

## Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?

The following is a transcript of a talk given by Tony & Peggy Campolo at North Park College Chapel on February 29, 1996.

### **Tony Campolo:**

I'm so pleased to be with you and so is Peggy. We were looking forward to this with great anticipation. First of all, I have to announce that we are two people who do not agree. We have very, very divergent views on this issue. I for instance believe that the Bible does not allow for same gender sexual marriage. I do not believe that same gender sexual intercourse is permissible if you read the Bible as I do.

Peggy believes in monogamous relationships. In short, she would hold to a belief that within the framework of evangelical Christianity, gay marriages are permissible and she will try to make her point.

My point to start with is that we are both evangelicals. That's the first thing. I have to define what I mean by that. That is we both have a very, very high view of scripture. We take the Bible very, very seriously. And so what the Bible has to say on this subject is simply not passed away as if it belongs to some archaic time that no longer and no longer applies to our contemporary time and situation. Secondly, we believe in the doctrines that are outlined in the apostles creed. And if you know the apostles creed that summarizes our faith. We believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth. We believe in Jesus Christ. We believe in his death on the cross. We believe in his resurrection. We believe in his second coming. We believe in those essential doctrines of the Christian faith. Thirdly, we both believe that being Christian involves a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you talk with him, you know, him, he invades you, he possesses you, he transforms you. So, these are things that we hold in common.

This is the divisive issue as was stated by your chaplain so well. And it's one that you can't avoid. It's obviously been brought to the fore in the political arena this year because the argument is brought to the fore against President Clinton, with many evangelical Christians, particularly those in the Christian Coalition, saying that this man has to be put out of office because he, quote unquote, has a very liberal view on this. It's talked about in almost every political debate that's taken place on the American scene today.

It's tearing up every major denomination. Every major denomination I know of: Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, are having to confront this issue. They're having votes. This year we're probably going to see some major splits in denominations, groups pulling out, separating themselves. We are seeing churches being de-fellowshipped, thrown out of denomination. It has become a decisive issue.

Mark Knoll of Wheaton College, who I think is one of the most sophisticated interpreters of social reality, says that evangelicalism has never defined itself in terms of theology, in terms of beliefs, but always in terms of politics. Indeed, what it meant to be an evangelical fundamentalist, back in the Civil War days, was that you were opposed to slavery. And most fundamentalists were so anti slave that they pulled out of mainline denominations because mainline denominations were afraid to take a strong stand against slavery.

The issues change over the years and today the two defining issues for evangelicals that make you either an evangelical or not an evangelical are probably homosexuality and your view on abortion. We're only dealing with one of those today. One is enough.

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Alright, we do differ and the reason why I like doing it this way is that we have something to say that is more important than anything we say in words. We're saying something by being here and this is what it is, that it is possible for two people to differ intensely over a crucial issue and not get a divorce. It is possible for two people to have lively discussions over dinner and have interesting intellectual exchanges over an important issue, a decisive - this is not a minor issue - this is a major issue, and still stay together in a loving relationship. And it is our hope that of all the things that we communicate to you today - this above all should be communicated, that it is necessary for us to respect each other across our differences, love each other and recognize we belong together even if we don't agree on an important issue as crucial as this one has posed to be. Let not an issue destroy the fellowship. Let not a difference of opinion alienate us. Let us be one in Christ Jesus because we're going to have to work this thing through. A hundred years from now this, I think, will be resolved. In the meantime let us stay together. Let us love each other. Let us be together. So I like this format where a husband and wife who care about each other have these differences of opinion.

Secondly, because it models for me what I try to say about Christian marriage itself. Some of the brethren out there are upset with me because as one television evangelist has said, Tony Campolo does not have his wife in submission. Which basically means, if you're husband and wife, your wife should submit to every idea that the husband has or you will go to hell, directly to hell. You will not pass go or collect \$200. Well, I am not into that. I think that a Christian marriage in fact allows for honest dialogs between equals.

