

Disagreement ≠ Hatred

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Good morning! Welcome to Restored Church. My name is Dan, and I'm one of the pastors here. We're so glad that you took time out of your schedule to be with us this morning. Today especially we want to welcome members of the LGBT community here in Wilkes-Barre. You are always welcome at Restored, and we're very glad that you are with us! Today, we're going to discuss one of the most controversial topics in our nation. My message is entitled Homosexuality: Disagreement ≠ Hatred. Before we get going, let me set up the message with these 5 thoughts:

#1. I want to say right up front that I do not pretend to have all the answers. Our time this morning will not answer all of your questions – hopefully you can make it back tonight at 7PM for our Q&A session with myself, Pastor Tim, and Dr. Mark McGinniss. **#2.** This message will not be a typical “sermon.” It's more of a “talk” than a normal sermon. **#3.** This message will not primarily be a defense of why we at Restored Church believe what we believe – although we will be honest regarding our position. If you'd like to hear a message defending God's original design in detail, I'll recommend a message from my friend Pastor Mark Stuenzi: lead pastor at Parker Hill Community Church. You can find his message on Parker Hill's Vimeo channel online. **#4.** This message is not a political message. We are not lobbying for a political position, endorsing candidates, or telling you how you should vote. **#5.** The real purpose of this message is to make the case that disagreement should never equal hatred when it comes to the issue of homosexuality, and this goes for both sides of the issue.

My challenge today is for those here who believe that God's original design for human sexuality is for a man and a woman within the covenant relationship of marriage. My challenge is also for those here who believe that God's original design for human sexuality includes a gay lifestyle. Whatever you believe, I hope that we all can come to the same conclusion this morning – that disagreement should not lead to hatred. My hope and desire is that all of us here today can still love each other and form relationships regardless of our different viewpoints. Please don't tune me out this morning. Please stick with me through the entire message.

Now, the leadership of Restored Church does believe that the Bible teaches God's original design for human sexuality is between a man and a woman in the covenant relationship of marriage. The reason we believe this primarily comes from God's Word through the teachings of the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:18-32 (PAGE #610) & 1st Corinthians 6:9-11 (PAGE #620). The gravity of this issue warrants a thoughtful & articulate explanation.

That being said, I'd like to show you a 9-minute video clip of a world-renown speaker, author, scholar, and theologian named Dr. Ravi Zacharias who clearly articulates the viewpoint that I refer to as "God's original design." Dr. Zacharias has spoken all over the world for 42 years in scores of universities including Harvard, Dartmouth, Johns Hopkins, and Oxford University. Please listen to his loving response to a very sincere question that many are asking today.

RAVI ZACHARIAS CLIP

Again, if you would like to know why Dr. Zacharias came to this conclusion (why he would hold this viewpoint), I'd invite you

to study the teachings of the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:18-32 (PAGE #610) & 1st Corinthians 6:9-11 (PAGE #620). And if you have more questions, please write them down on the yellow index cards in front of you. We'll try to answer as many as we can this evening right back here at 7PM.

Please hear me very clearly this morning. The Bible teaches that pride, arrogance, and bigotry are the most heinous, horrible sins known to man. Pride, arrogance, and bigotry come from our enemy Satan, and they are the fullest extent of rebellion against God. Sadly, many who call themselves followers of Jesus are some of the most proud, arrogant, and bigoted people in America today. And typically, root attitudes of pride and arrogance lead to fruit attitudes of bigotry and hatred. It breaks my heart to see people who claim to be Christians make a name for themselves through hatred and homophobia. Few groups exemplify this more than a group know as Westboro Baptist Church.

To the members of the LGBT community here this morning, please hear my genuine, heartfelt apology for the hateful, bigoted actions of groups like Westboro Baptist Church. Even looking at this photo up on the screen makes me feel sick inside, and it should! I am deeply sorry that people like this who claim to be Christians would spend their entire lives in hate-filled condemnation. Westboro's actions are completely opposed to how Jesus calls his followers to live. This is not the example of our Savior. It's anything but that. If you have been on the receiving end of hate and scorn simply because you are same-sex attracted, I am deeply sorry for that.

Restored Church is a community of Jesus-followers whose primary ethic is love, not hatred. The only rule at Restored Church is "No Perfect People Allowed." We believe that every

human life is valuable to God because we're all made in his image and likeness. At the same time, every human is equally needy as well. None of us here has it all together. Every single person in this room should be dependent on Jesus' perfection because we don't have everything figured out. We point people to Jesus. It's faith in Christ's perfect life, death, and resurrection that saves us and gives us new life. Jesus modeled a life of love for us where the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor regardless of race, religion, background, financial status, or whether you're gay or straight.

