



Love homosexuals as Jesus would, ex-gays urge at conference

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By Janna Barber

(Tim Wilkins is quoted in this article)

LAKE FOREST, Calif. (BP)--Chad Thompson began by telling his story.

"I remember sitting on my bed when I was in the fourth grade. I hadn't even hit puberty yet, but I knew I was different," said Thompson, author of "Loving Homosexuals as Jesus Would" and a featured workshop speaker at the "Disturbing Voices" HIV/AIDS conference at Saddleback Church. The Nov. 29-30 conference offered 16 different workshops, including with the same title as Thompson's book.

"I knew that my feelings toward males were different from the other boys I knew," Thompson said, explaining that he understood where homosexuals are coming from when they say they've always felt different, or they can't remember ever not being attracted to someone of the same gender as themselves.

Calling himself an "ex-gay," he told the workshop audience he decided to begin living as a heterosexual once he realized that his legitimate need for love and affection from a male was the source of his homosexual struggles.

Thompson went on to tell how he helps others struggling with the same issues via his organization, Inqueery, which operates a website of the same name and addresses homosexuality on high school and college campuses.

Thompson said he's met many homosexuals who did not feel accepted at all by the church community. He named three roadblocks that stand in the way of ministry to homosexuals: media, politics and research.

"All three of these arenas perpetuate stereotypes of gay people as well as Christian people ... so when someone from the evangelical world meets someone from the gay community, there is this tension because we've been lied to about each other," Thompson said.

In a recent article he wrote for Relevant Leader magazine, Thompson acknowledged that Christians want to love homosexuals as Jesus would, but knowing how to show love begins with knowing how to communicate.

"Trying to have a discussion about gay marriage with someone who is lesbian or gay is often like trying to play a game of baseball while the opposing team is on a soccer field. Each side is basing their arguments on completely different assumptions about homosexuality," he wrote.

Many Christians like to use the phrase "hate the sin, love the sinner" to describe their attitude toward homosexuals, but again, communication completely breaks down, Thompson said.

"Christians consider homosexuality a behavior, but homosexuals consider it an identity," he said. "If gay and lesbian folks consider their orientation an identity, is it really possible to 'hate the sin' without also hating the sinner?"

Thompson suggests that instead of looking at homosexuals through the world's eyes, Christians need to look at the world through their eyes.

"This means that, when discussing the subject of homosexuality with people, we must use words that are inclusive, not divisive," he explained, pointing out that while homosexuals use words like "love" and "relationship" to describe homosexual behavior, Christians use words like "sin" and "abomination."

"We must put aside this kind of language if we want our ministries to be a safe place for students to talk openly about their sexuality," he said.

Tim Wilkins, founder and director of Cross Ministry, a ministry that seeks to equip the church to evangelize and disciple homosexuals, led the second half of the workshop. Now a husband of 12 years and father of three girls, Wilkins practiced a homosexual lifestyle for 11 years.

"If someone had told me 30 years ago that I would one day be married and have three children, I would have said, 'You're crazy,'" Wilkins said. "But on the inside I would have hoped it was true because I truly dreamed of being a husband and father but never thought it was possible."

Wilkins read an e-mail he once received from a pastor who read an article by Wilkins and somehow inferred that he was still a homosexual. The pastor condemned Wilkins and said he prays for Wilkins to find the truth.

"The pastor ends the e-mail by quoting 1 Corinthians 6:9-10," Wilkins said, "which lists those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God, including idolaters, adulterers and homosexuals."

Wilkins paused for emphasis. *"But the pastor failed to include verse 11, which says, 'And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.'"*

"If we're going to love homosexuals the way like Jesus does, we have to tell the truth, and the truth is that we all have sin," Wilkins said.

He outlined personal qualities necessary in order to love homosexuals: humility, care, patience, kindness, gentleness and respect.

"Gentleness and respect are especially important. Like it says in 1 Peter 3:15, '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,'" Wilkins reminded his audience.

He recounted a time when he invited a homosexual man named Mitchell to be a guest on a television program he was hosting. After the taping of the show, Mitchell shook hands with him and said, "I really thought you would blindside me on TV! I appreciate the respect you showed me."

Wilkins emphasized, *"A genuine, conspicuous display of Christian love quickly and decisively eclipses the counterfeit love [homosexuals] found in homosexuality, opening the door for the Gospel."*

Thompson concurred, saying, "Many homosexuals see people like Fred Phelps, pastor of the infamous Westboro church [a Primitive Baptist church in Topeka, Kan., which publicly expresses condemnation and hate for homosexuals], and assume all Christians are that way. Some may even assume God is that way. After all, if the only Christian people they know are angry at them, then God must be angry at them, too."

Both Thompson and Wilkins cited listening as one of the best ways to show love to a homosexual, because each person's story is unique and complex.

They also admonished participants not to try and talk someone out of their homosexuality for it is God who heals them.

"If you're not sure how to hug someone who is struggling with homosexuality, just open your arms," Thompson said. "If they need your touch, they'll walk right in." Allowing someone who has struggled with homosexuality "to get close to you," he said, can be among the greatest gifts they can be given.