

THE *Gay* Gospel?

Joe Dallas



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THE GAY GOSPEL?

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WHERE WE ARE NOW

“The attempt to determine spiritual and moral truth by personal preference will lead to certain disaster, as it did in ancient Israel when ‘Everyone did what he considered right’ (Judges 17:6).”

JOSH MCDOWELL
The Last Christian Generation

Writing about homosexuality is like reporting on the weather. Things change so quickly, and sometimes so drastically, that what you write today seems irrelevant within weeks.

I wrote the first edition of this book in the spring of 1996 under the title *A Strong Delusion*, completing the last sentence three hours before my son Jeremy was born. Bill Clinton was our president at the time, and the hot topics relative to homosexuality were gays in the military, public funding for HIV education, and a few scattered school districts adopting pro-gay curriculum. The gay-rights movement had certainly gained momentum and public support, but in light of all that’s happened since then, 1996 seems almost quaint.

Back then we thought Rosie O'Donnell, Richard Chamberlain, and Ellen DeGeneres were straight. The Matthew Shepherd tragedy was still two years off, hate-crime legislation was somewhat novel, and gay/straight alliances in high schools were unheard of. Antisodomy laws were still on the books in some states, there was no *Will and Grace*, *Queer as Folk*, or Fab Five. The thought of an openly gay Episcopal bishop seemed laughable, and no county, state, or nation anywhere on earth had sanctioned same-sex marriage. In short, when *A Strong Delusion* was first released, we were living in very different times.

Some things relative to homosexuality remain the same, though, and one of them is the struggle experienced by women and men who wrestle with a conflict between their beliefs and sexual desires. In the years since I left both the gay church and community in 1984, I've seen my story repeated too many times, in too many lives. It's time we recognized those lives, and the seductive effect the gay religious movement is having on them.

Webster refers to a movement as a “tendency, a trend, or a series of organized activities working toward an objective.” The gay Christian movement meets all three qualifications. It represents a tendency among Christians who are homosexually tempted to yield to that temptation and then try to justify it. It represents an ongoing trend within parts of the Christian church to legitimize homosexual behavior. And it's brimming with organized activities working toward an objective of widespread acceptance of homosexuality in both the church and society.

In that sense, it's much like the broader gay-rights movement in that it seeks legitimization (not just tolerance) of homosexuality. Gay spokesmen have made no secret of the fact that this is their goal. Activist Jeff Levi put it plainly to the National Press Club during the 1987 Gay Rights March on Washington:

We are no longer seeking just a right to privacy and a protection from wrong. We also have a right—as heterosexual

Americans already have—to see government and society affirm our lives. Until our relationships are recognized in the law—in tax laws and government programs to affirm our relationships, then we will not have achieved equality in American society.¹

But pro-gay theology takes it a step further by redefining homosexuality as being God-ordained and morally permissible:²

I have learned to accept and even celebrate my sexual orientation as another of God's good gifts.

—Gay author Mel White

How could we go on being ashamed of something that God created? Yes, God created homosexuals and homosexuality.

—Reverend Troy Perry, founder, Metropolitan Community Church

I offered thanks to God for the gift of being gay.

—Gay priest Malcom Boyd

When God is alleged to sanction the abominable, a religious travesty is being played out, and boldly. The travesty is twofold. Not only are believers falling into homosexual sin and legitimizing it but uninformed heterosexual Christians are applauding them as they do! Prominent religious figures and Christian organizations are giving a friendly nod to gay ideology, making Isaiah's famous warning more relevant than ever: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (Isaiah 5:20 KJV).

A Growing Movement

To get a sense of the prevalence of darkness being called light, even among professing Christians, consider just a few of the gains the pro-gay religious movement within the Christian church had made as of mid-2006:

- Four of America's most visible mainline Protestant denominations—the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran

Church of America, the Presbyterian Church USA, and the Episcopal Church—contain thriving pro-homosexual groups that tirelessly lobby their denomination to officially condone homosexual practices and ordain openly homosexual pastors.

