

From Christians Who Formerly Identified as LGBTQ: A “Thank You” to Our Allies

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I want you to know that your opposition strengthens and encourages people like me—Christians who have struggled with same-sex attraction. When we see Barronelle refuse to lay her cross down, she becomes Simon to us and helps us shoulder our own.

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Like most *Public Discourse* readers, I have long been aware of [Barronelle Stutzman](#). She has been a hero of mine since she came into her unwanted fame. Sadly, six years later, Barronelle’s case is as fresh as ever. The Supreme Court is being asked, for a second time, to take it up.

I have long wanted to write this article and always planned to title it, “Thank you, Barronelle.” But as time has worn on, and months have turned into years, more and more “Barronelles” have appeared. I dare not thank only Barronelle, for there are now so many others, from Jack Phillips to Aaron and Melissa Klein to Elaine Huguenin. Anyone seeking to live out their faith by honoring their convictions about marriage is at risk. To you all, let me simply say, “Thank you.” You may not realize it, but you are among my greatest allies.

The Stigma of Homosexuality

I have [written several times](#) about homosexuality and my experiences identifying as a lesbian when I was a young woman. I know firsthand that dealing with same-sex attraction used to carry a huge stigma. If people knew, it was a mark of disgrace. Most of us dealing with it felt ashamed and suffered the pain of that stigma, at least privately. Many in my generation, and especially those before mine, tried to deny it and hide it. This experience is almost inconceivable to the millennial generation and younger. Shame has been replaced by celebration. As we are relentlessly reminded during the month of June, identifying as a member of the LGBT community is now seen as a source of pride.

While the closet was difficult for those of us dealing with same-sex attraction years ago, the ticker-tape parade that awaits us today if we “come out” and establish our identity based on our desires presents us with a host of other problems. These days, it is not our disordered sexuality that is to be kept in the closet, but our faith in Christ. We are told to reject the Christ that came to set us free from sin, sexual sin included, that we might become our true selves in Him. Rather, to be publicly acceptable, our faith must affirm LGBTQ behavior and identity, as if Christ came soothingly to tell us there is no such thing as sin. Yet, in truth, embracing and celebrating a tendency toward that for which our Maker did not make us leads us away from Him. Basing our identity on that which is false is not the will of the One who is faithful and true.

Over many years of struggle, what transformed the stigma for me was neither shame nor pride, but surrender—a surrender to the Savior’s embrace. I slowly began to unite the wounds of my sin and my struggles with same-sex attraction with the wounds of Jesus. In time, I began to see the stigma transform into a kind of stigmata. His wounds were the source of healing for my own, and the blood that flowed from His wounds was the price of my redemption. As I turned away from sin and offered Him my brokenness, He carried me. I began to share in His cross more and more by taking up my own. And that participation—that “working out” of my salvation—brought me to know Him more deeply than I would have if I had never had same-sex attraction in the first place. As St. Paul said, “I count everything as loss in order that I may gain Christ: To know Him, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.” Although my experience has been excruciating at times, the surpassing greatness of knowing Him is worth the loss of all things.

The Stigma of Christianity

But now to you, Baronelle and company: what of the stigma of your opposition?

As you well know, all who seek to be faithful to Christ face stigma in our culture.

LGBTQ issues have become everyone’s issues. Even those who have never struggled with same-sex attractions or gender dysphoria have to face the new sexual orthodoxy. So

you were faced with a choice: compromising or being willing to oppose the culture. And because you opposed the culture, very real suffering has come to you. You are called “bigots” and “haters.” Those who stand with and defend you, like those at Alliance Defending Freedom, are labeled as members of a “hate group.”

Hate. Such a powerful word. Perhaps this is one of the most difficult aspects of the suffering: the false accusations about your motivation. During “Pride Month,” I read about wedding venue owners in Georgia who had declined to host same-sex weddings. In response, to predictable media fanfare, a Georgia comedian offered to host same-sex weddings free of charge at his beautiful residence. It could have been simply a nice gesture from someone who has different values, an accommodation in our pluralistic society, but that’s not how the narrative ran. To his credit, the comedian didn’t call for a social media pile-on directed toward the venue. However, he did characterize the owners’ refusal as “wrong and backwards.” In [his words](#), “I guess what I ultimately hope is that people will see the love and see how well it was received and make them think, ‘Maybe I’m not doing the right thing harboring hate in my heart here.’”

“Harboring hate in my heart”—as if hate could be the only reason to decline to participate in a same-sex wedding. I winced and thought of you, Barronelle, serving your client faithfully for ten long years, then quietly and politely declining to do flowers for his wedding. I thought of you enduring legal action and risking all your worldly goods, refusing every false compromise offered. Such costs are not paid by those who hate, but only by those who are motivated by a higher love. The comedian said, “See the love.” Affirming choices that do not lead people toward their Creator’s plan for them, and thus towards their human flourishing, is not love. Declining to do so is. Barronelle, you serve the God who is Love, who made love manifest in Christ crucified for our sins.

Carrying the Cross, Running the Race

Not all Christians will suffer the way Barronelle, Jack, and others have. But this stigma of opposition will come to each of us. Many of us will bear the pain of being among the few to stand for truth in a beloved LGBTQ-identified one’s life, not enjoying the

closeness that celebrating their LGBT identity would allow. We will be distanced. We will be shunned—perhaps by them, by our wider “affirming” family, and obviously by the culture at large. All for seeking to love people with God’s love and stand for the truth of Jesus regarding sexuality and marriage.

As you bear that mark of disgrace, that suffering, I pray that it will lead you too into deeper union with Jesus. I pray that the stigma we face for being faithful to Christian truth and God’s word and design will be transformed into stigmata, marks of sharing in the wounds of Jesus. And I pray that our suffering, united with His, will become redemptive for our own souls and many others, including our loved ones who identify as LGBTQ and people who vilify and oppose us.

I want you to know that your “opposition” strengthens and encourages people like me—Christians who have struggled with same-sex attraction. For you, it would be easy to compromise. If you simply stayed silent and didn’t make waves, you could put down the burden of this cross of opposition. We cannot do the same. For us, the cross of opposition cannot be laid down, for it is tied up with our struggle against the attractions. We must endure both, or we lose the battle. I didn’t choose the cross of same-sex attraction. Nor did Barronelle choose the cross of opposition that was placed on her. Yet God has allowed these crosses to come to us. And when those of us who have struggled see Barronelle refuse to lay her cross down, she becomes Simon to us and helps us continue to shoulder our own.

I’m sure that you are all now painfully familiar with legal proceedings and *amicus* briefs. So, I got a few *amici* as signatories on this letter. I speak not just for myself, but for many others, from my friend Diane to [Walt Heyer](#) to [Doug Mainwaring](#), and countless more. To you, our allies, we say, “Thank you.” Be encouraged, for—[as Doug would say](#)—“You’re doing far more good than you know.” When so many others have compromised, you did not choose to become the silent “good men who do nothing,” so that you yourselves would be spared. The voices for truth are embattled, but they still speak.

Yours are among them. We are part of an earthly “cloud of witnesses,” cheering you on in your race, eyes fixed on Him, as we run ours.

By the grace of God, we’ll see you at the finish line.

About the Author

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