There are certain things that we have to say and that is this. First of all, as a sociologist, which is what I am by trade - I got into this analysis of homosexuality back when I was a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania from '65 to '75, as I talked to my colleagues and I listened and I interviewed over 300 people who were homosexuals, I found that there were certain universal truths. I only interviewed male homosexuals so I can only say I studied that one group. Out of the 300 male homosexuals that I interviewed, I never met a homosexual who chose to be one. That, I have to say right up front. Okay? You can argue over the causes of homosexuality. Let me also add, nobody knows what causes homosexuality. I mean I know that you get these religious publications that talk about this cause and that cause and the other cause. Every social scientist that I know who has analyzed this problem say, we don't know what the causes are. There are those who talk about genetics. There are those who talk about biophysical. There are those that talk about sociological, psychological factors. Nobody knows. And those who are experts say, for the most part, there are a variety of factors that interact with each other to create homosexuality and it may even be that no two people are homosexuals for the same reason. We don't know what causes it. We know this - that at least for the males who I can attest to that I interviewed, the imprintation of the consciousness, the establishment of the orientation occurred so early in the psychosocial development of the individual that the individual never remembers having made a choice. That's important because I often hear rhetoric that says if you just pray and repent and turn away from this that God will honor you and all will be well. And that's the second point.

We also know that there are very, very few cases where people actually change their orientation. I interviewed significant numbers of homosexuals who, quote unquote, claim to be cures. And I asked them a simple question. Here's the question: Do you ever have sexual fantasies. Now, everybody in this group, except Dr. Horner, has sexual fantasies. Everybody here has sexual fantasies, you see. As a matter of fact, before this program is over, according to, to one study, the average male in this group will have three sexual fantasies. That's why I like speaking in chapel: Where else can you bring so much pleasure to so many people in such a short period of time. The truth is I asked the question of all my homosexuals that I interview and here it is: When you fantasize do you fantasize

homosexually or heterosexually? I always get the same answer. We fantasize homosexually. Well, how can you say that you're no longer in a homosexual orientation? So I'm not convinced that you change as easily as some of the televangelists say you're going to change.

As a matter of fact, I would argue that, from my evangelical, conservative position, I'm going to argue that what we really need to do as a church is to provide a framework to help brothers and sister who want to remain celibate, to do so. We need to pray for them. We need to encourage them. We need to support them. We need to stand by them. I hope we get to the place where we can at least be as generous to people who are homosexuals as we have been to alcoholics. There was a time when the alcoholic couldn't get accepted into the church unless he stood up and said, I am no longer an alcoholic. Now, the alcoholic stands up and says, without shame, this is who I am. I struggle with this problem everyday, you see. And I wouldn't be able to do it unless, unless I was honest and open and had the support of other people.

The only reason why I don't like the analogy is because I'm not sure that I want to call this a sickness. So other than that, I basically am going to hold to that. So that's where we agree. We agree that it's not chosen. We also agree that in the overwhelming number of cases - please, there's always somebody out there that has changed - I am not saying things are impossible. I am just saying, my expectation is that people who are Christian and are homosexual are probably going to remain homosexual.

I call them to celibacy because I've got some problems. There's scripture. Here's a scripture: Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20, verse 3. You know these passages in the Old Testament. Now you have to understand that that's not a good case. Romans 1 is the good case. The Old Testament's not a good case because the Old Testament divides in the Pentateuch the scriptures into two kinds of law: Moral law and what we call purity codes. Purity codes are what we call the kosher laws. And if you read the Old Testament you will find there's a whole host of kosher laws, of what you can eat, what you can't eat, what kind of clothes you can wear. All of these things are spelled out.

There is no question but when Christ came and when Peter preached, purity codes were set aside. We no longer lived kosher like our orthodox Jewish friends do. Kosher laws, purity laws have been set aside. And those who are scholars, even the most conservative scholars, will argue with you that the statements in Leviticus that have to do with homosexuality fall into the purity code category. As a matter of fact it comes right after the passage that says that to touch the skin of a dead pig is an abomination to God, which puts the whole Super Bowl into question. So you know, we have to deal with that right up front.

