

“Xenophobia” by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. E8060226

Matthew 10:5-15 and Luke 6:27-31

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An estimated ten percent of the world's population is born with a condition they cannot help. They are often discriminated against. This condition has been present in the human race since long before the Bible was written. People with this condition often ask, “Why does the world hate us?” Probably, it's humanity's tendency to look down on something that is unfamiliar. It is the fear of something that is strange or different. We call that fear “xenophobia.”

Movements have been formed to re-orient people with this condition. Such efforts generally meet only with failure and frustration, unable to make long-lasting inherent change. My youngest sister, Alice, was born with this condition. People tried to force her to change, but it didn't work. Their efforts only caused her to doubt herself and lower her self esteem. I'm not sure how old she was when she discovered she was born with this condition, but it was very apparent by the time she entered school.

Yes, life was difficult for her because she was born left-handed. How many of you are left-handed? Raise your hands. You know what I'm talking about. Life is difficult for you, and I'm sorry the world has a hard time accepting you. My sister Alice had to learn how to use scissors that were designed for right-handed people. She had to take notes on writing desks that were made for people who write with their right hands. Teachers and family members all tried to force her to use her right hand as the dominant one. It didn't work. Alice could not make herself right-handed as much as she wanted to.

Why are there left-handed people? There has to be a reason why left-handers have not been bred out of the population. “There must be an advantage....There must be a benefit to the species as a whole,” says David Wolman in a new book: *A Left Hand Turn Around the World*.¹

“When it comes to diversity of brain orientation,” Wolman concludes that “Lefty brains do differ in seriously interesting ways from right handers' brains.”

Left-handed people are created that way by God. It's in their genes. If they were created by God with this condition, then it is up to us to learn to accept them, and to welcome them.

It is said that approximately ten percent of the human race is born with a tendency towards same-gender relationships. It has been that way since long before the Bible was written.

Some well-meaning Christians have called such people sinful, as if they had chosen to be that way. I've met many people with the tendency toward same-gender relationships, and counseled a good number of them, but I haven't met one yet who chose to be that way. They no more chose their orientation than my sister Alice chose to be left-handed. What Alice did choose was to accept the way God created her, and she has turned out to be one of the most loving and gentle creatures I know.

A young man tells his story of growing up in a conservative church and being taught that same-gender relationships are sinful and wrong. He tried and tried to be attracted to women, but it just didn't work. He felt such guilt and shame, that it drove him to attempt to take his own life. Thank God he was unsuccessful, because, after he found some good Christian love and support, he accepted his condition. He now uses his gifts and talents to preach the good news of God's love through Jesus Christ. He knows the joyous news that God loves all people, no matter what their color, language, orientation, or economic status.

There are many various sins condemned in the Bible. Why do so many Christians condemn homosexuality above all others? How many of you have ever cursed? “Holy ___” or “God [blank] it.” “When any of you utter aloud a rash oath for a bad or a good purpose,” you are guilty of sin. (Lev. 5:4)

You have committed a sin if you have “deceiv[ed] a neighbor in a matter of a deposit or a pledge, or by robbery, or if you have defrauded a neighbor, or have found something lost and lied about it—if you

¹*A Left Hand Turn Around the World* by David Wolman, © 2005, Da Capo Press

swear falsely regarding any of the various things that one may do” (Lev. 6:2-3)

How many have been to a hairdresser or barber? “You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. (Lev. 19:27)

How many have a tattoo? “You shall not make any gashes in your flesh for the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the LORD.” (Lev. 19:28)

Folks, playing football is a sin. A football is called a pigskin, right? Listen to Leviticus 11:7-8: “The pig, ... is unclean for you. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean for you. (Leviticus 11:7-8)

So why do people dwell on that one “sin” above all the others? In the Bible, greed is mentioned more often as a sin than sexuality is but greed, you see, is not so “different” for most of us. Greed does not bring out our xenophobia— our fear of something different— as much.

It’s easy to condemn that which I’m pretty sure I’ll never do! Greed does not turn our stomachs the way our bedroom imaginings do.

Why do people well on that one “sin” above all the others? Some of the most vociferous condemners are insecure about their own sexuality.

There is a story in Genesis Chapter Nineteen about a certain town. The town was punished for its wickedness. The name of the town has been associated with sinful and illegal acts. If you study the Bible’s own commenting on the story, you will discover that the sin of Sodom was not one of same-gender relationships. The sin was inhospitality. The sin was of the violent abuse of strangers who came to the town. It was the sin of xenophobia: the fear of the different.

Every one of the biblical comments on this story, save the one in Jude, is a comment about hospitality. Our first scripture lesson this morning described Jesus’ sending out the twelve Apostles to proclaim the gospel. For the towns and villages that would not accept the disciples, it was to be worse than it was for the town of Sodom. The residents of Sodom, according to our Lord Jesus Christ, were sinful because they were inhospitable.

Our xenophobia, our fear of the stranger, makes us turn those who are different into enemies. It is too easy to hate those who are different. Our fear of Arabs has become so great, that we have turned all of them into enemies. A Dubai-based company, an Arab-run company, cannot be trusted by us to manage a harmless port operation. All one has to do is throw out a word to condemn a group of people. We used to say “Communist” to condemn someone. Now we say “gay” to condemn someone, or we say “Muslim” or “Arab” to condemn someone.

Jesus taught us a better way. He said, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.”² He said, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”³ That’s all we have to do as Christians: treat others the way we would like to be treated. That’s how we get over our xenophobia, our fear of the stranger.

I am making some books available for you. They’re in the narthex and in the Fellowship Room for the Meet and Greet. I invite you to take a copy and read it. It’s entitled, *Finding Out, The ABC’s of Same-Sex Relations*.⁴ It is written by the parents of a gay child. The father is an ordained Presbyterian minister. It is one of the most sensitive and gentle books I’ve read on this subject. It can help you answer the questions of family members, or neighbors who wonder why you are a member of this church that welcomes all sorts of people.

Take a copy. Read it and pass it on to someone who might enjoy it or learn from it.

In the end, it’s not about the bedroom. It’s about loving, caring, committed relationships. It’s about treating everyone as the child of God that they are.

²Luke 6:27

³Luke 6:31

⁴*Finding Out, The ABC’s of Same-Sex Relations* by Homer and Sue Spencer, © 2002, Fithian Press, Santa Barbara, CA