

A REVIEW OF *QUEER EYE*, SEASON 5, EPISODE 1

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Season 5 of the Netflix series *Queer Eye* was released on June 5, 2020. Episode 1 features a number of ELCA pastors, including the Rev. Noah Hepler, who needed help in accepting his sexual identity; the Rev. Megan Rohr, the ELCA's first transgender pastor; and Bishop Guy Erwin, the ELCA's first gay bishop. This episode lifts up the LGBTQ+ lifestyle as well as what has come to be called "Queer Christianity." Because of the fact that potentially it could be seen by millions of people around the world, it is important that people know what is being promoted and how they can respond to friends and family members who see the episode and might be persuaded to accept its LGBTQ+ ideas. A link to the trailer for season 5, including episode 1, can be found [here](#).

Queer Eye is a series which features a team of five LGBTQ+ people, who are known as the Fab 5. Each of them is an expert/specialist in some field, such as cooking, fashion, and interior design. They work with individual people, giving them a makeover, redesigning their home and/or workspace, and then helping them improve some aspect of their life. Pastor Noah is the person whom the Fab 5 help in this episode.

I will begin by commenting on the Discussion Guide, which was prepared by ReconcilingWorks and ELM (Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries). These are two organizations which advocate for and are committed to the full participation of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the life and ministry of the Lutheran church. A copy of the discussion guide can be found [here](#).

Good things can be said about each of the three "Ground Rules for Engagement" in the Discussion Guide. In the First Ground Rule I agree that people are more important than definitions. If you do not know what pronoun to use, then just call that person by name. All you need to welcome someone and engage with them in conversation is their name. I agree with the concern in the Second Ground Rule to build a relationship of mutual trust and respect. A primary goal of conversation is to dismantle barriers between people. I appreciate the point in the Third Ground Rule that as people engage in conversation they might experience a new awareness of themselves and/or someone they care about. In any conversation we need to have an open heart and mind. We need to be learning and growing our whole lives. I can also understand the emphasis in the Third Ground Rule upon self care. People need to take care of themselves – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually – if they are going to be able to engage in these difficult conversations in a healthy way.

But immediately below these Ground Rules there is a quotation from Scripture, which I believe is being misused. The verse being quoted is 2 Corinthians 5: 17 – "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." I assume that the intended interpretation is that the old that passes away is traditional views of human sexuality as well as all the guilt and shame that is being felt by those who claim to have been abused by the church and therefore are struggling with their sexual and gender identity. I assume

that the new that comes is the full acceptance of all forms of gender identity and the full inclusion of people of all sexual and gender identities within the life of the church.

The problem with that interpretation is that it does not square with other things said by the same person (the apostle Paul) to the same group of people (the church in Corinth). Following the principle of letting Scripture interpret Scripture, we need to understand 2 Corinthians 5: 17 in the light of 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11. These three verses in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians list several examples of wrongful behavior, including two terms that refer to same-sex sexual behavior. Then Paul says, "This is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." We need to understand 2 Corinthians 5: 17 in terms of what was intended by the person who wrote it, not in a way that supports our own pre-determined agenda. Being a new creation, having the old pass away, and experiencing the new does not mean my accepting my gender identity, whatever it may be, and my acting according to my desires, impulses, and attractions, whatever they may be. Instead it refers to the forgiveness of sins, the breaking of the power of the hold of sin in my life, and my experiencing all the love, joy, peace, hope, and grace that God has to give.

There are six things that I would now like to say about Episode 1 of Season 5 of *Queer Eye*.

First, I am very sorry that Pastor Noah grew up in a home and church environment that was so negative and repressive. I thank God that there are many congregations that hold to traditional views that are not negative and repressive like the one he grew up in. I thank God that there are many congregations that hold to traditional views not to repress people, but to bring people into the life-giving way of Jesus Christ.

