

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

Chapter ~ Three

"A fire!" Paul removed his arms from around David, leaned him against the door jam and scanned the moonlit area. There were some old wood pallets and different sized cable spools, but nothing small enough to get a fire started. He darted back toward the truck, hoping to find something. He did find a cardboard box but, rain soaked, it tore as he pulled on it. Then Paul grabbed the blood soaked rag off the dash, and found a map and some loose papers in the glove box. Behind the seat was a grocery sack. Paul pulled a six-pack from the sack and threw it on the seat. Stuffing the map, bloody rag, and loose papers into the sack, he dashed back to the concrete bunker.

Paul checked on David as he dropped the sack just inside the doorway. Turning around, he went back onto the moonlit landing and retrieved a wooden pallet. Too large to start a fire with, Paul leaned the wooden pallet against the wall of the bunker and started to do roundhouse kicks. All the years of martial arts paid off as he skillfully used the force of his feet to dismantle the pallet. Paul stacked the broken pieces of wood into a teepee-shaped pile about four feet from the door, then grabbed for the paper sack filled with dry paper. As he stuffed the paper into the center of the wood, he anticipated the warming fire. The first match blew out—only three left. Carefully, he lit another match and cupped it in his hands, moving it toward the paper. The paper caught fire and started to burn, the blood soaked rag started to smolder, the damp wood only let off steam.

Paul watched the fire burn itself out. "Give me a break!" he yelled up toward the cold star filled night sky. With two matches left, no dry paper and only wet wood, there was nothing more he could do. Paul jumped up and started kicking the rest of the pallet apart. With one hard kick he snapped the two-by-four brace holding the slats of the pallet. Then he beat his fist against the big steel tank. Exhausted and beaten; drained of all hope, he leaned his forehead against the tank. *God, just get me through this. I can handle my own journey but David . . .*

When Paul pushed himself away from the tank he noticed how his fist had dented it. He hadn't displayed this much anger when he found out about testing positive for HIV. He looked again at the damage; vandalism had not been his intention. The **FLAMMABLE** sign was now bent and distorted. Paul walked back around the corner and sat on the floor next to David. He could see the fog of his breath as he forced out the words, "Please God, with all my heart, I pray that you take me in place of David. Just show me a . . ." Then with a sharp intake of breath he yelled, "Flammable!"

Paul ran back around the corner of the bunker; the tank he had taken his frustrations out on was the fuel tank that ran the generator. He looked around for a spigot to drain

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some fuel out of. There was only a metal fuel line running from the bottom of the tank in through the concrete wall. Paul pulled on it would not budge. He stood on his toes and looked on top of the tank; he could see the fill cap. Twisting it off, he instantly got a whiff of diesel fumes. Now another dilemma, no way to get the fuel out of the tank. Without even thinking, Paul moved as though he was being spirit guided. He went back inside the bunker, bent down and grabbed the torn undershirt from the pile of clothes he had stripped from David. Back at the fuel tank, he twisted the shirt, making it serve as a rope and let it down through the fill hole on top of the tank. As he lowered it, he noticed how much blood covered the shirt. Instantly, the shirt got heavy as the fuel soaked into it.

"Thank you, God," Paul said, pulling the shirt from the tank. Once back at the small pile of wood, Paul rang out the shirt and diesel splashed onto the wood. He returned to the tank once again for more fuel, just to be sure the fire would not again go out. Paul threw the diesel soaked shirt onto the small wood pile, then reached into his pocket and pulled out the matches. Only two were left. Squatting down, he lit the first match and flipped it into the wood. It did not light.

Paul expected a huge flare-up, but this was diesel fuel, not gasoline. Paul lit the last match and slowly moved it to the shirt. The edge of the shirt ignited and the flame started to spread. It took a few minutes for the fire to take hold. Grabbing the two-by-four he had kicked in half, he put it on the fire, and then rolled a cable spool up against the backside of the fire.

The spool helped reflect the heat and light of the fire toward the bunker. Steam rose from the concrete wall as the heat from the fire evaporated the rain water. The concrete building with the fire burning between it and a huge cable spool served as a huge reflector oven. Paul made a pillow for David out of some clothes, and then went out into the cold to gather up some more wood. David was sleeping hard and deep.

