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Institutionalized Hypocrisy — A Failure of Courage

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This week's question at [On Faith](#) [*Newsweek* and *The Washington Post*] has to do with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's vote to encourage its bishops not to enforce the doctrines and standards of the church — at least when it comes to the matter of homosexual clergy.

Here is [my article](#):

Churches and denominations that invite or allow their standards to be openly violated institutionalize hypocrisy. This usually indicates that the church lacks both the courage to change the standards and the conviction to enforce them.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA] has voted to encourage its bishops not to take punitive action against ministers who violate the denomination's ban on active homosexuals in the ministry. Last year, the Presbyterian Church USA [PCUSA] took a similar action, allowing local jurisdictions (presbyteries) to ordain candidates for ministry who violate a similar policy. Both cases represent tragic failures of leadership. Both churches failed to maintain their own standards and lacked the courage or consensus to change them.

All this is further evidence of why the liberal denominations are in such a decline in terms of membership and influence. These churches are divided between liberals who push constantly for doctrinal changes and conservatives who are determined to keep standards they believe to be mandated by the Bible. The conservatives are losing.

The liberals are pushing for the full normalization of homosexuality. This runs right into conflict with biblical prohibitions and clashes with the standards of these churches. Liberals in these two denominations dominate the landscape in the seminaries and church bureaucracies, but they have not yet been able to muster adequate support to change the policies. Conservatives are losing a battle akin to theological trench warfare. The big battles are lost an inch at a time.

Bishops, presbyteries, and congregations are charged to maintain the doctrines and standards of the church. When a bishop or presbytery or congregation fails in this task the whole church suffers. When this failure is made a matter of policy, the entire church embraces hypocrisy. When bishops are encouraged to allow doctrines and standards to be violated, they are encouraged to violate the integrity of their office. The same holds true for presbyteries or congregations, depending on the form of church government.

This process does not start with issues of sexuality, of course. Long before these churches faced controversies over sexuality, they had already allowed the doctrinal foundations of their churches to be eroded and compromised.

In other words, a "don't ask, don't tell" policy on doctrine preceded a "don't ask, don't tell" policy on matters of sexuality.

The only means of recovery is repentance and an affirmation of biblical authority. "Don't ask, don't tell" just doesn't work in church.

Be sure to look at the main page for other responses. We'll be discussing this issue today on *The Albert Mohler*

Program.

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