

Believing the Words of Jesus Christ – a Gay LDS Perspective

by Clay Essig

“He that will not believe my words will not believe me – that I am; and he that will not believe me will not believe the Father who sent me...”

“Come unto me, O ye Gentiles, and I will show unto you the greater things, the knowledge which is hid up because of unbelief” (Ether 4:12-13).

As a Gay Latter-day Saint I have had to prayerfully search the scriptures to find out how God wants me to live my life; because the more I believed and lived what the Church teaches about homosexuality or same-gender attraction, the darker, more confused, miserable, empty, hopeless and depressed my life became until suicide truly seemed my only option. I was sincerely willing to do whatever the Lord wanted me to do, including marrying any woman – the most beautiful or the least attractive to me.... How surprised I was to eventually learn that my Father in Heaven actually wants me to be happy, and to love and be loved genuinely... in this life... as well as the next ... according to my own different though very real love and “natural affection.” Gratefully, in that search to know God’s will for me, I have come to realize that for God’s Gay and Lesbian children the Lord and His words are our greatest ally, our greatest defense, our greatest guide. They also give us Latter-day Saints amazingly clear guidance on how we should treat our Gay and Lesbian neighbors and their families.

Through years of fasting and prayerfully searching the scriptures the Lord has filled me with tremendous hope, belief and faith that all the blessings of His Church and Gospel will eventually be extended to God’s Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender children, just as they were eventually extended to the Gentiles and more recently to God’s Black children. All of my belief, hope and faith are based squarely on the words and example of Jesus Christ. I believe the Church will eventually include and bless God’s Gay and Lesbian children because I believe most Latter-day Saints, like most other Christians, have an innate goodness and genuinely strive to steadily bring our lives into greater harmony with the words and example of the Savior.

This much needed extension of blessings would greatly help reduce the steady stream of Gay LDS suicides among our youth and adults. It would bring an end to thousands of good LDS families being divided and torn apart over this issue. It would reduce the number of Gay LDS homeless youth. It would bring an end to the steady stream of God’s Gay and Lesbian children fleeing the Church to find spiritual and emotional safety elsewhere. Being fully accepted and supported, instead of tolerated, feared or pitied, would greatly reduce the stereotypical self-destructive behaviors of substance abuse, promiscuity and pornography which too often serve as “self-medication” for deeply wounded, self-loathing and hopeless souls currently rejected and condemned by family and traditional religious culture. It would allow the many gifts of creativity, sensitivity, compassion, service, devotion and spirituality which the Lord often gives His GLBT children to remain in the Church to help enlarge Zion’s borders and increase God’s kingdom in beauty, love and compassion (see D&C 82:14). Only then can the Church or body of Christ be whole, complete and unified as the Lord requires (see 1 Cor. 12:12-27; D&C 84:109-110).

For those who truly believe the teachings of Jesus Christ, such a mighty change of attitude and policy requires no change of gospel principles, no reneging on teachings of

the Savior. Amazingly, not even new revelation would be required to extend the full blessings of the gospel and Church, including marriage, to God's GLBT children. All these much needed blessing hinge on just one, simple thing – believing Jesus Christ and living according to His teachings.

The scriptures show us that attaining such blessings is a process that requires the belief and faithfulness of both those who already have the full gospel blessings as well as those who have traditionally been excluded from gospel and Church blessings. Both the prophet Peter and the gentile Cornelius had to be faithful, believe Jesus Christ and see the good in each other (see Acts 10-11). In this dispensation, both President Kimball and God's LDS Black children had to be faithful, believe Jesus Christ and see the good in each other (see D&C Official Declaration –2). I believe it is the same today. Both fully blessed Heterosexual members as well as God's GLBT children must believe Jesus Christ, see the good in each other and be faithful to bring about such a mighty change of attitude and policy.

In most instances, revelation has accelerated the extension of the gospel toward “every nation, kindred tongue and people”. The revelations received by Peter and President Kimball did not give completely new light, but just confirmed the Lord's previous words and help clear away dead traditional beliefs which created invalid exclusions and obscured the literality of the Savior's all-inclusive words. The Lord and His scriptures had repeatedly declared the gospel and its blessings were to go to – “all nations” (Matt. 28:19), “every creature” (Mark 16:15), and “every nation, kindred tongue and people” (1 Nephi 19:17). But even the Lord's ancient apostles erroneously believed the Savior's all-inclusive injunction did not include “the gentiles”. Modern apostles and prophets believed the Lord's words did not include “the Negroes” or “the Blacks”. And today, many Latter-day Saints and other Christians similarly believe the Lord's words do not include “the Gays”; and yet the Lord stated clearly and simply, “And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God” (3 Nephi 11:33; Mark 16:16).

I and millions of our GLBT brothers and sisters truly believe in Jesus Christ. In fact, for many of us since religion and family have rejected us in word or action, many of us have had to shift our faith and trust from Church and family, to our Father in Heaven and our Savior, Jesus Christ. As a Gay Latter-day Saint I have been astonished how consistently the Lord's words are all inclusive. And yet, throughout mortal history, men and religion have added qualifiers, exclusions or exceptions to the Lord's words which He never said.

When the Savior's teachings are believed and lived by all Christians we, God's Gay and Lesbian children and our families, will be esteemed as equals and treated as equals with our Straight brothers and sisters. We will be welcomed as “fellow citizens with the saints, and the household of God” and no more treated as “strangers and foreigners”, (Eph. 2:19) enemies of the Church or outcasts of Israel.