- The Episcopal Church's House of Bishops voted in 2003 to confirm the Rev. Gene Robinson as the first openly homosexual Episcopalian bishop. Regardless of the distress and division the confirmation generated within the denomination, official Episcopal Church spokesman Daniel England hailed the confirmation as “an important step for the church.”³
- The son of radio teacher and pastor Chuck Smith, who is regarded as one of today's foremost Bible teachers and is founder of the widely respected Calvary Chapel church fellowship, has publicly declared he is no longer certain the Bible condemns homosexuality. “I need to investigate more thoroughly,” said Chuck Smith Jr., pastor of Calvary Chapel Capistrano Beach in Southern California, when asked about biblical references to homosexuality. Departing radically from his father's orthodox views, Smith Jr. also condones gay adoption and affirms that “gay” and “Christian” aren't contradictory. “I know two young men who've been monogamous partners for seven years,” he states. “They've adopted a son who's thriving, they're good people, they've asked Jesus into their hearts and seek to live Christian lives.”⁴
- An October 2000 episode of the popular television series *The West Wing* featured the President of the United States (a fictitious character named Bartlet) reciting a lengthy pro-gay interpretation of the Old Testament Levitical codes prohibiting homosexuality. The character is portrayed in a positive light as he humiliates a woman who still believes the Old Testament prohibits this behavior.⁵
- Grammy Award-winning gospel singer Cynthia Clawson, a prominent figure in Christian music for decades, has become a regularly featured guest singer at gay churches and pro-gay events. When criticized for publicly aligning herself with churches that condone homosexuality, Clawson dismisses the subject as a nonissue, stating,

“Jesus never said anything about gay people. How important could it have been to Him if He did not mention it?”⁶

- Ken Medema, another popular gospel artist who frequently performs at conservative Christian events and churches, is also a defender of the pro-gay religious movement. Though heterosexual, he endorses the notion that homosexuality is legitimate in God’s sight and, like Clawson, lends his talents to meetings of “gay Christian” groups.⁷
- Former president Jimmy Carter, when addressing a meeting of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, compared homosexuality to other secondary issues that “in God’s eyes, fade into relative insignificance, as did circumcision in the first days of the early church.”⁸
- Brian McLaren, widely known as an author and leader within the emergent church movement, seems to share President Carter’s ambiguity on the subject. In an interview with *Christianity Today’s* online *Leadership Journal*, he recounts his refusal to give a straight answer when asked where he stood on homosexuality. “Many of us don’t know what we should think about homosexuality. We’ve heard all sides but no position has yet won our confidence.” In light of his (and supposedly many others’) inability to decide what’s right or wrong on the matter, he recommends a “five year moratorium on making pronouncements,” during which he suggests we “keep our ears attuned to scholars in biblical studies, theology, ethics, psychology, genetics, sociology and related fields.”⁹

McLaren’s words echo a common sentiment growing among people who claim the Bible is either vague when it comes to sexual ethics, or perhaps just needs a little help from the social sciences. While stopping short of saying “Homosexuality is okay,” he and others suggest that Scripture is unclear on the matter and, to gain clarity, we need to consider not only what Paul and Moses had to say, but also what today’s psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers think.

Adding to the problem are the denominations that, despite their official positions on homosexuality, are reconsidering the matter or

allowing their members to ignore their stated policies on sexual conduct. A confused believer does not have to visit a “gay church,” as I did, for affirmation of his homosexuality. Several Protestant bodies contain both leaders and parishioners who fully embrace the pro-gay position, even while their denominations technically reject it.

What Do We Find in Churches Today?

So a curious mixture is brewing in Christendom. Major denominations may be filled with women and men committed to biblical integrity, yet a pro-gay contingent has been allowed to flourish alongside them. So when a homosexual person seeking truth enters a mainline church, what might he find today?

