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SHOULD CHRISTIANS ATTEND SAME-SEX WEDDINGS? PRO – CON

by Michael F. Ross and Joe Dallas

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PRO: Why I'd Say YES! to the Invitation

by Michael F. Ross

Is it permissible to attend the same-sex wedding of an immediate family member? Such a question immediately elicits many opinions. A decade ago, the same question would have engendered little discussion because it would have seemed so remote to most people. Twenty years ago, the response to such a question might have been, "What a weird question!" Not so today, for most of us have close friends, co-workers, or relatives who have "come out" and the issue of homosexuality is no longer remote. At the very least, the cultural push to accept and affirm the homo-sexual lifestyle, under the social rubric of tolerance, has made the question quite pertinent.

In answering the question, two plausibility structures must be overcome, or at least honestly faced. The first believes that homosexuals are just like everyone else and ought to be treated fairly; that is, accepted and affirmed by heterosexuals. The second plausibility structure holds that homosexuality is such a heinous sin that Christians must rise to its opposition for the safety and rescue of culture. Neither plausibility structure can easily be argued against. The polarization of these deeply held convictions creates an environment where opponents speak past each other in shrill and unreasoned tones.

I also must state that I do not believe the Bible gives us explicit instruction to answer this awkward question. Our answer to the question posed in this Viewpoint column can only be answered by fair and reasonable inference. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* accurately states that "the whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture."¹ A caution is in order: we must not be shamed into our response by peer pressure, one way or the other, but must wrestle with God's Word to *deduce* a response to this question.

If my son were a homosexual or my daughter a lesbian, and if either of them invited me to attend their same-sex union or wedding, I would do so, but with certain provisions made clear at the outset.

First, I would not, as an ordained minister, officiate nor participate in the service, which I believe to be a biblical abomination. Nor would I enter into responsive readings or explicit approvals of the marriage in any liturgy. I would make clear both my wife's and my disapproval of the gay lifestyle and unbiblical union.

Second, I would pronounce no blessing on the union—implicitly or explicitly. I would offer no prayers for, toasts in honor of, or benedictions on such a “couple” or their status. Nor would I enter into the social convention of clapping, throwing rice, or uttering civil comments of approval (“They’re just meant for each other” or “What a sweet day this is and such a lovely service”) on the union.

Third, I would make it clear that such a couple would not be welcomed to live as a couple when visiting my home—no sex, no sleeping in the same room, no permission to carry on as husband and partner or wife and mate in my home. The partner of my child would be welcomed and treated kindly, but never as an in-law.

Fourth, I would maintain the right to continue to evangelize and speak biblical truth into the lives and the union of my child and his (her) homosexual lover.

If these four conditions were explicitly agreed to by the gay couple prior to the service, then I would attend the service. I do not speak for my wife, and I would not bind her conscience to agree with me or accompany me to such a “wedding.”

My rationale for this argument is that Christians need to remain engaged with, and involved in, the lives of sexually immoral people in order to witness for Christ and seek to persuade them to repentance, faith, and holy living. Paul wrote to the church of Corinth about a man involved in incest: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one” (1 Cor. 5:9–11; all Scripture citations from the ESV).

In Paul's Greco-Roman world, homosexuality was not only a common practice, but one held in high regard: “The Greco-Roman world was characterized by moral corruption... that sprang from idolatry...homosexuality was a common result in Greek society which considered the noblest form of love to be friendship between men. Some of the greatest names in Greek philosophy regarded it as not inferior to heterosexual love, but it was practiced primarily among males between their early teens and early twenties.”²

Obviously, the early church did not shun homosexuals or lesbians, but maintained contact with them in order to lead them to Christ, repentance, and a new morality. Paul writes in the very next chapter that some “homosexuals and effeminate” were saved. “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). The Christian relatives, friends, and co-workers of such immoral people obviously maintained close contact with them in order to lead them to salvation in Christ.

Jesus Himself often met with immoral people, often at dinner parties, perhaps at times at wedding receptions. He feared less the rebuke of the religious (“He eats with tax gatherers and sinners!”) than He feared the loss of their immortal souls. Our motive for staying away from the “wedding” of a gay son or lesbian aunt must not be the fear of what our Christian friends will think and say of us. One does not need to defend his own faith and life at the expense of witnessing to others. Christ *never* lowered His holy standards for the godless: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5: 31–32). Few things are as “sick” as a gay marriage. Few things are as unrighteous as homosexuality. And few people need repentance as much as a practicing lesbian.

We always appear to worry about pollution and poor witness. The sins of other men will not pollute our souls unless we choose to engage in such sins. And any poor witness can be attributed more to our censorious approach to sinful people than it can to our association with them. When will evangelicals learn that most people are won to Christ in the context of a caring and authentic relationship and rarely by a good example?

