

# Faith In America

Don't Accept Bigotry As Religious Truth

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Lesson to be learned from Helms' dark legacy

While Faith In America respects this time of loss for former Sen. Jesse Helms' family, we are compelled to remind Americans that there is a lesson to be learned from Helms' dark legacy that for years promoted religion-based prejudice and discrimination against those that were different than him.

*In a 1995 radio broadcast he remarked, "Homosexuals are weak, morally sick wretches."*

*In a 1994 letter to Patsy Clarke of Raleigh, N.C., whose son had died of AIDS, Helms wrote "As for homosexuality, the Bible judges it, I do not."*

"These typical statements by Helms clearly demonstrate how he used the Bible to justify a message of hostility, condemnation and discrimination toward gays and lesbians," said Faith In America Executive Director Brent Childers.

"He clearly judged and condemned gay and lesbian individuals as morally depraved, while trying to conceal his hostility, bigotry and prejudice behind his own personal interpretation of scriptural text."

Childers said it may never be known if Helms truly believed gay and lesbians were condemned by God or if he once truly believed the Bible condemned interracial marriages when in 1968 he told Duke University students who staged a vigil in response to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination that *"They should ask their parents if it would be all right for their son or daughter to marry a Negro."*

"What we do know is that he was wrong in 1968 to condemn interracial marriage and he was wrong to condemn gays and lesbians," he said. "Inflicting harm on others in the name of religion is at the heart of Helms' dark legacy. People like Helms don't seem to recognize the very real harm they cause, especially to impressionable teenagers."

And while Helms in the past may have promoted bigotry and hatred because of his own personal misunderstanding and prejudices, Childers said it is clear today that many elected officials and those seeking public office promote hatred and bigotry toward gay and lesbians for no other other reason than political gain.

"These politicians are writing a legacy far darker than even that of Helms," he added.

*Faith in America is a civil rights advocacy organization whose mission is to end legal and spiritual discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people in America and to gain full and equal rights for those citizens. Faith in America is the only national LGBT rights advocacy organization lead by a straight ally. Faith In America is not a religious organization but works to educate Americans about the harm caused by religion-based bigotry against GLBT individuals by connecting the historical dots of discrimination and prejudice.*