In Mainline Denominations

In the Episcopal church, he might encounter some “progressive” bishops who have been ordaining openly homosexual priests for “decades—more than 100 since 1977, by some estimates.” In 1994, he’d learn, a number of Episcopal bishops signed a statement agreeing that homosexuality and heterosexuality are “morally neutral,” that both “can be lived out with beauty, honor, holiness, and integrity,” and those “who choose to live out their (homosexual) orientation in a partnership that is marked by faithfulness and lifegiving holiness” should not be excluded from the ministry.¹⁰ The congregation he visits might well agree. Indeed, a 1993 survey in the *National and International Religion Report* indicated that 75 percent of U.S. Episcopalians think sexually active gays can still be faithful Christians.¹¹

Among Presbyterians he would find an ongoing debate dating back to at least 1970, when a church panel declared that “sexual expression cannot be confined to the married or about to be married.” The panel’s recommendation was narrowly voted down. The discussion continues, though the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1991 rejected a similar report that claimed a “moral right” to sexual expression for “all persons, whether heterosexual or homosexual, single or partnered.”¹²

Among the United Methodist congregations, the visitor might stop

by the Foundry Methodist Church in Washington, DC, that has been home to, among others, former President and Mrs. Bill Clinton. There he might hear a visiting speaker describe the apostle Paul as a “self-hating gay man,” or he might listen as Foundry’s pastor considers whether or not Jesus was a cross-dressing “drag queen.”¹³ *

Also, when looking into the Methodist church, the visitor could choose between two diametrically opposing programs that coexist in the same denomination. Should he wish to embrace his homosexuality, he might join the Reconciling Congregations group, which advocates pro-gay theology. Should he decide to abandon homosexuality, the Transforming Congregations group will, thankfully, be available to him as well.

The visitor could listen in on dialogues already underway in the Reformed Church of America to determine the appropriate view of homosexuality. He could ponder the Christian Church’s (Disciples of Christ) election of a man who favors ordination of active homosexuals to head their denomination. And he’d be interested to note that two Lutheran Churches (ELCA—Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) in San Francisco hired homosexual ministers who refused to remain celibate, even though ELCA church policy dictates otherwise.¹⁴

Surely he’d scratch his head when hearing the Reverend Karen Bloomquist, director of a sexuality study within the ELCA, cite “all kinds of culture wars going on around issues of sexuality in wider society” as the cause for her denomination’s debate.¹⁵

Our curious visitor may well wonder: *Should culture wars in society dictate to the church what the church should believe?*

That’s a frightening thought, considering cult authority Dr. Ron Rhodes’s assessment of who should be influencing whom:

The culture-forming energies of Christianity depend upon the church’s ability to resist the temptation to become completely identified with, or absorbed into, the culture.¹⁷

* Although the official Methodist position on homosexuality is far more conservative than Foundry’s, unorthodox ideas about the apostle Paul and homosexuality are hardly new to Methodism. Victor Paul Furnish of Southern Methodist University, in a 1979 book, questioned whether Paul really condemned homosexuality in the New Testament.¹⁶

Indeed, the fact we're arguing over homosexuality is evidence of, as radio teacher Chuck Smith says, "a sign of weakness within the church. It should not even be a question, because the Bible is very clear on the subject." It's also a sign of accommodation. The world's shifting morality is affecting our own, spelling bad news for Christianity. "When the church begins to look and sound like the world," warned the late Dr. Greg Bahnsen of the Southern California Center for Christian Studies, "there is no compelling rationale for its continued existence."¹⁸

And large parts of the church are indeed looking and sounding more like the world, promoting ideas that sound increasingly secular and decreasingly biblical. In that sense there really is a "gay gospel," though it's a false one. It features a new and improved Jesus who's been stripped of His less-appealing qualities. Forget repentance, cross-bearing, and sanctified living. The sins that matter to Him mostly concern social justice, ecology, and the evils of fundamentalism (especially among the Religious Right). Other matters—sexual morality, personal holiness, and clear, uncompromised evangelism—are of secondary (if any) importance. This improved Jesus doesn't care if you're gay or straight, so long as you love whoever you're with. And He'll not only accept you as you are, but He'll also not impose restrictions on your life that you deem unreasonable.

Considering this new Jesus' growing popularity, evidenced by the weakness and moral uncertainty evident in many church bodies, it's small wonder pro-gay theology has made such strides.

In Conservative Denominations

By contrast, most evangelical, fundamentalist, and charismatic churches remain relatively untouched by the debates raging in their more liberal counterparts. Yet since 1987, my work counseling Christians with sexual problems leads me to believe there is something amiss in many conservative churches as well.

