

# **The Great Shame**

a message that must be preached.

ISAIAH 1:17 "Learn to do right! Seek justice, relieve the oppressed and correct the oppressor."

By Scott McKernan

I think it best to open this book with a little story.

There once were two women in a kitchen. While Mary was preparing a roast for dinner, her friend Kate said to her "why did you cut the end off of the roast before you cooked it?" to which Mary replied "it's the way Mum always taught me." The next day Kate visited Mary's mother and asked her why she taught Mary to cut the end off of the roasts. Mary's mother replied "That's the way my mother taught me!" Determined to get to the bottom of this, Kate visited Mary's grandmother and asked her why she taught her daughter to cut the end off of her roasts. The grandmother replied "back then I only had a small roasting pan and the roast wouldn't fit."

### WE ARE IN A CRISIS!

I have come to the conclusion that we, the Church, need once and for all to come to a conclusion on matters of sexuality. This is a topic that can fire us up no matter where we, as individuals, may stand. I have my own views, beliefs and values on the subject of human sexuality, as you may too.

I find the Church's debate on sexuality one of the most critical issues we are facing at the moment. This is evident to me because; firstly, the impact and consequences for people in this life and eternity are immense; and secondly, there may be an effect on our theology, or in other words, how we view and relate to God.

I aim to discuss some of the phenomena we find ourselves amidst in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These issues include predominantly same sex attraction and marriage, as well as people who are transsexual and also intersex people (formerly known as hermaphrodites).

There is some subtle change happening in certain pockets of the Church when it comes to accepting gay and lesbian people, however, we at large seem to hold the view that all sex outside of consensual sex between a husband and his wife is SIN. " The Bible says this in black and white, I believe it and that's that."

While for the majority I believe in the principle of believing the Bible, I also believe that we need to take a closer look at these issues as well as what the Bible may or may not actually be saying.

While researching some of these issues I learned some valuable life lessons from history. I learned that we cannot always afford to go with what the majority says to be so. It may seem to be right and it may be easier, but there is a living truth that abides in us as Christians. This truth is that Christ is our example of which we are to be conforming. He didn't always go with the majority...He had courage!

Throughout history the Bible has been used to support and endorse the slavery of human beings in the United States of America and possibly other parts of the world. We have also used it to suppress women and their rights, start needless wars and commit anti-semitic acts.

Nothing like that goes on now. We are all good intelligent Christians these days and we couldn't possibly be so blind as to let anything like that happen, could we?

We are more high tech and savvy these days when compared to past generations, but that's not to say that throughout history humanity lacked intelligence until now. We may have a vast array of knowledge, but this does not prevent us from having poor judgement and therefore we are as always...because we are human...able to repeat the mistakes of the past. I believe that we the Church are currently making a similar mistake, only on the subject of sexuality.

## STRUGGLE, CONFUSION, TURMOIL AND HATRED

I figure the best place for me to start is with myself. I am 33 year old man and have been a Christian since I was 10. I was a part of a Pentecostal denomination and I am grateful for that. However, in recent years God has led me away from the comfort and safety of my home Church into a broader and richer relationship with Himself. I feel that He has used this time (and is continuing to) to establish me, heal me and prepare me for things to come. Throughout this time He has never left me without Christian fellowship.

For most of my Christian life I felt like God was disgusted with me for having certain desires that (it seemed) I could not control. After all, the Bible uses words like "shameful" and "unnatural" when discussing homosexuality.

I tried everything I could think of to change. I prayed and prayed for years and years, but still I was not heterosexual. My Pastor did all he could do via prayer and counselling and one of those attempts even had me convinced I had changed, but I was soon disappointed and frustrated.

I had been to Exodus, a Christian organisation that originated in America who claim to 'heal' people of their homosexuality. I read their books and did everything they said to do. I placed a lot of hope and faith in their message and spent years waiting for the results, but nothing happened. I realised if God wanted me to be straight then something needed to change, but what?