As the sun peeked over the horizon and the sky burst into a brilliant orange, David awoke and all he could remember was shaking uncontrollably while trying to get help via his computer. He vividly recalled the last words on the blue screen: **SENATOR BRIAN BUCK LEADS POLLS IN RACE FOR RE-ELECTION. POLLS SHOW 64% OF VOTERS FAVOR HIM. CHARGES ON CHILD ABUSE AND DRUG SALES TO MINORS FALSE. HIS RECORD IS CLEAN.**

David lay still trying to concentrate on the day before. He took note that he was in sweats that were too small and saw the red coals of the fire just outside the door. *Let's see? I Picked up Paul at the airport, went to lunch, got a page, then we came up here to get the television translator back online. Paul told me he's HIV positive. It started to rain. I got soaked. Cut my damn hand. Went back to the truck. It got colder. Let the battery go dead. Tried to call for help. Went back to the truck and was colder. Took my computer and tried the Clipper Chip. It worked. Tapped into a wire service, maybe*

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United Press International? Started to shake and could not get help. Then I wake up in Paul's clothes. I know it's Paul's fault; after all he's gay. But I can't pin the weak battery on him. I've been jump starting the truck for the last week. David moved a little, his body stiff from the hard floor. He got to his feet and stepped out the door.

Trying to loosen his neck by twisting it from side to side, David caught a glimpse of Paul standing on the edge of the cliff, silhouetted by the rising sun, his arms out, hands turned palms up. His shadow stretched all the way back across the landing. As David stood there sandwiched between the fire on his right side and the sun on his left, and this image of Paul, time seemed to stop. Something unexplainable was in the air. *What is he doing? Is he going to commit suicide? Or is he just checking out the view?*

David moved slowly toward Paul, not wanting to startle him. When he got close, he could hear mumbling. Paul was praying. David stood quietly a few feet behind Paul. Like the electric feeling just before a thunderstorm, David felt a tingling sensation run from his neck down his arms to his hands. Then his whole spine trembled. The sense of something supernatural scared him; after all he had prayed many times before, and this aura emanating around Paul had never come over him. Uncomfortable with the spiritual feeling, David sought more rational explanations. *Boy, I must really be chilled. No, it can't be that, not with the sun and fire. I'm just nervous. That's it. Praying on the side of a mountain is kind of weird.*

Not wanting to confront or invade Paul's privacy, David started to ease backward. In that same moment, Paul turned around in a graceful motion. Their eyes met. Paul's essence of calm and the peaceful look in his eyes, made David realize that Paul was not the same person he had known for a good part of his life.

"Good morning," said Paul as he lifted his hand above his head. "Bless him, Father, in your name and the name of your son, Jesus. And thanks to the Holy Spirit for the guidance last night."

David felt like cold water had been thrown on him. Falling to his knees, he could not disavow his own faith. He recognized God's presence. But after a few moments, he felt awkward and uncomfortable. Never again would he be quite the same. Not knowing how to react, David stood up, turned away, and said, "I'd better get my own clothes on." He walked back mesmerized, not sure of what took place, wanting to forget the whole ordeal.

Back in the bunker, his clothes had dried over the propped open door where Paul had neatly hung them. First he pulled on his pants, but then stopped. *I wonder where my undershirt is? Hey, that looks like a piece of it.* David kicked at the blood covered four-inch wide torn piece. *Oh well, Paul must have used it on my cut hand.* He dressed slowly while contemplating what to say and do next. *Paul probably wants my help when*

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he starts to die of AIDS. How could he do this to me? We were such good friends once, but that was before I knew he was . . . But Paul saved my life. I need to at least say thanks for building the fire. David took his time putting Paul's clothes back into his suitcase and then moved to the terminal board where his computer was still connected. As he disconnected his computer from the modular plug, David smugly remembered how he had bought the stolen Clipper Chip. The airman he bought the black box from needed a fix; the risk both of them had taken was huge. David was glad the Airman was all strung out, he'd never be able to rat him out. The Clipper Chip was his and no one knew he had it. He couldn't remember if he had told Paul about the Clipper Chip last night. As David was packing the computer behind the seat of his truck he saw Paul approaching.

No matter how much he hated the thought of Paul being with other men he knew he owed him "You thirsty?" David asked, as he stepped back from the cab of the truck.

"Yes," Paul replied.

"All I have is a six-pack."

"I don't think my body can handle it," Paul said laughing. "Just like our old fishing trips."

David reached back into the cab and grabbed the six-pack of beer. He tore a can from the plastic retainer, cracked the seal and took a big gulp. The beer had just thawed out to the point where there was a little ice in it. "Ah! That tastes great. Sure you don't want one?"

