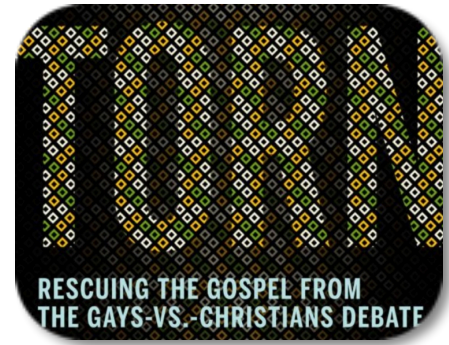


Torn

(a summary by Pat Evert)

- Battle of the century

The battle of the century is the gays versus the Christians. A mother just finds out that her son is gay, she is afraid for his soul, his eternal future, for AIDS and hate crimes, but most of all she's afraid of her church. A 2007 study by the Barna Group determined that the church is very judgmental and hypocritical. Its results show 91% of people say that the church is anti-homosexual and 80% of churchgoers agree. This has left many gay people more hostile to Christianity than ever. If they view the church as an unsafe place for them, we just might be raising the most anti-gay Christian generation American has ever seen.



- God boy

I was a very committed Christian and everybody knew it. I got the nickname God boy from those who disliked me. I believed that God loved the gays, but He did not want them to remain gay.

- The struggle

God boy had a secret. It was, I thought, the worst secret; I could not share it with even those closest to me, ever. I was not attracted to girls, but to guys. Night after night I cried myself to sleep, begging God to change me. I had to get rid of these feelings, my faith required it.

- The truth comes out

I was becoming aware that I was gay. But how could this be, I was a Christian. I was sure that God didn't want me to be gay; I didn't want it for myself. How could I share this with my parents? They believed that being gay was a choice.

- Why are people gay

Let's define homosexuality. **It's the attraction** to the same sex. It is not a behavior or belief. None of us can choose to whom we are attracted, we just are.

- Justin in ex-gayland

This was what it meant to be a Christian, broken, hurting, imperfect people united in love and grateful to God. If this was to be the battle of the gays versus Christians, where did I fit? Those who claimed they "used to be gay" are speaking about their behavior not their attraction. Giving public testimony to this was misleading millions of Christians to think they had become straight, when that wasn't true. Most of these were not trying to be deceptive; they were just trying to

provide hope. They were some of the most devoted Christians you would ever meet. But years upon years of trying to change with the promise that they could, only damaged their faith and feelings of self-worth. In a 'gays versus Christian' world, admitting that you were gay makes you an enemy of Christians. The Christians that continue to recommend ex-gay ministries are doing it with the best of intentions. **Ex-gay therapy can produce behavior changes, but not attraction changes.**

- *That the man should be alone*

Not only is sex a significant part of the human experience it's something that very few of us want to go without, it also represents something much deeper: love. It is a bonding agent to bring couples together. I began imagining what it would be like to fall in love with someone who would love me back.

- *South Park Christians*

I was back to feeling all alone, misunderstood by the very church that I loved so much. I might someday be kicked out of the church that has been my spiritual home almost my entire life. I had been kicked out and banned by one of the chat room moderators. That was the last time I was allowed in my favorite Christian chat room. Jobs' friends believed if he would repent and turn to God, if he would just do that, God would heal him and stop the suffering. These guys cared about Job, they were not bad guys. They wanted to help him, but their theology tells them that if God is just, then suffering must be evidence of God's discipline, because God would not punish a good person for no reason. It's just that in this case they were completely wrong. They are the ones - not Job - that need a lesson in humility. Sometimes when people are hurting they don't need our advice and theology but instead they need our understanding and comfort. In our Christian versus gay culture, Christians weren't such great people to hang around with if you were gay. But all my close friends were Christians. I didn't have anyone else to talk to. I never knew when my very presence was going to turn into a controversial issue. Ex-gay ministries and I differed on three things: 1) orientation was a choice and I could control it, 2) there is a difference between behavior and orientation, and 3) gay relationships were sinful and that some kind of change was possible. Even if they condemned gay sex, I didn't want them to condemn me for attractions that I wasn't even acting upon. It was official; 'God boy' was now a heretic.

