



URBAN CURRENT

Places of Grace

Floyd and Rad certainly stood out when they showed up in our tiny congregation in the hood. I had been pastoring a couple years. Obviously not from around here, they did seem familiar with church. Conversation revealed they were both from Arkansas; one from a Baptist church, the other from an Assembly of God church. Maybe they were 20 years old. My guess is they met in high school.

They, like thousands before them, had fled home and familiarity for faraway, big-city anonymity. I'm not sure why, but they didn't hide their homosexuality from me. I'll never forget the anguished question during one tearful conversation with Floyd: "How can this be wrong?" He was overwhelmed with need, emotion, passion, and counterfeit love.

I have to say, getting to know them as individuals radically changed my rabid hostility toward those I before would have called "perverts." I didn't change what I believed. My conviction that God's Word is true was not threatened. I had an overwhelming desire to be a channel of grace and, as John puts it, "love in truth."

It was God's truth and love by God's definition that eventually contributed to Floyd and Rad drifting away from the church, looking for something else I could not offer.

Let me tell you! I'm as opinionated a person as you'll ever meet. Furthermore, I am able to passionately, hey, vehemently articulate my views. I'm especially dogmatic and emphatic when it comes to behavior I don't engage in, and I can really preach against that stuff!

Many of us have gone through a process to get where we are today. We used to regularly rant against "easy targets" like communists and hippies, and these days those targets have been replaced by homosexuals, transgender, and "gay marriage" (as if there really were such a thing). And some continue to rant rather than to take a Bible approach.

Should we ignore these things or begin to accept them? Of course not, but we need to confront them biblically. After all, we are not just guarding our culture. We are not just doing battle with sinners. We are representing God and His grace as well as His warning.

I am constantly impressed with the love and grace God's people show to sinners in general, various and sundry groups of strugglers in particular.

Jesus' harshest condemnations target self-righteous religious zealots. His greatest compassion is expressed to those most ignorant of, rebellious toward, or distant from God. He said, "I didn't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Paul's life was given over to preaching Christ crucified, buried, and risen.

I have spent several decades now beating the drum of "what I'm dealing with in the city today, you'll be dealing with everywhere else tomorrow." This month, gay pride parades will march in places that 20 years ago would have been unthinkable. So-called gay marriage is sweeping the land.

Fifteen years ago I saw homosexual radical activists making influential inroads in our local public high schools. I said back then, the churches of America, specifically youth groups, would be dealing with homosexuality and general gender confusion of all kinds soon enough.

As if children and adolescents needed more sexual challenge.

Policies, procedures, guidance protocols, along with counseling for youth of varying sexual identities and categories of confusion are multiplying by the minute.

If you have ten kids in your youth group, most have been exposed to pornography. At least one of them is experiencing same-sex attraction or gender confusion. Many kids in our churches think if people love each other it's nobody's business what they do.

It goes without saying, those who are

determined to pursue any kind of sin are not going to be comfortable or in close fellowship in a Bible preaching church. That said, there is a whole slice of "sinnerdom," and for sure some wrestling with same-sex attraction, who would seek help from people they knew loved them. Is that not the spirit of Jesus?

How do we communicate God's love?

How do we communicate God's love to those who are out of bounds in any way, shape, or form? Think over-indulgence. Adultery. Consider any form of destructive behavior. What about unnecessarily angry people?

How do we express God's love to those who are way, way out of bounds?

Is God's love unconditional? Is the love I live, preach, teach, and lead our congregation to demonstrate just as unconditional?

Should the church be the last place these out-of-bounds people think of for seeking help?

Do the kids attending our churches know these are safe places to bare their souls and share their secrets?

Understand me. There is always someone reading between the lines looking for compromise if not sellout, and I am not advocating in any way changing or messing with what God says about any particular sin. I am saying our churches need to be havens of hope, dispensaries of love and deliverance, places of grace.

The rebels and unrepentants will cast themselves into an eternity without God ... but they should go with the knowledge we loved them. Those willing to believe God's promises, trusting Him for rescue, willing to fight the flesh in fellowship with God's people should never wonder if they have a home.

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