According to Jesus, the greatest commandment is to love God more than anything or anyone else. Love for our neighbor stems from our love for God first and foremost. And if we love God above all else, then Christians must love God's Word, the Bible, because it's his direct communication to us. And if Christians want to love and obey God's Word, then belief in God's original design is only natural due to the teachings of the Apostle Paul as I've already mentioned.

Belief in God's original design for human sexual relationships does not automatically make you bigoted or homophobic. Are there lots of people who believe in God's original design and who are also extremely bigoted and homophobic? Absolutely! But it's not automatic. Simply believing the Bible says what it says does not automatically make you a bigot. The sins of pride, arrogance, and bigotry can take many forms – but they are not automatic attitudes produced by belief in God's original design.

If disagreement ≠ hatred, then that truth goes both ways! It applies to both sides of belief on the topic that we're discussing. Should those who believe in God's original design be bigoted and homophobic? No! Absolutely not! And on the flip side, should those who fully believe in the validity of a

homosexual lifestyle be equally bigoted and heterophobic? No! Absolutely not! I used the example of Westboro Baptist Church as a negative example of disagreement leading to hatred (which should never happen). And on the flip side, let me use another example from the football world of disagreement leading to spite and hatred on “the other side of the fence” so to speak.

Michael Sam is a football player who publically came out as gay after his college career. He was selected in the 7th round of the 2014 NFL draft as the 249th pick overall. He was the first publically gay player to be drafted by an NFL team. Former head coach of the Indianapolis Colts, Tony Dungy, is a well-known conservative Christian. He was the first African American head coach to win the Super Bowl, and now he’s a sports commentator for NBC. This past summer, Tony Dungy made a very simple comment that he personally wouldn’t have taken Michael Sam in the NFL draft if he was still coaching.

He later clarified what he meant by saying, “I was not asked whether or not Michael Sam deserves an opportunity to play in the NFL. He absolutely does. I was not asked whether his sexual orientation should play a part in the evaluation process. It should not... What I was asked about was my philosophy of drafting, a philosophy that was developed over the years, which was to minimize distractions for my teams. I do not believe Michael’s sexual orientation will be a distraction to his teammates or his organization. I do, however, believe that the media attention that comes with it will be a distraction.”

In stepped sportscaster Keith Olbermann, who took the opportunity to tell the world that Tony Dungy is the “World’s Worst Person in Sports.” According to Keith Olbermann, Tony Dungy is the “World’s Worst Person in Sports” because he

wouldn't have chosen a guy who was picked late in the 7th round as the 249th pick. Dungy said, "The NFL has always been based on merit, and I think that will continue to be the case..." Michael Sam eventually was released by the St. Louis Rams. He is no longer an active NFL player; he is currently playing on the practice squad for the Dallas Cowboys.

Here's my question. Why does Tony Dungy become the "World's Worst Person in Sports" simply because he personally wouldn't have selected Michael Sam? He never expressed any hatred for Michael Sam. He clarified his remarks saying that he wishes him the best and has no ill-will towards the young man. But automatically, Coach Dungy got clobbered by the media because his personal opinion didn't agree with the popular opinion of the day. Quite honestly, being a conservative Christian these days will guarantee that hatred comes your way. The intolerance of the tolerance movement is at an all time high.

We live in a world today where tolerance reigns supreme, except when someone disagrees with popular opinion. It's at this point, especially with the topic we're discussing today, when the tolerant become extremely intolerant. And sadly, even the most innocent remarks anywhere close to the topic of homosexuality will bring out bigotry and hatred from those who disagree. When it comes to this issue of disagreement leading to hatred, let's just be honest with each other... BOTH sides are at fault.

But disagreement should not produce hatred. Whatever beliefs you hold today, I'm begging you to oppose this trend of animosity in our culture. Almost every popular YouTube video has thousands of comment threads where people war and fight in senseless quarrelling. Hatred reigns supreme on the

internet, and it also finds room in our own hearts. This should never happen! Disagreement should not equal hatred.

Now let me specifically address Christians who believe in God's original design. Let's all turn to Colossians 4:2-6 (PAGE #639). Please follow along with me as I read these verses, "[2] Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. [3] At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—[4] that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. [5] Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. [6] Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." (Colossians 4:2-6 ESV)

The Apostle Paul says here that followers of Jesus should be known by 5 things: prayer, thankfulness, commitment to gospel of Christ, wisdom, and gracious speech. Wouldn't it be awesome if the world around us thought of Christians as people known for their prayer, thankfulness, Christ-likeness, wisdom, and gracious communication? That would be awesome! But sadly, we're not known for these things. We're known more for what we're against rather than who we are for. This is a tragedy!