As God had always been so important to me, wanting to please Him was my greatest desire. He meant everything to me and still does. He has always been my "be all and end all." The thought of consciously embracing being gay and therefore seeking a husband, although part of me would have liked that, was not something I would have considered doing. It seemed unthinkable. There were

times when I had slipped from my "conviction" and acted on my longings. It was like living in a prison cell. There was no escape from those "horrible" feelings and desires I had for other guys.

There were people along the way who tried to tell me that I didn't need to change, but at the time I thought that they didn't know what they were talking about. When people would say this to me it seemed very comforting. THEY TOLD ME THAT I WAS OK. Considering I had been beaten and rejected for being gay, this was a welcome relief, especially as I had never chosen to be gay in the first place. It made me feel like all that I had suffered was NOT justified. Somehow, the Church's views seemed to make me feel the abuse WAS justified.

### NEEDING TO KNOW

In September 2006 I was in a counselling session and I said something which prompted my counsellor to say "look, are you gay or are you straight - which is it?" My little speech about God making me into a straight guy didn't wash with her. To her you were either born straight or you were born gay. So, I ashamedly answered "I'm gay," as I was still attracted to men despite my attempts to change.

My counsellor, a woman with a deep faith, said some things to me that day that began a revolution in my life. After all my loyalty (or so I thought) to God, she actually said some things to me that really got me thinking. I can't remember her exact words, but they stopped me dead in my tracks and made me think "am I right?" The thought that God made me gay was so incomprehensible, I just didn't know what to do!

Something stirred in me and I looked at my counsellor and said "I'm going to put this to God in prayer." I left that room with a determination to find the truth. I went to a quiet place to be alone with God and prayed. I could barely dare to talk to Him about it as I wasn't sure whether or not I was disgusting Him. I had to push through all of that to find out what he really thought about it. My heart was pounding.

I asked Him what He thought about me having a male partner. I sensed that He was not bothered by my question. I wasn't sure if that was my imagination so I then asked Him what He thought about me getting a bomb and blowing up a town. Instantly I felt a shudder in my spirit which quietly shook me. This seemed to confirm what my counsellor believed, but obviously this was far from convincing.

I headed home to think about what I experienced. I went back and forth between trying to grasp what it meant if God made gay people gay and feeling like a dirty little worm for even considering this. I pressed on, and rang the Gay and Lesbian Switchboard (a free community service line based in Melbourne), and asked what contacts they had for Christian services. They gave me three

numbers, the Metropolitan Community Church, the New Wave Christian Fellowship and one for the Rainbow Sash Movement. I rang the New Wave Church and spoke with the Pastor. I asked her if she could send me some literature on being gay and Christian. She obliged.

I tried ringing the other two numbers I was given. I was unsuccessful in contacting the Metropolitan Community Church, but I did get in touch with a man named Geoff who was part of the Rainbow Sash Movement. I found him to be very personable and intelligent. The fact that he truly accepted being gay made it much easier for me to discuss things.

Over the next two weeks we spoke for hours, discussing all the view points we could think of that the Church has on this subject. To every argument the Church made he had a genuinely wise counter argument. He gave me a lot to think about.

I felt a tremendous sense of responsibility as I sought God on the issue of being gay. Many Christians believe homosexuality is a sin which will keep you from going to Heaven, and the Bible seemed to indicate this. Because of this I approached the issue with a sense of awe and the utmost of integrity. Considering the Church holds the view that being gay keeps you from entering Heaven, I became aware that if in fact the Church is wrong on this issue, then it was actually the Church who was keeping people away from Christ and His Church because of their prejudices.

I was prepared to accept that God hated it. If I came to that then it stood to reason God would help me become heterosexual, just like He helps with everything else. It would have been hard to accept, but I started to think "how come after years of trying everything to change I made no progress?"

The next day I received my literature in the mail. I learned that things were not necessarily as they seemed with the Bible. 1 Corinthians 6:9 indicates that, among other people, homosexuals will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This used to create turmoil for me because I thought I was doing something incredibly bad. Even though I knew I was going to Heaven because of Christ's cross, I still felt like I had no control over being something which God abhorred and detested. I felt like I was one of His delinquent kids who He apparently loved, but couldn't truly and fully love...and I was powerless to do anything about it.

