



LDS Resources

for Latter-day Saints dealing with homosexual attraction

www.LDSResources.info

[ABOUT THIS SITE](#)

[OUR BLOG](#)

[VIDEOS](#)

[THE GUIDE](#)

[CHURCH LEADERS](#)

[FAMILIES](#)

[PROFESSIONAL S](#)

[ESPAÑOL](#)



[Robert Rees](#)

No More Strangers and Foreigners: A Mormon Christian Response to Homosexuality

[Robert A. Rees](#), Ph.D.

At a recent baptism as we welcomed a new member into the Church, I thought of Paul's welcome to the newly-baptized saints at Ephesus: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone" (2:19-20). Jesus Christ is the cornerstone not only of the Church but of our individual lives and when we take his name upon us and when we come together in his name, we should cease to be foreigners and strangers.

From the beginning, when the Lord gave his law to the Israelites, He stressed the importance of our relationship to strangers. In Exodus we are told, "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger nor oppress him, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (22:21). In Leviticus we have a foreshadowing of the New Testament ethic toward those who are strangers: "The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself,

for ye were strangers in a strange land of Egypt" (19:34). The Lord is reminding the Israelites that since they were strangers in a strange land, they must remember how it felt to be treated as aliens and therefore they should not merely treat strangers hospitably, but love them as they love themselves. The Lord also reminds us that in some ways we are all strangers. Certainly we are all strangers from the Kingdom of God, but God treats us as friends and invites us to enter His Kingdom as joint heirs with his Son.

It is significant that Christ refers to himself as a stranger: "I was a stranger and ye took me in" (Matthew 25:35). In the world, the stranger is oppressed, persecuted, imprisoned, cast out and even killed. One can open the newspaper on any given day to confirm this. Kurds, Palestinians, Jews, and Arabs are all considered strangers in some quarters of the Middle East; Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, Muslims and Christians in Kosovo, Muslims and Hindus in India, are all strangers to one another. Closer to home, there are other strangers--the "ilegals" who stream across our border from Mexico and Central America; the homeless; those of different races, nations, and political persuasions; strangers of gender, strangers of age, strangers of sexual orientation. Under the right conditions, any one of us might be considered a stranger.

Even in the Church, among brothers and sisters, we are sometimes strangers. We have a tendency to judge one another for failure to understand the gospel as we understand it or abide by the commandments as we ourselves do. In every ward there are members who speak disparagingly of those who are different, who question the devotion of their brothers and sisters on some basis, who treat them as strange.

In Romans, Paul emphasizes the importance of the saints having tolerance and charity for those who are different. To those who may make judgments about others in regard to their eating habits, for example, he says, "If a man is weak in his faith, you must accept him without attempting to settle doubtful points. For instance, one man will have faith enough to eat all kinds of food, while a weaker man eats only vegetables. The man who eats must not hold in contempt the man who does not, and he who does not eat must not pass judgement on the one who does; for God has accepted him" (14: 1-3, New English Bible; hereafter NEB). Disputations about the Sabbath day are seen in the same light. "This man regards one day more highly than another, while that man regards all days alike. On such a point everyone should have reached conviction in his own mind. He who respects the day has the Lord in mind in doing so, and he who eats meat has the Lord in mind when he eats, since he gives thanks to God. For no one of us lives, and, equally, no one of us dies, for himself alone. . . . Let us therefore cease judging one another. . . . Let us then pursue the things that make for peace and build up the common life" (14:5-7, NEB). Building that common life is our common stewardship and when we take it seriously we progress as individuals and as a Church.

I am struck by what Paul says because I think he is trying to teach a very important lesson: there are a number of things about which the Lord seems not to care, in which He gives us choice. It seems there are many issues over which we choose to be divisive, which are of no consequence to God. He doesn't care whether we are Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative, rich or poor, sophisticated or simple. It is probably of no concern to Him if we

are vegetarians, eat white flour, have beards, wear colored shirts to Church, or the myriad other things that some of us consider important enough to judge, condemn, or spiritually disfellowship one another over.

Instead of focusing on such trivia, we should, as Paul says, "pursue the things that make for peace, and build up the common life." Those things generally are love, understanding, tolerance, acceptance, liberality of spirit, magnanimity, and forgiveness.

