

I Still Love Homosexuals by Tim Wilkins, Baptist Press Contributor

Part 1

Unsure how I, a former homosexual, received an invitation to speak two consecutive weeks to a gay/lesbian organization at a major university, I readily accepted. I arrived well ahead of time to mingle with the students, shake hands, and get to know them.

Though I felt like a ham at a bar mitzvah, I shared with the twenty-five to thirty homosexuals how, from an early age, I felt "different"; how, upon reaching puberty, I was attracted to other men; and how, after eleven years of homosexual activity, I told God, "It's over! Homosexuality is an illusion, a dead end! Homosexuality promises a lot, but delivers little!" I told them homosexuality was a sin, immoral, and that God punishes sin.

For ninety minutes I shared my story and answered many questions – some of which were mildly discourteous and others overtly rude.

No sooner had the meeting ended, several homosexual men and women, most with puzzled expressions on their faces, approached me. In semi-private conversations the recurring statement was, "You didn't say what I expected to hear." I asked, "What did you expect to hear?"

The recurring answers were predictable. "I expected you to be preachy, loud, and self-righteous." "I expected you to quote Scripture the entire meeting, to say you hate us."

But I did none of those things. I politely expressed my appreciation for the opportunity to speak with them, befriend them, and tell what Christ had done in my life.

I arrived the following week to a crowd almost twice the size of the previous week's. Why? Word had spread that "the ex-gay guy was respectful, polite, and friendly."

Had I compromised my beliefs, condoned homosexuality, diluted Scripture?

No.

After being interviewed on a TV program and while leaving the studio, I met a militant gay man who hosts a TV program.

I extended my hand, told him I had seen his show, and found it "interesting." Ted asked my name and why I had been interviewed. I gave my name and said, "I used to be gay."

Immediately, Ted's speech accelerated, his face reddened as his knee-jerk reactions kicked into gear. I stood silently as his monologue continued, all the while asking God how I might diffuse the situation. When he paused, I intervened with these five unprepared words. "Ted-you-are-a" – I was unsure what the last word would be, but it finally left my lips – "blessing." In the most generic sense, Ted is a blessing in that, though he is not a child of God, he is a creation of God.

Like a man who had been punched in the stomach, Ted was speechless. After collecting his thoughts, his face relaxed. With a deep sigh, Ted said "I really appreciate how you have taken our conversation to a higher level."

Immediately, I moved the conversation away from homosexuality to family, work, college – general topics.

Shortly, the TV host who had interviewed me approached the studio door where Ted and I stood talking. Automatically, I prepared to introduce Ted and the host. While turning to my right, I placed my left hand on Ted's right shoulder saying, "Ted, this is the host," and then telling the host, "Ted has his own TV show."

Ted and I ended our conversation as we left the building. We shook hands and went our respective ways.

A week later, Ted's live show aired. And guess what? This militant gay man recounted to his primarily militant gay audience our entire conversation, ending it with these words: "I don't know whether the guy used to be gay or not, but he made a distinct impression on me."

Rick Warren says, "There are two basic reasons people don't know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. One, they have never met a Christian. Second, they have met a Christian."

A genuine, conspicuous display of Christian love quickly and decisively eclipses the counterfeit love found in homosexuality, opening the door for the gospel.

Do I hate homosexuals? Absolutely not! The truth is I love homosexuals more now than when I was one!

I Still Love Homosexuals – Part 2

A few years ago I invited a prominent homosexual to be a guest on a television program I was hosting. I had met and become acquainted with Mitchell months before; we had developed a quasi-friendship. Mitchell accepted my invitation with some reluctance.

He arrived at the studio late and noticeably ill at ease. I extended my hand and welcomed him. As he sat next to me, while having a microphone clipped to his shirt, I detected the strong odor of alcohol; apparently Mitchell was trying to calm his nerves.

I did not divulge his "secret," as it would have unnerved him more. Rather, I smiled broadly and assured him we would have a delightful though disagreeable conversation.

Because it was a Christian program, the studio crew prayed before going live. I had told the crew before Mitchell arrived that we would pray as usual. I gathered everyone at the set and asked that we hold hands and pray. I reached for Mitchell's hand, noticing his perplexity and mistrust. I prayed that God would bless the interview, calm us and bring honor to Himself.

Immediately after the program, Mitchell confided, "I really thought you would blindside me on TV! I appreciate the respect you showed me." And with a puzzled look he asked, "Do you always pray before each show?" I said yes.

Is it possible to maintain that homosexuality is immoral and yet respect those who engage in it? In his book "Setting the Record Straight," Larry Burtoft writes, "What many people forget, both among those for and against homosexual rights, is that it is quite possible (and from a Christian perspective, obligatory) both to judge a behavior or lifestyle as immoral, and yet treat individuals with the respect and dignity which they deserve."

Not yet convinced?

1 Peter 3:15 says, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

I received a call from a single mother whose 15-year-old son had "bought in" to homosexuality. The mother said her son was researching a paper and wanted to interview me over lunch. I obliged.

For more than 90 minutes, the three of us sat in a booth, mother and me on one side and her son on the other. Methodically Rob placed his tape recorder on the table and began his interview, questions in hand. During the interview, Rob appeared detached, impersonal and emotionless. When he finished, I asked if I could share some thoughts and he agreed.

I told him about the legitimate, appropriate need men have for affection and connectedness; I shared with him biblical examples of genuine, healthy same-sex friendships -- Jonathan and David, Paul and Timothy, Jesus and John. I told him about our need for a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Slowly, Rob began to focus. Then I asked, "You know what I believe you really want -- to be affirmed in your masculinity, to be acknowledged as a man, to feel like one of the guys." Then I said, "I wonder what you would do if I was to move from my side of this booth to your side, sit beside you, and put my arm around your shoulder." I now had his full attention. If a waiter had dropped a stack of dishes, I do not believe Rob would have noticed; we were communicating for the first time. For that brief moment, I had spoken his "love language" and he heard me. Rob then began to absorb every word I spoke, though just as quickly as tears welled in his eyes he fought them away, as I began to speak the redemptive words of Jesus Christ that we pray will transform his life.

Tim Wilkins, a former homosexual, is the director of Cross Ministry, a speaking ministry in Wake Forest, N.C. © 2003 Cross Ministry. More information can be found at www.crossministry.org.