

The oral majority

Groups who try to restrict free speech should go to #&!*



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There is no moral majority.

Don't get me wrong, there is a self-proclaimed "moral majority," but they are neither moral nor the majority. I've been a vocal opponent of them for years, but I never realized how much I really despised what they were trying to do until this past year or so.

Over the past year, I've run into a whole hell of a lot of them. My opinions are wrong, they've said. My opinions are despicable, they've said. I'm corrupting the innocent, they've said. (Yeah, they *actually* said that. What am I, Socrates?)

I've been very outspoken against a lot of "moral" things. For those of you who aren't listening, here's the list of things I'm "immoral" about, so you can get mad in advance: I'm anti-censorship, anti-family values, pro-pornography, pro-violent entertainment, pro-profanity, pro-individual freedom, pro-drug legalization and definitely anti-politics.

What it all comes down to is whom do I trust more, me or you? In the end, naturally, I trust me.

I joined the American Civil Liberties Union recently because of my stands on personal freedom. I'd thought long and hard about it (and waited until I had \$30 to make my symbolic gesture with) and then I sent them the check.

The reason? The ACLU is probably the only organization I feel like I can honestly endorse wholeheartedly in America.

The stories about the ACLU are practically legends to people in the know. A Jewish attorney defending the right of a bunch of neo-Nazis to speak their opinion. The ACLU as a whole going toe-to-toe with the attorney general on whether or not the Internet should be regulated.

No matter who you are, the ACLU stands behind your right to express your opinion. It isn't about whether or not they agree, because that isn't the point.

The point is that you have the right to say it.

Perhaps this is the highest price one has to pay for freedom, because it means tolerating hearing the things you hate.

I listen to the self-proclaimed "moral majority" because it's my obligation as a free person to do so. When I get tired of their senseless rhetoric, I turn it off. I walk away. I stop listening.

But I choose to do this myself. It's not something stipulated to me by anyone. I have as much right to listen to them as I do white supremacist diatribe, which is equally worthless.

I can also listen to a Communist tell me about what kind of atrocities our country is committing and how our president should be "dealt with."

I have the right to puff on a big cigar, sipping from malt liquor while watching a pornographic film, because that's within my rights.

I also have the right to pray regularly, give money to the homeless, have a nuclear family and spout hateful rhetoric.

How does this all tie together, you're asking? The moral majority wants to take those rights away, the ACLU wants to defend them.

Call me anti-morals, I guess.

I believe that gay couples should have the same legal rights as neo-Nazi couples. I believe that we need this equality for everyone, the people we love and the people we hate.

Ironically, both sides often disagree with me.

The conservatives claim that the

resurgence of family values in politics will stop people from corrupting their children with "impure ideas and thoughts." Oftentimes, they cite Christian values, as if everyone in America has to be Christian by default. Surprise, I don't think that any book can tell me what to believe, no matter how long it's been around.

The liberals, weirdly enough, often claim that hate speech shouldn't be tolerated because it corrupts children, who will be tainted with "vile ideas and thoughts." Well, I'll be. It may be despicable, but I've got the right to listen to it too.

So where does this put me? Somewhere further than anyone, other than the ACLU, wants to go apparently.

Sure, I do lean towards the liberals politically (because I'm asking for people to be treated equally, go figure) but I think that's just an extension of this speech theory.

Everyone is equal: men, women, people of any color, sexual orientation, religious preference, political preference or any other distinction, minor or major, between any individual or group of people.

These "moral distinctions" that people try and define as "right and wrong" or what is "good/bad for children" are nothing but speculative hogwash that needs to be exiled from politics as soon as possible.

Despite what it may claim, the "moral majority," like *any* group of people, is a minority. More and more, as we run headlong towards the horizon, the influence of a "majority" is fading.

Maybe some day we'll be able to handle being unique and diverse individuals. Until then, however, the bickering will go on, the lawmakers will pass biases and the ACLU will fight them and I'll bitch to anyone whose attention I can get for a few minutes.

The next time you hear people talking about things you don't like, take it with a bit of pride, because when they want to shut you up, they can't.

And while we may have to put up with enduring their annoyingly backwater "bring God back into politics" speech, take heart in the fact that the public eye is rapidly turning away from them.

I believe in pure freedom of speech not because some God tells me to, but because I want the same liberty afforded to me.

Someone ask the "moral majority" if we should start excluding people from equal rights because they're Christian and they'll usually give you a blank stare.

That, in itself, says it all.



MELANIE FALK/DN

Love the sinner

God protects all his children despite their earthly acts



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My fingertips press against the heavy glass door and I push it open slowly. The downtown cafe is quiet this Sunday afternoon, with just a few scattered customers engaged in various conversations. I make my way back to the private room, eager to see a friend. I'm just in time for the end of my colleague's going-away party.

John, I guess we'll call him John, is tall and thin. His reddish-blond hair is cut short and his hairline is slightly receding. He's almost 40, but doesn't nearly look it.

