Chip And Joanna Gaines' Church Is Firmly Against Same-Sex Marriage

Their pastor considers homosexuality to be a "sin" caused by abuse — whether the Fixer Upper couple agrees is unclear.

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Joanna and Chip Gaines. Jennifer Boomer / Getty Images / Via hgtv.com

Chip and Joanna Gaines' series Fixer Upper is one of the most popular shows on HGTV. The couple has recently graced the cover of People magazine; their book, The Magnolia Story, has been on the New York Times' best-seller list for five weeks; and they were the subject of a long profile in Texas Monthly that credited them with revitalizing the city of Waco, Texas, where the show is set and where their businesses are located. The couple are riding a wave of success, largely due to their charm and appeal. Joanna's design aesthetic — large kitchen islands, open-concept floor plans, and shiplap — is one of the show's stars; Chip's goofiness — his willingness to call himself fat, his sadness and terror when he has to deliver bad news to a client during construction, and his buoyant attitude — is the other.

They have built a small empire, and they are not done yet. They have a huge retail space in Waco, as well as a new magazine, the Magnolia Journal; they have a real estate company; Joanna has a paint line and a home decor line. Season 4 of Fixer Upper begins Nov. 29.

They are also, as they detail in The Magnolia Story, devout Christians — Joanna has spoken of and written about her conversations with God. (God told her both to close her store to spend time with her children, and then to reopen it a few years later.) Their church, Antioch Community Church, is a nondenominational, evangelical, mission-based megachurch. And their pastor, Jimmy Seibert, who described the Gaineses as "dear friends" in a recent video, takes a hard line against same-sex marriage and promotes converting LGBT people into being straight.

So are the Gaineses against same-sex marriage? And would they ever feature a same-sex couple on the show, as have HGTV's House Hunters and Property Brothers? Emails to Brock Murphy, the public relations director at their company, Magnolia, were not returned. Nor were emails and calls to HGTV's PR department.

Fixer Upper has fans of all stripes: Christians, feminists, and LGBT viewers have all found something to love in the Gaineses. So in the absence of a response from them or their representatives, it's worth looking at the severe, unmoving position Seibert and Antioch take on same-sex marriage.

Jimmy Seibert, left, with Joanna and Chip Gaines. Antioch Community Church

When reached by phone, Antioch Community Church's communications director pointed me toward the church's website under "beliefs," where it states, "Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime." The church has held the same position since Seibert founded it 17 years ago, she said.

And in June 2015, on the Sunday after the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in all 50 states, Seibert scrapped what was going to be the program at Antioch that day in order to reaffirm where the church stands, whatever the law of the land may be.

After talking about Genesis, and saying that marriage is between "one man and one wife," Seibert emphasizes the fixedness of this idea. "This is a clear biblical admonition. So if someone were to say, 'Marriage is defined in a different way,' let me just say: They are wrong," he says from the pulpit to applause from the congregation. "God defined marriage, not you and I. God defined masculine and feminine, male and female, not you and I."

Seibert then goes on to discuss sin. "Truth No. 1: Homosexuality is a sin. The lie: Homosexuality is not a sin." He urges compassion for the sinners, though, because "the statistics say that 90% of people who are in a full-blown homosexual lifestyle were abused in some way. Physically, sexually, mentally." He also says that gay pornography deserves some of the blame. "We have people and young people that never had any intention of a same-sex attraction et cetera, who have seen sexuality up front in pornography and now are trapped in the addiction of it."

Chip and Joanna Gaines on Fixer Upper. Rachel Whyte/HGTV

But LGBT people have a choice, Seibert says, and can change. “Truth No. 2: God is able to give us power over every sin, including homosexuality. Lie No. 2: I am a homosexual in thought and action, and I cannot change.”

He tells the story of a playground conversation he recently had with a friend, who was wondering whether one of the kids in their charge was going to be gay or straight. He said to her, “Can I just tell you you don’t have to wonder? You can lovingly, carefully bring them back to Scripture, be compassionate in the journey. And help them direct their passions rightly to how god created them.”

He expands on that notion: “We can change, contrary to what you hear. I’ve worked with people for over 30 years — I have seen hundreds of people personally change their direction of same-sex attraction from a homosexual lifestyle to a heterosexual lifestyle. It doesn’t mean they don’t struggle with feelings, it doesn’t mean that they aren’t hurting, it doesn’t mean it’s not challenging. But they have chosen to change. And there has always been grace there for those who choose that.”

(In 2009, a task force of American Psychological Association concluded that “efforts to change sexual orientation are unlikely to be successful and involve some risk of harm.” The Human Rights Campaign has also decried conversion therapy, linking it in minors to “depression, anxiety, drug use, homelessness, and suicide.”)

Seibert delivering his sermon after the Supreme Court decision in June 2015. Antioch Community Church

Nevertheless, Seibert urges educators in public schools not to accept normalizing same-sex marriage, which will trickle down to “teenage relationships,” and even into kindergarten. He says that teachers should risk being fired. “If they feel you can still work there, so be it. If not, God will have another way for you.”

His sermon is available to watch online in full.

The spokesperson for Antioch said she could not speak for Chip and Joanna Gaines on same-sex marriage. But Seibert clearly does not offer any wiggle room on the issue, as he says emphatically in his sermon: “Business leaders, you will have to be clear about who you are. And you will have to be willing to stand to lose even a deal or two or 10 or even lose your business. But if you’re not clear, you will have no leg to stand on down the road. If you think you’re going to get away with it in the short run, I promise you won’t in the long run, because the spirit demands submission.”

“We’re being called to a higher calling,” Seibert says. “A greater compassion and love, but a greater clarity than ever before. Because it is coming now. Starting Monday morning, we will not have the option anymore.

“And with that,” he concludes “will come persecution.”

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