The literature I received gave me a brief study on 1 Corinthians 6:9, especially on the word "homosexual." Originally the word meant "one who is soft" or "softie." The original greek word used here is "malakos". From my study on this passage I have learned that leading scholars are not all in agreement as to what this word means, but what is clear is that the word "homosexual" is not what the Apostle Paul was referring to. How we have come to include the word "homosexual" into modern Bibles (since 1946) is, unfortunately, by human error. The King James version started it off by translating the word "malakos" as "effeminate" and this human prejudice developed into the word "homosexual."

Note: - being effeminate could hardly be a sin since not all gay men are effeminate  
- there is no mention of lesbians here, only men

I also read about the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. This is the most famous 'condemnation' of homosexuality in the Bible. We associate Sodom with homosexuals, but this is not what the Bible actually says. One point raised is that ALL the men of Sodom were going to gang rape the two male angels. The notion that all the male citizens of Sodom were gay is simply irrational. Secondly, the reasons God destroyed these cities is mentioned in more than one place in the Old Testament, including Ezekiel 16:49-50, and there is no mention of homosexuality. Ironically one of the sins listed is being unkind to strangers (or those who are not "one of us"). It seems that Sodomy is alive and well in the Church, but not necessarily coming from gay people.

Further study revealed something I found to be quite startling. There is an almost identical passage of scripture found in Judges 19. This is a story of a Levite and his concubine. God ended up destroying another city because its residents were like that of Sodom and Gomorrah. They gang raped the Levite's concubine and left her to die. What amazes me is that in recent history we have used Genesis 19 to condemn homosexuality, but we have not used Judges 19 to condemn heterosexuality. These are purely human prejudices at work here, not God's and not the Bible!

To further my study, I purchased some books from Amazon.com. I ordered "What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality," as this had been recommended. Of all the books I eventually read, I found this to be the most thoughtful and accurate.

The further I looked into things, it seemed I was born gay. Several times while speaking with Geoff I told him I was just not sure about it. He pointed out that I was waiting for God to write in the sky "it's OK to be gay!" I realised I was going to have to make a decision what to believe. It was hard to disagree with the majority of the Church, but I couldn't turn my back on the fact that the Church seemed to be wrong. Where would we be if Martin Luther King didn't stand up for what he believed?

Within three months I realised that I was created gay. To come to this conclusion I recalled something God said to me. Years earlier, while attending Church, I went up to an altar call and intended to ask the minister to pray for me to become heterosexual. He came up to me and placed his hand on my shoulder, I knew I didn't need to say anything. We just stood there. He then said to me "all I'm getting is 'STOP RUNNING.'" I could tell by his facial expression that he didn't understand its meaning.

That night I thought about what it meant, I figured that God was saying to stop running from the things that make me gay in order to get set free from it. I thought this because of Exodus' teachings. The next day I received a package in the mail from a ministry I was partnered with. I tore it open and the first thing I saw was a red stop sign saying "STOP RUNNING." The package was a set of tapes entitled "Stop Running, Get a Grip and Face Reality." I didn't order that package.

Stop running was the only thing God ever said to me on the subject. I searched for the reasons that I was gay, but all I came up with was "I'm gay because I'm gay." There were no reasons. It slowly dawned on me what God was saying. I could hardly believe it. God spoke to me through a minister, in a Church, to tell me to stop running from who I am.

## MY CONVICTIONS

The thought that God made me gay gave me something which I had always longed for. It gave me the ability to be loved by God and others. I was told that I was not really gay, and to think otherwise was deceptive. I wondered how this could be.

In the proceeding months after coming to acceptance, I would occasionally descend into doubt over my decision when I'd hear a homophobic comment. I was soon reassured by Geoff that after living so many years the way I did, this was to be expected. I was going against the grain of the Church, I was in new territory, so I had to believe in my own convictions. I never got my 'concrete proof' I was looking for, but what I did get was a clear conscience.