Secondly, there's a passage in 1st Corinthians 6:9. Nobody knows what the word means. Interestingly enough, up until the fourteenth century it was translated as masturbation. Nobody knows what the word means in 1st Corinthians 6:9. There's a passage in 1st Timothy 1:10. That particular passage refers to a particular practice in which young boys were castrated in order to maintain their feminine-like, child-like characteristics for sexual purposes of exploitation. That no way falls into the concept of two consenting adults entering into a commitment with each other.

Which brings us down to Romans the first chapter, the twenty-sixth verse and following. And there, I think it's very clear that homosexual relationships of a physical nature, that people enter into these kinds of activities are living contrary to the teachings of scripture. My - there's arguments over what 1st Romans, starting in verse 26 really means and what it's really talking about.

My argument is this, you can argue over this interpretation or that interpretation but in Hermeneutics, which is the study of scripture, you have to take something very seriously and that's called the church. Roman Catholics understand this better than Protestants. There is this fellowship

of believers that comes from the time of Christ up to the present time called the Church of Jesus Christ. I believe that the church speaks with authority. The only difference that I have with Roman Catholics is how they define church. They see it in very institutional forms. I see it as the people of God who love Jesus Christ and who are in a personal relationship with the Lord. Down through the ages, over almost two thousand years, the church has read Romans 1, people who knew the Apostle Paul personally, have written about what Paul meant when he wrote these passages in the duodece for instance, in the writings of the church fathers, you will find these particular statements. This is what Paul said. This is what Paul meant. When an interpretation of scripture has been around for more than 19 hundred years, I think it's a bit arrogant to come up and say, all the saints throughout history, the church historically is wrong. I've got a new interpretation of what Romans 1 means and I'm going to set the tradition of the church aside and I'm going to come up with a new interpretation. I think it does boil down for us Christians to Romans the 1st chapter, starting at the 26th verse. At that point, I turn it to my wife.

**Peggy Campolo:**

Thank you.

I'd like you to note that Paul wrote Romans in the city of Corinth where the prevailing religion was the worship of Aphrodite. Aphrodite was a hermaphrodite with both male and female sexual organs and in the worship of Aphrodite people played the role of the opposite gender and engaged in sexual orgies with same sex prostitutes who were available in the temple. It was against these orgies that Paul wrote in the first chapter of Romans. There is an obvious connection between idolatry and homosexual practices in Romans one and what Paul says here cannot be applied to the kind of relationships created by loving homosexual partners who are making a lifetime monogamous commitment to each other.

I don't think that that's a proper use of the Bible. Some people, including my husband, say that those who believe as I do about Romans one are stretching the passage to agree with our own a priori beliefs. They say it is arrogant to declare that 19 hundred years of church history and tradition are in error. I would remind these people that all those years of church tradition supported an interpretation of Timothy 2:11 and 12 that disallowed women from church leadership. We only know what the church fathers said because those who might have been the church mothers had no voice.

**Tony:**

She's sneaky. She's very sneaky.

**Peggy:**

And I would like you sometime today to read the first chapter of Romans about the worship of idols and sexual orgies and ask yourself if these verses do not better describe pagan orgies than the domestic life of lesbian and gay couples today or, for example, the ministry of the gay pastor I know who's been in a committed monogamous relationship for 44 years.

Now, that's, as Tony said, the place, the basic place where we differ and I'd like to tell you some places where we agree. Tony and I agree as he has said, that a homosexual orientation is not chosen and we believe that homosexual people should not have to be in the closet to be part of the body of Christ. We are greatly saddened that the church has not done a better job of reaching out to include homosexual people and we're angry about the lies being said about gay men and lesbian women by some church leaders. The result of this is often cruel mistreatment and great injustice and both Tony and I pray for the church to repent of this sin. Tony and I agree that the term homosexual lifestyle

without an S on the end is a misnomer and should never be used because there are many homosexual lifestyles just as there are many heterosexual lifestyles.

For instance, Madonna and I are both heterosexual women but you can't say that we live a lifestyle that's the same. At least I don't think you can. Both Tony and I are opposed to promiscuous lifestyles which use and discard people, be these lifestyles homosexual or heterosexual.

