

An Open Letter to a Young Ministry Leader: Should Christians Oppose “Gay Marriage”?

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Julie Rodgers, ministry leader

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Dear Julie,

Here are some thoughts regarding your blog post, “[They’ll Know We’re Christians by What We Oppose](#)” (July 1, 2013). Julie, I appreciate your heart to win over others for the Lord and your sweet spirit of encouragement. This is your strength, along with your marvelous writing ability. Having met you once personally, I can testify that you are just as delightful in person as you are in your writings. You are also faithful in your own Christian life in not acting on your publicly acknowledged same-sex attractions. I expect that you will become a major figure in Christian ministry (and indeed you already have a growing platform). It is in this context as a Christian brother who cares about you and your ministry that I register the following concern: Your encouragement of Christians to bail on the public “gay marriage” debate is a harmful false start. Because your posting is public and because the view that you espouse has been put forward by other well-meaning

Christians (though rarely as winsomely and artfully as you), I have decided to make this a public letter to you.

1. The problems in your blog post start with your title, which recalls a lyric in a Christian song. The lyric itself directs the hearer to John 13:35: “By this all will know that you are my disciples: If you have love for one another.” Both the song and the verse refer to the love that Christians have for one another. Neither was ever intended to be used as a basis for Christians to shut up when the broader culture is declaring immorality to be a good and the Christian stance on sexual purity to be an evil. As Christians we can and should oppose lots of things: slavery, wars of aggression, material exploitation, racism, and immorality. Doing so does not violate the spirit of John 13:35. I believe that you have taken a common Christian phrase out of its context and made it say something that it was never intended to say.

Jesus in John’s Gospel repeatedly spoke out against works of darkness. Most of Jesus’ teachings in John’s Gospel (and even more so in the other three Gospels) are accompanied by judgment sayings. Are these too against the spirit of John’s Gospel? According to the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke) Jesus ate with exploitative tax collectors even as he continued to make public statements railing against the material exploitation of others and warning that failure to repent would lead to exclusion from the very kingdom that he proclaimed. Was that unloving?

2. John the Baptist spoke out publicly against the immorality of Herod Antipas taking his half-brother’s wife as his own, a woman who (incidentally) was also his half niece. For this public criticism John was beheaded. As someone baptized by John the Baptist and who had high praise of John, Jesus undoubtedly had significant continuity with John and his views. Jesus in his aggressive temple cleansing opposed corrupt practices and incurred the wrath of temple authorities leading to his death. Did this public act which generated such hostility constitute a misstep on Jesus’ part since the Temple authorities surely did not come to “know Jesus’ love” by his overturning of tables of the money changes and disrupting the sale of animals? I assume that you would agree that it did not. That should suggest

to you the problem with equating public opposition to “gay marriage” with practices detrimental to a gospel of love. In the cultural environment of Jesus and the early church, the emperor and emperor-appointed governors were not running a democracy. Explicit critique of the government could get one killed and, as a result, Christians had to be particularly careful about public critiques of the state. We are in a different political setting where we have a responsibility to speak out and vote in ways that promote the larger good and welfare of society as a whole.

3. You erroneously equate Christian opposition to the state coercion of “gay marriage” with “shunning gay couples” and rendering them “invisible.” According to your presentation Christians have to choose: either continue to resist state-mandated “gay marriage” or enter into an evangelistic outreach to those who are homosexually active. Your argument presents as an either/or of what is a both/and. Taking a stand in the public sphere against immorality does not preclude one from inviting homosexually active persons into one’s home and sharing the gospel with them. Opposing the public imposition of “gay marriage” rather addresses issues of whether the general public should be coerced to support through taxes, goods and services, forced indoctrination, penalties, and the attenuation of our civil liberties a form of sexual practice that is immoral and injurious to society as a whole. There is absolutely no correlation between opposing “gay marriage” and refusing to take the gospel (with its attendant message of repentance) to persons who are in homosexual unions. On the contrary, just as Jesus spent most of his time reaching out to the economic exploiters and sexual sinners who were at greatest risk of not inheriting the kingdom of God that he proclaimed, precisely because of their egregious sin, so too the church can and should combine opposition to immorality in the public sphere with an outreach of love. “Love not in the person his error, but the person; for the person God made, the error the person himself made” (Augustine).

4. In a response to someone who posted a critique of your article, you state: “I feel Christianity is lived out through relationships rather than a mass movement that controls the state. In other words: keeping gay people from getting married will not

draw them into an intimate relationship with Christ.” Christianity is lived out in all spheres of life, not just individual personal relationships. Keeping a male-female prerequisite in place for marriage will benefit society as a whole. A society that enforces “gay marriage” will make it less likely that people who want to come to faith in Christ will give up homosexual relations because of the brainwashing that they have received from the government. Not to give up homosexual practice, like continuing in an adult-incestuous bond, would put the person in danger of not inheriting the kingdom of God, irrespective of whether a confession of faith in Christ is made (see Paul’s discussion of the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5 with 1 Cor 6:9-10). Paul repeatedly warned converts to stop deceiving themselves into thinking that they could continue in unrepentant sexual immorality and still expect to inherit the kingdom of God and its eternal life (for example, 1 Thess 4:2-8; Gal 5:19-21; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Eph 5:3-13). That Paul made such warnings is an historical fact. Were such warnings unloving?

