



Central  
Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

*The Front Porch: Combining Conviction & Compassion*

Selected Scripture

Mark Mitchell

June 8, 2014

*series: Building a Home: One Room at a Time*

We're continuing in our series on the family called, "Building A Home: One Room at a Time." Today we're on the front porch talking about an issue a lot of people want to keep in the closet. The issue is how we as families, nuclear and church, respond and relate to those struggling with same-sex desires, a gay orientation, or who have chosen a gay lifestyle. We understand this is a very emotionally charged issue both in the church and in our culture. It would be much easier to avoid it, but we can't avoid it because it's an issue that's confronting us all the time.

This isn't the first time I've addressed this subject. Ten years ago when Prop 8 was on the ballot I gave two messages. The first was on what the Bible says about homosexuality. The second was on how we should respond to those in this lifestyle. Those messages were combined and put into a Position Paper that's been on our website for the past ten years.

Since I gave those messages, a lot has changed in our culture, and a lot has changed in our church. We've **not** changed our position on this issue, but we do have increasingly more families who are dealing with this in relationship to their own children and other family members. In the last ten years, this issue has become much more personal to most of us.

For this reason, I've decided to address this subject again. But I'm going to do it a bit different this time. I'm not going to focus much at all on what the Bible teaches about homosexuality. As I said, we haven't changed in that regard and you can read about that in our Position Paper available for all of you as you leave today. Instead, I'm going to focus more on how we as families and as a church family should respond.

### **There is Hope**

The first thing I want you to know is there's hope for people struggling with this issue. The issue of change is a big one in this discussion. Is there hope for healing and change for a person with a gay orientation? There are two distortions in the church about this. The first is the myth that sincere repentance and prayer for healing or even counseling will always change that person. Although that's possible, it rarely happens. The other myth is the opposite: there's **no** hope at all for change. The person with same-sex inclination can never be set free from these crippling desires. Here's where we need the balance of Scripture, which teaches sanctification and change is a lifelong process. Some sins are what Christians from another generation called besetting sins. This is any sin that overtakes us on a regular basis. It's like

we try and try and we can't get rid of it. It may be worry or pride or a bad temper. It clings to us.

Tim Stafford did an investigation into the success of ex-gay ministries. His conclusion was ex-gays seldom experienced a 180-degree reversal of their same-sex desires but rather a gradual reversal in their understanding of themselves and their identity in relationship to God. This past week I've been reading an excellent book called, *Homosexuality and the Christian* by Mark Yarhouse. His thesis is the most important thing about us is **not** our sexual identity, but rather our identity in Christ. When talking about homosexuality, he argues for a three tier distinction between attractions, orientation and identity. The first tier is same-sex attraction. Some people have this experience, but that doesn't say anything about their identity or their behavior. The next tier is homosexual orientation. This is when same-sex attraction is strong enough and persistent enough for them to feel they're oriented towards the same sex. The third tier is gay identity. This is when people say, "I'm gay. That's my identity. That's who I am."

The problem in our society today is we tend to collapse these three tiers into one so the person experiencing same-sex attraction is automatically presumed to have a gay identity. Yarhouse talks about the "gay script" that says if you experience same-sex attraction you are gay and for you to be truly actualized and fulfilled as a person you need to live that out. By the way, that's why the LGBT community despises the phrase, "Love the sinner, hate the sin." If identity equals behavior, then hating gay sexual behavior means you hate gays.

But Yarhouse says there's another script that says same-sex attractions may be part of your experience but they aren't the defining element of your identity. The most central aspect of your identity is who you are in Christ, and you don't have to follow the gay script just because you experience same-sex desires. People that understand that can experience fulfillment in Christ whether their desires change or not.

### **Conviction and Compassion**

The second thing I want us to learn today is to embody the full force of both grace and truth. Another way to put this is we need to express both conviction and compassion. As you look at the life of Jesus, you see his conviction and compassion were inseparable, and he held on to the full force of both. It wasn't like 50% conviction and 50% compassion; it was the full force of both. It's 100% conviction and 100% compassion. Jesus holds together

both conviction and compassion, and this is how he enacts his lordship to us.

Conviction means we don't compromise God's truth. Our conviction is that homosexual behavior is not appropriate for the Christ-follower. A Christ-follower is under the authority of Scripture. We don't get to make the rules. But, not only that, God created us and he knows what's best for us. When we deviate from our creator's plan, we're the ones who get hurt. I like how Andy Stanley puts it: "Sin has a 'gotcha' and God doesn't want it to 'getcha.'" The apostle Paul put it this way, ***"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life"*** (Gal. 6:7-8). Even our convictions are rooted in a God who loves us and knows what's best for us.

