

## Believing the Words of Jesus Christ – a Gay LDS Perspective

*“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).*

*“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 great hope that BYU and The Church will eventually change their treatment of God’s Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender children because I believe that most Latter-day Saints, like most other Christians, have an innate goodness and genuinely strive to steadily bring their lives in greater harmony with the words and example of Jesus Christ.

All my hope, all my belief, all my faith that BYU and the Church will eventually accept and treat equally God’s GLBT children, just as they have come to accept and treat equally God’s Black children, are based on the words and example of Jesus Christ.

As a Gay Latter-day Saint I have had to prayerfully search the scriptures to find out how God wanted 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 and hopeless my life became until suicide seemed the 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 wanted me to be happy, and to love and be loved.... in this life! As well as the next! Oh so 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. Try them and see!

My intent is to mention just a few of many of the Lord’s teachings found in LDS scriptures which can bring about this marvelous change of attitude and policy. When the Savior’s teachings are believed and lived by all Christians we, God’s Gay and Lesbian children, 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 or outcasts of Israel.

I believe this change will happen because 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).

It’s easy to see how clearly this describes the difference between the treatment of Straight and Gay students at BYU. Sadly, it equally describes the difference in treatment of our 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, 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 Prophet, President Hinckley, has 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 or Lesbian child of God, and yet serve faithfully in the Church, do we currently find equal acceptance, love and genuine support at BYU or in the Church that God’s Straight children enjoy; or are we mostly tolerated, feared, closely monitored and generally judged as a threat to children, youth, and deemed 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 BYU or the Church support the same civil and religious freedoms and protections for GLBT citizens that heterosexual members 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 degrade and demean 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 that we esteem our brothers and sisters – Gay, Straight, Black, White, male, female, Jew, gentile, etc. - 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 that we esteem our Gay brothers and sisters as our Straight brothers and sisters? Can we say we are “one” as the Lord requires?

James, from the Bible, 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).

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 Alma 26:33).

The Lord gave us further guidance through simple commandments. He said, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (D&C 59:6). In loving our Gay and Lesbian family members and neighbors, 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).

The Savior also commanded “Thou shalt not speak evil of thy neighbor nor do him any harm” (D&C 42:27). When we Latter-day Saints and other Christians realize that God’s GLBT children are our neighbors, and we choose to obey these simple commandments of the Lord, attitudes and policies will change.

In the Bible and the Book of Mormon Jesus taught the Golden Rule: “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 Ne. 14:12). When we Latter-day Saints realize how hurtful, demoralizing, demeaning and yes damaging current policies are to God’s Gay and Lesbian children, policies will change.

I believe that current policies, which lead to attitudes, significantly contribute 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 has got to stop! I believe BYU students and other Latter-day Saints are compassionate enough to care and do something about this alarming reality. Once they understand that these young men don’t kill themselves because they are Gay; they kill themselves because of the ways Gays are treated and made to feel in our religious and political culture, attitudes may change. I believe that eventually LDS parents will end the silence and stop covering up the suicides of their Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender children. Then attitudes and policies will start to change.

I believe BYU will change its policies because our Prophet has 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, faithful relationships, marriages and families. Furthermore our Book of Mormon teaches, “... 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 and adoption laws promoted by the Church put Gay individuals, couples and families, on unequal grounds?

BYU’s conduct code allows Straight students to date, hold hands, walk arm in arm, go dancing, kiss and even marry someone they truly love! Are GLBT students allowed those same standards?

In two other places the Book of Mormon teaches “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).

Is there any pride in the notion that only “traditional families” are of worth to God, His Church and society? That only heterosexuals love God and only they are deserving of full gospel blessings? That only God’s Straight children deserve to love and be loved? That only their love is good and of God? That only opposite-gender attracted people are capable of successfully raising children up to the Lord in truly loving families?

Moving on: In the national marriage debate are we Latter-day Saints following these words of the Savior found in the D&C? 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; The 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).

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 98:5-7). If we Latter-day Saints truly believe these words of the Lord, how can we campaign for changing our Constitution to deny rights, protections and privileges of millions of God's Gay and Lesbian children which His Straight children readily enjoy?

I don't know how the Lord could be more clear when He uses such all inclusive terms throughout the scriptures: "All flesh" "All mankind," "every man" "Whosoever", "any" and "every". The Book of Mormon teaches "...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). The Bible teaches: "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 Gays and Lesbians believe in Jesus Christ? 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 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 experts on this issue (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 2000, 76). As I have asked God what He would have me know and do as one of His Gay sons, He has liberally given me understanding and guidance, "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little" (2 Nephi 28:30) through the scriptures and guidance of the Holy Ghost. All of us have that same opportunity. Please take it!

