

Evaluating Steve Morgan's Truthfulness

This is an effort to evaluate whether Steve Morgan is qualified under the biblical qualifications for a pastor, elder, overseer. This is not an evaluation of whether he is qualified with respect to his actions leading to criminal charges against him in the 1980's for sexual assault of a minor. While reasonable people can disagree about that, I have concluded for myself that he is not automatically, permanently disqualified by those actions. He may remain disqualified because of it, but that is not automatic, permanent, nor is it the subject of this evaluation.

Likewise, this is not an evaluation of whether he is qualified with respect to the fact that he did not universally, publicly disclose his conduct which led to the criminal charges against him in the 1980's.

It is furthermore not an evaluation of whether he is disqualified by his failure to disclose his history of being arrested for and charged with criminal sodomy against a minor.

Most narrowly, this is an evaluation of whether he has been honest for the last several years about this.

To begin, the starting assumptions are what I understand Steve Morgan to have said privately. That in or around 1986 or 1987, Steve had unlawful sexual conduct with an underaged boy. At the time, Steve was 22 and the boy was 15. So far as it has been relayed to me, Steve was a youth group leader in a Latter Day Saints organization. Steve was then arrested and charged with aggravated criminal sodomy against a minor in Kansas - a felony charge. Steve and the prosecutor completed a diversion agreement whereby Steve agreed to do certain things to avoid full prosecution.

At some point later, Steve became a Christian. He started attending church. He ended up at the Ziegler Vineyard church with pastor Jaime Moyers, and his small group leader is Larry Anderson. Steve claims that he told Larry the complete details of the criminal sodomy episode. Larry has since died and cannot verify the truth or timing of this, but circumstantially at least part of it is consistent with the understanding of other events. In particular, the fact that Larry knew *at some point* is corroborated by Sandor Paul, James Chidester, and Andrew Lumpe. There is no way to verify, independently of Steve, when Steve told Larry and how much detail he told him at the beginning. (A helpful question to have answered would be when Sandor and James Chidester learned of the criminal sodomy episode, and how forthcoming Steve was with them). Andrew Lumpe seems to have been informed around June 2007, while an overseer at Blue Sky, when he observed Steve going

through an emotionally tumultuous time. From Andrew's account it is not clear whether Larry knew of the criminal charge component of the episode. Andrew's account indicates that he had confirmed knowledge of the criminal charge component by July 2007 when he spoke with Steve about the matter.

Around 1995, Steve and Larry apparently felt a calling to plant a Vineyard church in Carbondale, IL. That church today is Vine. As I understand it, the first step in this process was to talk about it with their local pastor, Jaime Moyer, and the Ziegler Vineyard. Obviously at this point Steve knows about his criminal sodomy episode from ~8 years earlier. Larry is said to have known at this point as well, though this is not independently verifiable from someone other than Steve, so far as I can tell. Even if Larry "knew," it is not clear whether Larry knew the full nature and extent of the criminal sodomy episode. Neither Steve nor Larry told Jaime Moyers about the criminal sodomy episode with any kind of candor. Steve told Jaime that Steve had a homosexual encounter once and then never again. If it was worth bringing up at all (it was), it was worth telling the whole truth, not some part of it. This is not what happened. The reasonable inference in this is that Steve withheld the most damaging details because he wanted to be a pastor and he didn't think that he could be if he told the whole truth.

In this, Steve showed extremely bad judgment. At a minimum, his lack of candor about this does not seem to be above reproach as laid out as a requirement for an overseer / pastor in both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. This evasive disclosure also seems double-tongued, which precludes service as a deacon, let alone an overseer / pastor. While I am open to additional information, I do not believe Steve satisfied these qualifications in 1995. I do not believe that Steve was qualified to be a pastor in 1995. Had he told the truth, I do not believe he would have been ordained or permitted to pastor a church.

These concerns are compounded by the accounts of Jaime Moyers and Happy Leman. The account on the leavingthenetwork.org article says that after Steve and Larry came to him with a plan to plant what would become Vine, Jaime Moyers sent Steve to speak with Happy Leman, and told Steve to tell Happy everything. Happy Leman's statement is difficult to understand, but it seems to indicate that Happy does not believe that Steve told him everything - Happy's email says "First, I knew nothing about this legislation [presumably, he means "information"]."