Peter declared we should “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). While many have scoffed at my hope and faith, and some have declared “it will never happen”; my intent is to offer just a few of many of the Lord's teachings found in LDS scriptures which create “that hope that is in me.” When believed and lived these words of the Lord can bring about this marvelous and desperately needed change of attitude and policy.

Overcoming Roadblocks of Tradition

The Sins of Sodom

The Lord's words first help us clear away the roadblocks of false traditional beliefs which have been used, or misused, to condemn all God's Gay and Lesbian children, our loving, faithful relationships and our families. For example, Christian tradition teaches that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of homosexuality. Few Christians seem to know or believe the Lord's words telling us exactly why He destroyed Sodom. "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters.

"Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.

"And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good." (Ezekiel 16:48-50).

If we Latter-day Saints and other Christians truly believe these words of the Lord, we can no longer use Sodom as scriptural justification to condemn our Gay and Lesbian neighbors.

When we Christians believe our God, that pride, neglect of the poor, idleness and haughtiness are the principle sins of Sodom, we must then consider have we allowed any of the true sins of Sodom to creep into our lives, our attitudes, our culture or our laws?

If we believe these clear words of God, we must ask ourselves some hard questions: Is there any pride in the notion that only "traditional families" are of worth to God, His Church and society? Does pride play any role in the belief that only God's heterosexual children are deserving of love, marriage, families or Constitutional rights, civil liberties and protections? Is there any haughtiness in the teaching that heterosexual relationships are based on love but all homosexual relationship are based on lust? Is there any pride in the belief that universally opposite-gender couples and families are better, more loving, more devoted or more spiritual than same-gender couples and families? Is there any pride in the notion that only "traditional families" are "founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ"; or only heterosexual "marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities" (see "The Family A Proclamation to the World"); Or that only heterosexual individuals, couples and families love and serve God? Is there any pride in the belief that only heterosexual parents are capable of raising healthy, happy, righteous children to love and serve God?

Furthermore, when we Latter-day Saints study and believe the Joseph Smith translation of the Biblical Sodom story, "We will have the men, and thy daughters also; and we will do with them as seemeth us good. Now this was after the wickedness of Sodom" (JST Gen. 19:11-12); it becomes evident the attempted abomination committed by the wicked citizens of Sodom was gang rape of men AND women. It was lustful and violent abuse of sexuality – heterosexual and homosexual. While this describes the "lifestyle" choice of some heterosexuals and some homosexuals, it certainly does not characterize the lifestyles of the majority of either group and should not be used to condemn all heterosexuals or all homosexuals.

Leviticus

For many Latter-day Saints and other Christians, Leviticus presents another roadblock to loving and fully accepting God's Gay and Lesbian children. It is true, in the Old Testament the Lord stated the Law of Moses very clearly: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (Leviticus 18:22) and "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them" (Leviticus 20:13).

Today we Latter-day Saints would never think of putting our neighbors to death who work or play on the Sabbath (Ex. 31:14-15); Nor do we put to death children who talk back to their parents (Ex. 21:15,17). We no longer consider it an abomination for women to wear pants or their husband's old shirt (Deut. 22:5). Those who eat clams, lobster, crabs, shrimp, scallops etc. are no longer guilty of committing abomination (Lev. 11:10-12). The "blemished", blind, lame, deformed, crookbacked, dwarfed, or injured are no longer considered "profane" or prohibited to perform priesthood ordinances or come unto the vail or altar of the Lord's sanctuaries (Lev. 21:16-23).

Yet many Latter-day Saints and other Christians cling vehemently to that jot or tittle of the Law of Moses to condemn truly loving, committed, monogamous Gay or Lesbian relationships and families. In so doing they effectively deny Jesus Christ, His atonement and His very clear words. In our own Book of Mormon the resurrected Lord declared: "Behold, I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses. Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfil the law; therefore it hath an end... the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me" (3 Nephi 15:4-5, 8; see also Matt. 5:18; Heb. 8:13; D&C 74:4-5).

He further clarified: "For verily I say unto you, one jot nor one tittle hath not passed away from the law, but in me it hath all been fulfilled.

"Therefore those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are all fulfilled. Old things are done away, and all things have become new." (3 Nephi 12:18, 46-47).

Do we Latter-day Saints believe these words of the Lord enough to set aside our traditional beliefs and the "anti-gay" attitudes and actions they fuel? Will we live by His words or will we foolishly cling to dead jots and tittles to justify our attitudes, actions, mistreatment, condemnation, prejudice and discrimination toward our Gay and Lesbian brothers, sisters, neighbors and their families?

Teachings of Paul

A few of Paul's teachings are another traditional roadblock to accepting and blessing God's Gay children. We Latter-day Saints readily dismiss Paul's teachings regarding women keeping silent in church (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12), the wearing or not wearing of hats (1 Cor. 11:4-7), hair length (1 Cor. 11:14-15), his injunction to "drink no longer water, but use a little wine" (1 Tim. 5:23), shunning and shaming sinners (1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Thes. 3:14), the marital status of deacons and bishops (1 Timothy 3:2, 8, 12), the verses used to justify slavery (Eph. 6:5 etc.), not to mention the verses which suggest celibacy is more noble than marriage (1 Cor. 7:7-9, 38); but many promote vehemently Paul's writings that are traditionally used to condemn all homosexuals and homosexuality.

