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A Pastor's Response to "Will I be Fully Accepted at Your Church as a Gay Man?"

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1

Below is my response to an email I received that asked the following question: "I believe church should be for all of God's children. No exceptions. I am a gay man. My question is, would I be fully accepted with no judgment and fully welcome and able to serve at Ashland Avenue Baptist Church?"

I have changed all of the identifying information, but other than that, my response is in full below. I hope that it will be helpful to others facing similar questions.

Dear D,

Welcome home to the beautiful Bluegrass. It is great to hear from you and to hear of your previous connection with Ashland. What a ministry this church has had for almost 100 years.

As to your question, it depends on what you mean by "I am a gay man" and what you mean by "accepted completely with no judgment and fully welcome and able to serve at Ashland Avenue?"

If by "I am a gay man" you mean that you struggle with same-sex attraction, recognizing any sexual activity outside of a covenant marriage between a man and a woman is sinful and that you desire Christian discipleship to walk in line with the Gospel as you struggle with this temptation, then we would rejoice at your honesty and openness and receive you gladly at Ashland. We have faithful and accountable members right now in that very situation and attempting to live celibate lives to the glory of Christ.

Of course, this is really no different than a man who struggles with heterosexual sexually immoral desires or any of the myriads of sinful desires we all struggle with as disciples of Christ. Sin is an equal opportunity offender and something that every Christian struggles with in unique ways.

If by "I am a gay man" you mean that you embrace a lifestyle of homosexual activity and you refuse recognize it as sin no matter what the Scripture says and you are looking for

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Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

a church that will affirm homosexual activity and/or same-sex marriage that would be a different matter entirely. But there is no uniqueness to homosexual sin in regard to this approach. The same would be true if a man came to us and said “I am a ‘name the sin’ man” and by that he meant he planned to keep on sinning in that way and embracing it as a lifestyle no matter what the Scripture says. There is a world of difference between struggling with a sin and embracing a sin. God saves us where we are, but loves us too much to leave us where we are. He is at work conforming his people into the image of Christ.

As far as whether or not you would “be accepted completely with no judgment and fully welcome and able to serve at Ashland Avenue” that would depend on what you mean as well. We welcome all to attend our public worship services. Consider this your invitation to worship with us. We would love to have you in attendance. If you mean that you desire help in an accountable community of faith to struggle against sin then I would say that we are a community of believers whose hope is in the finished work of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins—not our goodness. We are all struggling sinners attempting to follow our Lord and Savior and encouraging one another to do so.

On the other hand, if you mean that you want a church where any behavior you participate in will be affirmed and accepted in the membership of the church then the answer would be “no.” I do not think you would want to be a part of a congregation would tolerate any behavior or action among its members.

We are all broken in our sin and are in great need of acceptance by God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. We are all guilty sinners who have rebelled against a holy God and who desperately need to respond to Christ in repentant faith. It is the awareness of our sin that reveals our need for redemption in Christ. Self-acceptance must not replace repentance and the liberating love of Christ that delivers us from bondage to our sins. Faith, sin and repentance are Christ-directed. Self-justification is man-directed and fashions God as a sort of divine therapist who helps us to accept ourselves.

You are right that God’s gospel is about his “love, acceptance, non-judging, and forgiveness for all” but such is the fruit of believers who trust God and agree with God about their sin in repentant faith. The comfortable and convenient thing would be to do away with the notion of sin altogether but such an approach would abandon the biblical gospel and would not be a demonstration of Christian love.

The apostle Paul told the church at Corinth,

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Paul paints a beautiful picture of love, acceptance, and forgiveness for those who come to Christ in faith and repentance of sin. If we lose Paul's grammar, we lose his gospel. If we shift his words to the present tense and say, "And such are some of you," we are left with no one washed, no one sanctified, and no one justified.

I hope this response provides you respectful and direct answers to your honest questions. I struggle with my own sins so I could easily remove "homosexuality" from this letter and put my sins in those spaces and apply this letter to myself. The good news is that I do not have to be defined by my sins and neither do you. We can be forgiven of our sins and have our identity rooted in Christ and his grace.

I am thankful for the dialogue and your interest in my thoughts. I hope to see you soon at Ashland.

Blessings in Christ,

David E. Prince

This article was originally published June 3, 2015.



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