By and large, these churches are taking a clear stand against homosexuality while, however, showing indifference to or ignorance of the many believers in their own ranks who struggle with same-sex attrac-

tions. When homosexuality is mentioned from the pulpit, it's usually framed as a problem "out there in society." When denouncing it, though, few pastors add, "Perhaps someone here is wrestling with this sin, as well. Resist it—God will be with you as you do. And so will we."

As one who has known countless women and men who have renounced homosexual practices and who resist, sometimes daily, temptations to return to them, I can attest to the world of difference one encouraging remark like that from a pastor can make.

This neglect of a significant problem among believers can be found in Christian outreach or support programs as well. Special ministries exist in many churches for people dealing with chemical dependency, alcoholism, marital problems, postabortion trauma, emotional dependency, and eating disorders. Yet the question I heard the gay minister pose in 1978—"Why don't they do anything to help us get over our sin?"—remains largely unanswered.

One possible reason is ignorance. Conservative Christians may simply be unable to believe that such a problem could be plaguing one of their own. "I've never run across that in *my* church," a local minister assured me when I tried to acquaint him with my ministry to repentant homosexuals. Ethics and common sense kept me from informing him that his own choir director came to me twice a week for counseling.

Reluctance to tackle the messy issues homosexuality raises might be another reason to avoid the topic, though there's a certain inconsistency in that. I remember a friend of mine once suggesting to a pastor that his church might develop a support group for men wanting to overcome homosexuality. "That's unnecessary," the minister retorted. "We believe in the power of the Word to transform lives. We teach people the Bible and send them home; we're not professional counselors."

No, they are not, and no one was asking them to hire any. But this same church had, weeks earlier, started a support group for people who were "codependent." Moreover, a group for the chemically addicted had been meeting there for years. And sadly, one of this man's former associate ministers had fallen into homosexuality and died of AIDS.

So why the double standard? Why weren't the codependent, the drug-addicted, and the alcoholics also just "taught the Bible and sent home"? Why the willingness, in this church and so many others, to let pastors or group leaders address complex problems like addiction and dependency while relegating the homosexual issue to "professional counselors"?

Of course, many fine churches have no support groups of any sort, and who's to say they should? But among the thousands of churches that *do* offer special care for a myriad of other problems, doesn't it seem odd that so little support is offered to the repentant homosexual?

Where Is the Real Help?

So the homosexual is caught between two voices: the liberal and the conservative Christian, both of whom are repeating part—but only part—of Christ's words to another sexual sinner, the adulterous woman:

"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

"Neither do I condemn you," the liberal theologian comforts today's homosexual. "Go and sin."

"I *do* condemn you," the conservative Christian too often seems to retort, "so go and sin no more!" Or else he just says, "Go!" The sinner is then left alone to figure out just how to "sin no more."

No wonder the gay Christian movement looks so appealing to the woman or man struggling with homosexuality. It offers them acceptance and understanding that they may never have found in the church. That doesn't absolve them of responsibility if, like me, they decide to embrace pro-gay theology. But if we have offered them little help on their way toward making that decision, don't we bear some responsibility too?

Ron Rhodes makes a good observation on this point:

A person does not usually join a cult because he has done an exhaustive analysis of world religions and has decided that a particular cult presents the best theology available. Instead, a person generally joins a cult because he has problems that

he is having trouble solving, and the cult promises to solve these problems.¹⁹

Sadly, we seem to forget that we evangelical Christians can promise solutions too. We can address the expanding gay Christian movement, refute its claims, and equip ourselves to answer its revisions of the Bible. We can learn to intelligently debate pro-gay advocates in our denominations by knowing their arguments and the reasoning behind them. And we can promise to develop a more effective response to the repentant homosexuals in our churches who crave—and deserve—our support. Having done that, we can address the broader gay-rights movement by faithfully serving in both truth and love, refusing to compromise one for the sake of the other.

Answering Pro-Gay Theology

Promises such as these are long overdue, but many believers today seem eager to both make and keep them. That's why *A Strong Delusion* has been revised and rereleased under the title *The Gay Gospel?* It's written to equip Christians to answer the claims of pro-gay theologians, who insist homosexuality and Christianity are compatible. A Christlike, biblically based response to these claims is more urgent than any of us could have imagined in 1996, so when Harvest House Publishers asked me to update this book, I eagerly accepted.