Years earlier, my experience was that although I felt for gay people, my hands were tied. I knew that if I said to someone who was gay that God loved them, but He hates homosexuality, that this could only serve to make them feel how I felt for most of my life. I knew this could not be love because love would not make a person feel this way. Believing what I believed, I could never find a way around this. Some gay people have tried to change themselves and tried every type of therapy and treatment known to man, so telling someone that God wanted them to be heterosexual could only serve to anger, offend or perhaps even break their spirit because it is simply not possible to change it.

In certain churches black people were once banned from the pulpits. Now it's gays and lesbians. I do not want to be an obstacle to anyone who wants to serve God. I am certain that God will do for we gay and lesbian Christians what He did for women and other oppressed groups.

In Romans 1:26-27, the Apostle Paul speaks of men and women pursuing unnatural sex with those of the same gender. In his book "What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality," the author writes that the word "unnatural" accurately translates as "a-typical," "unusual" or "different," and not as "against nature" (my paraphrasing). Page 77-80. The more commonly used word in most Bibles is "unnatural," which, in English, has a negative connotation. The original Greek word used is "para physin." He then continues, "a study of the Greek words suggest that there is no ethical condemnation in Paul's use of "para physin." This conclusion seems certain. Why? Because there is further evidence on the matter, and the evidence is weighty. In Romans 11:24, Paul uses those very same words to refer to God." Page 80.

I don't intend on giving a thorough study on all relevant scriptures, but I will point out that interpreting Romans 1 to mean that God finds homosexuality disgusting simply doesn't make sense. To do so, we also must conclude that the scriptures below apply to every gay and lesbian person...

Romans 1:28-32, "and since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to all things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness,

evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious towards parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God's decree, that those who do such things deserve to die – yet they not only do them but even applaud those who practice them."

I am a sinner, but I am just not that bad. Whomever these scriptures are referring to, it is obvious that they do not apply to all gay and lesbian people. It seems that our historical interpretation of this passage has been clouded by naivety, ignorance and inaccuracy.

Another irony I discovered is that some Christians hold those who are promiscuous in contempt, while giving them no real reason to come to Church, and in some cases, forbidding them to come to Church. We point the finger readily, but have failed to see our own faults that contribute to the problem.

There simply isn't a good argument why God would condemn homosexuality. It is merely people being people. Some argue that the lack of capacity to have children within a homosexual union is evidence enough. Following the same logic, we should condemn straight marriages who choose not to or cannot have children. *Exodus* believes in a particular psychology that they say causes homosexuality. They believe it is caused by inappropriate responses to a domineering mother and/or an absent father. A founding member of *Exodus*, after years of treatment, realised their treatment didn't work. The men and women who turn to *Exodus* enter into a life of disappointment and frustration. Likewise, with *Exodus'* statements, there are plenty of people who have had the same experiences as their gay counterparts, who have no homosexual inclination. Vice versa applies here too.

I find *Exodus'* argument lacking conviction and common sense. This whole situation began somewhere because someone got scared. This is now called homophobia. Martin Luther King said "they hate us because they fear us, and they fear us because they don't know us." People need to open their hearts and get to know gay and lesbian people. We are not that scary. God wants a BEAUTIFUL and GLORIOUS Church. He wants us to be ALIVE, not a cowardly, little, petty, mean Church! It grieves me to see that the world has, to some degree, grown to accept gays and lesbians while the Church has not. It is the Church who should be leading the way on matters of social justice.

Nowhere in the Bible is homosexuality regarded as immoral. Not even in Leviticus. Yes, twice in Leviticus (18:22 and 20:13) the word "abomination" has been used in reference to male-male sexual intercourse (but there is no mention of lesbian sex). Research has revealed the original words used here imply no moral or ethical condemnation. In "What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality" (page 56), the author writes; "Evidently, "abominable" is just another word for "unclean." An "abomination" is a violation of the purity rules that governed Isrealite society and kept the Isrealites different from other peoples."