It is tragically ironic that so many self-proclaimed Christian mothers can so

readily dismiss Paul's teachings regarding women while so thoroughly embracing his words to condemn and demean their own Gay or Lesbian children. Many promote these verses even though NOWHERE in the New Testament, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, or Pearl of Great Price did the Savior ever say one word that confirms traditional anti-gay interpretations of Paul's words. In so doing many comfortably blind themselves to the true message of those verses which simply affirm the Savior's teachings against lust and infidelity (see D&C 42:23-24; Matt. 5:27-28). This becomes evident as we Christians consider sincerely, if the behaviors described by Paul in Romans 1:26-32 were committed by heterosexuals or opposite-gender people, would that make their behavior okay?

When we Latter-day Saints believe our scriptural teaching in the Doctrine and Covenants that the apostle Paul "wrote unto the Church, giving unto them a commandment, not of the Lord, but of himself" (D&C 74:5) we can begin to see things in clearer perspective that such things can happen in the Lord's Church as part of His plan of agency.

In today's world of violence, war, division, abortion, divorce, neglected and abused children and elderly, it is easy to see that heterosexuals as well as homosexuals can too easily find themselves "without natural affection" (see Romans 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3). Many fail to realize the importance of "natural affection" and that "natural affection" can be as diverse as natural hair color, skin color, eye color, weight, height, natural abilities or natural dexterity (right handed, left handed or ambidextrous).

Through religious tradition, the adversary has masterfully diverted the attention of many Christians from the principles Paul and the Savior taught by misleading us to despise an entire group because part of that group disregarded those principles. Yes there are Gays and Lesbians who "through the lusts of their own hearts... dishonour their own bodies between themselves." (Rom. 1:24) and "burned in their lust one toward another" and are "abusers of themselves with mankind" (1 Cor. 6:9); but there are also a lot of Straights or heterosexuals who struggle with and succumb to the same spiritual and physical denigration. Clearly Paul's words do not describe the stable, loving and faithful marriages and families I and millions of other Gays and Lesbians are fighting for today.

When the adversary can so brilliantly get good, heterosexual Christians to believe these teachings of Paul are completely about "those homosexuals" he brilliantly blinds them so they fail to be alerted to their own opposite-gender lusts or their diminishing "natural affection" for their spouse, their Gay or Lesbian family member or neighbor, their aging parent or their waning natural affection for the human race – God's family. Nowadays some Christian heterosexuals even seem to feel their lust and its fruit of pornography or infidelity is not as serious because it is directed toward the opposite-gender, and yet the Lord repeatedly and specifically condemned men lusting after a woman (D&C 42:23; 63:16; Matt. 5:28; 3 Nephi 12:28).

Once we Latter-day Saints understand that there is no scriptural justification for condemning God's Gay and Lesbian children or our loving, faithful, monogamous marriages and families, we can begin to see the marvelous light and truth that can bless the lives of all God's children, including those of us who are Gay or Lesbian.

Teachings of Jesus Christ

Let us now consider a few teachings of Jesus Christ which if believed and practiced open the way to full gospel blessings for Gay and Lesbian Latter-day Saints.

Equality

In our own LDS scripture, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord said, “let every man esteem his brother as himself... And again I say unto you, let every man esteem his brother as himself.”

Then the Lord taught a profound parable.

“For what man among you having twelve sons, and is no respecter of them, and they serve him obediently, and he saith unto the one: Be thou clothed in robes and sit thou here; and to the other: Be thou clothed in rags and sit thou there - and looketh upon his sons and saith I am just?

“Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable, and it is even as I am. I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:24-27).

Sadly, it is easy to see how clearly this describes the difference between the treatment of Straight and Gay sons and daughters in too many of our families and the Church today. We say to both: serve faithfully, study your scriptures daily, fast, pray, pay an honest tithe and generous offerings, graduate from Seminary and Institute, fulfill your callings, serve faithful missions, do your family history, attend the temple, do your home or visiting teaching, be kind and loving and serve all.

Both do all those things, but then to our Straight sons and daughters it is said, “Be though clothed in the glorious robes of marriage, family, love, acceptance, support and respect and sit thou here in an equal and honored place as fellow citizens with the Saints in the Church and society.” But to our Gay sons and daughters who have served just as obediently and diligently or perhaps even more so, it is said, “Be thou clothed in the rags of celibacy, loneliness, shunning, disrespect, condemnation, suspicion, pity or shame, regardless of your diligence. Sit thou there alone out of the circle of marriage, family acceptance and support, or full and equal fellowship in the Church or society.” When these are the realities, can we as Latter-day Saints and Christians today say, “We are just”?

Some would argue that God’s Gay and Lesbian children are welcome in the Lord’s Church. Even our past prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, declared that we are welcome and there is a place in the Church for us. But let’s consider sincerely, is it an equal and blessed place?

When we are open and honest about our creation as a Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual or Transgender child of God, and yet serve faithfully in the Church, do we currently find equal acceptance, love and genuine support in the Church or its schools that God’s Straight children enjoy; or are we mostly tolerated, feared, closely monitored and generally judged as a threat to children, youth, and denounced by some as “enemies to the Church”? Do our marriages and families find the same acceptance and support that “traditional” marriages and families enjoy? In word or action does the Church or its schools support the same civil and religious freedoms and protections for GLBT citizens that heterosexual members already enjoy? Does BYU provide an equally safe haven for Gays and Lesbians to learn, worship, socialize, date, fellowship and serve God without fear of being demeaned, condemned or demonized from the pulpit or classroom?

