

# Seventh-Gay Adventists?

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Last year saw the production of a feature-length documentary entitled “Seventh-Gay Adventists,” which explores the spiritual journey of three same-sex couples who wrestle with trying to reconcile their religious and sexual identities. The film apparently seeks to elicit a sympathetic response toward these very ordinary everyday Adventists who just happen to be gay. Having seen the trailer online, it did remind me that in our attempts to defend our moral standards it is possible to lose sight of the fact that we are not just dealing with an issue, but we are dealing with people. People, who are often hurting, often confused; people who hide behind masks of pretence for fear of vilification and rejection; people who need counsel not condemnation; people who need a safe place to work through their inner turmoil.

Ask yourself this question: 'If a member of your church openly admitted that he or she was struggling with same-sex attraction, how would that individual be received?' I recall sitting in a meeting in which the question was raised regarding how we should relate to those within our church who have a homosexual orientation. I overheard one church elder whisper to another, "burn them!" Now I am quite sure this does not represent the majority view of church leaders, but it is representative of a disturbing lack of compassion for those whose wrestle with this issue.

The well-worn line that ‘God made Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve’ may draw chuckles from an unthinking congregation, but it makes me cringe every time I hear it. I wonder how the young person who is struggling with his or her sexual identity feels when the authority figures in the church use the core of their struggle as an opportunity for cheap jibes. Can we seriously expect them to confide in leaders who make light of their pain? Where then do they go? We have a great emphasis at present regarding our Mission to the Cities, but if we are as successful as we wish to be, there will be all sorts of people coming through our doors. Are we ready to receive them?

Our biblical position on homosexuality is what it is. It’s not going to change. However, what needs to change is how we relate to the people we consider to be lost. I believe that one of the barriers to a compassionate response is our traditional position that homosexuality is simply a rebellious lifestyle choice. While we readily embrace various possible causes for homosexuality, we tend to shy away from the possibility that genetics may play a part.

There is a misconception that if we accept that homosexual orientation is genetically influenced then we must also accept that, “it’s natural, can’t be helped, and it’s just the way God made some people.” The fact is that we live in a “cursed earth.” As a result, people can be born with all manner of physical, psychological and physiological abnormalities. Ellen White alludes to this when she refers to “hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil” (Desire of Ages, 311). Mankind is affected by sin on every level including our genetic make-up. We have to allow for the fact that some

people may be born with a predisposition toward homosexuality. It is too simplistic to just dismiss homosexuality as a choice. Can anybody just choose his or her sexual orientation? When did we choose to be heterosexual? Even in our permissive society, why would an Adventist Christian consciously choose such an orientation, which is guaranteed to excite opposition?

Whether homosexuality is genetically influenced, a conscious choice or of developmental origin - or even all three - it is still the product of a fallen human condition. Homosexual orientation may not be a choice but homosexual behaviour is a choice. A thorough study of the biblical passages that refer to homosexuality shows a condemnation of practice not orientation. A person's orientation indicates sexual preference and how an individual may be tempted. However, God does not judge us for how we are tempted. He holds us accountable for the decisions we make, and the behaviours which follow those decisions.

The fact that a person may have a predisposition toward homosexuality is not the point. Genetics do not determine morality. The Bible makes it clear that we are all born in sin and shaped in iniquity (Psalm 51:5). The fact that we are 'naturally' sinful does not legitimize sin, but rather emphasises our need of a Saviour. The argument is often raised that if an individual surrenders completely to God, He will change their orientation. Can God do that? Of course! The God who spoke the world into existence is able to change a person's sexual orientation, but that does not necessarily mean that He will. Did the Lord have the ability to remove Paul's 'thorn in the flesh'? Of course! Did He? No! He simply said, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

There are in existence various "exit ministries" who claim great success in helping homosexuals to change their orientation, but there are also many homosexuals who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour and have committed themselves to a life of celibacy in spite of their orientation. To live without the opportunity for legitimate sexual expression is a common experience for both those who experience same-sex attraction while choosing to remain celibate and single heterosexuals who for whatever reason remain single.

Living without romance and a legitimate outlet for sexual expression may be considered as a loss for those who desire such relationships. However, such relationships are not the be all and end all of human intimacy. In his excellent book *Beyond Boundaries*, John Townsend makes the point that as a society we have bought into the fallacy generated to a large extent by Hollywood that a sexual relationship trumps every other kind of intimate relationship we can experience. Our primary concern has to be faithfulness to God's will for our lives and if that requires celibacy, then so be it.

In order to respond compassionately, we need to come to terms with our own prejudices. We need to examine our own hearts and ask ourselves whether we truly have the capacity to hate the sin and love the sinner. In His dealings with both the

woman at the well (John 4) and the woman caught in adultery (John 8), Jesus demonstrated both love and acceptance while at the same time holding these women accountable for their choices. It is the absence of compassionate heart that leads to a 'round 'em up and burn 'em up mentality'.

It is much easier to take a judgmental view when homosexuality has no face. However, if the church is truly a family, then we need to appreciate that those who are fighting their silent battles are our sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters to whom we owe a duty of care. It is those we consider to be the worst of sinners who need the best of grace. In Luke 15:2 the leaders of the church levelled what was intended to be a criticism of Jesus, but was in fact one of the greatest compliments they could have paid Him. "And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

Our challenge as a church community is to create a safe place of compassion and understanding which allows people to bring their struggles and receive spiritual and emotional support.

In the words of former GC Communications Director, Ray Dabrowski, "A Christian church is expected to uphold biblical standards. But it is equally important that as Christians we are always full of grace and compassionate towards everyone." - SDA Position on Homosexuality, 1999-OCT-03