"Well, my throat's awfully dry. A beer does sound good. You talked me into it."

David tore another beer from the retainer and handed it to Paul, a gesture once common to them. They both gulped, not saying a word. Both had become dehydrated through the night's ordeal. "Ah, that hit the spot," said David. Wiping his mouth, then popping open another beer. "Want another?"

"Sure, why not. The beer really does hit the spot. I didn't realize I was that thirsty." Drinking this beer a little slower, Paul turned around and looked over the site. He noticed that the only evidence of the fire was a few red-hot embers. The sun crept above the horizon and beat on the back of his neck, its penetrating warmth making him groggy. His lack of sleep started to take effect. He slowly drank the second beer, deciding to tell David the real reason for coming when he finished the second beer.

David went to the front of the truck, popped the hood open and started to take the battery out. He figured that he could hook it up in the radio bunker since the diesel generator was now running, charging up the rest of the equipment. In a couple of hours,

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the battery should be charged enough to start the truck. He grunted as he pulled the battery from the truck. On his way to the bunker and not even looking toward Paul, he mumbled, "I owe you for last night. Thanks."

"I have another thing to tell you," Paul said. The beer had relaxed him and had taken the edge off.

"Wait till I get this battery hooked up. Then we'll talk." David continued toward the bunker, straining from the weight of the battery.

After a few minutes David emerged from the building and walked right up to Paul and said in a cocky tone, "Well, what else do you need to tell me?"

"Maybe you want to sit first," suggested Paul.

"Sure, let's go sit on the tailgate."

Both men quietly walked to the back of the truck. David lowered the tailgate and they both sat down. The sun had worked itself a little higher in the sky and beat onto their backs. Paul didn't know if it was the warmth of the sun or the alcohol, but he felt as if he could fall asleep right there. His weariness fostered an I-don't-care attitude. *Whatever David decides to do, even if he wants to turn me in, it just doesn't matter any longer. Even if I have to spend the rest of my life in jail, at least I'll know I did the right thing.*

Looking at David straight on, Paul hit him with the rest of the news. "When I got tested for HIV, I used your name and Social Security number. I know it was wrong but I just wanted to hide my identity, being a priest and all. The hospital has David McIntosh on record as being HIV positive. I have tried to straighten things out, but they need you in person and some documents to prove your identity. I will pay your airfare or whatever it takes, but you will have to go in person to the San Francisco Hospital." Once the words were out, Paul held his breath.

David finally spoke. "Is that it?"

Expecting some kind of outburst from David, Paul simply answered, "Yes."

David was more curious how Paul obtained his Social Security number than he was angry. He had not used it for almost twenty years, since the day a Dishonorable Discharge showed up in the mail. He too was hiding his identity but for a different reason. It was ironic—two friends both covering up something in the past. "How did you get my Social Security number?" David asked.

Paul was stunned and lost for words. Last night David had been incoherent from the

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hypothermia, but now why wasn't David even concerned about how he'd forged his name?

"I asked, how'd you get my Social Security number?"

Paul could tell that David was covering up something.

"Can't you hear? I asked how the hell did you get my Social Security number?"

"Remember that ten-speed bike you sold to me when we just started our sophomore year?" Paul answered.

"Yeah, kind of. I think that was when I got my first motorcycle and thought I was too old for a bike. Yeah, now I remember, you also wanted to get a motorcycle and your dad almost flipped out when you asked him. That was the bike you rode to football practice when everyone else drove their cars, cycles, or rode the bus. You looked weird riding my bike in high school. Anyhow, what's that got to do with my Social Security number?" David asked.

"You engraved your Social Security number into the frame."

"Oh," David said. Paul's answer was too simple. Still skeptical, David pressed for more information. "You still got that old bike?"

"Yes I do. It sat in my parents' garage throughout the war, and then some. Nine years ago I took it on campus to get around, when I was studying to become a priest. I probably looked weird riding it at college too. When I get back to the monastery, I'll get rid of it. A priest riding an old bike must really be a sight."

"I can't believe you still have that thing. You are really a cheapskate."

"I suppose you're right about that," said Paul. "But I mainly kept it because it was kind of a keepsake, reminding me of all the good times we once had."

David was quiet for a while, also remembering the closeness and youth they had shared. "You know Paul, I owe you for last night but I just can't understand how you can be a fag."