If we truly believe these words of the Savior we understand that such inequality in

attitudes or actions not only degrades and demeans God's Gay and Lesbian children, but unless repented of, prevents all who promote inequality from becoming one with the Savior, and therefore being exalted.

As I understand the Lord's words, we as individuals and a Church cannot be one with the Lord until our attitudes and actions prove we esteem our brothers and sisters – Gay, Straight, Black, White, male, female, Jew, gentile, or any combination of those - as ourselves and thereby become one with them. Clearly the temporal and eternal consequences are profound. Inequality in actions or attitudes prevents faith, love, unity and exaltation. With things as they currently are, can we say we esteem our Gay brothers and sisters as our Straight brothers and sisters? Can we say we are “one” as the Lord requires?

James understood the vital importance of this principle: “My brethren, ye cannot have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, and yet have respect to persons.

“... And if ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool; Are ye not then in yourselves partial judges, and become evil in your thoughts?

“If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors” (see JST James 2:1-9).

Our Book of Mormon strongly affirms, “... for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds” (Alma 30:7). Do the current laws or policies at BYU bring GLBT students onto “unequal grounds” from their Straight peers? Do State and Federal marriage amendments or other marriage and adoption laws put Gay individuals, couples and families, on unequal grounds?

BYU's conduct code allows Straight students to date, hold hands, walk arm in arm, dance together, kiss and even marry someone they truly love. Are GLBT students allowed those same standards?

I believe policies will eventually change when our former Prophet's words are put into action. President Hinckley said “our hearts reach out to those who refer to themselves as gays and lesbians. We love and honor them as sons and daughters of God. They are welcome in the Church. It is expected, however, that they follow the same God-given rules of conduct that apply to everyone else, whether single or married.” (Ensign, Nov. 1999, 52).

That God-given standard of conduct includes, allows, even encourages truly loving, unfeigned, faithful, devoted, covenant relationships, marriages and families. How can President Hinckley's words be fulfilled if God's Gay and Lesbian children are forbidden to do any of those things?

All are alike unto God

The Book of Mormon teaches a related, simple truth that if believed and lived would bring about equality: “...all are alike unto God”, “black and white, bond and free, male and female both Jew and gentile” (see 2 Nephi 26:33). Peter and the Bible give a second witness: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-35).

Does God accept the millions of His Gay and Lesbian children who fear him and work righteousness? Do we?

Speak no evil

The Savior commanded: “Thou shalt not speak evil of thy neighbor nor do him any harm” (D&C 42:27). Are we Latter-day Saints and other Christians willing to realize that God’s GLBT children are our neighbors? Are we willing to stop speaking evil of them and start seeing the good in them? Are we willing to stop harming them, their loving relationships and families through reparative therapies or “pro-family/anti-gay” legislation?

Many of us recognized at an early age we are homosexual. Growing up in Utah, I was taught repeatedly that homosexuals are an abomination, vile, filthy, disgusting, pedophiles, predators and only better than a murder. Do you understand the spiritual, mental and emotional harm that is done to children, youth and adults who are repeatedly told this is what they are?

Gratefully, in recent years, wording regarding homosexuals has been tempered in Church statements. I am grateful that President Hinckley, Elder Holland, Elder Oaks and even Elder Packer and a few others have spoken words of love regarding those with “same-gender attraction.” Gratefully some have decried violence against us. But when those words are compared to the public actions of actively and aggressively supporting legislation to deprive millions of God’s Gay and Lesbian children basic civil rights and protections to live, love, marry, raise families and serve in the community according to their religious and personal beliefs, it is very difficult for many of us Gay Latter-day Saints to believe words of love. In loving our Gay and Lesbian family members, neighbors, and their families, John’s word’s are imperative: “let us not love in word neither in tongue only; but in deed and in truth” (JST 1 John 3:18).

Consider the message sent loud and clear when the Church publicly announced it would withdraw from the Boy Scouts if Gays were allowed to continue serving as Scout leaders. While it may not have been said in words, a grossly false, degrading and demoralizing message was sent to us, our families, ward members and neighbors – the Church - our Church and our leaders believe all Gays are pedophiles and predators. Whether that message was intended or not the Church’s actions spoke far louder and bore the fruit of demoralizing, degrading and demonizing millions of God’s Gay children regardless of their true character and service.

What message would you receive if when you excitedly wanted to introduce your fiancé to your family, they responded, “Please don’t do that. Don’t put us in that position... [especially] if there are children in the home. ...don’t expect to stay over night. Don’t expect to be a lengthy house guest. Don’t expect us to take you out and introduce you to our friends, or to deal with you in a public situation that would imply our approval of your “partnership”?” (Elder Dallin H. Oaks; <http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/public-issues/same-gender-attraction>). Would you believe any words of love from that family member or the Church leader who instructed them to say that? What harm would such statements do to your self-esteem or your sense of feeling loved, valued, respected, accepted or wanted in the family? What impact would they have on the fiancé? What impact would those words have on the unity of the family for years to come?