The Gay Gospel? is based on a series of talks I began presenting to churches and conferences in 1991, titled "Answering Pro-Gay Theology." Several people mentioned how helpful the series would be if put into written form. Members of denominations debating the issue, for example, said such a book could be a valuable tool to them as they took a stand in their churches. Family members with gay loved ones said it could help them better understand their sons, daughters, or siblings who were part of the gay Christian movement, and concerned believers said this information could help them dialogue more effectively at their schools, workplaces, and social gatherings. That's when I determined to make a book out of the seminar.

Three things seem necessary to effectively answer pro-gay theology:

1. An understanding of its origin and evolution over the years.
2. A point-by-point knowledge of its claims.
3. A point-by-point response to each claim.

With that in mind, the next two chapters of this book will overview the importance of the subject and provide some background on the gay religious movement and the influences in modern Christianity that have contributed to it.

Chapters 5 through 8 will detail common pro-gay arguments such as “Gays are born that way”; “Homosexuals can’t change”; and “Homophobia, not homosexuality, is the problem.” Then, in answer to the often asked question “What do gay churches do with the Bible verses on homosexuality?” chapters 9 through 13 will outline what I call the “revisionist” interpretations of the scriptures that mention homosexuality. An answer to each argument and revision will be provided, as well as a sample dialogue/debate as a model for person-to-person discussions. In chapter 14, I’ve offered some thoughts on what does and does not work well when arguing these points, and in chapter 15, I’ve included more of my own life story, as well as my hopes for the church as it deals with pro-gay theology in the coming years.

Not all pro-gay theological arguments are included here; no book could adequately address them all. Some change regularly or are refined with time—and some, having been presented for a season, disappear entirely.

But some have stayed pretty much intact for years, even decades, and these are the ones I’ve included. They’re the ones I believe are most likely to be encountered and, therefore, need a response. Some of what I’d consider the more far-fetched arguments—attempts to sexualize David and Jonathan’s friendship, for example, or morph Ruth and Naomi into lesbian lovers—are rarely, in my experience, taken seriously and don’t merit the space needed to explain and contradict them. And the occasional attempts to paint a romance between Jesus and John the

Beloved are so repugnant and ineffective I'd rather not dignify them with any mention, though perhaps someday they too will be more commonly accepted and will require a response.

Despite this book's title, I don't find *gay* and *gospel* compatible. The gospel is the good news of God's love expressed in the person of Jesus Christ and His atonement. The gospel is not homosexual or heterosexual, though its invitation is extended to both groups, and this title isn't meant to imply otherwise. But God's good news to all people is being revised and presented as God's *approval* of all people, and this is what I consider the "gay gospel" to be about. It's a revision of the basics on human sexuality, with broader implications for the way we interpret the Scripture and approach Christian living. For that reason we'll use the term *revisionists* for those fighting for a pro-homosexual revision of the church's position on homosexuality, and the term *traditionalists* for those holding to the traditional and, I'm convinced, the doctrinally correct view that homosexuality is condemned in Scripture in unassailable terms.

"Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts," the apostle Peter admonished. "And always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason

The Word Gay

I'm aware of, and respect, the objections many people have to the use of the word *gay* when referring to homosexuals. *Gay* originally had a different meaning, after all, and it has been co-opted to put a more positive spin on homosexuality. But for better or worse, *gay* has become a commonly understood term meaning not only homosexual, but *homosexual-affirming* as well. So when a person says, "I'm gay," he's normally not just admitting his homosexuality. He's also saying, in effect, "I celebrate my homosexuality and accept it as normal and good."

This, to my thinking, is what *gay* means in modern culture, and it is in that context I use it. So when referring to a person, institution, or mind-set that affirms homosexuality, I may at times use *gay* as a descriptive term. In so doing I am not affirming homosexuality as being literally gay, happy, and so on. Instead, I'm using a term identified with the approval of homosexuality.

for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). This book was written toward that end, and with the hope that it will equip the servant of the Lord, as Paul so aptly said, to

not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Timothy 2:24-26 KJV).

As one who was graciously given repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, I hope that *The Gay Gospel?* will be profitable to those who can instruct, and to those needing instruction.

Because both groups are everywhere.