

Oprah's 'Greenleaf': Christians Who Don't Support Gay Marriage Are 'Broken'

This week Oprah's mega-church drama *Greenleaf* featured not one, but two gay storylines, both regarding discipline: one was a matter of self-discipline, and the other dealt with discipline within church leadership.

In Wednesday's episode "Strange Bedfellows," a rift forms over the decision to fire the church's gay choir director Carlton Cruise (Parnell Damone Marcano). Many members of the church are bothered by Carlton's "brazenness" since he began publicly flaunting his relationship with his new husband. Bishop James Greenleaf (Keith David) and his wife, Lady Mae Greenleaf (Lynn Whitfield), are pushed to the brink by concerns over money and church membership numbers (Betty Wilcox, one of the church's biggest donors, is demanding that Carlton be fired, and half the deacon board has yet to pledge because of the issue).

Unfortunately for Bishop and Lady Mae, their daughters are more into the world and less into the Word, so they try to convince their parents to change their minds to no avail. While GiGi, an associate pastor at the church, pouts, saying of firing Carlton, "This is so dumb! And immoral," her sister Charity answers, "Well, no, I can understand why people like Betty think what they think, but it's not very loving."

Aren't these sisters such open-minded modernists, full of love and tolerance, while Bishop and Lady Mae Greenleaf are just old-fashioned and archaic homophobes? If you get your Bible study from *Greenleaf*, that's certainly what you're led to believe.

In fact, God's Word deals with this exact topic of sin and tolerance within church leadership in 1 Corinthians 5.

Confused leadership in the Corinthian church not only refused to judge the unrepentant sin in their midst, but they actually celebrated their tolerance of the sin, thinking it was a sign of their love and devotion.

We all sin. We all fall short of the glory of God. No one expects church leadership, including Carlton, to be perfect. But when unrepentant sin is being flaunted among leaders of the church, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 is quite concise on how to handle it.

This summary from Pastor Gary Hamrick at Cornerstone Chapel says it all:

A man in the Corinthian church is living in sexual sin. Everyone knows about, but no one wants to do anything about it, and on purpose! They think that tolerating sin is an indication of "unconditional love." In reality, it's an indication of spiritual immaturity. The Corinthian believers don't understand that true love is about correction, salvation and restoration. They are unwilling to do the hard thing of removing someone from the church who is engaged in on-going, unrepentant sin. It's called "church discipline," and God still calls the church to practice it today.

Finally, Lady Mae gets tired of waiting for GiGi to handle Carlton's firing, so she takes it upon herself.

Carlton: Good morning, Lady Mae.

Lady Mae: Good morning.

Carlton: You wanted to see me?

Lady Mae: Yes, um, sit over there. Thank you. Carlton, let me start by saying what a wonderful addition your ministry of music has been here at Calvary.

Carlton: Thank you.

Lady Mae: And I want you to know that if you ever need a personal reference from me

Carlton: Oh, that's what this is.

Lady Mae: I'm afraid so. I'm sure you know that we've been going through some financial issues that we couldn't have foreseen last year. And so we've had to look hard for cuts. And unfortunately, the music ministry is one of those areas.

Carlton: That is unfortunate.

Lady Mae: And since you were the last person hired in the department, well, you know the rest.

Carlton: I do, actually. Quite well. May I ask you a question?

Lady Mae: Of course.

Carlton: Do you think gay marriage is wrong? Because you knew I was gay when Charity hired me, so all this has got to be about Reggie and I [sic] getting married.

Lady Mae: I believe what the Bible says about marriage and sexual immorality.

Carlton: But what about what it says about love, or not sitting in the seat of the scornful, or being in judgment?

Lady Mae: Listen. Because I believe what the Bible says doesn't mean I don't love you. It doesn't mean that I am sitting in judgment of you. This is purely a financial decision.

Carlton: For the record, I don't believe you. But I love you, and I will pray for the broken part in you that has to believe that there is a broken part in me. Thank you.

Carlton tells Lady Mae that he'll "pray for the broken part in you that has to believe that there is a broken part in me." First, it's really the other way around. Rather than being tolerant of Lady Mae's religious beliefs and convictions, it is he who "has to believe that there is a broken part" in her rather than realizing she is simply a woman who is following God's Word. Secondly, God's Word is very clear that we as Christians must always put others above ourselves, so true Christians never see others as more broken than themselves.

Like I said, don't take Bible lessons from *Greenleaf* unless you want a twisted, liberal spin on truth that has nothing to do with God's Word. Once again, we're being shown that Christians who believe in God's Word on marriage and sexual immorality are arrogant, hateful and judgmental. Sadly, most Christians who follow closely to God's Word are depicted exactly as Bishop and Lady Mae Greenleaf are. Right down to the secret greed and impure, hypocritical motives.

Meanwhile, we find that Charity's husband Kevin is making great strides in his gay conversion therapy program, Fortitude Families. We finally get a glimpse of a meeting and to hear from a husband who was able to successfully turn away from his gay urges and be happy in his heterosexual marriage. He proclaims that looking back on his former self feels like looking at "a whole different person." The group leader applauds him, saying that real transformation is the goal and he achieved it.

Kevin looks wistfully at the couple as they smile and hold hands, and he's obviously hurt that Charity won't attend a meeting with him. After the meeting, the group leader gives Kevin advice based on his own personal experience. "... you probably feel like you're the whole problem," the leader tells him. "But you're not, 'cause you're coming to these meetings. If your wife isn't ready to do that, well, that's her prerogative. This might be a situation where you need to step up and lead. Be the man. It may be what she's hoping

you'll do."

Later, Kevin does just that, and Charity seems to respond well, as the sexual tension and love between them become obvious. They move out onto the porch with their newborn son and begin reminiscing about when they first met, and Charity ends up inviting him to spend the night.

It looks like *Greenleaf* just might end up portraying conversion therapy groups in a good light after all! In fairness to all who have worked hard to change in such programs, let's hope this storyline continues in a positive direction. {eoa}

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