What harm is done when the Church or its leaders have been slow and often unwilling to support the same civil, employment, housing and anti-violence protections Straight citizens enjoy? How can our own families possibly truly love, accept and support us when they are told to use their money, time and means seeking to destroy our agency to live in loving, stable relationships? What message and harm result when we are repeatedly taught about the temporal and eternal blessings of marriage and family but are then told in word and action that we, God's Gay and Lesbian children, are inherently so bad that we do not deserve any of those blessings, or anything that resembles those blessings in this life. We are taught love, marriage and family are good and of God... except for us, ... that we are so vile that somehow merely participating in marriage and family would cheapen and undermine all marriages and families; as if Gays have some kind of marital cooties that will degrade the sanctity of all marriages and destroy civilization as we know it.

Did granting slaves freedom cheapen and undermine freedom for all or did it actually strengthen freedom and increase the numbers of those willing to fight to maintain it? Did allowing women the right to vote weaken and undermine democracy and society or did it strengthen and broaden it? Did allowing God's Black children the priesthood destroy the sanctity of priesthood or defile the temple? Or did it actually strengthen the priesthood and purify the temple through diminished prejudice and increased love and unity?

When we Latter-day Saints realize how hurtful, demoralizing, demeaning and yes harmful current policies, actions and teachings are to God's Gay and Lesbian children, policies and teachings will change. Actions really do speak louder than words.

When all these degrading and literally demoralizing messages are sent by word or action to Gay and Lesbian Latter-day Saints, is there any wonder there is so much dysfunction, depression and self-destructive behavior found in parts of our GLBT community?

The damaging fruits

We have more recently been taught those with "same-gender attraction" are either sick, under-developed, burdened, addicted or handicapped. We have been instructed to never accept who we are or associate with or talk to those who do accept, understand, and support our creation as Gay sons and daughters of God. The Savior taught, "by their fruits ye shall know them" (3 Nephi 14:20; Matt. 7:20) My own experience and the experiences of thousands of other Gay Latter-day Saints have demonstrated clearly that Church teachings, policies and actions regarding homosexuality have born the fruits of depression, self-hatred, confusion, isolation, division in families, feigned marriages, divorce, despair, misery and too often self-destructive behavior, substance abuse and suicide. Two of my Gay LDS friends told me that when they first came out, they actively tried to get AIDS because that is what they felt they deserved. Certainly that is what some of our leaders have preached will be our fate. Tragically, in both their cases this prophecy was self-fulfilled by the self-hatred they had been taught. Even more tragically all this contributes to Utah having one of the highest suicide rates in the nation among young men from teens to mid-thirties. The steady stream of Gay LDS suicides must stop!

I believe Latter-day Saints are compassionate enough to care and do something about this alarming reality. Once they understand these young men do not kill themselves because they are Gay; they kill themselves because of the false, degrading and

demoralizing messages they are taught about Gays and the love in their soul which the world calls homosexuality. They kill themselves because of the ways Gays are treated, feared and demonized in our religious and political culture. When we Christians realize this reality attitudes may change. I pray and plead that LDS families will end the fatal silence and stop covering up the suicides of their Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender loved ones; then attitudes and policies will start to change and lives will be saved.

The Golden Rule

In the Bible and the Book of Mormon Jesus taught: “Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets” (see Matt. 7:12; 3 Nephi 14:12).

If we believe these words of the Savior we must ask ourselves: “Would I want the government or the majority dictating who I can or cannot marry and what my family will look like?” We Latter-day Saints should understand better than most that since our polygamist ancestors did not like having their marriages and families condemned, ridiculed, persecuted, oppressed, legislatively attacked and eventually forbidden to live according to their religious beliefs; we shouldn’t do the same thing to our Gay and Lesbian neighbors today... if we believe the Savior.

Agency

Even more vital in the global debate over the rights, protections, marriages and families of God’s Gay and Lesbian children is the fundamental gospel principle of agency. In LDS Seminary and Institute, I was taught marriage, our choice of who we marry and how, is one of the most important and personal choices or exercises of our God given agency we can make in mortality. If marriage is an exercise of personal choice and agency for us, isn’t it the same for our Gay and Lesbian neighbors?

Our Father in Heaven declared: “...because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him... by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down” (Moses 4:3). Do we Latter-day Saints believe and live by these words of God? Can our Father in Heaven teach us any more clearly that when we seek to destroy the agency of any of His children we are doing Satan’s work, not God’s; and in so doing we put our souls in serious jeopardy of being cast down? Or do we believe God has suddenly changed and is now pleased when we legislatively seek to destroy the agency of the millions of His Gay and Lesbian children to marry and raise families according to their conscience and religious beliefs? If we Latter-day Saints vote to destroy the ability of millions of God’s Gay and Lesbian children to choose to enter the sacred and loving bonds of marriage, what will we say to God in our final judgment if He asks, “Did you seek to destroy the agency of any of my children?”

Maintain the Constitution, rights, protection and privileges of all

In the national marriage debate, which many consider a “moral issue”, are we following any of these words of the Savior regarding “moral agency”? The Lord said: “... the laws and constitution of the people which I have suffered to be established, ... should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh according to just and holy principles; That every man may act in doctrine and principle ... according to the moral agency which I have given him... And for this purpose have I established the

Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose...” (D&C 101:77-78, 80).