So if you're here today, and you're a Christian who believes in God's original design, here's my challenge to you. Let's be known for prayer. Let's be humble people who depend more on God than we depend on ourselves. Let's be known by our thankfulness. Instead of griping, complaining, and whining – we should be the leaders who improve our workplaces, homes, neighborhoods, and schools with grateful hearts and attitudes that lift others up. Let's be known for our commitment to the

gospel of Christ. If we really believe that God saves us regardless of how far we've run, then how could we ever be people who are known by judgmentalism, condemnation, and hatred? And let's be known for our wisdom and gracious communication as well.

Christians, stop shooting your mouth off on Facebook, and start encouraging people. Stop reposting hate-filled venom that condemns and tears down anyone who disagrees with you. One pastor has said, "Stop trying to make a point, and start trying to make a difference." Start spending your time building relationships with people that you disagree with and try to see their side of things. Stop putting your faith in politics as well.

Stop condemning; start forgiving. Stop judging; start loving. Stop viewing yourself as higher than others, and start humbly serving everyone in your spheres of influence like Jesus would. We have to start living lives full of grace and wisdom. That's what Jesus wants! If the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ is true – if we have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus then how can we not live lives full of the grace that God has already extended to us in Christ?

How do these challenges apply to the issue of homosexuality? The primary application is building relationships rather than building walls. Should those who believe in God's original design show love and develop friendships with the LGBT community even though there's disagreement? Absolutely! I highly doubt that all of us here only have friendships with people who agree with us on everything. All of us here today have friends that we love who also disagree with us on any number of things. Let me tell you about my friendship with Justin Vacula.

My friend Justin is an atheist activist here in the Wilkes-Barre area. We disagree on almost every issue imaginable, but we do agree that disagreement \neq hatred. Over a year ago, Justin hung a banner promoting atheism in Public Square here in Wilkes-Barre. I read in the paper that he was receiving tons of hate mail from Christians. So I called him up and asked him and his friend Rodney out to lunch at Rodano's. I told them Restored Church was paying for their lunch, and I took the opportunity to apologize for the hateful actions of the Christian community. We talked for 2 hours about lots of things, and we've stayed friends ever since.

I've been to Justin's home. Justin's been to my home. We've gone out to eat many times. We've talked about all kinds of issues and topics, and we disagree on most of them. But that doesn't keep us from being friends – even though I'm a pastor and Justin is an atheist. Even recently when I started receiving lots of hate mail for Restored's billboard promoting this sermon series, Justin had this to say on his blog: "Some reactions to Dan's comments about the billboard — particularly surrounding LGBT individuals — are of the reactionary 'Nichols is a bigot who hates gays.' From my interactions with Pastor Dan, I don't agree with this sentiment... Although I am friends with Pastor Nichols, I can't support his billboard message, but I can support his view — echoed in the article — that people can disagree and not hate each other."

If you're here today and you're a Christian who believes in God's original design, I want to encourage you to be known by love, first and foremost. Members of Restored Church need to pursue healthy relationships with those that we disagree with. Let me conclude this morning with a final story written by Huffington Post writer Shane L. Windmeyer. This is not the

kind of story that you would expect from a Huffington Post staff writer, especially one who is a nationally recognized LGBT leader in higher education, bestselling author, and executive director for Campus Pride. The title is “Dan and Me: My Coming Out as a Friend of Dan Cathy and Chick-fil-A.” This is a lengthy story, but it illustrates the message of the morning beautifully.

Shane writes, “I spent New Year's Eve at the red-blooded, all-American epicenter of college football: at the Chick-fil-A Bowl, next to Dan Cathy, as his personal guest. It was among the most unexpected moments of my life. Yes, after months of personal phone calls, text messages and in-person meetings, I am coming out in a new way, as a friend of Chick-fil-A's president and COO, Dan Cathy, and I am nervous about it. I have come to know him and Chick-fil-A in ways that I would not have thought possible when I first started hearing from LGBT students about their concerns over the chicken chain's giving practices.

For many this news of friendship might be shocking. After all, I am an out, 40-year-old gay man and a lifelong activist for equality. I am also the founder and executive director of Campus Pride, the leading national organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and ally college students. Just seven months ago our organization advanced a national campaign against Chick-fil-A for the millions of dollars it donated to anti-LGBT organizations and divisive political groups that work each day to harm hardworking LGBT young people, adults and our families. I have spent quite some time being angry at and deeply distrustful of Dan Cathy and Chick-fil-A. If he had his way, my husband of 18 years and I would never be legally married.

Why was I now standing next to him at one of the most popular football showdowns? How could I dare think to have a relationship with a man and a company that have advocated against who I am; who would take apart my family in the name of "traditional marriage"; whose voice and views represented exactly the opposite of those of the students for whom I advocate every day? Dan is the problem, and Chick-fil-A is the enemy, right?