It is an easy default to pit holiness against love, but the Bible will not allow us to do so. A holy love rubs up against dirty people while maintaining a pure heart. “Love covers a multitude of sins” —both in forgiving and forbearing. If I remove myself from my gay son’s wedding or my lesbian daughter’s union ceremony, I may well have forfeited the opportunity to “speak the truth in love” later on. My love for these errant loved ones does not necessitate my condoning of their actions. As I remain in an honest and sincere relationship with them, the distinction between sinful homosexual and horrible homosexuality will become clear. This clarity will take time, but it must not be derailed because I chose to pass up an opportunity to share with two gay people a pivotal moment in their lives.

I honestly believe that no one could (or would) love a homosexual son like a father, a lesbian daughter like a mother, or a gay sibling like a brother or sister who is in Christ. The pathway to honest, spiritual, and restorative conversation between gay person and close relative must be kept open at all costs. Respect and a modicum of acceptance can go a long way in opening hearts to the gospel.

Evangelical Christianity may well have become known more for what it is against than for what it stands for. Our retreat into sanctified ghettos, under the excuse of “go out from their midst, and be separate from them” (2 Cor. 6:17) has led to disaster. The retreat from public schools, academia, politics, the media, the arts and entertainment, publishing and journalism has led to a culture without a coherent gospel witness. Meanwhile, our fornication, divorce, adultery, and pornography rates, along with children born out of wedlock and abortion rates, rival that of the world.

Perhaps, we should read 1 Corinthians 6 and 2 Corinthians 6 and rethink what God is calling us to do. “The Corinthians apparently misunderstood Paul and took him

to mean that they should not associate with any evil person of this type, whether in the church or outside in the pagan society. He states clearly that this was not his intention. If it were, this would practically forbid Christians having any dealings with the outside society, such as buying and selling, transportation, work, as well as certain common social activities.”³ Like...weddings!

I told my children as they were growing up, “There is nothing you can do to make me stop loving you, make me cease to be your father, or keep me from pursuing your souls for Christ.” I meant that. I would pursue my children (and my grandchildren, siblings, parents) anywhere, in order to bring them to Christ. And that would include a gay wedding.

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NOTES

- 1 *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chap. 1, “Of the Holy Scripture,” 1–6.
- 2 Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 64.
- 3 Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 91–92.

CON: “Sorry, Cannot Attend”

by Joe Dallas

Many believers, holding to the view that homosexuality falls short of God’s will, have friends, family members, or associates who are openly homosexual. Up until now, their general challenge has been to sustain respectful, even loving relationships without compromising their own beliefs, a challenge most often risen to by simply “agreeing to disagree.” When dialogue over the rightness or wrongness of homosexuality has been possible, they’ve sought to engage. When such dialogue turned contentious and counterproductive, they’ve refrained, opting instead to show respect, acts of service, and friendship, leaving the argument over sexuality alone. But apart from occasional requests from a homosexual loved one to have a partner share a guest room during holiday visits, tensions have generally arisen over conversations, not events.

America’s growing acceptance of same-sex marriage is changing all that. As more states ratify a redefinition of wedlock into their constitutions, more believers will receive invitations from friends, colleagues, and family members to attend their same-sex wedding ceremonies. Whereas cordial debates over sexual ethics may have been the main source of contention between traditionalists (those holding the view that

heterosexuality is God's established norm) and revisionists (those pressing for a redefinition of "normal" to include same-sex coupling), the acceptance or refusal of a wedding invitation is a far more personal, deeply emotional matter. After all, to say "no" to such an invitation, absent pressing circumstances preventing attendance, is logically considered an insult and rejection, thus invitations to weddings are not lightly refused. But to say "yes" means also to say, in my opinion, "I bless and support this union, in that I both support same-sex marriage in general, and your same-sex union in particular."

For many of us, that's just too much.

We're not all on the same page, certainly, an understandable situation considering we're charging into new territory when addressing the question of Christian attendance at same-sex weddings. Some believers have even adopted a revisionist viewpoint of homosexuality, declaring it to be a normal variant of human sexual response, though normally they are of a more liberal theological persuasion than their conservative counterparts.

But even among traditionalists, there's difference of opinion, not on homosexuality itself (traditionalists still believe it to be unnatural and immoral), but on our approach to homosexuals, and our participation in their lives. All of us in that camp will agree on three basic points:

1. As salt and light in this world, we should walk in wisdom toward nonbelievers ("Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" [Col. 4:5, all Scripture from KJV]), speak respectfully ("Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" [Col. 4:6]), live uprightly ("That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" [Phil. 2:15]), and, when possible, engage them in discussions opening them to the gospel ("And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient. In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" [2 Tim. 2:24–25]).
2. We are not called to judge nonbelievers, as they are outside the church and thereby outside its authority ("For what have I to do to judge them also that are without?" [1 Cor. 5:12]) but, when opportunity allows, we can engage them in discussions about moral issues that will hopefully point them to the God who is the source of all true morality.
3. We are free to interact socially with nonbelievers as Jesus did, provided our conduct is befitting of a Christian, and that we are not participating with them in behaviors that would violate biblical standards and/or our own consciences.

