appeared in the leading newsmagazines: *Time, Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report.* We have also had coverage in the national Christian media, such as *Christianity Today* and *Charisma*. The subsequent media feeding frenzy has kept us up late at night and found us rising early to do live radio interviews in other time zones. I believe, however, that this brief season of unprecedented activity has been well worth the inconvenience.

Most important, I believe the gay community has suffered an enormous blow to its massive public relations strategies. To most Americans, the very concept of "ex-gay" is confusing—something manufactured by the religious right. In *Time* magazine, Margaret Carlson typified this response at the end of her cynical "Praying Away the Gay" article: "Maybe the lame walk and homosexuals become heterosexuals, but I doubt it." [1] This post-modern mindset leaves no room for the miraculous. Miracles? "No way!" Change? "Impossible!" But Carlson wasn't alone in her diatribe against homosexuals.

Winnie Stachelberg, the political director of the Human Rights Campaign, called the ads "an unprecedented wave of anti gay attack" and warned "the strategy is going to backfire." [2] But it didn't backfire. To the contrary, it caught the gay community completely off guard. Here's why...

First, the gay community has rested on its enormous public relations successes of recent years. Millions of people have swallowed the "born gay" rhetoric. In fact, the few who question the so-called "gay gene theory" are dismissed as uninformed, bigoted, or homophobic. Homosexual lobbyists and spokespersons have been so successful in foisting this misguided notion on the public that many now accept inborn homosexuality as common truth.

Since the nationwide Exodus ads, these gay assumptions have come under increasing secular media scrutiny. The Carlson & Stachelberg comments notwithstanding, the gay community's press relations machinery has been put to the ultimate test, fumbling miserably in an attempt to respond to the ads.

To most journalists, the "discovery" of thousands of ex-gays is like finding a lost tribe in the Amazon! "Are you for real?" seemed to be the question on many minds. Dumbfounded and confused, journalists and their readers were faced with the inevitable question, "Are ex-gays for real?"

The questions from incredulous journalists at our conference demonstrated their sense of bewilderment. One mystified TV reporter asked former gay activist Joe Dallas, "Do you really prefer sex with a woman now?"

The end result of all this publicity—good and bad—has been to raise questions. Many people thought they had a handle on the "gay issue." Now, they're not so sure. "Is it possible," they now wonder, "that we have been duped by the gay community?" That, of course, is the underlying, though unspoken question. And that is precisely the reason the gay community came unhinged by a simple picture of people who have been set free by the power of Jesus Christ.

The advertising sent gay public relations strategists scurrying to devise a quick rebuttal to the ex-gay ads. One political analyst charged that we felt "marginalized unfairly." The interpretation: "We are frustrated and disgruntled." But the best the gay community had to offer could not reverse the damage done by the Exodus ads.

One pro-gay media release boldly declared, "I am here to say these 'ex-gay' ministries don't work." Never mind that the Exodus ad showed scores of people set free—a glaring reminder that change is always possible through Jesus Christ.

Another tactic played out in editorials across the country: "I was raised in a devoutly Christian home...that same Christian upbringing almost killed me." [3] The interpretation: "Christians can't be trusted...Christians are bigots....Christians have no compassion." But none of the arguments—if they can be called that—ever dealt with the fundamental question that the ads raised, "Can homosexuals change?" And no matter how hard the gay community denies it, the photo of ex-gays will be emblazoned on the memories of the American public.

The Convenience of Denial

After Jesus healed a man born blind, the Pharisees tried to discredit the transforming miracle. The man who was healed was battered by questions from these religious leaders. Finally, the man replied, "Whether he (Jesus) is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was born blind but now I see!"[4]

A changed life is the greatest proof of the reality of the Cross. That a handful of people drift back into an immoral lifestyle does not negate the truth of change in thousands of others. Perhaps more disconcerting, a life changed by Jesus Christ will inevitably judge those who refuse His lordship in their own lives. This is precisely why Stephen was stoned to death during the opening days of the early church.

The book of Acts tells us the people who were listening to Stephen were "furious...they covered their ears and yelled at the top of their voices."[5] What had Stephen done to deserve the death penalty? Nothing. He simply told the truth. And denial—like covering our ears or closing our minds to the obvious—is a mechanism people often employ when they don't want to come face to face with truth issues. So they adjust their beliefs to their behavior rather than the other way around.

Today, we live in a society that loves darkness more than light. And the apostle Paul tells us, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers..." [6] It was no mistake that the theme for this year's conference was "Standing Firm in the Truth." As recent national events suggest, truth is under attack. From the highest office in the land to school rooms, board rooms, and in families.

Trust in authority—any authority—is under assault. As former Supreme Court nominee, Richard Bork, noted, "As behavior worsens, the community adjusts its standards so that conduct once thought reprehensible is no longer deemed so."[7] How else can we explain our society's nonchalance for sexual impropriety in the White House?

The notion of absolute values is open to debate in our society. The "new absolutes" have replaced