

## **STATEMENT TO THE GAY AND LESBIAN COMMUNITY**

**from**

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As a church leader in the greater Charlotte area, I want to take a moment to address the homosexual community of this city. As most of you know, for the last four years, Christian groups have protested the gay pride events that have taken place here in Marshall Park. You know that we have objected to the public displays of lewdness and to the obscene speeches and entertainment, and we have stated clearly that such things - be they heterosexual or homosexual - do not belong in our city parks.

Most of you know that, as followers of Jesus, we have non-negotiable moral convictions, based on God's Word and His natural laws, and we make no apology for those convictions. We believe that God's ways are best, and we believe that homosexual behavior is contrary to His ways, just as we believe that all sexual activity outside of the bonds of male-female marriage is contrary to His ways.

We are not ashamed to take these stands, even if you consider us to be hateful and bigoted. We say again: God's ways are best, and we make no apology for our Lord and for His Word. We love Jesus, our Savior and Friend, and we are not ashamed to be identified with Him.

But there is something else we want you to hear. We recognize that we have sometimes failed to reach out to you with grace and compassion, that we have often been insensitive to your struggles, that we have driven some of you away rather than drawn you in, that we have added to your sense of rejection. For these failings of ours, we ask you to forgive us. By God's grace, we intend to be models of His love.

We understand, of course, that in your eyes, our biblical convictions constitute hate, and it is hurtful to us that you feel that way. The fact is that we really do love you - more than you realize or understand - and because we love you, we will continue to speak the truth, knowing that it is the truth that sets people free. Love does what is right, even when it is scorned and mocked and ridiculed.

Many of you speak of your devotion to Jesus and tell us that if we were true Christians we would accept you as you are, and we do not doubt your sincerity. But Jesus did not simply accept us as we are. He died to change us! That is the greatest expression of sacrificial love. It is true that he says to us "Come as you are," but His invitation is always to come and be changed.

And so we will not stop loving you, even if you call us bigots, even if you claim we are depriving you of your civil rights, even if you mock us and call us Bible-ranters. We will pray for you and fast for you and reach out to you and suffer alongside of you. Whether you understand it or not, we are here to help.

We do not look down on you or despise you, since for us, the ultimate issue is not homosexuality or heterosexuality. All human beings fall short of God's standards in many ways, and all of us - heterosexual and homosexual alike - need God's mercy through the blood of Jesus. All of us need forgiveness, and all of us need to turn from our sins and ask God for grace to lead a holy and virtuous life.

You can reject our message, but we will still love you. You can question our motivation, but we will still love you. You can consider us hateful and intolerant, but we will still love you, and we hope that our actions will speak louder than our words. We personally extend an invitation to sit down and talk with us face to face. It is true that we have some profound and deep differences, but we need not differ in a mean-spirited and destructive way.

We extend to you afresh the message of God's transforming love through Jesus.