Like most LGBT people, I was provoked by Dan's public opposition to marriage equality and his company's problematic giving history. I had the background and history on him, so I thought, and had my own preconceived notions about who he was. I knew this character. No way did he know me. That was my view. But it was flawed.

For nearly a decade now, my organization, Campus Pride, has been on the ground with student leaders protesting Chick-fil-A at campuses across the country. I had researched Chick-fil-A's nearly \$5 million in funding, given since 2003, to anti-LGBT groups. And the whole nation was aware that Dan was "guilty as charged" in his support of a "biblical definition" of marriage. What more was there to know?

On Aug. 10, 2012, in the heat of the controversy, I got a surprise call from Dan Cathy. He had gotten my cell phone number from a mutual business contact serving campus groups. I took the call with great caution. He was going to tear me apart, right? Give me a piece of his mind? Turn his lawyers on me? The first call lasted over an hour, and the private conversation led to more calls the next week and the week after. Dan Cathy knew how to text, and he would reach out to me as new questions came to his mind. This was not going to be a typical turn of events.

His questions and a series of deeper conversations ultimately led to a number of in-person meetings with Dan and representatives from Chick-fil-A. He had never before had such dialogue with any member of the LGBT community. It was awkward at times but always genuine and kind.

It is not often that people with deeply held and completely opposing viewpoints actually risk sitting down and listening to one another. We see this failure to listen and learn in our government, in our communities and in our own families. Dan Cathy and I would, together, try to do better than each of us had experienced before.

Never once did Dan or anyone from Chick-fil-A ask for Campus Pride to stop protesting Chick-fil-A. On the contrary, Dan listened intently to our concerns and the real-life accounts from youth about the negative impact that Chick-fil-A was having on campus climate and safety at colleges across the country. He was concerned about an incident last fall where a fraternity was tabling next to the Chick-fil-A restaurant on campus. Whenever an out gay student on campus would walk past the table, the fraternity would chant, "We love Chick-fil-A," and then shout anti-gay slurs at the student. Dan sought first to understand, not to be understood. He confessed that he had been naïve to the issues at hand and the unintended impact of his company's actions.

Chick-fil-A also provided access to internal documents related to the funding of anti-LGBT groups and asked questions about our concerns related to this funding. An internal document, titled "Who We Are," expressed Chick-fil-A's values, which included their commitment "to treat every person with honor, dignity and respect," including LGBT people. Dan and his

family members had personally drafted, refined and approved the document.

Through all this, Dan and I shared respectful, enduring communication and built trust. His demeanor has always been one of kindness and openness. Even when I continued to directly question his public actions and the funding decisions, Dan embraced the opportunity to have dialogue and hear my perspective. He and I were committed to a better understanding of one another. Our mutual hope was to find common ground if possible, and to build respect no matter what. We learned about each other as people with opposing views, not as opposing people...

Throughout the conversations Dan expressed a sincere interest in my life, wanting to get to know me on a personal level. He wanted to know about where I grew up, my faith, my family, even my husband, Tommy. In return, I learned about his wife and kids and gained an appreciation for his devout belief in Jesus Christ and his commitment to being "a follower of Christ" more than a "Christian." Dan expressed regret and genuine sadness when he heard of people being treated unkindly in the name of Chick-fil-a -- but he offered no apologies for his genuine beliefs about marriage.

And in that we had great commonality: We were each entirely ourselves. We both wanted to be respected and for others to understand our views. Neither of us could -- or would -- change. It was not possible. We were different but in dialogue. That was progress...

Dan, in his heart, is driven by his desire to minister to others and had to choose to continue our relationship throughout this controversy. He had to both hold to his beliefs and welcome me

into them. He had to face the issue of respecting my viewpoints and life even while not being able to reconcile them with his belief system. He defined this to me as "the blessing of growth." He expanded his world without abandoning it. I did, as well.

As Dan and I grew through mutual dialogue and respect, he invited me to be his personal guest on New Year's Eve at the Chick-fil-A Bowl. This was an event that Campus Pride and others had planned to protest. Had I been played? Seduced into his billionaire's life? No. It was Dan who took a great risk in inviting me: He stood to face the ire of his conservative base (and a potential boycott) by being seen or photographed with an LGBT activist. He could have been portrayed as 'caving to the gay agenda' by welcoming me.

Instead, he stood next to me most of the night, putting respect ahead of fear. There we were on the sidelines, Dan, his wife, his family and friends and I, all enjoying the game. And that is why building a relationship with someone I thought I would never understand mattered. Our worlds, different as they can be, could coexist peacefully. The millions of college football fans watching the game never could have imagined what was playing out right in front of them. Gay and straight, liberal and conservative, activist and evangelist -- we could stand together in our difference and in our respect. How much better would our world be if more could do the same?"

Disagreement ≠ Hatred.