

Megachurch Pastor Responds to Accusations of Distorting Bible to Support Gay Marriage

Despite criticism that an Orlando-based megachurch fell into the “trap” of LGBT affirmation, Senior Pastor Joel Hunter says this is simply not the case.

“We have always been clear about our stance concerning homosexual or heterosexual activity outside marriage. Our understanding of Scripture is that sex is a gift God gave to be used exclusively inside the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman. Any sexual activity outside that boundary is sin,” says Hunter, the pastor of Northland, A Church Distributed.

Northland recently hosted a seminar titled “Elevating the Dialogue on LGBTQ Inclusion and Understanding in the Church,” which featured Hunter and an LGBT pastor, among others, discussing the church’s relationship with the gay community.

The event was sponsored by The Reformation Project, which was founded by Matthew Vines, who wrote *God and the Gay Christian*.

Some believers were deeply offended at the topic and Northland’s agreement to host the discussion.

“The Reformation Project is designed to change the church to affirm an LGBTQ lifestyle as normative, and it appears Pastor Joel Hunter has fallen into that trap. For him to host that pro-LGBT event is heresy,” said Mat Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel. “While we all are sinners and all are welcome at the foot of the cross, Jesus also told the adulteress to go and sin no more. He did not affirm her in the sin of adultery, nor did he affirm people in their continued sin. He saves us from our sin. The doesn’t mean we do not

falter, but we cannot distort His grace as a license to continue to sin.”

Staver continued:

Matthew Vines thinks it is OK to keep sinning and convince yourself it's not a big deal. Vines says the Bible only condemns lust, not same-sex committed relationships. He believes Sodom and Gomorrah had nothing to do with homosexuality, and other passages in the New Testament do not mean what they say. In other words, being LGBTQ is okay and the Bible says nothing contrary. Human sexuality is not to be taken lightly or compromised. The message of the Reformation Project and this event are wrong and an affront to Jesus and the Bible. The church needs to live in the resurrection power of Jesus and stop compromising to be just like the sinful culture we are called to redeem.

Hunter says the event was not pro-LGBT as was reported, nor does he or his church support The Reformation Project's gay-affirming goals.

“We do not agree with Matthew Vine's biblical exegesis; we rather agree with the foremost biblical scholar and advocate of the traditional viewpoint, Robert Gagnon, in his book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. That was stated by me very clearly in the event,” Hunter tells *Charisma News*. “We invited Matthew because his organization helps churches, including churches that do not agree with him, have a conversation to increase understanding between the two normally adversarial groups. It does us no good, and is a poor representation of Christ, to treat each other with disrespect and ignorance.

“The leaders in the event, though having very different views, treated each other with respect and did not try to gloss over the differences. We offered resources to help Christians understand and be equipped to state the traditional viewpoint, and, of course, Matthew offered his book,” Hunter says.

Hunter says his church hosted the event for seven reasons:

1. If the church is to have any credible voice to non-church people in our culture, we must first gain the kind of understanding from them that only comes with listening to their perspective. And if we want to be spiritually mature, we must be able to respond like Jesus to anyone who might make us uncomfortable. I don't know of another conservative evangelical church that is so unafraid to discuss Scripture in cultural dialogues and that genuinely considers all perspectives.
2. If we are to be a part of our community's healing, we must actually create opportunities for understanding what those who are vulnerable or traumatized have experienced. Otherwise we all just stay in our own little groups and think the worst of each other.
3. I want Northland to be a place where all people feel safe and respected and included, no matter what issues or sins we have in our lives. God loves us all even before repentance (Rom. 5:8).
4. If the church does not enter into these cultural conversations, then we have reduced the recommended moral choices to only what the culture is advocating.
5. If we don't build venues for actual, respectful, caring, appreciative relationships with people who do not buy into traditional Christian practices, then our dogma becomes an irritating (noisy gong/clanging symbol) prattle, just confirming to them we are heartless bigots.
6. If we don't defend the vulnerable (LGBTQ youth have suicide rates four times higher and family rejection rates more than eight times higher than straight kids), we don't reflect the Lord who always cared for the outcast.
7. After the Pulse shootings, I felt compelled to look into my own heart to see if anything I had said or done as a pastor could have been complicit in such a heinous act.

The natural reaction to catastrophe is to look for someone else to blame, but Christ's instruction is to see the log in our own eye (Matt. 7:3-5), i.e., what could be improved in how we ourselves live and love. Maybe we all could benefit from such self-examination.

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