Paul hated *that* word! "I'll make you a deal, David. If you never use the word fag again, then we're even for me helping you out last night."

"Sure, okay. But don't get so uptight. Just let me know what all your buddies like to be called. I surely wouldn't want to hurt their little feelings. I heard thirty percent of priests

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are fags. Oops, I mean queer. Anyway I saw on TV where all these queer priests are molesting children. Are you part of that?"

Paul had become somewhat tolerant of ignorance, and knew to choose his words carefully. Now was not the time to defend himself or the priesthood. "You see, David, when you use such strong language it's only hatred speaking. I didn't contact you to invite your scorn. I wouldn't have contacted you at all if I hadn't used your name and now need your help in clearing the record."

"Hey, I don't hate you. I just can't figure out what happened to turn you into a ..." David swallowed hard and searched for the right word. "Homosexual."

"I wish I could explain it to you but I am not sure myself. I've read books about it, been to a couple of shrinks, and watch every talk show host try to tell me what my problem is. I'm more confused now than ever. Today there is so much hate toward gay people, it makes it impossible to deal with the real issue of self discipline."

"Homosexuals should just stay in the closet and keep their big mouths shut. People are tired of them saying its normal." David then took a big swig of beer.

"If that's really how you feel, and you believe thirty percent of priests are homosexual and are molesting children, what should we do? Continue hiding in the closet?" Paul paused. *David is just like everyone else. To him homosexuals and child molesters are one and the same. But it's okay. I just need to keep from losing my temper and accept his ignorance.* But Paul just couldn't help it; he did lose his temper. "Where the heck, did you get the thirty percent figure from?"

David felt like he was being put on the spot. Besides, he never cared for priests. Determined to stand his ground, he replied. "Both the paper and news said thirty percent of you guys are gay. I also saw on a TV talk show where thousands of priests have molested children and most of the kids are little boys. So I know it is true. You tell me. You're the one living with a bunch of these guys. Is it true?"

"David, now is not the time for me to go into all the evil that comes from bearing false witness. TV and the rest of the media have twisted the truth. They no longer report, they sensationalize. And it's all wickedness. I just want you not to hate me, or anyone. Hatred will destroy you. Don't become a pawn to false information," warned Paul.

"I asked you a question. Is it true or not?" demanded David

Paul felt a burst of energy and could see that he was not going anyplace with this conversation. He had hoped talking to his once best friend would be easier than talking to his father. It was important to make sure David had all the facts. With so little truth left

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in the world, Paul knew this might be impossible. The papers only printed what they wanted and television only aired the most bazaar events. By running the same stories over and over, they distort the facts, conditioning society into thinking one or two isolated events happened more than it actually did. Now, David was questioning Paul's true commitment to the priesthood, another result of the unconscionable media. Almost all sources of the news media had jumped on the bandwagon to contribute to the moral demise of society. It was only logical to attack the good in society first, such as the clergy. When was the last time we read or heard about all the good priests or even a good politician? All the good in society is being suppressed, giving society a sense of hopelessness. Hopelessness was one of Satan's tools.

"David, I think the whole country is being misguided by the facts and statistics. I believe an evil power greater than us is behind it. You are asking me if my fellow priests are gay, or at least thirty percent of them. In all truthfulness, I have not met another priest that professed to be a homosexual. I am sure that there are, just like I have heard about some being child molesters. These priests are just men, like all priests are, but they have fallen to temptation. My heart, just like yours, goes out to any child or person who is victimized by anyone, let alone by a priest. But I do believe that the news media and talk show gamut twists and distorts the facts."

"So, what are you saying? That all the reporting about priests is false, all those cases are made up?"

"It's the thirty percent statistic I question. I have read the same statistic about Boy Scout leaders and day care operators. Where do they get their facts? That's my point."

David felt he was winning the debate because Paul was admitting there were bad priests. David enjoyed seeing the self-righteous people in the world being torn apart, crumbling under the scrutiny of a talk show host or reporter. Now he was doing the same to Paul. A victorious smirk came upon David's face as he said, "The statistics don't matter. The facts are there, and you are admitting them. I don't see how you can support a church that allows all of this to happen. I think you are just covering up, just like the rest of your church."

Arguments disgusted Paul, but he was forced to continue. "David, the statistics do matter. They are the tools used to deceive the world. People are fed the incorrect statistics, they believe them to be true, and then people draw conclusions based on incorrect information."