Compassion and grace means we love the way Jesus loves. How does Jesus love us? Does he love us because we're just so lovable? Does he love us when we decide to repent of our sin and clean up our act, or does he love us through it all? Rom. 5:8 says, ***"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*** Here is how it worked for Jesus: he called sin sin, and then he paid for it. Grace and truth. Conviction and compassion.

If you look at John 1 you see a beautiful statement of this. John introduces Jesus like this in v. 14: ***"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."*** And then a few verses down he says, ***"For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ"*** (v. 17). You see, it wasn't one or the other. It was both: Grace and truth; conviction and compassion. And he didn't switch back and forth. He was the full embodiment of both.

These two things are always in tension with one another. It will always be a bit messy and inconsistent. Keeping this tension will often cause misunderstanding. This, of course, was a misunderstanding that people had about Jesus.

Let's look at a few passages where this played out in his life.

### **Jesus and Levi the Tax Collector**

First, turn to Mark 2:13-17. This took place towards the start of Jesus' public ministry. That would have been a crucial time. You don't want to give the wrong impression. Verse 14 says as Jesus walked along he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting there at his tax booth. Jesus said, ***"Follow me"*** and Levi got up and followed Jesus.

I'm sure that raised more than a few eyebrows. Tax collectors were despised. They were like the wealthy pimps of the ancient world. When decent people talked about really bad people they'd use the phrase "tax collectors and sinners" because it's like

they were in a category all their own. Not exactly the way you want to brand your product.

But that's not all Jesus did. Verse 15 says he went and had dinner at Levi's house and ***"many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples."*** Talk about giving the wrong impression! It's okay if you want to use one guy like Levi to show your power to change a life, but this is taking it way too far! Back then, sitting down and eating with someone was an expression of friendship. Think of all his PR guys. They're having fits over this.

Someone might say, "Well, these were repentant sinners. The only reason Jesus would hang out with them is they were repentant." But we don't know that. The text doesn't say that. We have every reason to believe people wondered if he was actually accepting their behavior. See what I mean? Grace is messy. That's why the religious leaders were fuming, "Why does he do this?" Jesus shot back at them with this, ***"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners"*** (Mark 2:17).

This is why I have no question today Jesus would have befriended gay people. And I have no question many of us would have been confused and offended by that.

### **Jesus and the Samaritan Woman**

Let's go to another example. You might think Jesus was so soft he'd never bring up anything to offend someone. Look at John 4 and the story of the Samaritan woman. Jesus showed grace to this woman. He broke all the cultural and religious rules when he engaged with her. Not only did Jews hate Samaritans, but Jewish men weren't supposed to talk to a woman alone like this. But Jesus doesn't just greet her, he asks her for a drink of water and he drinks out of a cup that would be considered unclean by any self respecting Jew! Even more significantly, he showed grace to her by offering her living water that would spring up to eternal life (v. 10).

But then Jesus brought up a very uncomfortable subject. He told her to, ***"Go call your husband and come back"*** (v. 16). This seems like a strange thing to say, but it was essential for her to come to terms with something if she was going to experience the gift of God. The conversation continues. She says to him, ***"I have no husband,"*** and he says, ***"You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true"*** (verses 17-18).

Her life was composed of one relationship after another. There was sexual brokenness and sin in her life. And Jesus, who is full of both grace and truth, brings it right out in the open. He didn't do this out of a cruel need to humiliate her. Rather, this is a skilled surgeon's scalpel necessary for her to experience the life he came to offer. And she found it. Her life was transformed and she went on to evangelize her entire village.

Grace and truth. Conviction and compassion. For us to receive this gift of living water he spoke about, we must allow him to bring our sin into the light. But that never would have happened with this woman unless Jesus had first boldly broken a few rules and engaged genuinely with her. It's messy. It's confusing. Not a balance of grace and truth but the full force of both.

### **Jesus and the Lost Sheep and Coin**

We see something similar in a third example from Luke 15. Again, Jesus was surrounded with tax collectors and sinners, eating with them like they're his best friends. When the religious leaders saw this they questioned him. *"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them"* (v. 2).

Jesus responded by telling some stories: *"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep'"* (verses 4-6). Then he tells another story about a lost coin. *"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin'"* (verses 8-9).