I'd like to begin my story about how I came to these beliefs and this commitment and this ministry by making three statements: One, to live in a closet is a terrible thing; two, people live in closets because they are afraid they will not be loved or accepted if they are honest about who they are; and third, homosexual people are not the only people who live in closets.

My own time in a closet began when I was nine years old and it lasted thirty-eight years, until I was forty-seven. And that was eleven years ago, so now you know how old I am. It was the custom in the Baptist church where I grew up for the pastor to talk to the nine-year-old Sunday school class about making a profession of faith, being baptized and joining the church and I would imagine some of you went to churches where that was done. In theory at my church any child was free not to do that but the reality for me, the pastor's daughter, was that if I were honest and admitted that I didn't even know God, I alone would be rejecting God and it seemed to me, my dad too. It didn't take me long to decide what to do.

Daddy would be happy if I declared myself a Christian and so would everybody else I cared about. So I told myself that perhaps the whole Christian thing was like the children's story of the Emperor's New Clothes, that everybody just pretended they knew God because the idea of God was such a good one and it made people nicer. That didn't seem so bad to me. So I pretended to accept the Jesus I did not know and developed a great talent for evading direct questions, for giving answers that created a false impression even as I carefully chose truthful words. That is part of living in a closet as my gay brothers and lesbian sisters know only too well. I can remember answering the question, when did you become a Christian? by saying, "I was baptized when I was nine years old."

My husband got in trouble some years ago for saying that Jesus is a presence inside of every person whether or not that person is a Christian. Furthermore, Tony said the place to find Jesus is in loving service to poor and oppressed people. Some in the Christian community argued that Jesus dwelt only in those who believed in him. Right here in Chicago there was actually a heresy trial in 1984 which ended with the jury saying that Tony was not a heretic but did need to be more careful about how he stated things.

But later that same year I learned first hand that Tony was right about where to find Jesus. It happened at the bedside of my dear friend Helen who was dying. Helen had always said she believed in God but now she didn't have any assurance about heaven or peace about dying and there I was, her best friend in this world, not even remotely in touch with God, with Jesus or any hope of heaven. I felt more inadequate than I'd ever felt in my life.

Helen needed God to die and I needed God desperately if I was to be any comfort at all to Helen. So I decided I would tell my friend all that I had ever heard about God and going to heaven. And after all those years in church I knew it well. Helen held my hand for dear life and I know she heard me and as I shared God's grace and love with my dying friend, the presence of God became real to me.

Helen grew too ill to talk after that day but I could talk to her and I did and I believe God did take her home to heaven even as I know God has remained with me. It was in my caring for Helen that I had come to know God. My husband's quest in theology about finding God in those who are in

need or being oppressed became a reality to me that day in the hospital. You do stand with God when you stand with and for those who suffer.

Now, none of us can be a loving presence to all of God's children. None of us can even perceive, let alone try to make right, every wrong in this world. But God has chosen for each one of us those particular people that God wants to love through us. I've been a straight, heterosexual lady all my life. I don't have a gay son or a lesbian daughter but after I became a Christian, God let me know that I was to love and speak out for my gay brothers and lesbian sisters in Jesus' name and to my utter amazement it dawned on me that God had been preparing my heart to do that long before I knew God.

You have to come back with me forty years, to Abraham Lincoln High School in Philadelphia where Tom was my friend. His hall locker was near mine so we always met at the start and again at the end of the school day. Tom was what I call a comfortable friend. I didn't worry about what I wore, how I looked or the way what I said might come out when I was with him. He liked me and I can still remember how good that felt at a time when I wasn't always sure I liked myself.

Like me, Tom was a preacher's kid. Quite unlike me he had a beautiful singing voice and was one of the more gifted actors in the dramas and musicals at Lincoln High. That year when I was fifteen I seemed to go from one hopeless crush to another but I never had a crush on Tom. He gave me something I needed far more than another crush. He was a listening ear, a sympathetic heart and, in many ways, a kindred spirit. So I didn't like it the day that some of the boys walking past our lockers upset Tom. All they did was to call his name as they sauntered past. But I heard evil in their voices. "Tommy, Tommy" they called out, silly grins on their faces, eyes darting around to see who was watching their game. I followed Tom's example and tried to pretend it hadn't happened. But I felt afraid and sad and I knew he did too.

