



What Would Jesus Say To Ellen?

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We are in a battle for souls. As our culture becomes increasingly confused in the areas of gender and sexuality, we the church must grow bolder in our proclamation of the truth--the truth of Jesus power to transform lives through His body. A few years ago my pastor wanted me to respond to Ellen's coming out of the closet. Her public confession provoked in me a greater passion to proclaim Jesus transforming love for the sexually broken. As Christ's body, we alone possess the truth, grace, and healing power that can set captives free.

May the following article on which that sermon was based empower you to be a source of transforming love for the sexually broken. You are a vital part of the body of Christ. Together we can raise the banner of His love amid the confusion and win many to His powerful love.

What would Jesus say to Ellen? I refer of course to sitcom star Ellen Degeneres who revealed her lesbianism on her show last April to about 36 million Americans. How would Jesus respond to her?

Would He call her Ellen "Degenerate", a la Jerry Falwell? Or would He bless her for being true to herself? He would do neither. Jesus would woo her with a love that is full of truth, full of grace, and full of healing power. His compassion would call her onto a higher and truer reckoning with who she is as a woman called to glorify Himself. Jesus would neither condemn nor bless her in her lesbianism; He would seek to save her with a love that is as grace-filled as it is truthful. And if she responded to Christ's call to follow Him, He would throw a "coming out" party for her that would surpass any that the gay community could give one of its new members. He would celebrate her true membership in His body, and would call each of us to celebrate with Him that one who was lost now has been found. That's what Jesus would offer Ellen. If she were listening.

That's a big "if." Anyone at the start of an intense infatuation similar to Ellen's relationship with her new lover usually isn't listening to Jesus. The power of misplaced affection drowns out the "still small voice." Are there others like Ellen who are listening? Young people in the throes of same-sex attraction--women barely out of their teens who have been abused or at least confused by men and who are comforted by the empathy and tenderness of girlfriends? Or young men unaffirmed in their manhood whose longings for father become tangled up in masculine eroticism? These are the ones on the brink of sexual decision-making; these are the ones most adversely impacted by an Ellen. These are the ones left to determine whether her choice is the only or the best way to go. These are the ones the prophet Joel spoke of when he proclaimed: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision." (Joel 3:14) As an 18-year-old, I was listening. While in the throes of the homosexual lifestyle, Jesus wooed me with a love as truthful as it was filled with grace. A love powerful in healing

authority. And that love beckoned to me through His body-- good Christians who administered that truth and grace and healing power.

The church conveyed to me the compassion that transforms lives. John 8:1-11 gives us a glimpse of Jesus love for the sexual sinner, and the kind of love He wills for each of us to have for him or her. That love powerfully heals through its fullness of grace and truth. This passage describes a group of religious men who drag a woman caught in the act of adultery and present her to Christ. They await His verdict as to whether or not she deserves death by stoning, a punishment derived from a literal interpretation of Mosaic Law. Jesus responds that any of the accusers who are without sin can cast the first stone. One by one, the men drop their stones and depart. Jesus releases her from condemnation, then commands her to leave her life of sin. The men who caught the woman in her sin were actually trying to entrap Jesus. If He followed the Law literally, He would undercut His call to forgive and redeem the fallen; if He handled her adultery too lightly, He would disregard the severity of sin. Jesus acts to liberate the woman. He sees that her bondage is twofold. Not only was she ensnared by the sin of adultery. She was also held captive by those who had already condemned her to death. It was as if her accusers were saying: "You've made your coffin; now lie in it!"

How do these two realities--the sin of adultery and the accusations that condemn the sinner apply to the "Ellen's" of our day? First of all, homosexual fantasy, identity, and relationships constitute a kind of adultery. In Matt.5:27,28, Jesus expands the definition of adultery to include not only sleeping with your neighbors spouse but also to the lusts of the heart, imagination, and eye. "If anyone looks at a woman lustfully he has committed adultery with her in his heart." (v.28) When any of us seek to possess another sexually in our imaginations or in our actions, we commit adultery. The only context for sexual passion is heterosexual marriage. That is the consistent teaching of the Old and New Testaments. It is the clear teaching of Jesus. But rather than minimize scriptural boundaries for sexual activity, Jesus magnifies them to include the state of our broken hearts, out of which adulterous thoughts flow like water from a polluted fountain. The one wrestling with same-sex attractions can readily commit adultery. (S)he sins when those tendencies are submitted to homosexual fantasies and relationships. Regardless of the strength or the direction of our sexual desires, we sin when we seek in thought or deed to be one with another outside of heterosexual marriage.