I walk into the room and see him sitting in the back, legs crossed, talking with another middle-aged man. He doesn't notice me at first, but then finally sees me and jumps to his feet.

"Hi!" said John. "I didn't think you'd show up here."

His words resonate in my mind over and over. What's that supposed to mean anyhow?

"Come sit down," he said, "Have a brownie or something."

I hardly even notice the food in front of me, I'm still thinking about what he just said. I look around and it finally hits me as to what he is talking about. Besides a few older women, who appear to be family, the room is entirely filled with middle-aged men. Gay men.

"How've you been?" I said. "It seems like I haven't seen you forever."

"Well, I got a new job out of state, and just sold my house," said John. "I've got to take care of a few last things and I'm leaving Wednesday."

He'd resigned from work and had been looking for another job for about a month. I'm happy to hear that he'd found something new, but I'm still regretting not being able to spend more time with him. Somehow his homosexuality got in the way. I let his actions and society's reaction to them cloud my ability to just hang out with him. I guess I kept forgetting that he's just a regular guy.

Our conversation dwindles, and since the party is almost over, I assume he's going to politely send me off so he can wrap things up.

"You know I really appreciate you coming today," said John. "You're the only one from work that came."

"What about our boss?"

"No, but I was sure that someone would show up, I don't know, maybe something came up. ..."

"I'm real sorry about that, John," I said. "I'm sure we all got the memo about it."

"I guess they just wouldn't feel comfortable coming to a place that's

full of gay men."

All of the sudden the room becomes dead silent. His somber tone of voice really hits home with me. All the years of service to our company, and no one would show their faces. I can tell being shunned has really hurt him. I just want to take the blame for all of the bitterness that he has now. He's been treated unfairly, and my heart can't help but go out to him. I'm not an emotional man, but in my entire life, I've never wanted to cry as much as I did at this moment.

Tears start to well up in my eyes, and I put my head down to hide them. As I am composing myself, I felt something inside that told me things were not quite right. I'm thinking about all the times I could've talked to John before, I could have spent time with him outside of work, gotten to know him better.

I want to share my faith with him. My faith in Jesus. As I look up at him, his eyes told me he was waiting for me to speak. I'm thinking about what God would want me to say, I'm just searching for guidance.

I remember how God said in the Bible: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is in Jesus Christ our Lord. And how he also says in his word that homosexuality is a sin.

"John," I said, "I want you to know that I love you. I love you as a child of God."

He gets a curious look on his face as I attempt to put my thoughts into words. He's patient and eager to hear what I have to say.

"You know, John," I said, "I've got to tell you something. I feel like I'm deceiving you if I don't say ... John, I don't approve of what you're doing, what you call your lifestyle. I just feel like I dishonor God if I don't talk to you about it."

"You don't understand how much I feel I was born this ..."

"Please listen," I said, "I'm not here to argue with you at all. I just want to tell you that I follow Christ. That's where my love comes from, and that's why I want you to know about God."

He pauses and lets out a breath, then slowly breathes in another. His chin relaxes to his chest and collects his thoughts.

"Thank you for being real with me," John said. "Most Christians aren't like that. They hold up signs that say 'God hates fags,' and just condemn what I do."

I can see him clenching his teeth to hold in his emotions, and my heart begins to weigh on me. I want to be able to take back every ungodly thing every Christian has ever said, all of the hurt that has been caused in the name of God. And the expression on his face told me exactly what he thought about Christianity.

"God isn't like that," I said. "He doesn't hate anyone; he just hates our sin. And he has a plan for each one of us. Don't forget that, John. No matter what, remember that God loves you."

A look of solace comes over his face, and I can tell something touched him. But more importantly, he has touched me. I reach over and

give him a long hug. I'm still beating my emotions down, hiding them inside.

We exchange last good-byes, and I turn towards the door. He sits down to talk with another friend, and gives me a smile before I go. I return with a grin, and make my way out of the cafe.

I get to my car, still pondering the experience the entire way. I lean my head back on the seat and rub my eyes, as thoughts race through my mind. Maybe I did the right thing, and somehow God will use our talk to his glory. Or maybe I was judging John, and I'm just as bad as those people with the hate signs. I think about how society is changing its views on homosexuality, and how God's views are always the same.

I get a sobering reminder that I'm equally sinful myself. Some people treat gays as committing some kind of sin worse than all of the rest. To God, it's just a sin like any other.

I put my head on the steering wheel and really start to cry. I can't change the actions of others. All I can do is love people for just being souls created by God. Today I think I finally truly loved one of those precious souls. My heart wants to rejoice that my cold, callused self has actually been touched by what God really means when he says "love." But all I can think about is John saying "God hates fags," over and over again in my head. Then I think about the phrase "Love the sinner, hate the sin." And I wonder how many Christians really apply that to every sinner.