Variations of that ugly scene were played out more times than I care to remember. The horror to me was that Tom was being harassed, not because of anything he had done, but because of who he was. And then there were the jokes and innuendo and people told me that Tom was queer. If the answers I got to the questions I asked my folks at home were not really enough, at least it was made clear to me that the right thing to do was to go on being Tom's friend and that his tormentors were wicked and wrong, but I already knew that. I knew too that I should take a stand for Tom. Sadly, in those days, I didn't take stands on much of anything. I was too afraid of being an outcast myself. Oh, I did tell people that Tom was really a nice guy. And I begged my friends not to join in the teasing. But I didn't have what it took to turn my sadness into righteous indignation on Tom's behalf.

And it wasn't until Jesus became real to me that I found out it was Jesus I needed to give me courage. Then thirty years ago Tony invited a Christian woman who was a lesbian to talk to his class about homosexuality. Because the climate on campus was a bit unfriendly back then, the meeting was held at our house. I was curious but not particularly enthusiastic and when Louis, the speaker arrived, I did not like her. Everything about her seemed angry. She even seemed to wear angry clothes I thought at the time. She seemed to be angry at everybody, including me. Now I could understand that she didn't like the way the world treated her, but why did she act like I owed her something. I never saw her pain and I never realized that she was wanting us to try to understand the reason for it and I forgot all about Louis almost as soon as she walked out my door.

Then, twenty years ago, my husband and I went to Provincetown, Massachusetts to go whale watching. We'd been warned that the charming village on the tip of Cape Cod was a mecca for lesbians and gays. I expected to ignore that, enjoy the whales and go home. But I fell in love with P'Town and the people I met there changed my life. As a straight couple, Tony and I are usually in

the minority when we visit the art galleries, shops and restaurants of Provincetown. But there's an acceptance there that makes me feel special. Both of us feel special and not weird. And when I consider that the people I meet there, especially the couples, would not be accepted in most of the places I come from, I feel a sense of sadness and of shame. On our first visit there I remember saying to Tony, what I feel here is something of what I've always imagined the church should be like and isn't. To be real about it, we who walk the streets of Provincetown don't even know each other and we certainly don't all love each other, but what I feel there makes me aware of the aching void there is in most places on this Earth where people do not accept each other, nor are they kind.

Tony and I love getting acquainted with folks in P'Town and one afternoon Tony met a man who recognized him as a preacher and the two of them visited while I shopped. They talked theology and had a grand time. When I joined them and Tony and I prepared to take our leave, my husband tried to find out more about his new friend. The man wouldn't give him name, but simply said, "I was a priest in my former life and I used to love to talk about God but when I told people who I really was I couldn't be a priest anymore and I don't usually think about God anymore either but it's been great to talk to you my friend." He was gone before more could be said and some of his sadness remained with us. We once spent an entire afternoon as the only customers at a small, rooftop restaurant overlooking Cape Cod Bay. It was one of those lazy slow times that should be part of all our lives more often. The young man behind the bar came out and sat at our table with us and we talked of many things. Where's home for you, Tony asked. Too much time elapsed before the answer came. Oh, my folks live in Iowa but I can't go there anymore so home is just wherever I happen to be and I'm here now. Why can't you go home, Tony asked, really wanting to know. And the look he got in response seemed to indicate that my husband had spent most of his life on the moon.

Provincetown made me a wiser person. As I got to know the place I realized how narrow my straight life had been. I really didn't know any openly homosexual people and now I wanted to know some. It was rather like I had visited a foreign country, had a great time and come home anxious to make friends with people of that nationality. And slowly that began to happen as I let it be known that the status quo that existed for gay men and lesbians was unacceptable to me. We lived near the college, Eastern College, where Tony teaches, and from time to time a homosexual student would find his or her way to my door.

