

Why Can't the LGBT Community Be Members of Your Church? Do You Agree With This Pastor?

The *Christian Post* recently ran the headline, "San Francisco's Largest Evangelical Megachurch to Allow Non-Celibate Homosexuals to Be Members." Apparently, the Elder Board of City Church announced that they will end the practice of preventing LGBT people from becoming members if they are unwilling or unable to practice lifelong celibacy.

"Our pastoral practice of demanding life-long 'celibacy,' by which we meant that for the rest of your life you would not engage your sexual orientation in any way, was causing obvious harm and has not led to human flourishing," Sr. Pastor Fred Harrell writes in a letter "on behalf of the Board and for the Gospel."

The pastor cites social science research, saying it points to "skyrocketing rates of depression, suicide and addiction" among the LGBT people. But will encouraging this sin by silence help to prevent depression, suicide and so on? No, it will not. What these people need is what all of us need—HOPE! We can't excuse and validate sin ... this will only lead to further isolation.

These cries for help are not isolated just to those in the LGBT community; they are characteristic of many of us. Lasting hope and joy are by-products of repentance and seeking God wholeheartedly and unconditionally as a life-long commitment—turning from sin rather than embracing it.

Jesus perfectly balanced grace and mercy with confrontation and correction. He wanted people to know the truth even if it offended. Oswald Chambers said, "The words of the Lord hurt and offend until there is nothing left to hurt and offend."

The Bible was written so that people would know the truth—the truth about God, creation, sin and redemption. In reality, truth invites scrutiny; whereas, error runs from it (cf. 1 John 5:13).

We are not called to make truth tolerable but to make it clear. Follow Jesus' example: Preach the difficult truths as well as the joyful ones; preach the cross and the new life; preach hell and preach heaven; preach damnation and preach salvation; preach sin and preach grace; preach wrath and preach love; preach judgment and preach mercy; preach obedience and preach forgiveness; preach that God "is love," but don't forget that God is just. Ironically, it's the love of God that compels us to share all of His truth, including those things that are hard to hear.

We cannot "affirm" what the Bible clearly calls sin. Those who strongly believe in the Bible and God's will regarding sexual behavior also strongly believe in unconditional love and forgiveness. To say that authentic Christians hate or fear those trapped in the homosexual lifestyle demonstrates a gross misunderstanding of the Christian faith. To "confront in love" simply comes from a desire to honor God and to truly love and care for others.

We must extend compassion but without compromise. Warning, confronting, challenging, advising and admonishing are all characteristic of genuine love. Parents warn, confront, challenge and admonish daily. Truly misled or self-serving individuals would wrongly attribute these traits to "hate-speech."

The Bible is filled with passages about obedience that leads to joy. For example, 1 Peter 1:14 says, "As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance." 1 John 3:3 adds that "all who have this hope in Him purify themselves, just as He is pure." And Romans 6:19 tells us to present our "bodies as slaves to righteousness."

Peter asks, "What sort of people ought you to be in holiness and godliness?" (2 Pet. 3:11). Joy and peace are by-products of those who obey.

Sadly, many don't seek the surrendered life. They want the narrow road to be broad and the cross to be light. Thank God for the wonderful work that City Church has done over the years, but I pray that they would seriously re-evaluate this new direction in the light of truth rather than political correctness.

When people, groups, denominations, or movements depart from absolute truth, and thus quench and grieve the Spirit of God, they become mechanical in their approach to Christianity and lose the ability to guide. The Word of God is not in their hearts "like a burning fire" (Jer. 20:9), but relative, powerless and debatable. Unfortunately, those Christians who are sounding the alarm are often categorized as irrational, judgmental, bigoted and intolerant. But how can we warn if we won't confront, correct if we won't challenge, and contend if we won't question? We must speak the truth in love.

When my daughter was 18 months old, my wife and I took her to a local feline zoo. As we walked through the facility, we were entertained by a variety of small leopards, tigers and other exotic felines. My daughter enjoyed seeing all the "kitty cats." Before leaving, we took a ride on a miniature train. As we rounded the first turn, I was amazed and shocked to see a large lion leaning against the chain-link fence with his massive paws slamming against it.

As the train moved slowly through the lion exhibit, I looked down, and to my horror, my daughter was unbuckling her seat belt. She shouted, "Daddy, hug the lion; play with the lion," as she desperately tried to get out of the train. I replied with an emphatic, "No," as I pulled her tightly to me and refastened her seat belt.

Needless to say, she wasn't happy. She began crying, hoping that it would change my mind. To her, and others looking on from a distance, I may have appeared narrow-minded, judgmental and intolerant, but had I let my daughter play with the lion, she might have been mauled to death. That's the truth in love: loving enough to tell the truth, even if it hurts—to spare others tremendous pain.

Again, there is hope, but we can't excuse and validate sin ... this will only lead to further isolation and depression. Don't give up; look up. There are consequences for past mistakes, but the answer is to live in God's arms redeemed rather than to live broken outside of His will. Which way will you run?

Watch the sermon, *Same-sex Attraction: Balancing Grace & Truth*.

Want to know more about the next great move of God? Click here to see Jennifer LeClaire's new book, featuring Dutch Sheets, Reinhard Bonnke, Jonathan Cahn, Billy Graham and others.

Shane Idleman is the founder and lead pastor of Westside Christian Fellowship in Lancaster, California, just North of Los Angeles. He recently released his seventh book, *Desperate for More of God*. Shane's sermons, articles, books, and radio program can all be found at www.shaneidleman.com. Follow him on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/shaneidleman>