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Washed And Waiting: Reflections On Christian Faithfulness And Homosexuality



Synopsis

"Gay," "Christian," and "celibate" don't often appear in the same sentence. Yet many who sit next to us in the pew at church fit that description, says author Wesley Hill. As a celibate gay Christian, Hill gives us a glimpse of what it looks like to wrestle firsthand with God's "No" to same-sex relationships. What does it mean for gay Christians to live faithful to God while struggling with the challenge of their homosexuality? What is God's will for believers who experience same-sex desires? Those who choose celibacy are often left to deal with loneliness and the hunger for relationships. How can gay Christians experience God's favor and blessing in the midst of a struggle that for many brings a crippling sense of shame and guilt? Weaving together reflections from his own life and the lives of other Christians, such as Henri Nouwen and Gerard Manley Hopkins, Hill offers a fresh perspective on these questions. He advocates neither unqualified "healing" for those who struggle, nor their accommodation to temptation, but rather faithfulness in the midst of brokenness. "I hope this book may encourage other homosexual Christians to take the risky step of opening up their lives to others in the body of Christ," Hill writes. "In so doing, they may find, as I have, by grace, that being known is spiritually healthier than remaining behind closed doors, that the light is better than the darkness."

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Customer Reviews

This weekend I had the chance to read Wesley Hill's new book, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Wesley is an old acquaintance of mine from grad school days, and a gifted writer and brilliant thinker (he is currently doing his Ph.D in New

Testament at Durham in the UK). Previously Wesley had penned a brief, powerful essay exploring his own personal experience of exclusive same-sex desires, reflecting in it on his own anguished struggle of learning to relate his sexuality to the Christian gospel in a meaningful and consistent way. In my view, neither the world nor the church has done a good job in recent decades in thinking through the complicated issue of homosexuality, or in responding both graciously and truthfully to those who identify as gay or lesbian. This sad state of affairs makes Wesley's book all the more crucial and poignant. Here I provide a basic overview of the book (160pp), but above all else I hope that many of you will make it a point to pick up a copy of it and work through it yourselves. Whether you find yourself agreeing or disagreeing with Wesley's own settled perspective, I think it unlikely you can remain unmoved as the author recounts his own story in often gut-wrenching detail, and you will certainly come to respect his authenticity and ruthless honesty throughout. *Washed and Waiting* takes its title and cue from two biblical passages. I Corinthians 6:9-11 refers to the "washed" spiritual status of Christians, while Romans 8:23-25 reminds us that we are "waiting" and groaning for the future consummation of our redemption.

I saw Wesley speak yesterday at the Story:2010 conference in downtown Chicago. I volunteered and so didn't get the conference swag bag (which had his book in it), but I managed to score a copy at the end. I read almost all of it on the one hour train ride from the city out to my apartment. What's so powerful about Wesley's 'testimony,' and this book in particular, is the way that he manages to bring together two things which are constantly painted as being in opposition to one another, both by the church and by wider culture. On the one hand, Wesley is up front and honest about being gay. As he went through puberty, he discovered that he consistently reacted differently than his male peers. His story defeats simplistic "gay is a choice" rhetoric as well as challenging the assumption that everyone who is gay must have some sort of childhood psychological trauma that, once addressed, will unlock that person's true heterosexuality. He grew up in a conservative, close, loving, Christian household, and had a relationship with both his mother and his father. He simply felt different about his sexuality from the get-go, often despite his best efforts. On the other hand, Wesley began to own, from a fairly young age, his Christianity. He believed in the gospel and found, as he grew older and read more, that he believed the Bible to be true; that he trusted Christ as the one who could save him from death and forgive him from sin; that he agreed with the Bible's overall narrative and picture of reality; that he believed the Bible to be accurate, authoritative, and sacred scripture.

Wesley Hill is a most counter-cultural person: he is a homosexual Christian who nevertheless believes that 1) the Bible is categorically against all forms of homosexual expression, including a loving, committed relationship and 2) this condemnation is sound. As such he has committed himself to celibacy, unless (or until) he develops an attraction to the opposite sex. In this eloquent, fascinating book, Hill recounts his struggles as a homosexual Christian and gives an apologia for his current position. His struggle is two-fold: despite much prayer and pleading, he has not experienced a dramatic reversal of his sexual orientation, so he continues to be tempted by lustful feelings for other men. But because he believes it would be wrong to act on them, he experiences intense loneliness as well as shame. Given this two-front struggle, readers will wonder why he does not simply change his stance and enter a committed homosexual relationship. Why continue to abide by behavioral restrictions which most of our society views as outdated and puritanical anyway? The simple reason is that Hill believes the Gospel to be true: it reveals the truth about why God created the universe, including human beings, and what He intends for them. Because of that, the biblical condemnation of homosexuality is not arbitrary and tyrannical, but in fact a reflection of the way things ought to be in God's creation. If you're instructing someone how to use a car it is not arbitrary or tyrannical to insist that they must fill the tank with gasoline instead of vinegar: cars were made to run on gasoline, not vinegar. Even though this is a short book, Hill quite convincingly argues that the biblical narrative does, indeed, frown upon homosexual relationships.

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