As I listened to their stories, a rage began to build in me. In all my life nothing had ever seemed so unfair. The lives these students had to live were terrible. Nobody understood. Their parents were unfair. The college was unfair and most of the church was unfair too. If they even knew some of these people hadn't told anybody before who they really were and frankly, I marvelled at how together they were able to be in spite of the forces marshalled against them.

I wish I could stand here and tell you that my crusade for homosexual justice began back then twenty years ago. But it did not. When Tony began to take a public stand on the issue, I confessed to having wished he did not feel a need to add yet one more controversial subject to his public life. It was not until I met Jesus that I found the strength to speak out for God's homosexual children.

The last time I lacked that courage occurred very soon after my friend Helen died. It's importance to me is precisely because it was the last time. Tony and I were riding in the back seat of a car, headed for one of his speaking engagements in a western town. The couple in the front seat were evangelical Christians. I think that's what they would have called it. They wanted to talk to Tony about the ills that plague our society and threaten the church. First on their list was the homosexual problem. As they described these people I began to feel ill and I desperately wanted to be somewhere else. They were wrong, wrong, wrong, these seemingly nice but grossly misinformed people. I sat in silent misery and anger, doing what I had always done, what I'd always believed was the right thing to do -

nothing. I'd never made waves or upset anybody when I was with Tony on one of his speaking engagements.

To his credit, Tony did his best to enlighten the couple. But my own silence was so loud in my ears that I cannot remember what he said. The ride seemed interminable but it ended too soon and I was left with my guilt. For me that day a rooster crowed for the third time. I had not only betrayed my friend, I had betrayed my God too. Those two people in the car would go on, comfortable with their madeup Jesus and their mixed up thinking and they had every reason to think I agreed with them, and that's why I'm not silent anymore.

**Tony:**

Whenever I hear Peggy speak and it's very hard for her to speak, she...

**Peggy:**

I need papers. He doesn't.

**Tony:**

I am always moved by her, not just because she's my wife, because she speaks of pain she has felt in other people. My own stories are very much like hers. There was a boy in my high school, named Roger. It's not really his name. I'm just giving him the name Roger. We knew he was gay and the day he was most at pain was the day of gym because after we played some games we had to go into the shower and he would never go into the shower with us. When we left the shower, we took our wet towels and would sting his body by whipping the towels at him. As we walked past Roger we would whip the towels at Roger and sting him and we thought it was great fun to see this queer dance under our taunts. We thought it was fun to work on him. I wasn't there the day they shoved him into the corner of the shower and 5 guys urinated all over him. But that night Roger went home and went into his garage and he hung himself.

So all of us had guilt that I did not speak up and actually was part of those who hurt, who contributed to the death of a young man. And you say, you're a terrible person, I wonder how many of us, by words, by deeds, even without being aware of it have said things that have created pain and suffering.

I'm appalled at the Christian community, just appalled. I see leading evangelists selling these, this tape called the Gay Agenda. I don't know how many of you have seen that. It's sold hundreds of thousands of copies and made huge amounts of money for evangelists who drive Mercedes Benz. They bother me. Because they show the gay community doing obscene things in San Francisco, horrible parades, masturbating in public, doing filthy things and they say, "This is what the gay community is really like. Don't be deceived. Those people that want to teach in your high schools, that want to live in your community. This is what they are really like when you're not watching them."

I resent that for a very obvious reason. I wouldn't want anybody going down to Mardi Gras and filming the filthy behavior that goes on in New Orleans on Mardi Gras and saying, this is what Tony Campolo is like. This is what the heterosexual community is like. I would resent that. And that we sit back and let filth like that be perpetrated and that the anger and the hatred that those things create and all of it comes from the church.

That's what scares me. It comes from the church. I don't know what we're else about, but we are not to be about creating hatred toward the Rogers of this world, whatever our views are. And I am a conservative on this issue. I believe that same gender sexual intercourse, I don't know how many

times I have to say it to get it clear, that's not what is at issue here. What is at issue here is not homosexuality. What's at issue here is the church of Jesus Christ.

