

## **Question: "What would your congregation do with a member guilty of pedophilia?"**

You may have noticed in the recent past a wave of pedophile accusations against the Mormon Church (LDS). No doubt, the reason for such widespread coverage is that they are a religious group so well known for promoting family values. The accusations stem from well-documented cases in which child molesters were allowed to continue as members of the LDS after confessing the crime to their bishops.

From the point of view of their leadership, they are preserving the public image of the LDS while privately encouraging repentance through counseling and prayer. The victims and their families, on the other hand, see the leadership attempting to sweep away a very serious problem. In their view, some of the bishops seem more sympathetic toward the perpetrator than toward the innocent victim.

The problem with the LDS' method of dealing with pedophilia is that such an activity is criminal behavior; a violation of criminal law and the person should be turned over to the authorities. Furthermore, pedophiles are generally very effective deceivers and liars. They can charm their way into the good graces of a family and take advantage of a child before anyone realizes it. And now with so many children having Internet access, pedophiles have a far-reaching medium at their disposal by which they can involve the innocent and unsuspecting in their sexual perversions. Pedophilia is a sin driven by a perverted mind that is difficult to manage. A pedophile is seldom cured.

What must a local church do when they become aware of the criminal behavior of one of their members?

### **1. Explain to the offender that he has violated God's law, and admonish immediate confession to God and public repentance of the sin.**

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Co 6:9-10). *The word underscored in the verse above would include catamites or pedophiles.*

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore, he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another" (1Th 4:3-9).

### **2. Explain to the offender that although he may repent and receive the forgiveness of God and his brethren, he has committed a criminal act and is accountable to the criminal court system.**

### **3. Identify the event to the congregation, so that if the errant member will not repent, others may help convince him of his error.**

- 4. Counsel any of the members, when it is necessary as a result of the incident. Any counseling of a member must always avoid the appearance of evil. Neither our elders nor the evangelist will counsel one on one, male with female, unless a third party is present or near.**

When sin comes to light in a congregation, it must be dealt with immediately and openly (1Co 5:11-13). It is no time to be concerned with the “image” of the church. A sinner must be led to repentance, a soul saved from death, and the church purified before the problem escalates into a major fiasco (Ac 8:22-23 Js 5:19-20 1Co 5:6). The following passages teach the disciplinary measures the Lord’s church is to use with wayward members (Mt 18:15-17 2Th 3:6-15). Religious bodies, purporting to be “of Christ,” that do not follow New Testament directives, prove that they are not what they profess to be.

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