



ETHNIC BLENDS **MARK DEYMAZ**

# Becoming a Church **That Reaches**

**a**s regular readers of *Outreach* know, this column is devoted to providing insight, information and inspiration to ministry leaders seeking to build healthy multiethnic churches for the sake of the Gospel in an increasingly diverse and cynical society. In recognition of this current issue's theme, however, I want to address something that I believe the American church will need to give even greater consideration to in the future, something we can no longer ignore: homosexuality.

Of course, many cite Romans 1:18-32 as a key passage addressing the subject—and it is. However, this passage cannot rightly be interpreted apart from understanding the entire context of Romans 1-3. In these opening chapters, Paul leads the Jews into understanding that they are no different than the Gentiles when it comes to sin and, therefore, no less in need of God's forgiveness and grace. In so doing, he directly confronts their spiritual arrogance by suggesting that in passing judgment on others, they condemn themselves, "because you who pass judgment do the same things" (Rom. 2:1, NIV; see also 1:29-32).

### **Guilty of Spiritual Arrogance?**

I wonder, if Paul were writing today, would he similarly suggest that Christians are guilty of spiritual arrogance when it comes to our view of the world and of the lost; of others for whom Christ died who do not see things our way; of fellow believers struggling with sin and trying to overcome their own humanity, even of those identifying themselves as gays or lesbians?

**"Let us find a way in more than mere words to say, 'You are loved by God, therefore, you will be loved by me and by this church.'"**

Given that homosexuality is so openly promoted in our society, Christians are increasingly pressed to consider their response on one level or another—that is, in dealing with their own same-sex attractions or in relating to family members and friends who live an openly gay or lesbian lifestyle. Far too many of us, however, are doing so in silence or shame, and without the loving support, care and compassion of the local church.

### **Love As Christ Did**

Now let me be perfectly clear: My understanding of biblical theology does not allow me to equate homosexual relationships, even monogamous ones, with the biblical ideal or standard of marriage—one man with one woman, for a lifetime. On the other hand, it does not allow me to judge or condemn those who do not agree with me, or who have not lived up to this ideal for one reason or another. Rather, I am commanded to love them just as Christ loves them, unconditionally. Likewise, my understanding of biblical theology commands me not to judge or condemn other believers who are struggling with sin—any sin. Rather, it commands me to speak the truth in love while waiting patiently and prayerfully along with them, as one with them—a sinner in need of grace, mercy and forgiveness every day of my life—for "the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23, NIV). Such views create tension for me and for my church, but together we believe the tension is good.

Admittedly, this is a complex subject that most of us find difficult to understand or discuss. Nevertheless, for the sake of the Gospel and for all those within the body of Christ who are struggling with gender-identity issues or same-sex attraction, we must will ourselves to do so in humility and love.

In the future, then, let us seek to narrow the gap between those who view Christians as people of hate, and those of us who desire to love all people as Christ did. Let us find a way to encourage those who are struggling in their own skin to work out their salvation in fear and trembling. They must know that they are not hopelessly displeasing to God. Indeed, let us find a way in more than mere words to say, "You are loved by God, therefore, you will be loved by me and by this church."

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