I would like now to turn from the general to the specific, to a particular kind of strangeness or differentness—homosexuality. I would like to make it clear that I don't consider myself an authority on homosexuality. While I have read widely on the subject and thought a great deal about it, while I have counseled with many homosexuals during the more than five years I have served as bishop, and while I have a number of homosexual friends, I do not presume to have any new knowledge on the subject. I speak only as one Mormon Christian who has tried to understand both what it means to be homosexual and what my Christian responsibility toward homosexuals should be.

Sexuality is such a powerful and mysterious part of human experience and identity that any discussion of it can never really be neutral. This is particularly true of homosexuality, a subject so charged with prejudice, so influenced by historical attitudes, and so distorted by myth and misconception that it is usually difficult to have a rational discussion about it.

Over the centuries homosexuality has not only been misunderstood, it has been treated with contempt, hostility and violence. In almost every society homosexuals have been subject to persecution. In many cultures they have been cast out or killed. Even today, gays and lesbians experience numerous kinds of persecution and discrimination, much of it subtle and insidious. I believe that any time we speak disparagingly of gays and lesbians, make jokes about them, mimic stereotype gestures, or treat them in unkind or cruel ways, we participate in that long history of persecution.

Although traditionally homosexuals have been treated as abnormal and strange, in actuality, except for their sexual preference, homosexuals and heterosexuals are basically alike. As LDS psychotherapist Jan Stout says, "The personality spectrum among homosexuals is as diverse and complex as it is among heterosexuals." To elaborate on this point, Stout quotes Judd Marmor who says that this spectrum runs "from passive ones to aggressive ones, from shy introverts to raucous extroverts, from theatrically hysterical personalities, to rigid compulsive obsessive ones, from sexually inhibited timid types to sexually promiscuous flamboyant ones, from radical activists to staunch conservatives, from defiant atheists to devout church goers, and from unconscionable sociopaths to highly responsible, law-abiding citizens."

In speaking of the range of expressions homosexuals have in the Church and in society at large, one gay Latter-day Saint has written, "We belong to your priesthood quorums; we teach your Sunday School classes; we pass the sacrament to you each Sunday; we attend your Primary classes, your faculty meetings, your family reunions and your youth conferences. We sell you groceries, we keep your books, we police your streets, we teach your children in school. We

preside over your wards and even your stakes. We are your sons, your brothers, your grandsons, and who knows, but by some riddle of nature, we would be you as well."

What do we know about homosexuality? There are numerous theories and scientific explorations about possible genetic, neurobiological, hormonal, psychological and environmental causes. But there is no consensus as to which of these or any combination of them holds the key to understanding homosexuality. However, the consensus among those who counsel with homosexuals and who study same-gender attraction is that homosexuality is not a disease or a depravity, as the following statement by the American Psychological Association attests: "The research on homosexuality is very clear: homosexuality is neither a mental illness nor a moral depravity." What most researchers do agree on, and this is confirmed by my own experience in counseling numerous Latter-day Saint homosexuals, is that homosexuals do not choose their sexual orientation any more than heterosexuals do.

One of the reasons this conclusion is important is that there is a tendency for homosexuals to blame themselves for their homosexuality and for parents to feel that somehow they've done something to cause the homosexuality of their child: either the father was not masculine enough or the mother was overweening. There is nothing in the research to suggest such a cause and effect relationship. We simply do not know what causes one person to have a same-sex attraction and another person to have an opposite-sex attraction.

Can homosexuality be changed? Can homosexuals be "cured"? This is one of the most controversial subjects among both Latter-day Saint and other psychotherapists. . Some therapists contend that homosexuals can change their sexual orientation. While gays and lesbians may have no choice over the fact that they are homosexual, these psychologists argue, they do have choice over whether they stay homosexual, and if they will but reorient themselves, recondition themselves through "reparative therapy," they can change from same-sex to opposite-sex orientation.

Some of these therapists claim limited success in helping some gay and lesbian Latter-day Saints to reorient themselves. I emphasize, some psychotherapists claim limited success in helping some gay and lesbian Later-day Saints to reorient themselves sexually. If these reports are true, what it suggests is that in the range of homosexual experience, some may have more choice than others with regard to their sexual attraction.