Whether we Latter-day Saints believe marriage is a right or a privilege, the Lord further clarified: “And now verily I say unto you concerning the laws of the land... that law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before me... And as pertaining to the law of man, whatsoever is more or less than this, cometh of evil” (D&C 98:4-7).

If we Latter-day Saints truly believe these words of the Lord, we must honestly consider, do state and federal marriage amendments seek to “maintain” the Constitution or change it? Do they defend God’s gift of “moral agency” and His “principle of freedom” or do they undermine them? Are these amendments written and supported “according to just and holy principles” of freedom, love, equity, justice and compassion? Do they support “rights and privileges” and “protection of all flesh”, “every man” and “all mankind” or do they deny and even take the rights, protections and privileges of millions of God’s Gay and Lesbian children which His Straight children readily enjoy? Will we Latter-day Saints believe and live by these abundantly clear words of Jesus Christ or will we campaign and vote in direct opposition to them for the sake of tradition? Can we truthfully call ourselves Christians if we teach, campaign and vote contrary to Jesus Christ’s abundantly clear words found in our own scriptures?

The Lord asked the most relevant question, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46).

God’s all-inclusive gospel

The Book of Mormon teaches a related principle: “...the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God” (Helaman 3:28). “Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20). Jesus confirmed: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Can Gay and Lesbian individuals, couples and families believe in Jesus Christ, press forward feasting upon the word of Christ and endure to the end? Yes, we can and millions of us do.

All Latter-day Saints should know this one: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” (James 1:5). As a Gay Latter-day Saint I gratefully testify, through personal experience, of the absolute reality of this truth! God will answer His Gay children as well as His Straight children if we will stop trusting in the arms of flesh (see 2 Ne. 4:34; 28:31) and ask God directly – especially when those chosen, well-intentioned, yet mortal arms of flesh (see D&C 1:19-28) humbly admit they are “not an expert on these things. I don’t pretend to be an expert on these things” (see President Gordon B. Hinckley on Larry King Live Dec. 26, 2004) and that “gender disorientation is poorly understood” (Elder Russell M. Nelson; Ensign, May 2002, 76); and most recently described as “a situation we don’t understand... We have so little reliable information about it” (Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle With Same-Gender Attraction”,

Ensign, Oct. 2007, 43). These wonderfully humble and honest admissions confirm what the Spirit steadily urged and strengthened me to do long ago – ask God directly. As I shifted all my trust to God and prayerfully asked Him what He would have me know and do as one of His Gay sons, He has liberally given me and many others understanding and guidance through the scriptures, personal revelation and guidance of the Holy Ghost. All of us have that same opportunity. Please take it.

Notice, not one of the blessings promised in these and many other scriptures are contingent on or limited by gender, sexual orientation, the choice of our partner or the appearance of our family. There is not one single requirement for salvation or exaltation in the scriptures that God’s GLBT children are inherently incapable of if others allow us the freedom and opportunity to make those choices. His gospel is completely INCLUSIVE, no exceptions as long as we do the simple things He asks of all His children.

Not good to be alone – Multiply and Replenish

“In the beginning” the Lord declared another truth which is pivotal in this issue: “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Current policies will change when we Latter-day Saints realize God’s words are as true for His Gay and Lesbian children as they are for Adam and God’s Straight children. When these words of God are so plain and simple why do so many Christians teach the complete opposite - that it is right and good for the millions of God’s Gay and Lesbian children to live alone and celibate, never seeking or having a truly loving “help meet” (Gen. 2:18 see footnote b) with whom they can learn to become one? Are we willing to understand that while Adam and Eve were the first couple they were not the last couple which “God hath joined together” (Matt. 19:6) which “shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) through His gifts of love, natural affection and the sacred gift of sexuality? As we look lovingly at our Father in Heaven’s vast family here on earth we see that “traditional” couples and families are not the only couples and families God created which obey God’s laws to multiply, replenish the earth and fulfilling the measure of their creation in many wonderful ways. What would the Lord have us learn from His scriptures about how He multiplied, replenished the earth and fulfilled the measure of His creation? What would He have us learn from the millions of good couples who are unable to procreate with their chosen companion? Has God in mercy and equity provided other ways this commandment can be fulfilled?

The gift of love

God continues to create truly loving couples and families by the varying gifts of love and “natural affection” which He instills in our hearts. When others realize that “being Gay” is fundamentally about love as much as it is for “being Straight”, attitudes will start to change.

Perhaps most married couples will agree the love and “natural affection” they feel for their “help meet” is a gift from God. The very last chapter of The Book of Mormon, which was written exclusively for us in these latter-days, gives us vital understanding about God’s gifts, including His gifts of love and “natural affection”: “I exhort you my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God. And there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them” (Moroni 10:8).

When we Latter-day Saints understand the gift of being Gay and the gift of being Straight are simply two different administrations of God's gifts of love and natural affection, attitudes and policies will change.

But how can others know that "being Gay" is about love unless we openly and honestly exemplify it by our loving lives, our loving relationships and our loving families?

God designed diversity

The necessity of our diverse gifts of love will be better understood when we Latter-day Saint believe the Savior's words about the importance of diversity in His kingdom: "let not the head say unto the feet it hath no need of the feet; for without the feet how shall the body be able to stand?" (D&C 84:109).