"So what if the statistics are off a little?"

Paul had had this argument before. It was the main reason he had left Jeffrey, his male friend and lover. Jeffrey intentionally distorted the facts with information such as, "Half of

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all men have homosexual tendencies." Jeffrey felt that feeding society this false information strengthened the homosexual agenda, while at the same time made homosexuality more acceptable. It was ironic—the deception Jeffrey used to support his lifestyle was now David's weapon in tearing down a moral institution—the priesthood. The process was in motion. By the constant chipping away at the truth, would these little lies that both Jeffrey and David used lead to the collapse of a society? Paul lost sleep over these falsehoods, and believed them to be the tools of the antichrist. "Okay, David. You'll have to bear with me on this. It's a little hard to explain. Let me ask you this, what percentage of priests do you think are homosexual?"

"I just told you, thirty percent," snapped David.

"Now, what percentage of all men, not just priests, would you say are homosexual?" asked Paul.

"Well, I guess something like ten percent. I think that's the figure I've heard or read," answered David.

Paul was ready to prove his point. "Well then, you tell me where the twenty percent difference comes from. Why would there be such a difference in the figures?"

David thought for quite some time before he replied, "I would have to research that. I don't have an answer right now."

"Okay, let me see if I can help you. How many men that you have known, including our classmates and guys you've met in the military were gay that you know of?"

David saw that Paul was trying to trap him so he took longer to answer this question. "All I can think of is you."

"Out of how many men?" Paul asked.

"Let's see. There were about three hundred forty in our graduating class, about fifty I knew on base, plus about fifty more I have worked with over the years."

"But you just stated ten percent of men are gay. That would amount to about forty five of those men you've known"

"There must be a mistake with the statistics somewhere. Anyway, it doesn't mean crap about how many there are!"

"David, you're wrong. Most people draw their conclusions from what they hear, and when they are fed the wrong information they come up with the wrong conclusions. God

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regarded the truth so important that He put it into one of his commandments and it holds equal weight with the others. What you are doing is bearing a false witness. Ignorance has led to wars. Society is changed by this continual barrage of erroneous statistics and information."

David took a big gulp of beer and then said, "Paul, you're losing me. I still don't see your point. You are a homosexual and you're a priest. You can't change those facts."

Paul wished he could explain himself better. "Let me give you an example. Let's say you have children and you have two schools you can send them to. The first school doesn't teach morality or personal values. You look at all the kids there and they seem fine, except you notice that they are all egocentric and selfish. They are taught to only take care of themselves. Now the second school teaches just the opposite; they teach the children to love and help their classmates. But then you hear a rumor that thirty percent of the teachers at the second school are child molesters. Which school would you choose?"

"Oh, that's simple." David snapped impulsively. "The first school. And they should shut down the second school and shoot all the teachers."

"Let's do exactly that. Shut down the second school and shoot all the teachers. Even the seventy percent that were not child molesters?"

"Wait a second. You're not going to trick me that easily," David said smugly. "I meant just shoot the teachers that were child molesters."

Paul was tired, and realized he had used a poor analogy. "Suppose ten years down the line some new facts come to light, that the percentage of child molesters, God forbid, were the same at all schools."

David took another long, swig. Besides the alcohol slowing his thought process, he hated being lectured. "So, what's your point?"

"Now let's suppose the school is a church. You've shut it down and shot the preachers. Now where does society get its spiritual direction?"

David felt both tricked and angry. "I can't believe you. Here you are, some fag. Sorry, I mean gay priest and you're trying to preach to me about spiritual guidance. Your being a priest is a joke. You're a queer and you have the guts to preach to me. What a hypocrite you are."

"Hold on a second!" Paul turned with a glare that would stop a train. "I told you before that I personally do not know of any other homosexual priests. Though, I'm sure there

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are some."

David saw Paul's face get beet red; he lifted the beer in an antagonizing gesture. "I'm right no matter how you preach it."

Paul took the hint. "Just forget it. I'll go wait by the cliff until the truck battery charges." He jumped from the tailgate and started to walk away.

David had to get the last jab in. "Can't face the truth, can you?"

Paul spun around. It took a great deal of strength but he managed to speak in a mild tone. "You know David, you knew me when we played football and I gave my one hundred percent."

"Yeah, you did. You were the best on the football field."

"And when I fought for our country, I gave it all I had."

