

4 Truths to Remember When Dealing With Gay Church Membership

How should churches who affirm biblical truth regarding homosexuality handle gay members?

Yesterday I addressed the controversy generated by Watermark Church's decision to discipline a gay member of its congregation. The continuing debate fostered by this issue shows that it is not limited to one church or to the issue of homosexuality. While I cannot explore this complicated subject fully in a single article, I would like to offer this overview.

1. Church discipline is unpopular.

When the Watermark decision became public, the response was immediate and strongly negative. I heard people ask, "Who do they think they are? What right do they have to judge others?" Such questions are symptomatic of a culture that has defined truth as personal and subjective. Tolerance is the overriding value of our day. As a result, any attempts to hold others accountable for biblical morality will be met with derision.

In his excellent *Dallas Morning News* column, Watermark Pastor Todd Wagner stated that the church's decision "has gained much attention online. Some are confused, even hurt, and I understand why. The practice of church discipline (which is to say, loving correction) is a process that is unfamiliar to most and because of the harshness of the word 'discipline' might even be perceived as unloving, oppressive or archaic."

Christians who stand for biblical morality can expect opposition to discipline, accountability or even public statements that conflict with the tolerance ethic of our day.

2. Church discipline is biblical.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul addressed “sexual immorality among you, and such immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles, that a man has his father’s wife” (v. 1). The apostle instructed the congregation to remove the man from its fellowship (v. 5).

Jesus made clear the steps by which we are to confront sin (Matt. 18:15-17). As history shows, early Christians took such discipline very seriously. Tragically, our tolerance-based society has caused many churches to ignore this biblical imperative.

3. Church discipline should focus on all unbiblical morality, not just same-sex behavior.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul went further: “But I have written to you not to keep company with any man who is called a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner. Do not even eat with such a person” (1 Cor. 5:11). In a later list of vices we must avoid, he included idolaters, adulterers, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers as well as men who practice homosexuality (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Watermark does not single out homosexuality for spiritual discipline. Neither should any other church or disciple of Jesus. We should hold members accountable for heterosexual sin as well. Cohabiting, pornography and adultery are all unbiblical.

4. Church discipline is intended to bring about repentance and restoration.

After Paul instructed the Corinthians to discipline a man who “has his father’s wife” (1 Cor. 5:1), the man repented of his sin. As a result, the apostle encouraged the congregation to

“forgive him and comfort him, lest perhaps he might be swallowed up with excessive sorrow. Therefore I ask you to confirm your love toward him” (2 Cor. 2:7-8).

No sin exempts us from the Spirit’s transformation. After listing nine different behaviors we must avoid, Paul stated, “Such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, and you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). Our Father intends all discipline to bring correction and restoration. And all discipline is to be exercised with humility and grace.

I believe God wants to redeem this controversy by calling churches to teach and obey his truth regarding all sexuality. We must be different before the world will want what we have. As we live biblically and love graciously, others will be drawn to the Christ they see in us.

Christians are beggars helping beggars find the “bread of life” (John 6:35), knowing that whoever comes to Jesus “shall not hunger” (John 6:35). Is there a greater privilege?