I spoke recently with a good friend who is a highly respected psychotherapist, both in the Church and in his profession. When I asked him if he knew of any cases in which homosexuals had successfully reoriented themselves, he said, "Well, I know of cases in which people have made successful heterosexual relationships that have lasted fifteen or twenty years." He added, "But my guess is that if you could take an x-ray of those people's psyches, you would still find a very strong homosexual component to their personality." Of course, a homosexual who has married, especially if the marriage was sealed in the temple, would have a very strong motivation to adjust to a heterosexual relationship, particularly so if he or she had a bi-sexual orientation. Others who try for years to make such an adjustment are unsuccessful in doing so.

After counseling with numerous gay and lesbian Latter-day Saints, I have come to the conclusion that not only would the vast majority of homosexuals change their orientation if they could, but that most have tried desperately, usually for many years, to do just that. These good brothers and sisters have fasted and prayed, often over a sustained period of time, have sought priesthood blessings, have thrown themselves passionately into church service, have made desperate promises to God, and have endured tremendous suffering--all in an attempt to change their sexual orientation. Some, following what at one time was Church counsel, but which no longer is, have even married and had children to prove their sincerity in trying to adapt themselves to the heterosexual norm.

H. Wayne Schow, a Mormon whose son, Brad, died of AIDS, in commenting on the depression that plagued his son over a period of years, says, "He told us that he prayed fervently over a long period that God would help him reorient his feelings, and in return he promised God extraordinary devotion." Another gay saint expressed his struggle in these words: "After much denial, suffering, fasting and prayer, many tears and brave efforts to change, I submitted my problem to God. It was not as though I had never asked for help, but...God's answer was to continually deny my request to become heterosexual."

I would characterize such efforts as these as evidence not only of great commitment, but of great faith and courage as well. It may not be possible for heterosexuals to fully understand the anguish, heartache, and despair that such struggles entail. When heterosexuals so glibly tell homosexuals that all they have to do is start thinking in the opposite direction and change will come, they do a great disservice to the noble efforts of those who have struggled to try and become something that they are not. More destructive are those who suggest that homosexuals who have not been successful in changing their orientation have failed because they are not righteous or faithful enough.

Instead of condemning homosexuals, Mormon Christians should seriously examine the ways in which they themselves may contribute to the suffering of their gay brothers and lesbian sisters. We are compelled as Christ's disciples to lift the burdens of those who suffer--no matter what their sexual orientation. Speaking of the burdens homosexual Mormons bear, H. Wayne Schow has written, "Consider the psychological burden born by Mormon homosexuals in particular. From their youth the seeds of low self-esteem are planted. From both adults and peers they hear the deprecating epithets, the scornful aspersions, the biased misinformation about gays which cause them to feel contemptible. They struggle to understand their differences in an environment which demands conformity. They hide their feelings from the world, even from loved ones, and hate themselves for this deception. They discover that there are laws against homosexual intimacy. They read books written by people who encourage their assumption that they are flawed, mental ill" (Schow, p. 12).

Based on my experience, homosexuals have four possible relationships with the Church. One group, the smallest, have chosen to live a chaste life and have decided to forego expressing themselves sexually with another person in mortality. I have some such individuals in my congregation, and for their devotion, and especially for their courage, I have the greatest respect. These saints admit they are homosexual, they acknowledge their desire to have

legitimate sexual relations with partners of their own gender, they often express a strong wish to be heterosexual and to have a spouse and children, and yet they are firm in their resolve to keep their covenants. They do not have easy lives.

The second group, after struggling for a period of time with their homosexuality, drop out of the Church, although some continue to have a distant relationship with it. Some of these gay and lesbian Mormons are bitter about the Church and are openly critical of Church leaders. Others are happy and seem to be at peace with their choice. Some are promiscuous while others live in homosexual monogamous relationships. Either way, if they remain connected to Mormonism, they do not have easy lives.

The third group maintains an ambivalent relationship to the Church. This relationship tends to be more mercurial than those of the other groups. Their lives generally are characterized by periods of conforming to Church standards, having an initial homosexual experience, repenting, being involved in extensive counseling, further sexual intimacy with various partners, being subject to Church disciplinary councils, dating opposite-sex partners, etc. They have lives that are marked with turmoil and considerable pain. As with the others, they do not have easy lives.