Let's suppose God's Gay and Lesbian children are viewed as the "uncomely" feet. Currently we are told that we are welcome in the body of the Church but that we must never act like "feet". We must "not act on" our creation and we should do everything we can to act like hands and, if we are righteous enough we can become hands. For some this performance is "do-able" for a time but it is unnatural, untrue to our creation and ultimately damaging, demoralizing and destructive, throwing us and "the body" out of balance, resulting in more harm to ourselves and the whole body of our families and Church.

While we Gays and Lesbians may feel like feet who get walked on, covered up and disdained, Straight and Gay Christians must remember, "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him... and those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness...but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked; That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another" (study 1 Cor. 12:1-31).

Doing good to all

The growing schism in the body of the Church over the treatment of God's Gay and Lesbian children will start to mend when we Latter-day Saints live up to our own 13th Article of Faith: "We believe... in doing good to all men", including our GLBT brothers and sisters. What good do we do to any of God's children when we discourage and condemn them and even legislatively prevent them from creating healthy, loving, stable marriages and families?

"If there is anything virtuous, lovely or of good report we seek after these things." Are we willing to take off the blinders of tradition long enough to see all that is virtuous, lovely and of good report in our Gay and Lesbian neighbors, their marriages, their families and lives? Will we seek after these good things or will we continue to ignore and prevent them?

Religious freedom

LDS attitudes and policies will change when we abide by our own scriptural declarations: "We believe that no government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience... (D&C 134:2) Certainly, we Latter-day Saints believe marriage is a

profound and sacred “exercise of conscience.” It is for us, your Gay and Lesbian brothers and sisters, too.

“We believe that religion is instituted of God; and that men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it, unless *their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others*” (D&C 134:4; emphasis added).

Isn't it strongly held “religious opinions” regarding marriage and family that are fueling these “pro-family” campaigns which severely “infringe upon [marital and familial] rights and liberties of others”, specifically our Gay and Lesbian neighbors?

Growing numbers of churches see the good in their Gay and Lesbian members and want to offer them the blessing of marriage. If we Latter-day Saints support the majority to legislatively deprive the religious freedom of those churches to marry according to their beliefs, aren't we opening the door further for the majority to vote away our right to practice our LDS religious beliefs, severely undermining essential religious freedom?

“... but we do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion” (D&C 134:4).

Do we practice what we preach?

Consider some forms of public or private devotion. Do they include prayer, scripture study, baptism and marriage? Since we believe the proper form of prayer is to conclude “in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen”, should we pass a Constitutional amendment forbidding any other forms of prayer? Should we Latter-day Saints constitutionally define baptism as “only by immersion by one having authority from God” and legislatively forbid other forms of baptism? How can we maintain integrity when we continue to support political movements, laws, State and National Constitutional amendments that are contrary to our own declarations in our own LDS scriptures?

Marriage

Political positions and policies regarding marriage will change when we Latter-day Saints believe these abundantly clear words of Jesus Christ: “And again, verily I say unto you, that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man” (D&C 49:15).

“Forbidding to marry” is one of the evils Paul prophesied for our “latter times” (see 1 Tim. 4:1, 3). How can we Latter-day Saints possibly say we believe and follow these words of Jesus Christ if we “do all [we] can... donating [our] time and means” to legislatively forbid millions of God's children to marry? Yes, we would be fulfilling prophecy, but Jesus' words make it clear we would be on the wrong side.

I have learned that it is vital to know what the Lord actually said as opposed to what others say He said. I have found it equally vital in prayerfully studying His words to notice what He did NOT say. Throughout the ages men and religion have added to and taken away from the Lord's words. As stated above, the Lord declared simply “marriage is ordained of God unto man.” To me it is profoundly significant He did not make any exclusions or gender specific limitations in that statement even though He surely knew hundreds of thousands of God's Gay and Lesbian children would be born into His Church in these latter-days. The Lord repeatedly warns of grave penalties for those who “declare more or less than” His words and establish it for His doctrine (see 3 Nephi 11:40; D&C

10:68; 98:7; Rev. 22:18-19). When we add exceptions or exclusions that He never said, it is evident we are treading on dangerous ground.

The Bible substantiates the Lord's all-inclusive words: "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 3:4). Millions of God's Gay and Lesbian children are fighting for our right to enter honorable marriage. Growing millions of us are no longer willing to live the lifestyle of "whoremongers and adulterers" to which religion and society have traditionally consigned us.

It is important to note in the verses following D&C 49:15 the Lord clearly states one purpose of marriage and one form of marriage that is lawful. However, we Latter-day Saints know those verses are not a complete explanation of what is lawful in God's law of marriage. We know the Lord "will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have" (2 Nephi 28:30)

In even greater all-inclusiveness, the Lord has given more light and knowledge regarding what "is lawful" when His children are "married and given in marriage" (4 Nephi 1:11) utilizing the sacred sealing powers. The Lord made it clear "there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys" are conferred (see D&C 132:7). Today, only our prophet, President Thomas S. Monson has the God-given right and the authority to dictate how those sacred sealing powers will be used and which of God's children can be blessed by them. Currently His servants have authorized those sealing powers to be used to seal "a man to a woman" and parents to children. But I rejoice in the all-inclusive words of Jesus Christ regarding what the sealing powers which we Latter-day Saints use in temple marriage can be used for: Jesus said, "And again, verily I say unto you, my servant Joseph, that whatsoever you give on earth, and to whomsoever you give any one on earth, by my word and according to my law; it shall be visited with blessings and not cursings, and with my power, saith the Lord, and shall be without condemnation on earth and in heaven" (D&C 132:48).