We don’t want to repeat the mistake of “liberal” Christianity of the nineteenth century in thinking that we can bring the kingdom of God on earth by social reform. Yet neither should we want to react as some conservative Christians once did in retreating from wider cultural engagement in order to preserve a spiritual Christian enclave until such time as they might be “raptured” out of this evil world.

5. “Gay marriage” will have widespread negative ramifications for society. Christian love for others and a desire to promote a healthy society necessitate public opposition to such a radical restructuring of the institution of marriage. The imposition of “gay marriage” will lead to more heavy-handed indoctrination of youth in the public schools and elsewhere, which will promote homosexual practice to some youth who would otherwise not have engaged in such behavior, cause many to renounce a foundational element of Christian sexual ethics (a male-female foundation to marriage), and lead to ostracism of those who continue to hold such a foundation as “bigots” (and they will be called bigots irrespective of whether they hold such views only within the church and not in public sector). The next generation of Christians in particular will be subject to significant persecution in their education, in their places of employment, in their characterizations in the media, and indeed in all public sectors.

“Gay marriage” will also further erode the institution of marriage since in eliminating a male-female requirement it does away with any rational and natural basis for opposing other immoral (though less severe) practices such as adult-committed forms of polyamory and incest. In increasing the incidence of homosexual practice in the population, “gay marriage” will have the effect of making heterosexual marriage more “open” and impermanent and less monogamous and long-term than it already is. Rather than influencing homosexual relationships to resemble married heterosexual bonds (only a small percentage of the homosexual population will get “married”), “gay marriage” will further escalate the deterioration of heterosexual marital unions and indeed decrease further the marriage rate. “Gay marriage” will result in more youth entering a homosexual life which, in turn, will lead especially among males to an increase in sexually transmitted infections and (ironically) mental health problems arising from disease, nonmonogamy, and high relational turnovers.

6. To be consistent, you would have to oppose Christian resistance to further changes in the definition of marriage that are essentially mopping up measures once a male-female requirement has been imploded: allowing marriage of three or more persons concurrently and marriage of close-kin adults (incest). This would be an absurdity. Indeed, you would have to oppose any unpopular attempts by Christians to speak out against idolatry, injustice, and immorality.

7. You seem to be moving toward a personal acceptance of “gay marriage” as a good for society when you state: “The hope of Christ isn’t that we’ll live in a society where men only hold hands with women and where gay people are denied hospital visitation rights.” The remark about “denying hospital visitation rights” suggests that Christians who oppose “gay marriage” are the ones doing harm to homosexually active persons in opposing “gay marriage” when in fact Jesus and the writers of Scripture generally view homosexual practice as an inherently self-degrading act. Hospital visitation rights in America today are very liberal in their extension of visitation privileges beyond family members to close friends. Persons in a homosexual union should not have the sexual component of their union

validated, as though they had now become “one flesh” with their same-sex “partner” through an immoral sexual bond. They should not have any special treatment beyond the treatment that would be given to close but non-sexual friendships. By the way, we do hope for a refashioning of heaven and earth in which all manner of sin is done away, which would certainly include an end to homosexual practice, as well as other sexual sins such as incest, adultery, bestiality, polyamory, and fornication. Certainly there is *more* to the kingdom of God than this but at the same time this *more* does not mean something *less* than an end to immorality.

When you say that “God is pursuing a man who’s married to a man just as much as a man who’s married to a woman,” you overlook the fact that a convert to Christianity has to dissolve a homosexual union but not a heterosexual one. True, in the kingdom of God even heterosexual marriage will be done away when the true marriage that it images between God/Jesus and the church is consummated. Even so, it is the union of a man and a woman, at its best, that prefigures this consummation, not the intrinsically sinful sexual union of persons of the same sex.

We know that a male-female requirement for marriage (and thus for all sexual relations) was so important to Jesus that he treated it as the foundation for sexual ethics, citing as he did Genesis 1:27 (“*male* and *female* God made them”) and 2:24 (“For this reason a *man* shall ... be joined to his *woman* and they [i.e. the two] shall become one flesh”). This was not a minor matter in sexual ethics for Jesus. It was on the basis of the twoness of the sexes in sexual union that Jesus rejected both polygamy and a revolving door of divorce-and-remarriage for any cause. In the context of talking about sexual sins, Jesus called on people to remove the offending body part because it was better to go into heaven maimed than to be sent to hell full-bodied (Matthew 5:29-30). Jesus warned the woman caught in adultery to stop committing adultery lest something worse happen to her than a capital sentence in this life, namely, loss of eternal life (John 8:11; compare 5:14). The Risen Christ in Revelation 2-3 warned a number of churches that tolerating sexual immorality in their midst could get them removed from a place in the New Jerusalem.

It is my hope that you will take this counsel in the spirit in which it is offered and give it careful consideration. I do appreciate so much your use of the many gifts with which God has blessed you.

Blessings,

Rob