Notice, not one of the blessings promised, 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. His gospel is completely INCLUSIVE, no exceptions as long as we do the simple things He asks of all His children.

The Lord established another essential truth through His scriptures. Way back "In the beginning" "the Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). BYU's policies will change when students, faculty, administrators and Church leaders realize God's words are as true for His Gay and Lesbian children as they are for Adam and God's Straight children. They will then understand that while Adam and Eve were the first couple they were not the last couple or family God created which are capable of multiplying and replenishing the earth and fulfilling the measure of their creation in many wonderful ways – just as the Savior did. God continues to create truly loving couples and families by the varying gifts of love and "natural affection" He instills in our hearts. When others realize that "being Gay" is fundamentally about love, at least as much as it is for "being Straight", attitudes will start to change.

Perhaps most married couples will agree that 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 realize that the gift of being Gay, just like 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 they know that “being Gay” is about love unless we openly and honestly show them by our loving lives, our loving relationships and our loving families?

Policies and attitudes will change when true Christians realize the importance of diversity in God’s kingdom, for Jesus taught in the Doctrine and Covenants: “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).

While we Gays and Lesbians may feel like we get walked on a lot, we may not be the feet but are better likened unto some “poorly understood” part of the body, like the tonsils or appendix which many view as an unnecessary or troublesome and best cut out. Nevertheless, we must remember, as Paul taught, “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).

Even if God’s Gay and Lesbian children are viewed as the “uncomely” feet, we are currently told that we are welcome in the body of the Church but that we must never act like “feet”. We must either “not act on” our creation or we must act only as the hands; which, for some, is “do-able” for a time but it is unnatural, untrue to our creation and ultimately damaging, demoralizing and destructive, throwing “the body” out of balance, resulting in more harm to ourselves and the whole body of our families and Church.

Policies and attitudes will change when we Latter-day Saints live up to our 13<sup>th</sup> Article of Faith: “We believe... in doing good to all men” including our GLBT brothers and sisters.

Political positions and policies regarding marriage will change when we Christians believe these words from the Bible: “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.

Political positions and policies regarding marriage will change when we Latter-day Saints simply believe these words of the Lord as He spoke them without adding to them or taking away from them: “... marriage is ordained of God unto man.” (D&C 49:15\*\*). In that same verse He declared “whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God.” “Forbidding to marry” is one of the evils Paul prophesied for our “latter times” (see 1 Tim. 4:1, 3).

And in even greater all inclusiveness the Lord declared in our dispensation the proper use of the sacred sealing powers which we Latter-day Saints use in temple marriage: 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 believe these all inclusive words of the Lord? Tragically I have found few Latter-day Saints who do.

Policies and attitudes will change when true Christians consider the last 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, discriminate against, cast out or crucify any of His children.

Finally, policies and attitudes will change when we Christians truly understand and believe these basic words of the Lord Jesus Christ:

“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).

Do we Christians understand the magnitude of the Savior’s declaration? Are all the laws governing marriage, relationships and families to 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 a Gay or Lesbian couple truly love God and their neighbor, how can we Christians condemn them if we believe Jesus’ words?

Do we Latter-day Saints, as individuals and a people believe any of these teachings of the Lord, especially when they conflict with tradition – traditional views regarding “traditional marriage” and “traditional families”? Or have we become as the ancient Israelites as 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. The choice is ours.

What can we do to help our belief, our hope, our faith become reality? How can we exercise our faith to bring about such needed miracles of softening hearts, enlightening minds and changing attitudes, treatment and policies?

We can do just what we are asking 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 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. That may be a tall order, but our Creator, our God has given each of us a 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. etc”

I have found that as we “come out of the closet” with God, 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 we 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 despitefully 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 Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender 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 know that God is on our side and we are on His side when we choose love over hate, unity over division, 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 and His words! All of my faith and hope that the blessings of the gospel with 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, and filled my heart and mind with His glorious light and life. As a Gay son of God, His truth has set me free to live a life of honesty, truth, integrity and yes, LOVE and 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 be great missionaries for this cause of truth, freedom, 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.

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\*\*It is important to study any scripture in its full context. Keep in mind that the Lord explained how He teaches us: “I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little” (2 Ne. 28:30). This reminds us that the verses immediately following D&C 49:15 do not give us a complete discussion of the Lord’s law of marriage. Other verses scattered throughout the scriptures give us further insights about what is lawful in God’s eyes regarding relationships, marriage and family. D&C 132, which discusses polygamy and other uses of the sealing powers, adds to the principles taught in Sec. 49. The Lord ends Sec. 132 with the words, “And now, as pertaining to this law, verily, verily, I say unto you, I will reveal more unto you, hereafter; therefore, let this suffice for the present. Behold, I am Alpha and Omega. Amen.” (D&C 132:66)