The fourth group consists of those who have chosen to remain active in the Church but who are secretive about their sexual preference. Some in this group are sexually active but they do not disclose this information to church leaders for fear that it will affect their ability to function in the Church. Because their relationship with the Church involves deception, like those in the other groups, they do not have easy lives.

Most Latter-day Saint homosexuals who stay connected to the Church live in a state of almost constant conflict because they feel they must choose between being true to the Church and being true to themselves, because they must choose between being open or closed about their homosexuality, and because they desire to be intimately involved in the Church and yet recognize that they belong to a group who generally are treated with scorn and derision by the very community they wish to be a part of. While no official statistics are available, it is the consensus of those closest to the situation that a significant number of Latter-day Saint homosexuals, out of fear, self-loathing, guilt and a desire to be free of the tortuous conflict in which they find themselves with regard to the Church, have taken their own lives. One authority on this subject reports that there is a higher number of known gay related suicides among Latter-day Saints than among members of any other American religion.

Because of the strong sentiment against homosexuality within the Mormon community, Latter-day Saint homosexuals often experience rejection and alienation from their own families. If they do not disclose their homosexuality to their families, they are usually subject to intense pressure to marry; if they are open about their sexual orientation, they risk condemnation and sometimes ostracism from family members.

From time to time I get calls from Latter-day Saint parents who want to know what to do about a homosexual child. Recently, a mother called and said, "I'm very concerned because our

eighteen-year-old son has just told us that he's gay. Our family is extremely disturbed, and my husband is very angry about it. What can we do to change him?"

I said, "Your emphasis should be on what you can do to help him, because if he has declared his homosexuality to you, knowing how you feel about it, you have to assume that he's frightened, confused, and in a great deal of pain. What he needs more than anything is to know that you will love him no matter what his sexual preference is. He needs you to accept him for what he is. He's still your son, and being homosexual does not change that."

She said, "Well, my husband wants to kick him out of the house because he's worried that our son will influence the other children to become homosexual." I assured her that there was no basis for such fears. I counseled her to take the leadership in encouraging all members of the family to love this young man and to help him through what was sure to be an excruciatingly painful experience.

What should our attitude as heterosexual Latter-day Saints be toward our homosexual brothers and sisters? Let me suggest several principles from the teachings of the Savior and those of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

For those who consider homosexuality a sin or who tend to condemn homosexuals who have transgressed the law of chastity, the following statements by Joseph Smith might prove instructive:

"The nearer we get to our Heavenly Father, the more we are disposed to look with compassion on perishing souls. We feel we should want to take them upon our shoulders and cast their sins behind our backs."

"Nothing is so much calculated to lead a people to forsake sin as to take them by the hand, and watch over them with tenderness. When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind, while the opposite course has a tendency to harrow up all the harsh feelings and depress the human mind."

"Our Heavenly Father is more liberal in His views, and [more] boundless in His mercies and blessings, than we are ready to believe or receive."

These statements suggest that we should have a greater magnanimity toward our gay brothers and lesbian sisters than is now generally the case.

The entire burden of Christ's message is that we should be slow to judge and quick to forgive, that we should consider all people as ourselves, and that we should love one another without regard to our differences. The Golden Rule applies especially to all those whom we consider strange, queer, abnormal—all those whom we might see as different from or less than we are.

The scriptures continually emphasize principles of charity. The alteration of the following scriptures is in keeping with their intent and I hope illustrates my point.

"Beloved, let us love one another (including homosexuals); for love is of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not (homosexuals) knoweth not God, for God is love." (I John 4:7-8)

"If a man says, I love God, and hateth his (homosexual) brother (or sister), he is a liar; for he that loveth not his (homosexual brother and sister) whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (I John 4:20)

"And he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female, (homosexual and heterosexual)." (2 Nephi 26:33)

"Be filled with love towards God and all men (and women, including homosexuals)." (Mosiah 2:4)

"Thou (both heterosexual and homosexual) shall live together in love." (D&C 42:45)

In addition to accepting and loving homosexuals, I believe we should recognize that they may have something significant to contribute to the culture of the Church. For whatever reasons, many gays and lesbians seem to have an increased sensitivity to beauty and a more highly developed artistic sense than do most heterosexuals. To exclude them is to deprive ourselves of the richness they can bring to the Church. It also seems to be true that homosexual men have a more gentle, if you will, a more feminine demeanor. While this characteristic is often mocked and derided, a more enlightened view might consider it a potentially positive influence on some of the more aggressive aspects of the masculine ethos that tends to dominate the Church. Lest such an idea be dismissed too quickly, one should remember that at times the Savior referred to himself in terms that society might consider feminine. As a whole, integrated being who took upon Himself the sins of men and women, he taught us how to balance the masculine and feminine.

