

Should Christians Attend Gay/Trans Marriages?

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Recently, Alistair Begg has been involved in a controversy. He was criticized and “cancelled” because of the counsel he gave to a grandmother. She asked whether she should attend her grandson’s marriage to a “transgender person.”

I asked the grandmother, “Does your grandson understand your belief in Jesus?”

“Yes.”

“Does your grandson understand that your belief in Jesus makes it such that you can’t countenance in any affirming way the choices that he has made in life?”

“Yes.”

I said, “Well then, okay. As long as he knows that, then I suggest that you do go to the ceremony. And I suggest that you buy them a gift.”

“Oh,” she said, “what?” She was caught off guard.

I said, “Well, here’s the thing: your love for them may catch them off guard, but your absence will simply reinforce the fact that they said, ‘These people are what I always thought: judgmental, critical, unprepared to countenance anything.’”

Here are some typical criticisms and rebuttals of Begg’s counsel:

1. Transgenderism is unbiblical. Attending the wedding affirms that union. Loving others is part of our gospel witness. But it is not loving to endorse sin. You can show the love of Christ in *other* ways that don’t affirm this sinful identity. Proclaiming the gospel is the proper means of Christian witnessing. This is like caving to the mob at Lot’s door in Sodom. – Owen Strachan
<https://owenstrachan.substack.com/p/unrighteous-wedding-invitations-a>

2. Loving and engaging with non-believers is prescribed by Scripture, but attending a ceremony that openly rejects God’s design for marriage? For the vast majority of theologically conservative Christians, this was a line that ought not be crossed. – Justin Peters
<https://www.thechristianworldview.org/topic-alistair-begg-responds-to-furor-over-his-counsel-to-attend-trans-wedding/>

3. If I apply Pastor Begg’s approach to other areas of my life, then when someone needs an abortion, and although I don’t agree with it, I should still drive them to the clinic as a way of demonstrating my love for them. If someone wants to destroy their life through drug usage, but I don’t agree with it, I should still give them a place to live while they pump their bodies full of substances. Cites Luke 14:26: “*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*” – Kelly Williams

<https://www.christianpost.com/voices/a-pastors-response-to-alistair-beggs-gay-wedding-advice.html>

4. A wedding is a “celebration” or, more specifically, a wedding is a covenant ceremony of one sort or another. Some may confuse what a wedding really is, but it’s a *covenant ceremony*. It’s being declared as the formal public declaration of a thing, and that thing is a marriage or a

union. It's not just that we think same-sex marriages are wrong; it's that we don't think same-sex marriages are marriages. [By implication, we must not celebrate it with them.] – Al Mohler <https://churchleaders.com/news/468295-this-isnt-hard-al-mohler-explains-whether-christians-can-attend-lgbtq-weddings.html>

“After all, attendance so as to show ‘love’ or avoid giving offense is a form of *blessing*, just without the name,” – Carl Trueman

Begg gave his response to his critics, in his next sermon:

In the message, taken from Luke 15, titled “Compassion vs. Condemnation,” Begg warned about our “inclination toward *Pharisaism*” that is alive and well within all our hearts. “In that conversation with that grandmother, I was concerned about the well-being of their relationship more than anything else. Hence my counsel.”

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/alistair-begg-im-not-ready-to-repent-over-gay-wedding-advice.html>

That advice, he said, was based on Jesus' command for Christians to love even those they disagree with or disapprove of. “Jesus said you are supposed to love your enemies,” said Begg, drawing on a series of Bible texts to claim Christians should show compassion—and not condemnation—for those who have gone astray. Begg warned his congregation about Christians who seem unwilling to show grace or forgiveness to others, telling his congregation to be wary of pastors who are eager to loudly condemn sinners. To a different person in different circumstances, he said, he might have given different advice.

<https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/faith-culture/alistair-begg-wont-back-down-on-trans-wedding-advice/>

Personally, I'm glad Alistair Begg stood his ground. I agree with the advice he gave, and also with his response to his critics. He stood up to the pietists and legalists who pervade our churches and pulpits. They're using the same coercive techniques that anti-Christian leftists use against those who disagree with their DEI agenda: they ban them from the public square. I think a number of the opposing propositions and argumentative techniques used are false or misleading. Their motives may be pure — to defend the historic faith against attacks from without, and errors from within. But I think they fall short on both counts.

False comparisons

Notice that Kelly Williams used this twisted logic: “It's like saying that you oppose abortion, but you'll drive them to the abortion clinic.” Sorry, but that's an absurd comparison to this particular circumstance. So is claiming that it's like housing an addict while he shoots up. It's more akin to saying, “I'm opposed to your drug abuse, but I won't abandon you in your struggle.” The grandson's behavior is unacceptable, but her love remains.