Let me tell you one more story. I have a friend. He pastored a church up in Brooklyn. It was a dying community, a place where everything was disintegrating. He kept himself fed and clothes and his family cared for by, by doing odd jobs, one of which was doing funerals for the local undertaker when nobody else would take them. The man was a saint and he didn't know it so I would call him and get great stories because he never used them. And I would always say, Jim, anything good happen that I can tell, any good story that, anything happen this week? He'd always say no.

"What about Tuesday at 11 o'clock? What were you doing then?" "Oh, he said, that was fascinating. The undertaker called me early in the morning because he had a man to bury who had died of AIDS and nobody wanted to take the funeral so I ended up taking the funeral."

I said, "What was it like?"

He said, "About 25 homosexual men came and sat there. Never once, Tony, did they ever look up at me. The whole time I spoke their heads were down and they were looking at the floor. Never once did they ever make eye contact with me all during the funeral. We went out and got in some cars and we followed the hearse out to the cemetery, lowered the body into the grave. I stood on one side of the grave. These 25 some homosexual men on the other side. Standing there like statues, neither looking to the right or to the left, looking straight out into infinity. Never budging just sitting there, standing there rigid like statues. I read some scripture. I said some prayers. I committed the body to the grave. I said the benediction and I started to move - walk away, but they didn't move. They stood there as though frozen so I, I came back and I said, 'Excuse me, is there anything else I can do?'"

"And one of the men said, 'Yes. I never go to church. Used to go to church but I don't go to church. The only thing I really liked about church was when they read from the Bible, especially the King James. I like the King James. You didn't read the 23rd psalm. I thought they always read that at funerals. Could you read the 23rd Psalm?'"

Jim opened the Bible and read the 23rd Psalm. Another man said, "There's a passage in the 3rd chapter of John about being born again. I like that passage."

John read that. Then a third man said, "The 8th chapter of Romans, right at the end, that's what keeps me going."

And Jim read to these homosexual men. "Neither height nor depth, neither principalities nor powers, neither things present, nor things to come, nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Nothing. And when he told me that, I hurt, I hurt, because I knew that these men wanted to hear the Bible but would never step foot inside a church because they are convinced that church people despise them. And do you know why they think church people despise them? Because church people despise them.

I am not approving of homosexual behavior. I am disapproving of a church that has forgotten how to love people that Jesus will never stop loving. And if you don't like it, join another club but don't call yourself a member of the church of Jesus Christ for we are the community of lovers and we love all kinds of people with all kinds of sin and that's your good fortune and mine too, for where would we be without such a church. And I want it to be the church that Christ wants it to be.

We are concerned because in this political climate there are politicians who are playing on the homophobia of people. They're tapping our deepest feelings and they're gleaning votes by playing on our hatreds and our fears.

Perfect love casteth out fear. We can't let it go on. We've got to stand up. We've got to say, we have differences of opinion. I'm conservative on this issue. She is not where I am on this issue. We both hold to the word of God. We're not going to get divorced but here we stand together. We will not allow others to take away the rights and the dignities of human beings. We just won't let you do it.

That's why when these referendums come up in state after state after state, we think that the Roman Catholic bishops were right when they said, we do not approve of this form of behavior but we will not allow anyone to take the rights away from those who are citizens of this country. Because I want to tell you something, after you say you can't live in my community, after you've said you can't teach in my school, after you've said you can't go to my church and after you've said you can't come to my college, after you've said all of this stuff - don't think for one moment it's going to wash when you smile that plastic smile that I see in the Christian community and say, "But we love you in the name of Jesus."

You cannot exercise hatred and discrimination and talk about love in the same breath without coming across as a sheer hypocrite. So take your choice.

Take your stand and be bold for Christ and say this, that whether we agree or do not agree on this issue, we will not allow discrimination and hatred and meanness to be directed at people who did not choose their identity, number one, and cannot choose to get out of an orientation as simply as those evangelists who preach so blithely suggest. We've just seen too many people hurt and we've just experienced too many people who have suffered.