- *The poisoned yeast*

A little information can alter our entire understanding of a situation. Yeast is a common biblical symbol for an idea that permeates an entity or group and alters it.

- *Faith assassins*

And while many of us in the church have been focused on the threat posed by homosexuality, we've missed the realization that the church is under attack, not by gays but by Christians. If Jesus' followers are now known more for their politics than for their grace, something is wrong. As the yeast of misinformation has spread through the church about gays, it has turned the church not only into the perceived enemy of gay people, but into its own worst enemy as well. Well intentioned Christians, believing that being gay is a sinful choice, or can be easily changed,

fight against cultural acceptance of homosexuality and recommend ex-gay ministries. Throughout history one of the most compelling arguments for the Christian faith is that of changed lives. Sadly, that is no longer what we are known for. In some ways, I think, Christendom is better off when it must function as an oppressed minority. Christians who live under the threat of persecution have to put their lives on the line for their faith, and it strengthens them.

- *The other side.*

I don't believe ex-gay ministries have ever made anyone straight; all they've done is give people a reason to lie in order to fit in. I refused to lie. What their messages did do was make me hate myself. The people I looked up to were my parents and various leaders in the church. Theirs was the life I wanted to imitate. Yet all of them were straight, and all of them looked down on homosexuality. As a Christian, I wanted to live a life focused on serving God and others, not egocentric carnality. The images I was seeing of gay people weren't me. For the sake of these young people, it's vital that the church get a better understanding of this issue. As Christian Justin, I had my Christian friends, and as Gay Justin, I had my gay friends. Yes, there were gay Christians on campus. They were all over. But they had grown up, like me, seeing "Gays vs. Christians" as the only option. You had to pick one or the other, and whichever one you didn't pick had to be squelched or hidden or forgotten. The Christians judged the gays and the gays shunned the Christians, the misunderstanding and resentment fed into itself, giving all the more reason for people to feel a need to pick a side.

- *Back to the Bible*

Does the Bible condemn homosexuality?

- The Sodom story - There's no mention in the Bible of homosexuality in Gomorrah at all. Every man in the entire city surrounds the house and threatens these angels with gang rape. It was a lot easier to believe that everyone would be whipped up in a frenzy of hate than to believe that everyone in the town was gay. Their tone also suggested this was about violence, not sex.

- Lying with a man - In Leviticus 18 - 20 we have laws to keep Israel separate from the polytheistic cultures around them. If gay sex was being condemned for its connection to idolatry and cult prostitution, that would explain the harsh punishment and the description of it as "abomination," and it wouldn't apply to modern-day relationships at all. But if gay sex was being condemned because gay sex is inherently sinful in all situations, then that condemnation would still apply today, even in a committed relationship.

- Exchanging natural for unnatural - Paul began by talking about wicked people who had turned from God, then discussed how they had begun to worship idols, leading God to give them over to the dishonorable sex rites that accompanied such worship—rites that involved gay sex practiced by otherwise straight people, something Paul knew his audience would find objectionable. Then he springs his trap, "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges."

- The sinful arsenokoitai - The Leviticus and Romans passages had a clear context of idolatry, not committed relationships. If 1 Corinthians 6:9 was condemning the same things, or something else like pederasty, then the Bible didn't address committed gay relationships at all. If I got this wrong, I'd end up either trying to justify sin or unjustly condemning loving relationships that God never intended to condemn.

- Whatever commandment there may be

I was torn. And whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." We are no longer under the supervision of the law. You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4) From a rule-following perspective, Jesus' argument makes no sense. But from a love-your-neighbor perspective, it makes perfect sense. "The law was made for people; people weren't made for the law." Or, as Paul put it, "The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ." Christ did not come to lead us to the law.