He then continues to discuss various other things that were considered to be "unclean," such as sowing two types of seed into one field, or eating certain types of animals. Acts 10:15 states Christ saying to Peter "do not call anything impure which God has made clean." This scripture is in relation to Peter eating only ritually pure foods. God was speaking metaphorically, but the point is

made that God doesn't distinguish between ritually "pure" or "impure." This does not matter to God, as far as He's concerned, we're all OK to Him - He just wants us basically to be good people!

## GOD WEARS A PINK DRESS!

After accepting myself, I had another realisation. In sharing this I imagine I will be swiftly dismissed by many, but anyway, I realised that all of God's creation reveals something of Himself. My desire to be married to a guy and enjoy sex is therefore an aspect of God!

When we look around us, we see God has been VERY creative. God loves diversity. I am highly creative and like to think outside the square, I love to surprise and do something different. God loves it too, otherwise there would be no exceptions to the rule in His creation- no differing from the norm. The universe is full of these, just when we think we've got it all figured out, God surprises us. The Emu is a bird that doesn't fly, the male penguin raises their chicks, some animals can grow new limbs and others have both male and female sexual organs.

This brings me to another point, the fact there are people who have both male and female sexual organs. Male and female are not so clear when it comes to intersex people (formerly known as hermaphrodites). There are over twenty known variations on being intersex. Some are noticeable, and some are not. In view of Church beliefs and attitudes, how and with whom shall these people marry and have sex?

Are we to condemn and reject those we don't understand? I do not want to imply I fully understand why some people are transgendered. There are questions I have no answers on this topic. I do believe, however, that there are some people who are one gender on the outside, and the other on the inside. We all know that in most cases our bodies tell us we are male or female, I also know there are differences between the male and female souls and/or spirits. Evidence suggests that our brains are male or female (or somewhere in between). This is a scientific fact and is established prior to birth.

As this topic is not my forte, all I want to say concerns our treatment of these people. I have known a couple of transgendered people, and I know, to some degree, what they have to live with. I hesitantly use the phrase "have to live with" as I believe they should not. To me it is simple, God loves people and He wants us to as well.

It has been said that the real acid test for whether something is true or not, is judged by its fruit (its consequences). Believing that homosexuality is sin brings shame, guilt, rejection and torment into the lives of gay and lesbian people, however, believing it is a gift from God brings relief, acceptance, peace, love, happiness and enjoyment.

With thanks to Justin R Cannon, I include his conclusion to his book *The Bible, Homosexuality and Christianity*, which reads; "On another note, we accept that it is true that we are not only spiritual and mental beings, but also physical and sexual beings. Does it make sense then that a large percent of God's children should live in denial of a fundamental part of who they are? Should this group be forced to live without the affection and intimacy that comes with committed partnership? Nonetheless, that is precisely what is happening. Homosexuals in the Church are not only among the most marginalised groups, but are often victims of violence or driven to suicide because they cannot make sense of their feelings in light of what they believe or are told the Bible says. Or because of a lack of understanding of what the Bible truly says (or doesn't say) they are, more often than not, driven to leave the Church.

The Church needs to embrace and support this group of people, not despite scripture and tradition, *but in light of scripture and tradition*. The doors of the Church need to be opened and human prejudices set aside, so that we can truly live according to the law that Christ taught us. The problem, however, is rooted in fear and lack of awareness. Gomes concludes, "The combination of ignorance and prejudice under the guise of morality makes the religious community, and its abuse of scripture in this regard, itself morally culpable."

We need not only victory getting into the pulpits, but also victory in the streets, schools and our homes. How many more gay teen suicides must there be? How many more men and women do we need to feel at odds with themselves and hate themselves? This is exactly what will happen until the Church changes. Throughout my experience of coming to terms with being a gay Christian I realised a sad irony, this is in discovering where the great shame truly lies.

Thank you for reading this.

2 Samuel 1:26- "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant you have been to me.

Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."

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Edited by Nathan Tyrer

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