ve been so loath to confess our faults to each other. So, it must begin with the Church recognizing (14:06) her own immorality, repenting of it, and creating within her walls a safe environment. Albert Adler said, “It is always easier to fight for our principles than it is to live up to them.” Give me a City Hall meeting to testify to, or a debate with a gay activist, and I can find that difficult but not impossible. But, oh my gosh, being a patient father, keeping my thought life clean, loving my wife sacrificially as I am commanded to do? Living up to my principles? Much harder than fighting for them.

You know, ironically though, the best way to fight for our principles is to live up to them. Having lived up to them, then we have a model of credibility that we can offer to the world by which we regain much of the power and credibility I believe we have lost through our own compromised vow of separation. So, let’s take Jesus at His word when He says, “Before you try to remove that speck in someone else’s eye, you must do something about the log in your own.” So, first, I believe God would call the Church to repent of her own immorality and recommit herself to biblical standards of holiness. Secondly, I believe God would call the Church to repent of hostility towards homosexual people and recommit herself to “bold love.” I believe, as we address the issue of homosexuality, God would call us to repent of whatever hostility exists within the Church towards lesbian women and gay men and recommit ourselves to bold love.

Remember Jonah, called to deal with a group of people he loathed and feared. The description of the Ninevites in his book is specific and strong: “they were exceedingly wicked and evil.” And when you see the word “evil” in the Old Testament you know, in essence, you’re looking at something that is more properly described as “unspeakable” (16:00). No wonder he was afraid. And so, he went to extraordinary lengths to get out of his calling. And God went to more extraordinary lengths to bring him back into his calling. And after he’d gotten himself barfed up on the beach, he said, “OK, I guess

this is what I'm gonna to have to do." But you notice even when he did preach to Nineveh, he delivered what must go on record as being the world's worst evangelistic sermon: "Destruction's coming! Destruction's coming!! Destruction's coming!!! Goodnight." No altar call. Not a super sensitive message. Just, "Man, you're gonna burn. Ha!" And, according to his own writing, the guy got himself a front row seat to watch the Bar-B-Q. And yet, lo and behold, from the king on down, Nineveh repented. And Jonah went ballistic! And he said, "God, I can't believe this. I preached destruction to these people and You redeemed them!" He held such contempt for the people he was dealing with, he lost sight of their humanity.

Which begs the question, doesn't it? How many of us are afflicted with the "Jonah syndrome"? The Jonah syndrome happens anytime we lose sight of the value of the humanity of the people that we oppose. The Jonah syndrome showed itself in the 70s when many Christian televangelists, and pastors, and well known preachers began speaking out against the sin of homosexuality, which was good but, too frequently, when people were doing so, they weren't content to preach against the sin of homosexuality, they felt compelled to offer lurid exaggerations about homosexual people themselves to underscore their point.

I remember when I was an active member of the gay community, both as a very promiscuous gay man and also as a staff member of the local gay church, sitting in my favorite bar, hearing some laughter at the end of the bar and going down to see what was so funny. And several of the guys had gathered around a Christian tract that somebody got a hold of that was titled (kid you not), "What homosexuals do to each other." And inside, there was a graphic, detailed, lurid description of all of these sadomasochistic, rather acrobatic things we were all supposed to be doing to each other several times a week. And I tell you, I was a very sexually aware, knowledgeable man. And yet I learned things about gay sex from the Christian publication I had never heard of before and realized, "Well, that's what we've been doing all this time and I have nothing to show for it!" It was amazing. We didn't see ourselves in the Christian material. We did not see ourselves in the words that Christians used to describe us. We saw distorted, fun house, mirror images of ourselves, and that told us two things. It told us first of all that Christians disliked homosexuality. Well, that we could live with. But it also told us that some Christians were willing to say things about us that we felt they knew were probably not true in order to make a political point against us.

But, if the Jonah syndrome reared its head in the 70s, it went full throttle in the 80s when we faced something as a community that nobody ever thought anybody would be facing when we began to hear rumors of many young, gay men who were developing symptoms that no one could understand—losing weight, sometimes developing skin lesions, and ultimately dying— isolated cases in Florida, New York City, San Francisco, Hollywood. The media wasn't reporting on it at the time; it didn't have a name. All we knew was that young, otherwise healthy, gay men were coming down with something that was killing them. And we didn't know if it was in the sex, if it was in drugs we were taking, if it was in the water, if this was genocide. We were utterly confused and very, very, very afraid. We were so scared...and vulnerable. And I've often felt that if ever there was an opportunity for the Body of Christ to move evangelistically within the male homosexual population, it was at the advent what, of course, we know now was the AIDS epidemic.

When thousands of young, homosexual men, and others— but in America it was primarily young, homosexual men— were facing issues of mortality they didn't think they were gonna have to face for another 50-60 years, when their lovers were throwing them out into the streets, when families abandoned them, when ambulances wouldn't pick them up, when they would go broke and had no medical care, then, of all times, how they needed somebody who'd come in alongside them and say, "My gosh, this is terrible. What can we do? Do you need a friend? Do you need somebody to talk to? Do you need practical assistance? Do you need connection? You're afraid of dying, but there's a remedy for that! Provision has been made at the cross, let me tell you about that!" What an opportunity! And, I trust there were Christians who did just that. But you know the problem, as with any group, the people who speak publicly for us are, too often, assumed to represent us in everything they say. And we, in the gay community, did not hear a compassionate Christian response that said, "Oh my gosh, we are concerned about you." Rather, we heard time and again from well known, and I dare say well respected, leaders in the Church: "The judgment of God is finally falling down on the sodomites! They're reaping what they've sown! You can't get away with sexual perversion...keep the kids away from them. Perhaps they all ought to be quarantined!" Translated: "Your sin has finally caught up with you. You're gonna die, and we not at all sure we're sorry!" And that is a message that the gay community will never forget.

Now, in the ensuing years, I think our rhetoric has become more responsible. I think we're becoming more balanced, and this is good. But the Jonah syndrome still shows itself. You know, to hear some of us talk, you'd think it was more important to politically defeat lesbians and gays than it is to see them won into the kingdom of God. So long as we are more concerned to win a political victory over these people than we are to see them born again into the Kingdom for eternity then our priorities are skewed. And we must repent. And I say that as someone who is politically active. My wife and I walk precincts for godly candidates. We are a part of the system. We are, unapologetically, a part of that "vast right-wing conspiracy," and we'll continue to be so. But I must remember, when I am tempted towards real hostility towards lesbians and gays, who protest conferences like this and say how hateful and bigoted we are, when I am tempted to pull out all the stops to steamroll them the way they are trying to steamroll us, I am reminded Jesus said Himself, "My Kingdom is not of this world." There are more important things than temporal victories. The eternal souls of the people we oppose are certainly more important than any sociological victories that we can attain. (End 23:50)