

Should You Attend a Friend's Same-Sex Wedding?

Occasionally I receive emails from church members asking for my opinion on various personal or church problems. With last week's U.S. Supreme Court ruling clearing the way for same-sex marriage in 30 states, an inquiry I received recently is relevant to all Christians—particularly pastors.

Since many church leaders will inevitably receive this kind of question, they must decide now whether they will advise their members to choose a biblical stance or “go along” with our society's ever-lowering standards.

The Letter

“I am a follower of God wanting to walk in His truth,” this person wrote. “I have been invited to a same-sex celebration of marriage by two, longtime Christian friends.

“I could attend because I love both of them and could celebrate their happiness, but I could not celebrate their union as a marriage. If I go I feel like a hypocrite, and if I don't go I feel like a hypocrite. I am seeking counsel.”

My Answer

I told this individual it was easy to understand his dilemma. He doesn't want to alienate those he loves, but he doesn't want to leave the impression he is endorsing immoral behavior. Most importantly, he doesn't want to displease his Heavenly Father.

However, I told the letter writer this would not pose a difficult decision for me: I would not attend. He is being invited to participate in a ceremony that mocks God's intent for marriage.

"The Scripture teaches that marriage is a sacred covenant between a man and a woman and God," I said. "Marriage was not man's idea. It was instituted by God in the Garden of Eden and (to paraphrase Matthew 19:6): 'What God joins together, man is not to separate.' If I were invited to a polygamists' ceremony of a man marrying four women, I wouldn't attend because that ceremony would desecrate the sacred covenant that God ordained."

While one can rationalize, "I'm not endorsing their behavior, I'm just being a friend," his presence says to his children and others that gay marriage is OK. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for this kind of behavior. And, Hebrews 13:8 states that Christ "is the same yesterday and today and forever." James 1:17 teaches that God "does not change like shifting shadows" (NIV).

Paul's Words

In the first chapter of Romans, the apostle Paul documents the immoral behavior that characterized the world in his time. The list included same-sex relationships. He concludes with these words: "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also *approve of those who practice them*" (Rom. 1:32, emphasis added). I counseled this person that we must be careful not to leave the impression that we have caved in to the world's pressure and approve of what God's Word clearly prohibits.

"There's one other factor," I said. "Your attendance not only puts you in an uncomfortable position, but an untenable one. You will be expected to respond to favorable comments like, 'Isn't this exciting?' or 'I'm happy for them, aren't you?' That setting would not be an appropriate environment for you to voice your convictions.

"That's probably why you state that you would feel like a

hypocrite if you went. Unless you are prepared to create a scene or get into arguments, it doesn't seem wise to attend. You speak more eloquently by your absence than you could by your presence."

Violating One's Conscience

The same is true for all church leaders reading these words. When you talk to members fretting over alienating their friends, tell them to remember their friends' decision to have a public ceremony has deliberately put them on the defensive. They could choose to continue their relationship without flaunting it or requesting their Christian friends' approval. They are asking the member to violate his or her conscience.

Instead of attending, leaders can suggest the member write a note saying, "Thanks for inviting me to your ceremony. I really appreciate you thinking of me. However, as a follower of Jesus Christ I cannot endorse same-sex marriage, so I will not be attending. As your friend, I want you to know that I love you and want God's best for you and your partner in the future. Again, thanks for thinking of me."

If a gay couple distances themselves from a person because of their stand, that is the couple's choice. While a member may not desire that, neither should he or she be devastated. Remind them they may never know what taking a biblical stand will do to influence others, but it will. And regardless, aligning themselves with God's view of marriage will always be the right choice.

*At only 22 years of age, **Bob Russell** became the pastor of Southeast Christian Church. That small congregation of 120 members became one of the largest churches in America, with 18,000 people attending the four worship services every weekend in 2006 when Bob retired. Now through Bob Russell Ministries, Bob continues to preach at churches and conferences throughout the United States, provide guidance for*

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