

Duck and Cover -- December 23, 2013

[Phil Robertson](#) is a reality show star on the popular television series Duck Dynasty. He recently made some interesting comments. In a GQ interview, Mr. Robertson was asked, "What, in your mind, is sinful?" He responded with this:

Start with homosexual behavior and just morph out from there. Bestiality, sleeping around with this woman and that woman and that woman and those men. [...] We never, ever judge someone on who's going to heaven, hell. That's the Almighty's job. We just love 'em, give 'em the good news about Jesus - whether they're homosexuals, drunks, terrorists. We let God sort 'em out later, you see what I'm saying?

Phil Robertson

The GLBT community (and many others) weren't particularly happy about these statements. Mr. Robertson made some effort to separate his beliefs from the way that he treats people on a personal level, but his comments are pretty difficult to sugar-coat:

1. He implied that homosexuality can lead to bestiality and promiscuity, and
2. Equates homosexuals with drunks and terrorists.

It is human nature to support statements and actions made by others that align with our own beliefs, and to condemn behaviors that don't. This has a tendency to shut down meaningful dialogue and to corrupt the logical analysis of opposing viewpoints. In the interest of full disclosure, I'll state for the record that I personally support gay rights and I don't believe that homosexuality is sin. (Technically speaking, I don't believe that *anything* is sin, in that sin is defined as the act of violating God's will. Given my own lack of religious belief, I would say that the notion of sin is meaningless. However, I certainly believe in humanistic morality, in that human beings are intellectually capable of distinguishing right from wrong, e.g., hurting others is wrong, etc.)

After he made these statements, Mr. Robertson was suspended from his show. Free speech advocates then leapt to his defense, saying that he was being denied the right to speak openly about his beliefs. Let's examine this for a moment.

Free speech is defined as, "The political right to communicate one's opinions and ideas using one's body and property to anyone who is willing to receive them." This includes the right to share ideas that are non-mainstream and/or particularly odious. So, in this country, we are free to say basically *anything*. What some people seem to forget, however, is that while you are free to say what you want, the things you say can have consequences. The A&E network ¹⁾ decided that his statements did not align with the beliefs of the network. Therefore, Mr. Robertson was suspended from the show. A&E did not take away Mr. Robertson's right of free speech. *He is still free to say whatever he wants.*

I find this very easy to understand. I can even give you a personal example.

I work for an insurance company which provides services to the underprivileged (low income, some disabilities.) On a personal level, I am very proud of what my employer does. But, let's say that one day, I happened to wake up and decide that I just didn't like the people my company served. Maybe I decided that they weren't deserving of the services being provided for them. Further, let's say that I decided to begin speaking out against this community. I am quite certain that I would find myself unemployed very quickly, and *rightly so*. My employer would have no obligation to support a position

completely at odds with their mission. The notion that I would direct derogatory statements toward the community my company serves, then be shocked and upset when they let me go, is ridiculous.

Although I disagree completely with what Mr. Robertson said, I do believe that he should be free to say it, and that is the crux of the matter. His right of free speech has not been violated. To those who are angrily defending Mr. Robertson, you'd do well to remember that in a democratic country rich in diversity, personal rights are not extended only to those who think and believe exactly as you do.

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Mr. Robertson's employer, in the context of the Duck Dynasty show

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