- Lightning rod.

We Christians were failing to show grace to the gay community the way Jesus would. At the very least, Christians ought to be listening to their gay friends, seeking to understand them, to know their joys and their struggles. Nevertheless, even I as a fellow Christian was experiencing grace from them only rarely. Many were feeling scared and alone, wanting to serve God but being afraid of rejection at the hands of the church. Yet in the midst of all our disagreements, we were united by two things: our passion for Jesus Christ and our conviction that the church needed to do a much better job of supporting gay people. I also began meeting a lot of straight Christians who cared deeply about these issues and wanted to be part of helping make change. We welcomed them, too, with open arms. How would this new group handle differing opinions? I was struck by the respectful tone of the dialogue between such different people, not to try to convert or talk down to one another. Gays and Christians are supposed to be enemies. Side A and Side B are supposed to be enemies. Yet here we were, cats and dogs, living alongside each other and supporting one another in good times and bad. Loving Christian community is, I believe, even more than our doctrine, the thing that most demonstrates our commitment to Christ.

15 - The way to forward

1. Christians must show more grace, especially in the midst of disagreement. 'Love the sinner, and hate your own sin. And after you get rid of the sin in your own life, then you can begin talking about the sin in your brother or sister's life.' We must never let our theological disagreements get in the way of showing God's unconditional, overpowering grace to everyone we meet. Grace is about letting the Holy Spirit work through us to show people understanding and love instead of judgment.

2. We must educate Christians. As I've reiterated throughout this book, Christians are not bad people. They're good people. Many of them have just been misinformed on this issue. If they really understood what it was like for gay people, they would change their attitudes in a heartbeat. It's up to us to help them understand by sharing our stories.

3. We must move away from an "ex-gay" approach. These people end up many years later just as gay as they were to begin with, but now with deep emotional scars and a distrust of anything the church says. As Christians, we must move away from an ex-gay mentality and look at real, workable solutions that will allow gay Christians to live openly and honestly.

4. Celibacy must be a viable option. Celibacy is an extremely difficult path. It can be lonely and disheartening. Gay Christians who believe this is God's call for them need tremendous support from their church families. If churches are going to teach that gay Christians must be celibate, then at the very least they must provide ongoing, tangible support for them in their journey. These celibate gay Christians need avenues for companionship and love. The church has the power to be a family to single people and to give them a place to feel fully welcomed and included. All too often, we fail to do that. Single gay Christians face the difficulties of singleness alongside potential condemnation for their orientation. Most gay and gay-friendly groups don't have any tangible place for "Side B" celibate gays. I believe they must be welcomed and supported in following their consciences.

5. We must shatter the myth that the Bible is anti-gay.

6. Openly gay Christians must find their place throughout the church. We're Christians who know first-hand what it's like to feel like outcasts and to be hurt by the church, and that gives us important perspective that the church needs. If Christians in our culture are killing Christianity, the gay Christians just might be the ones who are able to save it. That means that we who are gay and Christian must accept the calling and take our place in the church, working in the various ways we're led to make the world and the church a better place. It also means that straight Christians must work to ensure that gay Christians are welcomed and supported at all levels of the church, and that their unique experiences and insight are honored. When there was serious disagreement within the Body of Christ, Paul encouraged people to follow their consciences and allow other believers to do likewise.

7. We must learn how to effectively dialogue. We each have a different perspective, and moving forward will require us to talk to one another, and, more importantly, to listen to one another. Listen to their stories, and seek first and foremost to understand what they are feeling. Stephen Covey reminds us, "seek first to understand, then to be understood." Dialogue means we must set aside our own prejudices and language preferences for the sake of communication. Grace sees people for what makes them uniquely beautiful to God, not for all the ways they're flawed or all the ways I disagree with them. That kind of grace is what enables loving bridges to be built over the strongest disagreements.