But while agreeing on these points, we can interpret them differently — point #3 in particular. The question we wrestle with isn't whether or not we should interact with homosexuals in a loving, respectful way, but rather, what sorts of interaction might

constitute a violation of biblical standards and/or our own consciences. On this point, I would argue that attendance at a same-sex wedding, whether that of a co-worker, friend, or loved one, constitutes a violation of Scriptural guidance regarding conscience and moral consistency.

While nothing in Scripture advises us against friendship with nonbelievers, or against loving relationships with family members who are outside the faith, there are clear admonitions against participating in activities that either condone sin or are, in themselves, openly sinful:

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11).

“Neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22).

Paul’s words for *partaker* mean “one who shares, partners, or comes into association with another’s activities,” a partnership Scripture forbids. Hence we may have a friendly relationship with a co-worker who over-imbibes, but we would surely know better than to become drunk with him. We may likewise be close to a female family member who participates in wet t-shirt competitions, but undoubtedly we’d refuse to accompany her to such an event. In both cases, the problem wouldn’t be our emotional bond with the person, but rather our participation in activities that person engages in that we ourselves ought not to condone, much less join in.

Of course, these examples are proverbial “no-brainers,” so they would probably not cause much of an ethical dilemma for most of us. The issue becomes much more difficult when the activity proposed is less openly salacious and more moderate, even genteel, like a wedding, an event monumental to the people being joined together, but problematic for those with fundamental objections to the joining.

If, for example, a close Christian friend were to marry a nonbeliever, that would constitute a clear violation of Paul’s injunction to “be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (1 Cor. 6:14). This would put that believer’s Christian friends in a difficult position, since they would hardly be able to say they blessed and condoned the marriage, no matter how much they liked and/or loved the couple involved. The very nature of the union, constituting a violation of Scripture, would make approval, much less celebration, impossible. That, in turn, would force a violation of conscience on the part of believers who attended the wedding, since attendance at a wedding is more than friendly socializing. It is, in essence, a three-fold statement of approval, support, and celebration. To attend and witness such a ceremony is publicly to state approval of the union being solemnized, a commitment of support to the couple being united, and a celebration of the event itself. And if something is wrong, no matter how bonded one is to the wrongdoer, the wrongdoing itself cannot in good conscience be approved of, supported, or celebrated.

And that is the crux of the matter. Friendship with a same-sex couple is certainly an option for a Christian, as is socializing, communicating, and building a friendship

with such a couple or, in the case of family members, solidifying the existing bonds one has with the family member and his/her partner.

But there seems to be no wiggle room when it comes to attending a same-sex ceremony bestowing on their union the title of marriage. Yes, one may be invited to a heterosexual union between two nonbelievers, neither of them belonging to Christ and therefore creating a union that God is not the center of. But the nature of the union itself, assuming it to be male to female, monogamous, and permanent in intent, is one God did indeed institute, and thereby it can be celebrated as one would celebrate any God-ordained institution whether or not the participants therein were born again, the institution itself being a good and honorable thing. The same simply cannot be said of a wedding ceremony between two men or two women.

The emotional ramifications of holding this position are, to be sure, enormous. It will take nothing short of God-given wisdom and sensitivity to convey these precepts to a friend or loved one who is, in genuine excitement and anticipation, inviting us to join their joy as they are wedded. This is, to me, far from academic. I did at one time identify myself as openly gay, celebrate my homosexual relationships and, at one time, seriously consider a lifelong commitment to a man. At the time, if same-sex marriage had been legally accessible, my partner and I no doubt would have availed ourselves of it, inviting friends and family to witness our union. And, no doubt, I would have felt outraged, perhaps even shattered, to have someone I cared for tell me my union was one they couldn't celebrate. That is the sad reality of life in this fallen world, a world where tensions between biblical truth and worldly wisdom often clash, the emotions of the people involved being the first casualties in all such collisions.

I know. I experienced such a collision after my repentance from homosexuality in 1984, when a gay male couple I was friends with asked if I would attend a ceremony solemnizing their relationship. I felt no choice but to decline, a decision that was agonizing to me, as I had no desire to hurt or offend my friends. So I communicated to them what I now encourage others to communicate when facing a similar dilemma: "I thank you for thinking of me. Our friendship matters hugely. But I can't in good conscience attend because of my own beliefs about marriage, beliefs that are unalterable. It would be hypocritical and dishonest of me to be there, and I'd never ask you to do something you felt would violate your conscience, as I feel this would violate mine. Please know how deeply I respect and love you, despite our differences on this matter, and how strongly I hope our friendship continues."

May that message, delivered in love and bathed in prayer, bear redemptive fruit when we, out of conscience and obedience, are compelled to check the box on the invitation stating *Sorry. Cannot Attend.*

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