Both stories picture someone losing something valuable to him, and then searching for it, finding it and rejoicing over that. Both stories show how important lost people are to God. He views them not as wicked sinners but as lost people who don't even know they're lost. And they're precious to him, so much so he frantically searches for them. How do you feel when something precious is lost? I panic when I lose just my keys. Think of the most precious thing you could lose, and you might begin to get in touch with the loss God feels when just one member of the human race wanders off. There are almost thousands of gays here in the Bay Area. Some of them know Jesus, but most of them are lost. Many of them don't want to have anything to do with Christianity or the church because they think we teach God hates them and is going to send them to hell.

But God's grace is such that he relentlessly pursues them. He loves them and wants to be in relationship with them. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. God is on a personal, risky, and intense hunt for every single lost gay person. Not one of them is so far away that God isn't still tracking them down, or too far buried beneath the dirt of life that God isn't still sweeping to find. Some of them became Christians in a church youth group or a Young Life camp, and they wandered away, but God is still chasing them down. That's compassion.

But it's not compassion without conviction. At the end of both stories he says essentially the same thing: *"In the same way, I tell*

*you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"* (v. 10). He doesn't deny their sin. Gay people have to repent of their sin just like I do. He loves them whether they repent or not, but when they do, he throws a party.

The real question these stories confront us with is, will we join the search party or not? When someone who was lost is found, will we rejoice? And, will we party with the search party? The religious leaders wanted nothing to do with that. That's why in the third story of the Prodigal Son it was the older son who stayed outside and criticized the lavish grace and compassion of the father. He was all conviction; no compassion.

### **Jesus and the Woman Caught in Adultery**

My last example is my favorite. You probably know the story from John 8. A woman is caught in the act of committing adultery. The religious leaders see this as a perfect opportunity to trap Jesus. They drag the woman through the streets. We wonder, where's the man she was with? But they don't care about that; they just want to get him to say something they can use against him.

With a large crowd gathered around Jesus in the temple courts, they throw her down before him. *"Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"* To them, she's like a case study, not a person.

Then Jesus stoops and writes something on the ground with his finger. We don't know what he wrote, but in doing this he slowed everything down. They persisted and finally he stood straight up and said, *"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."* You see, in Jesus' mind sin is sin. They want to single her out, just like we want to single the sin of homosexuality out, and that's wrong.

Then it says Jesus stooped down again. I sort of imagine him positioning himself between the woman and her accusers, like, if you're going to throw a stone it you'll have to risk hitting me. Jesus is clearly standing with this woman, even in her sin.

I love how it says when the people heard this they began to file out, the older ones first! Now it's just Jesus and the woman. He asks her, *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"* He was dealing with the issue of shame here. Shame is a powerful thing. Shame will keep you in hiding and it will keep you from being set free. She looks around and replies, *"No one, sir."* Then Jesus says, *"Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."*

There it is again: compassion ("Neither do I condemn you"); conviction ("Go and leave your life of sin"). I've often wondered what happened to that woman. Do you think she changed? Do you think she left her life of sin that day and became the poster girl for abstinence? I think she did change, but I don't think it happened overnight.

## Jesus and the Corinthian Church

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul lists several sins that characterized people who will not inherit the kingdom of God. He speaks with great conviction and says, *“Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

So right there in the pews of the Corinthian church were people who had come out of that lifestyle. By the way, notice in this list how he puts homosexual sex right along side of things like greed, alcohol abuse and slander. We tend to think it's okay for people to come to church who struggle with things like greed and gossip, but not homosexuality. For Paul, like Jesus, sin is sin.

But these are people in church who have come out of those lifestyles and are dealing with those sins. We have a wonderful ministry here at CPC that helps men and women who are dealing with alcohol and drug addiction. My experience with those people is that change is a process. It's often two steps forward

and one step back. And sometimes these folks just fall on their face. But when they fall we're there to pick them up. Because of that CPC has a reputation for being a hospital for the sick rather than a country club for the initiated. Why can't we be a place like that, not just for the recovery community, but for those struggling with same-sex attraction and behavior?

So my message should be very clear today. Families and churches are best when they embrace both grace and truth, conviction and compassion, and won't let go. It's not a balance of both; it's the full force of both. And it's messy. People will misunderstand you, like they misunderstood Jesus. But we dare not let go of either. There was a time in each of our lives and there will be times in each of our lives when we need massive doses of both.

Let's learn what it means to manage that tension in dealing with this issue. We want every person in every walk of life to know that God says, “Yes, you've sinned and I've paid for it. Yes, I want you to leave your life of sin, but even if you're struggling with that, I still love you. You see, the truth is, you're a sinner, but the grace is, I don't condemn you.”

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

© 2014 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA  
Catalog No. 1401-6