

Statement on Non-Discrimination
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As a two-time President of the Memphis Ministers Association and twenty-year religious leader involved in the greater community, it's become clear to me that whenever theology mixes with politics, both suffer. Why do I say that? Because religious leaders and voices who never appear at city hall when the subject is education, welfare or the poor, suddenly show up to condone the firing of gay people and label their protection from indiscriminate firing as "special rights."

Saving souls may be the business of ministers, but the oath taken by government officials is not to save souls. It is to protect rights, and not the rights of the majority but the rights of *any* minority who is the object of discrimination. Non-discrimination ordinances are not about special rights or a gay agenda. They are at the core of America's agenda to protect anyone and everyone from blatant discrimination. This ordinance is fundamentally about one thing - the right to be free of publicly condoned bigotry in Memphis, including gay and lesbian citizens who earn their livings, pay their taxes, and give back to this community.

In the sixties, a reason given for why black families were denied use of bathrooms after driving 5 hours on the highway was that the white owner of the gas station, often with one bathroom, would say, "It violates my right to let a person of color use the bathroom or water fountain I own." While I understand the opposition to gay marriage, it's beyond me how anyone could speak against or vote against equal protection for all people and reframe it as special rights. Are gay people really a bigger threat to this city than bigotry masquerading as "special rights?"

Contrary to what some preach, discussion about ending discrimination based on sexual orientation is not a gay issue any more than racism or anti-Semitism is a black or Jewish issue. Racism in the 60s wasn't the fault of black America; it's about what whites *did* to blacks in America. Similarly, anti-Semitism has nothing to do with Judaism; it's about what others have done to Jews. My point? Gays should not be held accountable for the discrimination perpetrated against them—it's the rest of us who aren't gay who must stand up and speak out against bigotry.

For those who want to get biblical, let's discuss scriptural texts outside city hall in God's original word – Hebrew. Let's discuss the verses some select and the ones they ignore, like the selling of daughters into slavery (Ex 21:7), the owning of male and female slaves (Lev 25:44), and the bible's command to kill any child who insults his parents. We'd all be dead.

I am not the only clergyman who has been called a gay lover and a negro-lover (with a different "n" word). And it's true. I love people who are black and those who are brown and white and gay. After all, isn't this what the faith of Jesus and all good religion teach? Isn't this the meaning of the prophet's plea: "*Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us? Why then do some deal treacherously every man against his brother?*" Whether gay or straight, black or white, Jew or Gentile, all are children of God, created in the divine image. That is why I subscribe to Jesus the Jew's central idea to love one another, especially those different than me.

The shameful demonization of people who happen to be gay or lesbian underscores what must happen now. We must all take a stand for non-discrimination and basic human dignity in the public square or be labeled a pious fraud. People of all faiths need to remember that we forfeit the right to worship God whenever we denigrate the image of God in other human beings.

I pray that any person infuriated by, obsessed with, or tired of dealing with discrimination against gay people will turn to the Bible and follow the words of Psalm 118: "*I called out to God from my narrowness, and God answered me with a great expanse.*"