"I know that. You have the medals to prove it." David downed the last of his beer. *Paul's trying to change the subject. This time he won't trick me.*

"Years ago, when I became a priest, I decided to give a hundred percent plus. Although it's hard and I have slipped up a few times, I am a good priest."

"Yeah, a good gay priest!" The alcohol was helping David twist the knife. He could now speak his mind. Not like last night when he almost felt sorry about Paul being HIV positive.

After Paul's ordeal with his father, he had prayed that David would be more understanding. He still had to ask for David's forgiveness; he knew the words would mean little but said them anyway. "David, I hope that you can find it in your heart to forgive me for using your name on that medical report."

"Sure, I can forgive you for that," David said slurring the words. "But you're such a phony, playing this high and mighty act and being a fag at the same time. Sorry, I mean homosexual."

"David, I told you I was a good priest I have never broken my vow of celibacy. I have been celibate for over ten years."

"I thought you told me you were a homosexual?" replied David in a much softer voice.

"I am, but I don't live the lifestyle," Paul answered.

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David felt like a complete ass when he realized this was no trick. He couldn't let Paul win this one. David came back with a quick question that was sure to trip Paul up. "What do you preach to your homosexual friends? I've heard gays have their own church and say Jesus loves them and accepts their lifestyle because the word homosexual was not in the last section of the Bible."

"I tell them the same thing I'd tell you. Most of them don't like what I preach, just like you wouldn't like it."

"What do you mean, I wouldn't like it? As long as you tell them they are sinners and going to hell, I would agree with you."

Paul knew he had to end the conversation. David would not accept his answer. When he got on this subject with some of his old friends in the gay community, it always ended in a heated debate. "I'd not be quite that hard on God's children. And maybe we should get into Christian theology at another time."

But David was on a winning streak and needed to finish one up. "Just tell me what you would preach to them and then we'll drop it."

"You promise that you will listen before you jump to a conclusion?" Paul carefully asked.

"Sure." David replied and looked Paul straight in the eyes.

Paul rubbed his temples with the tips of his fingers, chose his words carefully and then began. "First of all, that last section of the Bible you referred to is known as the New Testament. And indeed, it does not mention the word *Homosexual per se*."

David listened with only half an ear. *I know Paul and he's going to start preaching how God loves those fags. Then I'll hit him up about that Sodom and Gomorrah thing in the Bible. I'll show him that I'm not stupid. One of these days I'll read the Bible. Then I'll really be prepared. God will be proud. At least now I am standing up for his laws.*

Paul continued. "A very important part of the New Testament is that Jesus wanted us to love everyone just like he does. And yes, he does love homosexuals."

"I knew it. Here it comes." David said quietly.

"What he does not love is sin. Jesus taught 'Love the sinner, hate the sin.' And although he didn't mention the word homosexual exactly, he did say he came to earth to reinforce his Father's laws. Of course, God gave us the commandment against adultery, which Christ identified as a sin against chastity. In fact, Christ raised the commandment to

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hitherto unknown heights, demanding a response immeasurably higher from Christians than Yahweh expected of the Jews."

David butted in. "You're losing me. Can't you be a little more specific?"

Paul was weary. "Okay David. Two people having a relationship outside of marriage, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are breaking the sixth commandment: Thou shalt not commit adultery. It is sinful and to God all sin is equal."

A dead silence fell over the radio site, the calm before the storm. David's blood pressure flared. He was fighting mad. "You S.O.B. How dare you imply my living with a woman is the same as two guys living together!"

Now focused on self preservation, Paul stepped back and took a stance, an instinct from his lifelong martial arts training. Fury mixed with alcohol was a volatile combination for David. With one motion he hurled his beer can at Paul and then charged like a mad bull. Reacting with the grace of a skilled dancer, Paul's left arm deflected the beer can and he spun around. At the last moment he lowered his roundhouse kick to David's chest to avoid breaking his neck.

The blow of Paul's foot into David's chest forced all the air from his lungs and stopped him cold. David dropped to his knees, fell on his side, then lay curled up and gasping for air. Paul sprang right over David with his hand opened as a weapon, one that had been conditioned to drive through anything, even bricks.

Lying utterly helpless, David stared at Paul, silhouetted against the sun with his opened hand, cocked and ready to drive a fatal blow. Terrified, David curled up and cowered like a scorned puppy. Paul's hand moved through the air toward David, powerful and determined. In one skilled motion, his hand only inches from David's heart; he locked his powerful grip under David's armpit and lifted him to his feet.