

Dear Christians,

Growing up in a practicing Christian home means Sunday service and weekly youth group, it means potlucks with church members and attending Vacation Bible School, it means singing hymns and wearing bracelets with the acronym WWJD. Well, what would Jesus do? Would He mistreat an individual based on a characteristic that they cannot change? Would He stigmatize and work against a community because He was different than them? That doesn’t sound like the Jesus that I know. So how do we justify mistreating, stigmatizing, and working against people who choose to love someone who happens to be the same gender? I grew up around family that were practicing Christians and I found myself asking this question a lot, especially since Galatians 5:14 says “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This verse is exactly what the book of God is telling us to do, yet most of this community is falling short of extending love to *all* of our neighbors. I am not saying that we are ungodly for going against his words by mistreating our neighbor. But, we are at fault. By using the words of God to justify homophobia we are missing the message that the Bible is intending to extend to us.

The Bible was written over a period of 1400 to 1800 years by more than 40 different authors. These authors had a similar mission- to spread the word of God to everyone else in His kingdom. These passages are moving, inspiring, and helpful in leading a full life. But, they become problematic when every verse is taken literally, word for word. The first reason for this issue being that nowhere in its 30,000 versus does the Bible claim to be factually accurate in terms of history, geography, and all other matters. This might seem shocking, especially since 2 Timothy 3:16 states, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” However, the key words in this verse are ‘inspired’ and ‘useful.’ We can declare that Scripture is ‘inspired’ by God without claiming that it contains no factual errors. And, we can suggest that the Bible is ‘useful’ in teaching, but not necessarily a sole means to live by. In the Bible, there is no place where the authors declared what they were writing to be factually accurate. Rather, they wrote to be persuasive and inspire others to follow the words of Christ.

If the Bible was not intended to be read literally, then why do 3/10 Americans take everything the Bible says at face value? This we do not know. But, we do know that the main problem with reading the Bible literally is that it is not a reflection of the current time. In fact, the earliest passages of the Old Testament can be traced back to 6th century B.C.- a time that was *monumentally* different from today. Because of this, reading the Bible literally disregards the societal changes that have happened over the last 27 centuries. Many of you are already aware of this because we are not calling people abominations for eating pork or shell fish like Isiah 66 and Leviticus 11:12 tell us to. We are not declaring every person who lies to be a disgrace like Proverbs 6:17 tells us to. We are not damning those who drink wine to Hell like Proverbs 20 does. We are not crucifying individuals who have expensive items such as Rolexes and pearls like Timothy 2 tells us to do. We are not banning women from talking in church like 1Timothy 2:12 does. And evil will not be raised against those who cohabitate before marriage like Hebrews 13:4 says. All this to say that Christians no longer directly follow the repercussions written for these “sins” because they realize that these actions are common and natural in our present age. Furthermore, there are a lot of rules that are described in the Old Testament of the Bible, yet no one bats an eye someone goes against them anymore. But, it seems that there has been a microscope placed on verses that condemn same sex relations. This idea is hypocritical and we need to be better as a community to work against those who oppose LGBT individuals because acceptance of this community is necessary in evolving with the current time. Also, it doesn’t hurt to add that Jesus never once attacked or critiqued those who were gay. And if Jesus didn’t, why should we?

So, why is it that we still use Scripture to justify discrimination against and unacceptance towards LGBT individuals? John 8:7 says “let anyone who is without sin be the first to throw a stone,” and by account of the previous mentioned sins, we are all sinners. Thus, we are actually going against Scripture when we judge LGBT community members, because we are all sinners ourselves. Not only are we sinners, but the characters we read in Scripture are also sinners. We are all aware that the men we follow had less than ideal moments. Abraham sacrifices his wife to save himself, Moses is a murderer, David is an adulterer, Peter denies Jesus, Noah was a drunk, and Jonah ran from God. And despite their accomplishments, all of these men that we admire are complicated people with problems, baggage, and sins. But that is what makes the Bible so great, it is written by fallible people who use ordinary characters to accomplish extraordinary things. We identify with these characters because we see ourselves in them. We see our sins and our pain reflected in the trials and triumphs that these men go through. As sinners, we understand sin. This is why we need to be more understanding of and humanizing towards LGBT individuals. If we deem them to be sinners, how can we judge them when we are full of sin too?

My advice to you is the sit down, listen, and talk to someone who is LGBT. Storytelling is a powerful tool, one that Jesus practiced. In the Bible, when someone asked Jesus, “What is the reign of God,” he didn’t give them a definition. He said, “A farmer went out to sow. Or, “a woman lost a coin.” He taught people in stories, because definitions and arguments will close our minds, whereas stories open them up. I advise you to go and find someone who is gay, or an ally of the LGBT community, and ask them about their experiences in love. One couple that I personally know is two women who have been together for a few years. They live together and parent two cats. One of them works in marketing and the other works in Real Estate. One of the partners brings coffee to her partner every single morning. And, on Sundays, they listen to French music and read the New York Times. Now, does this sound like an unusual couple to you? By talking with LGBT individuals or allies you will soon realize that their life isn’t much different than yours. And, their definition of love probably mirrors your definition. By having a conversation, you will be exposed to a real account of what it is like to be gay, which will help humanize this community in your mind.

Finally, when we realize that the Bible isn’t intended to be read literally, we have always allowed Scripture to evolve with the change of time, and the characters in the Bible are not without sin, we can then understand why it is actually unchristian to judge LGBT individuals. And, by judging them, we are ostracizing a huge community. This in turn results in them feeling unaccepted and unwanted by faith, which discourages a large percentage of them from coming to service and accepting the words of God. Our actions are reducing the number of followers of our faith. But, when we realize that we are not without sin and have conversations with LGBT individuals, we can begin to understand that they are not much different from us. By doing this we will also become better Christians because we will be following God’s words, “Love your neighbor as yourself” Galatians 5:14. This evolution of thought will hopefully demonstrate the acceptance of our faith and encourage more individuals to come closer to God. Thank you for taking the time to learn more about our faith and for taking an interest in becoming a better Christian. By making the small change of being more accepting, we will create a monumental change for the LGBT community.

“There is only one law giver and judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you-

who are you to judge your neighbor?” James 4:12

**References**

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