When gay and lesbian Latter-day Saints are excluded from the fellowship of the gospel through prejudice or intolerance, when through suicide or disease they are taken prematurely from our midst, we lose something of great value. I believe it is possible to celebrate what homosexual saints can contribute in the Church without compromising gospel principles.

I don't know if there is a way out of the dilemma that Mormon homosexuals and Mormon heterosexuals who relate to them face, but I would like to suggest something that we might at least try. Since this is a matter of such significance to the Church, and since it involves the suffering of so many of our brothers and sisters, perhaps as individuals and as a Church we should make the solution of this problem a matter of urgent fasting and prayer. Since we believe in revelation, why don't we plead with the Lord for light and knowledge on this problem that affects so many of us? Surely it deserves very high priority among those matters for which we knock upon the door of Heaven.

Each of those of us who is concerned about this matter could begin including it in our daily

prayers. Perhaps we could undertake special fasts on behalf of our gay brothers and lesbian sisters. At the very least, our religion requires us to accept homosexual saints with love and fellowship, to bind up their spiritual and psychic wounds, to mourn with them, to weep with them, and to comfort them.

If, as suggested above, homosexuals do not choose their sexual orientation and if they have no power to change it, then both they and we must accept their homosexuality. This does not include expressing their sexuality in inappropriate ways; what it does mean is that they can express those aspects of their nature that are in keeping with gospel principles.

In his sonnet, "As Kingfishers Catch Fire," Gerard Manley Hopkins suggests that God created each of us to express our uniqueness:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same: . . .

Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

That is, all beings and all things are created by God to express what they are.

Hopkins says that we do even more than this:

Each person

Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—

Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,

Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his

To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Since we have the light of Christ within us, since we take on his character when we are born anew through him, thus becoming his children of light, then beyond expressing who and what we are, we also express who he is. Christ justifies us to God, and it is through His grace that when we act before the Father, in a sense we become Christ, because His light shines through us. Christ plays in ten thousand places and through many times ten thousand faces which he makes lovely to the Father through his grace. Those faces Christ plays through are both heterosexual and homosexual. He would bring us all to God.

I am grateful to belong to a church which teaches us that the light of Christ shines in us and can shine through us. It cannot do that if we act in prejudicial ways toward one another, if we consider others less than ourselves, if we persecute those who are different, if we cast out strangers and forbid them from the table of the Lord's Supper.

The great lesson of Matthew 25 is that Christ puts Himself in the place of the stranger--of the homosexual, if you will: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of one of these my (homosexual) brethren (or sisters), ye have done it unto me" (25:40).

There is no question but that many heterosexuals treat homosexuals as if they were the least. Yet Christ says that if we treat a homosexual with love and kindness, if we behave toward him or her with charity and magnanimity, then we have treated Christ in that manner as well.

I pray the Lord will bless us as brothers and sisters in the Kingdom of God, as those who have taken upon us His name, that we will let Christ's light shine through our faces, that we will

make of our community a wholeness, that we will seek that common ground of peace of which Paul speaks, and that we will learn how to love and serve the Lord by celebrating who we are, his heterosexual and homosexual sons and daughters. Because we are all his creatures, we are all born with his light. I pray that we may let that light shine among us, that it might grow, that we ourselves might be its beacon, and that, as a Church and as individuals, we not only will pray to the Lord for greater light and understanding, but that we will turn our hearts with greater charity. love and acceptance of all of those whom we might consider strangers.

I bear witness that the Lord wishes us to do this. That He waits for our prayers and for our lives which manifest those prayers. That we may love him, that we may let his light shine through us, that he may play through our faces to others, is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.