Second, we have a stunning example of what is called "queer hermeneutics" in Pastor Noah's telling about the healing of the centurion's servant, as recorded in Luke 7. The NRSV says in verse 2, "A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death." Following the principles of queer hermeneutics, Pastor Noah translates the word as "beloved" or "boyfriend," meaning that the centurion and the servant were in a same-sex sexual relationship. So rather than the centurion's concern for his servant being an example of the caring spirit and high moral quality of this Roman soldier, which would lead some Jewish elders to speak to Jesus on his behalf, because he had shown great care for the Jewish people by building a synagogue for them (verses 4-5), those who practice queer hermeneutics twist Scripture to say what they want Scripture to say in favor of same-sex sexual behavior.

I cannot imagine that Jewish elders, who were steeped in the law, would advocate for an official of an occupying foreign army who was having a same-sex sexual relationship with a servant. Jesus clearly defined marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman in which two people become one flesh (Matthew 19: 4-6). And though Jesus did get into trouble with the Pharisees for breaking the sabbath, he never did cancel the Old Testament moral law, such as in Leviticus 18: 22 and 20: 13, which clearly forbid same-sex sexual behavior. It is preposterous to me to say that Jesus did not say anything about the same-sex sexual relationship between the centurion and his servant, but instead healed the servant. Therefore, Jesus must have been okay with same-sex sexual relationships. Such a violation of the clear meaning of Scripture in order to promote one's own agenda is unworthy for anyone who would claim the authority to teach the Scriptures.

Third, in the episode one of the Fab 5 tells how he had been hurt by the church. He still has negative feelings about the church, but he says that he would be happy to help another person who would then promote a different kind of Christianity that does not hurt LGBTQ+ people. People who hold to traditional views of human sexuality need to realize that many LGBTQ+ people have been hurt by the church. We who hold to traditional views need to share our views in such a way that we do not come across as angry, judgmental, and/or afraid. It is not because we are against LGBTQ+ people, but instead it is because we care about and are concerned for LGBTQ+ people that we share our traditional views. LGBTQ+ people need to know that we care about them. They need to know our love for them.

Fourth, I am concerned about the way in which – in the redesign of the church – rainbow lights are placed along the side aisles, to add color as well as to celebrate Noah's queerness. Also, the church is decorated with flowers in the colors of the rainbow flag on the altar. Decorations in the church are to bring glory to God, not to celebrate me. Anything placed on the altar should be an expression of God's great love and gift of Himself to us. The altar and anything on the altar are not to promote a personal agenda or to point to me. Making me rather than the Lord the focus is a form of idolatry.

Fifth, Noah explains to the member of Fab 5 that both of them had been hurt by the church. On behalf of the church, Noah apologizes for the hurt that had been caused for the member of Fab 5 by the church's refusing to be LGBTQ+ affirming. As explained above, we who hold traditional views need to make sure that we communicate that it is our love and concern for LGBTQ+ people that leads us to share our traditional views. But we also need to remember what Martin Luther said so eloquently that the Bible comforts the afflicted, but it also afflicts the comfortable. Sometimes God's Word will make me uncomfortable. It will convict me of sin. Hebrews 4: 12 says that it is "sharper than any two-edged sword." Objects with sharp edges can hurt. I cannot expect that God's Word will never hurt. It is neither appropriate nor helpful for me to feel that I have to apologize every time God's Word hurts someone.

Sixth, just as I was troubled by the rainbow lights in the sanctuary that celebrated Pastor Noah's queerness and the rainbow colored flowers on the altar that promoted the LGBTQ+ agenda, so I am troubled by the wording of Pastor Noah's sending at the end of the service. "Go in peace. Be fabulous in the Lord."/"Thanks be to God." The purpose of the sending is to give glory to God and to strengthen my commitment to service and ministry. It is not to focus on how fabulous I am. Whether it is the decorations in the sanctuary, the items on the altar, or the wording of the sending, making me rather than the Lord the focus is idolatrous.