I do have to say once again, I could make this into a scholarly discourse of causes of homosexuality and I could do a lot of that stuff. It's all unnecessary. I think that there isn't an intelligent person here who claims to know what causes it. Secondly, I am not debating that there are certain people who were in a homosexual lifestyle who have changed because if you understand sociology you know it's a continuum. There's extreme hetero - there's extreme homosexual, there's a continuum. There're a lot of people in the middle that do have some leeway hither and yon. That's where I believe some changes take place.

But I am worried about these people over here who suffer quietly in the church. The latest study on sexuality was done by the University of Chicago, says 1 percent of males in America practice homosexuality, 1 percent. But 5 percent have homosexual orientations. What does that mean? It means that 4 out of 5 homosexuals don't practice anything sexual at all in terms of physical relationships. You know what that means? That means they sit in class next to you quietly. That means that they come to your churches. They're in every congregation in America. They are there. Five percent of the population, in the general population; 7 percent in the church.

They come and they sit and they hear obscenities directed at them, things said about them, they hear themselves described in horrible ways. Let me just remind you of one thing in closing. We do have a tendency to play the ball game two ways. We say we've got to be faithful to the Bible. Well I want to ask you, how many of you belong to churches - I won't ask for a raise of hands - how many of you belong to churches that allow people who are divorced and remarried into membership. I want to - don't, don't put up your hands. I don't want to - I don't want to know about your evil.

How many of you belong to churches which say if you're divorced and - well, you know, they're got a problem and we're going to accept them into the fellowship. Well, let me just remind you of

something. When it comes to homosexuality, Jesus never mentioned it. I mean, it wasn't on his big hit list. He never mentioned it. But he did talk about divorce and remarriage and he said people who are divorced and remarried are in sexual sin. Did he not? Now the question. If the church is so gracious in accepting people who are divorced and remarried, i.e., accepting people who according to Jesus are living in a sexual sin that he specifically condemns, then why can't they be at least that gracious to our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters?

I am not preaching approval. I am preaching acceptance because I contend that if there is going to be any change of behavior, it is always in the context of love. My wife says so eloquently that when we sing Just As I Am when people come down the aisle, we mean it for everybody except for gays and lesbians. Everybody else can come as they are to be healed. We say get healed first and then come.

When I got on this it was long before Peggy did. It was a problem for me because I am an evangelical and I'm an evangelist and I make my living writing books and preaching and the minute you take a stand on this issue you get cancelled. Books get sent back to the publishers by the book dealers. And my friends say, look, there're so many other concerns, why do you have to hit this one? I mean, why do you have to ride this horse? Why don't you just go back to the poverty issues and the social justice issues and the - why this issue? And my answer is quite simple. When I conduct evangelistic services I would ignore this except for the fact that I don't find other evangelists talking about this and it's important for somebody who preaches that people have to be born again according to the Bible to stand up and say, and being born again means, that you love people. Peggy, do you want to close this?

**Peggy:**

Yes, I would like to. If you're a heterosexual Christian here today, ask yourself what kind of a Jesus gay and lesbian people see in you? Do homosexual people see and hear you as a friend? Are you a safe person with whom they can talk or do they view you as a danger zone, perhaps the danger zone they're afraid to risk passing through even though they might like to look more closely at your God. Perhaps you're somebody who says nothing about homosexual people. You may not ever think about them. Maybe you're sure you don't know any gay or lesbian people. Well, if that's the case you're missing a great opportunity, the chance to be the church for someone who doesn't see any place for himself or herself in the church they see on television or hear about from too many pulpits.

You don't have to understand it all and you don't have to have the answers to all the questions and you certainly don't have to agree with me or with Tony to demonstrate the love of Jesus. Tony and I accept living with our differences because we know that the one who created us already knows that we won't agree on lots of important things. The Bible tells us that we will see things down here through a dark glass.

But Jesus does say that the world will know we are Christians by our love and there isn't any other way for anyone to know whose children we are. Would you pray with me please?

Holy Spirit, you are with us in this place. Help us to understand what is new and difficult. Go with us when we leave this place and help us to love in your name, especially those of your children who wrongly believe they are orphans and let none of us ever forget that we are your children. In the name and nature of Jesus, Amen.