She's not caving in to the mob at Lot's door, as Owen Strachan puts it. She didn't open her home for their wanton acts. She didn't encourage her grandson to marry his lover. Instead she made her objections known, thus opposing the mob as Lot did. She didn't host the wedding, invite the guests, or give a speech lauding its merits. *That* would have been an affirmation and celebration of his sin. Although Sodom is an apt passage for this sin, I think the way it was used exceeds the facts.

Such arguments condition the grandmother's love on compliance to the law, by an *unbeliever*. Critics say that boycotting the ceremony would show *true* Christian love to him. They ignore the inference that in disavowing the ceremony, she is disavowing her grandson. Proclaiming the gospel, they suggest, is the only path to take. No, it's not the *only* path. Something else is required before we can proclaim the gospel. *We must draw near*. The relationship is what prepares the way for the gospel. Gay and Trans persons must feel welcome to attend church to hear the gospel, and not feel that they need to cry out, "Unclean! Unclean!" as they enter.¹

Conditional love isn't love. It's manipulation. It makes a lie of the gospel, which proclaims that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone — not by grace plus works.

False implications

Begg's critics equate extending compassion and maintaining relational ties, with denying the truth of Scripture, affirming sin, and besmirching God's moral law. No, it *doesn't* equate to those things. What it equates to is quite the opposite. It affirms the truth of Scripture, but witnesses that God's grace is greater than all our sin. Her grandson doesn't have to put away his sin before coming to Christ. If he comes to Christ, *then* he'll put away his sin, willingly. Even believers (which this young man isn't) can be forgiven of gross sins, like denying Christ.

And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and ***when you have returned to Me***, strengthen your brethren." (Luk 22:31-32 ^{NKJ})

False applications

I believe the primary error in their assessment, is that they don't distinguish believers from unbelievers — those who can see and hear the truth of God, from those who are blind and deaf to it. They would exercise a form of church discipline on those who don't belong to the church. "Don't even eat with them" (1Cor 5.11). And who is "them" in this verse? It is "anyone named a brother" — anyone who claims to be a *believer*. Her grandson does *not* claim to be a believer. In contrast to these admonitions, here's what Scripture says about dealing with outsiders:

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? (1Co 5:12 ^{ESV})

Walk in wisdom toward those *who are* outside, redeeming the time. *Let* your speech always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. (Col 4:5-6 ^{NKJ})

I imagine their retort would be that they're not judging the unbelieving grandson, but the believing grandmother. Ah, indeed. The critics claim that attending might impact other Christians, or undermine Christian orthodoxy. They don't help this grandmother to deal with her unbelieving grandson. They say she should disavow his marriage, judge his lifestyle, and condemn him for it. Scripture prohibits that, and it prohibits judging even *believers*.

Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. (Rom 14:4 ^{NKJ})

¹ I am compelled to qualify this. The word is "attend" — not join, serve in, or act out in our churches. But certainly any unbeliever is welcome to sit and politely hear the gospel, observe the worship, and ask questions.

Yes, we are to judge our *brother*, but judge him rightly, without a log in our eye (Mat 7.5). But *unbelievers* are slaves to sin, who cannot see, cannot hear, and cannot understand. We offer them the gospel. But for them to accept it, they must be born again, born from above, *by God*. I'm hearing Arminian arguments being made by Calvinists, as if we could persuade people into the kingdom, or dissuade them from their sins apart from faith in Christ and the power of the Spirit! Regeneration *precedes* conversion, and conversion *precedes* sanctification.

When we proclaim the gospel, it must be in both word and deed, by *demonstrating* the unconditional love and grace of God to those who are lost. We're sinners, just like them; but we're *redeemed*. That's part of our testimony. We've been delivered, washed, and forgiven; and they can be too. We are washed *after* conversion, not before. We are sanctified *after* being justified by faith, not before. Those who can see and hear the gospel call, **will** respond to it. But boycotting the wedding contradicts that truth, and stops their ears. It says loud and clear, that we're "holier than thou." That's self-exaltation, not humble obedience. It's a false witness.

False witness

These critics don't distinguish between a pastor's influence on a ceremony, and the influence of a lay Christian on it. There's a practical difference between a pastor who attends a trans or gay wedding, and a believing family member who doesn't hold office in the church. Yes, the mere presence of a pastor or elder might appear to unbelievers, to lend tacit approval to the ceremony. That's a valid objection. If that's what Begg's critics were pointing to, I'd have to agree. But that's not the issue for this grandmother. I would assert that the presence of this lay Christian would not and cannot lend tacit approval to the ceremony. This is especially true when we know that she previously made her objections known to her grandson. *That* was her witness to the truth she believes. Now she must testify to the gracious love of God which she herself has experienced. Believers are indeed a royal priesthood. But this woman is not in a position of authority in the church. Moreover, this wasn't a *Christian* ceremony. She wasn't serving as a witness to the covenant vows being made by two believers in the sight of God. Yet some of Begg's critics say it is, and she's giving false witness by attending, condoning sin, and affirming that this is a valid marriage. Her presence does nothing of the sort; she's affirming her unconditional love.

