

Should Gays Be in Church Leadership or Not?

Jennifer LeClaire writes a well-balanced and thoughtful article responding to 'San Francisco's City Church putting an end to its policy of banning LGBT members who are unwilling or unable to take a vow of celibacy.'

There is a basic underlying principle implicit here which addresses more than the actions discussed in her excellent news story. It is the matter of church leadership modeling, and membership voting control, in a local church.

The majority of Protestant congregations are ultimately governed by the majority vote of their members. Leadership is appointed and ultimately accountable to the congregation. When a congregation admits people into membership, this permits those members to vote on what the standards and teachings of that congregation will be.

Once a decision is approved to admit people into membership, there must be reciprocal understanding that a Christian is one who has forsaken their old life and become a new creature in Christ through their personal relationship with the Lord. When a church admits members, they also admit them on the basis of confession of faith in Jesus, and willingness to abide by the purposes and by-laws of the local church constitution. The new member may not know much about how to walk with Jesus, but they are lovingly accepted and disciplined.

Membership however does not automatically entitle the member to become a leader. When a congregation chooses a person to fill a leadership position, a whole lot of new standards must be complied with. Paul writing to Titus and Timothy makes this abundantly clear. Paul outlines the requirements for both elders and deacons. Notice how in Titus 1:5-9 Paul starts by

listing qualities of Members before they can occupy a leadership role as an elder.

- Blameless
- Husband of one wife
- Believing children
- Not unruly
- Not self-willed
- Not a fighter
- Not money-loving
- Hospitable
- Lover of good
- Sober-minded
- Just
- Holy
- Self-controlled
- Loyal to Bible teaching
- A teacher of sound doctrine

He ends up in verses 15-16 writing:

“To the pure all things are pure: but to them that are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess that they know God; but by their works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.”

Paul lists similar characteristics for elders and deacons in 1

Timothy 3:2-10.

This is the same Paul who wrote “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged the natural function for what is against nature. Likewise the men, leaving the natural function of the woman, burned in their lust toward one another, men with men doing that which is shameful, and receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not proper” (Rom. 1:26-28).

In any congregation with a voting membership, the change of standards, allowing members to take leadership without adequate character qualifications will result in a mixed message to both the membership and the public. The grace of God is extended to all who will accept Jesus. The testimony of the congregation in their community requires leadership that is based on scriptural role models.

When you have sufficient ‘ungodly’ people in membership and leadership, it is a simple matter for the congregation to change the constitution and by-laws of that local church.

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