

My name is Raymond Hylton, I am the pastor of FPC of Evanston.

The issue before us tonight is to decide whether or not to change the current language in the Book of Order regarding ordination standards. Some of the reasons given by proponents of the amendment are that our current language restricts LGBT persons who feel called to ordained ministry from serving in the church. Another reason given is that the current language fails to show the love and justice of Jesus.

We are not here to wrangle over mere words. What we decide will have implications for members of our church, our youth, and congregational leaders who are experiencing sexual brokenness. How do we help and encourage these folks for whom Christ died? I am concerned about the proposed amendment because the language in the amendment offers no guidance for those broken by sexual sins. It is rather vague and this troubles me.

I am also concerned that in our efforts to be an open and inclusive church we have intentionally or unintentionally pitted truth against grace. There are those in the Church who believe that the witness of Scripture gives definitive guidance for all who follow Jesus and take up his cross; while others believe that the Scriptures are not clear and therefore it's time for the church to show new levels of openness and love.

Instead of positioning truth and grace as competing elements, the answer is to embrace them. Salt is essential for the body, but when separated into its two elements, sodium and chlorine, it can be deadly.¹

Jesus, who is the embodiment of grace and truth, encourages us to speak the truth in love. This is our challenge. How do we hold up these two essential virtues without minimizing one or the other? How do we affirm grace and truth and uphold the worth of all people?

W. P. Campbell makes clear in his wonderful resource, "Grace without truth pampers, confuses, and even deceives. Truth without grace cuts, wounds, and destroys."² And if we approach this subject simply on the basis of truth claims we run the risk of alienating people. While if we affirm the ethic of love and avoid truth, then we are unable to truly love people and help them with their sexual brokenness.

Jesus did not hide the truth from those who were broken. He spoke grace and truth to the woman caught in adultery; he spoke grace and truth to his religious enemies; he spoke grace and truth to greedy Zacchaeus. He spoke grace and truth to the rich young ruler. He spoke grace and truth to the woman at well with her many husbands.

We are called to do the same. The current language in the BOO does just that. G.6.0106b combines the elements of grace and truth. It speaks to the sexual brokenness of heterosexual and homosexual persons. It addresses a standard of holiness that is befitting

¹ Turning Controversy into Church Ministry: A Christlike response to Homosexuality, (*Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010*)

² *ibid*

of all leaders, and it also goes beyond behavior to attitude and invites us all to a life of repentance before God.

The good news of the gospel is that grace and truth are embodied in Jesus. Titus 2:11-13 captures the essence of grace and truth: *“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

The proposed amendment takes us away from such a call to follow Christ. And I urge us to vote no. Saying no to this amendment does not equate saying yes to bigotry, hatred, or intolerance. Saying no to this proposed amendment, is to say yes to the message of Christ.