False context

Why should we *not* shun unbelievers, even when it involves a marriage? I've offered several arguments already. Here are some others involving non-Christian marriages. I believe we are bound to distinguish marriages *between believers*, which are conducted by a minister of the gospel, and *other* "marriages." Al Mohler wasn't wrong about the premise, just its application.

What if the wedding is conducted in a church that's in a different Christian denomination or tradition? What if its doctrines are heterodox, or outright heretical? What if the pastor is female? What if the pastor is gay? What if, as in the PCA, the pastor is gay, but abstains? What if it's a Jewish ceremony? What if it's a civil or secular wedding, or done according to a completely different religion, like Islam or Hindu? What if it's Buddhist, where there is no god? What if it's not really a wedding, but a mere exchange of personal vows or commitments? Must *all* of these be boycotted?

Is any wedding ceremony a sacrilege if it isn't conducted in your own church, by your own pastor, with your own congregation, according to your own orthodoxy? *Where's the line?* May

a missionary overseas attend a pagan wedding with an unbeliever, as he builds relationships to facilitate a future conversation about Christ? If so (and I believe he may), then why may believers not do the same with unbelievers domestically?

False assumption

We teach that a sacrament is not invalid simply because the one who conducts it is not a believer, or sinful, or heretical in his beliefs. So this objection voiced against Begg's advice cannot be about the one conducting the service, nor about where the wedding takes place. It's about the *parties* to the marriage and the *condition* of their souls. They are *not* believers; they are *lost*. Whether we attend or shun that ceremony, they remain lost. There is only one cure, and that is a profession of faith in Christ. And there's only one way they are able to make that profession, and it's by the proclamation and belief of the gospel message, just as Owen Strachan asserts. But if you've damaged that relationship by boycotting the wedding, you also damaged the dialogue in which that message might be safely proclaimed and heard, and perhaps believed.

Alistair Begg's compassionate counsel was not so much directed at the grandmother, as the lost grandson. She should be all things to all men, including her grandson, that she might save *some*. What excuse would she give Christ when welcomed into her eternal abode, for ending the conversation that might have produced its fruit in season? Christ made an exception when he let the "dog" eat the crumbs which fall from their Master's table (Mat 15.27). It was meant for the children; but even others may be blessed by it. So Carl Trueman isn't wrong in saying that her presence would bless the ceremony — just not in the way he intends.

False leading

Notice that pastor Begg qualified his advice, "To a different person in different circumstances, he said, he might have given different advice." A pastor's counsel depends on the person as much as the circumstance. He may give two people in the same circumstance, very different counsel, depending on their maturity level, their past experience, their weaknesses, and their conscience. The pastor too has a conscience. He must be led by the Spirit whenever he offers biblical counsel. These critics weren't there; they had no leading of the Spirit.

What they seem to be led by in this controversy, is doctrine that isn't tempered by love, and by knowledge. They're not the ones who are accountable for this person's soul (Heb 13.17). They don't know this grandmother. They haven't prayed with her, cried with her, laughed with her, taught her, examined her, corrected her, or affirmed her. Yet they feel compelled to second-guess her own pastor's seasoned counsel. Instead of exercising compassion, wisdom, and discernment, they offer rule upon rule, precept upon precept (Isa 28.9-13). Hence pastor Begg warns his congregation to beware of Pharisaism, or what I called pietism and legalism.

Let's not confuse an illustration with an instruction. I know what drove the criticism in this instance is the fact that it was broadcast; he made it public. As such, it may have influenced people in your own congregations. But he qualified it, saying that it may not apply to all believers in all circumstances. Our response should be to teach our own congregation our understanding of Scripture, and not engage in a public dispute that divides rather than unites.

Another real-life example

Take Rosaria Butterfield's experience. She was a lesbian in a lesbian "marriage." What if that pastor and his wife who spent two years ministering to her, had been invited to her gay marriage, but shunned it? In point of fact, she came to them after her marriage. But their openness and acceptance of her, where she was at, allowed her to finally hear and accept the gospel. Rosaria then chose to end that false marriage. She became a Christian, married a Christian man, and began a Christian ministry.

I don't see the dangers which so many attach to attending the ceremony. Most objections involve how it would be perceived by non-Christians, or how it might cause other Christians to stumble. It may be that the weaker brother rule applies (Rom 14.21-15.1); but that's not the argument being made against it. Again, this isn't about intra-church relations and discipline, but about extra-church relationships and evangelism. Offending sinners is not our concern; rather, putting unnecessary obstacles in the way of the gospel is our concern. What better opportunity to proclaim it, than at a gathering of lost sinners, amazed that we're willing to associate with them? This grandmother was Christ's witness at the crossroads (Jer 6.15-19).

¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹² But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mat 9:10-13 ^{ESV})

I would do nothing to silence, muffle, or distort that call. Period.