Do we truly believe these all-inclusive words of the Lord? I believe them with all my heart! Tragically, I have found few Latter-day Saints who do. As a Gay Latter-day Saint these words of the Lord greatly strengthen my hope and faith that someday the full blessings of the gospel will be extended to God's Gay and Lesbian children and our families.

The great commandment

Finally, if truly believed, one teaching of the Lord could resolve this entire debate over God's Gay and Lesbian children, their marriages and families:

"Master which is the great commandment in the law?"

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:36-40; also D&C 59:6).

Do we self-proclaimed Christians understand the magnitude of the Savior's declaration? Is it possible all the laws governing marriage, relationships and families hang on love? Is love more important in marriage and family than tradition or outward

appearances or the perceived letter of the law? Do the prophets and all their teachings really hang on the commandment to love? If Gay or Lesbian couples truly love God and their neighbor, how can we condemn them if we believe Jesus' words?

The choice to believe

Do we Latter-day Saints, as individuals and a people believe any of these teachings of the Lord? Do we believe them enough to live by them? Or have we allowed "tradition" – traditional views regarding "traditional marriage" and "traditional families" to supercede the words and teachings of Jesus Christ? Have we become as the ancient Israelites described in the Doctrine and Covenants, "... the children... gave heed to the traditions of their fathers and believed not the gospel of Christ, wherein they became unholy..."? (D&C 74:4)

Jesus commanded, "Judge not according to your traditions, but judge righteous judgment" (JST John 7:24). We can believe and live by truth taught by the Savior or we can cling to tradition which excludes, oppresses, degrades and harms the millions of God's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender children. The choice is ours.

Policies and attitudes will change when true Christians consider the final days of the Savior's mortal life; when we realize that neither fear, pride nor centuries of religious tradition are justifiable reasons in God's eyes to persecute, condemn, vilify, discriminate against, cast out or crucify any of His children.

Once we truly believe and live these many teachings of the Savior, we Latter-day Saints will better live up to our own Book of Mormon commandments: "And there was a strict command throughout all the churches that there should be no persecutions among them, that there should be an equality among all men; That they should let no pride nor haughtiness disturb their peace; that every man should esteem his neighbor as himself..." (Mosiah 27:3-4; also see Alma 1:21-22).

What can we do to help our belief, our hope, our faith become reality? How can we exercise our faith to bring about the much needed miracles of softening hearts, enlightening minds and changing attitudes, treatment and policies regarding God's Gay and Lesbian children?

We can do what we ask our opponents to do. We can prayerfully study the Lord's words and truly believe and live by the teachings of Jesus Christ. We can follow His example and stand up for truth, compassion, integrity, equity, fairness and love even when it is contrary to generations of religious tradition. We can follow His example in teaching and following His word despite the vehement objections and demands of the powerful political and religious leaders of the day.

More specifically we can daily practice His words: "I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). Miracles will happen when we follow His example by being forgiving, patient, gentle and long-suffering. This is a tall order but our Creator, our God, has given each of us the powerful gift of love which the world, not God, labels "homosexuality, or heterosexuality, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Straight or Transgender, same-gender attraction, gender disorientation, etc."

I have found as we "come out of the closet" with God in living these truths, He gives us the strength to deal with condemnation, ridicule, rejection and persecution from religion, school, family or government, to stand up for truth, freedom, equality and love, in the face of growing opposition. When we come out with God and He has given us to

know His Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Transgender children are as much His creation as His Straight children, we can have the strength to be forgiving of our enemies and pray for them which spitefully use us and persecute us. We can follow our Savior's example and pray sincerely "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). As we stand with God, true to our creation as God's GLBT children or loving family members, friends and neighbors, we can survive and even thrive despite the judgments of others. We can have the strength to serve God by serving our fellow man, which is just what the Savior did.

I believe we are on God's side when we choose love over hate, unity over division, freedom over oppression, patience and understanding over prejudice and fear, and when we each choose "the abundant life" (see John 10:10; 2 Nephi 2:25) over mere survival.

As a Gay Latter-day Saint, I love the Lord, His words and example! I testify they are true! All of my faith and hope that the blessings of the gospel will eventually be extended to "every nation, kindred, tongue and people" (see D&C 77:11; Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16), - including the widely dispersed nation of God's Gay and Lesbian children, my kindred, our people - is centered solidly on Jesus Christ and His words. I believe Him. I trust Him. I count on Him. By simply believing His words, He has already become my Savior and Redeemer, saving me and redeeming me from the blackest, deepest pit of misery, confusion, despair, hopelessness, depression and inevitable suicide. He has filled my heart and mind with His glorious light and life. As a Gay son of God, His truth has set me free (John 8:32) to live a life of honesty, truth, integrity and yes, love! I love Him for that! I am deeply and eternally grateful for the "poorly understood" yet wonderful gift of being Gay!

As we come out of the GLBT closet as members or parents, siblings or friends may we enjoy the light and life of also coming out of the spiritual closet. Regardless of our religious standing, may we all believe the words of Jesus Christ and be great missionaries for this cause of truth, freedom, agency, life and love, by letting our light so shine that our opponents can see the God-given good in us. (see Matt. 5:16; 3 Nephi 12:16).

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

"If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23).

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