Ellen's "coming out" is a serious deception in that she is choosing a lie. Though the roots of homosexual tendencies are complex and often outside of ones control, Ellen is making a choice to submit those tendencies to an identity and relationship and lifestyle that violate Gods will in their disregard for heterosexual marriage. I am grateful for those truth-tellers many years ago who called me to squarely face the truth of Gods Word in regards to sexual boundaries. I couldn't choose not to have homosexual tendencies. But I could choose to accept the protection of truth that these boundaries afforded me. What then were my choices? If God wasn't freeing me to be a homosexual, what were my options? I discovered that I could choose Jesus and His body in the light of my broken, adulterous heart. I could choose a love that was and is higher and truer and deeper than any worldly hook to my homosexuality.

Denial of homosexual struggles is no answer. Covert, shame-laden desires and actions are death--the only answer lies in coming out into the light of Jesus and His body-- to become known as one who is in need of truth, grace, and transforming power. The one facing homosexual tendencies is not unlike the single person or one amid a broken marriage who has no outlet for sexual expression. In that needy place, we need Jesus. In our yearning for love and connectedness, we need the covering of Christ and those whole-enough members of the body who can love us without hooking into out adulterous tendencies. We need to meet Jesus through His body, and there discover grace and truth and transforming love. A friend of mine recounted an experience he had one Sunday morning in church. The night before he had poisoned himself with pornography and still bore its toxic effects as he entered the service. Detached and ashamed, he participated little in the worship and heard almost none of the teaching. Before the call to communion, the pastor requested that anyone in need of confessing sin could come forward and do so with a prayer team member. My friend spotted a friend on the team and responded to the call. There he lay down his sin and shame; he felt like his stomach had been pumped by the Spirit. Then, during communion, the Lord spoke to him: "Don't you yet know that you can feed off of

me? Come to me, allow me to be your food. My body was broken, my blood shed so that you could partake of me in those deep places where you hunger for love. Forsake the false bread of this world. Come to me, the bread of life, and I will satisfy your soul." My friend discovered Jesus through His church that day.

And yet for many with adulterous tendencies, the church continues to be a threat. Once our sin and need is revealed, will we like the adulterous woman be taken captive by others judgments? The church can either reveal Jesus to us, or the Pharisee. That is particularly true of those disclosing homosexual struggles. Many Christians view homosexuality as a worse expression of adultery than traditional sins like heterosexual lust and seduction. Why is this? Is it possible that something about homosexuality provokes fear about our own adequacy? For example, little boys in their striving for #1 status will almost instinctually refer to the weaker ones as "faggots." The measuring stick for masculine prowess seems to be based in not being a homosexual. Those who actually struggle in that way represent something inferior that may threaten another's tentative claim to potency.

Regardless, the cross creates level ground in the body of Christ. The swaggering, empty heterosexual who seduces women must kneel alongside the broken male who felt he could never measure up to his macho brother and who now is prone to homosexual adultery. The flirtatious female looking for a man to save her must realize that her sin is on par with that of the abused woman who is fearful of men and looking for a woman to save her. We are all broken, we are all adulterers, we all need Jesus. Without Him, we are all degenerate. That recognition breaks the dividing wall between those who wrestle with homosexual and heterosexual adultery. Once broken, we can kneel together before the same cross and discover the truth, grace, and healing power that frees us as we gather in His name. Bonhoeffer writes: "Anyone who lives beneath the cross and who has discerned in the cross the utter wickedness of all men and of his own heart will find that there is no sin that can ever be alien to him." My wife Annette discovered this truth many years ago. At a meeting in West Hollywood, God graced her with the sight that her sin was no better or worse than the homosexual strugglers who surrounded her. She never picked up those attitudinal "judgement stones" again. According to John 8:1-11, Jesus first clears out the hearts of the accusers. Jesus knows that only a community of grace can free us to deal forthrightly with our sin. He breaks the power of condemnation by silencing our accusers, then implores us "to leave our lives of sin." (John 8:11) And having broken the power of sin, Jesus raises up the true person. He bears the shroud of the homosexual "self;" He then imparts freedom for His people to walk in purity toward heterosexual wholeness. God wills that we grasp the goodness of His intention for us, humanity as male and female. I believe firmly in the healing authority of Jesus and His church to restore His sexual order for humanity, regardless of our starting points.

We must renounce the unbelief prevalent in certain evangelical circles that resigns homosexual strugglers to little if any release from their tendencies. That perception of God is too small! Though a journey that we will continue on until we see Him face-to-face, Jesus heals the homosexual. And He wills to heal through His church.

Jesus calls each of us out of our closets and into His community. It doesn't matter whether our adultery is heterosexual or homosexual. He calls us all to kneel before the one cross, and discover there the truth and grace and transforming power of His love. Only there and only then will the "Ellen's" of this age discover a true alternative to the deception of this age.