Steve's repeated representation to the lead pastors and perhaps others was that "the right people knew." This is not true, based on the available information. This has come up in the context of distinguishing Jaime Moyers' knowledge from Steve Nicholson's knowledge. More specifically, when Jaime Moyers said that he did not know about the criminal sodomy episode (only about a one-time homosexual encounter), Steve has directly distinguished Jaime Moyers' knowledge against the knowledge of Steve Nicholson. Steve Morgan claims that Nicholson knew

everything. Bobby Malicoat has verified that this is what he has been told by Steve Morgan. In particular, one of the "right people" has been identified as Steve Nicholson with the Vineyard. Steven Nicholson told Andrew Lumpe in March 2021 that he does not believe anyone at the Vineyard knew about the criminal sodomy episode. This is a denial from Nicholson that Steve Morgan told him the full story. I now understand that Steve Morgan claims that Steve Nicholson is lying about this. It is difficult to credit Steve Morgan's account in this when he concealed the truth from Jaime Moyers and Happy Leman, and by Steve Morgan's own account waited until **after Vine was planted** to tell Steve Nicholson. In other words, Steve Morgan's lack of forthrightness in other parts of this severely discredits his word against that of Steve Nicholson.

Even if we were to operate with the assumption that Steve Morgan did tell Steve Nicholson, there remains a grave concern about Steve Morgan's honesty. Steve's refrain (or the refrain made on his behalf, presumably at his instruction or urging) is that "the right people knew." That assertion should be expected by an ordinary listener or reader to include the suggestion that the right people knew *at the right time*. In my conversations with Tony Ranvestel, he disagrees with that inference / implication. I do not believe that disagreement to be reasonable. I believe it is purely utilitarian, reasoning backwards from the desired outcome. The use of the past tense "knew" implies a time in the past. If the right people did not know at the appropriate time, the proper phrasing would be that the right people "found out," "learned," or "were eventually told." Steve is a professional communicator - I believe that he is able to choose words well, and I expect he has been choosing them carefully throughout all of this. In this representation, Steve was double tongued and not above reproach. When I asked Tony Ranvestel to relay several questions to Steve Morgan on August 15, 2022, Tony called me back on August 16 and indicated that he had spoken with Steve Morgan, and that Steve Morgan's response was that he told Steve Nicholson **after Vine had already been planted in Carbondale**. According to Steve Morgan, the disclosure happened at Vine, when Nicholson was visiting after it had been planted. Even in this disclosure, Tony's description of the disclosure that Steve Morgan made to Steve Nicholson does not expressly include the full story, including the arrest and subsequently diverted criminal charge. Still, Nicholson's account is directly contradictory.

Steve Morgan has been either explicitly telling us or duplicitously leading / allowing us to believe that Steve Nicholson knew about Steve Morgan's criminal sodomy episode before Steve Morgan planted Vine, which would have been the right and relevant time for Nicholson to know. Even if it was not a direct lie, it was evasive and dishonest, obfuscating (intentionally, it seems) the truth. It was an incomplete answer on a matter that calls for full answers and careful clarity. On the issue of Steve's wrongdoing in the 80's there seems to have been a pattern of evasion - not telling the full story to Jaime Moyers, Steve Nicholson, Happy Leman or David

Stark, and now choosing carefully parsed words in an effort to prevent the dishonesty from being uncovered.

Sandor sent an email on July 9 that says "Four different overseer boards in authority concluded the same over the years, that Steve is not disqualified (Vineyard: Steve Nicholson, Vine church, Bluesky church, Network leadership team)." Steve Nicholson has not concluded that Steve Morgan was qualified or disqualified based on full (or even close-to-full) information. In fact, Steve Nicholson denies that he was aware of the information. The overseer board at Blue Sky has not known all along - it was later disclosed to Andrew Lumpe after Blue Sky was planted and Lumpe was on the board. When did each board conclude that he was not disqualified? This is less convincing as more information comes out.

Steve Morgan's story has shifted from "the right people knew" to "I told Steve Nicholson **after** Vine was planted." His accounts of telling folks at the Vineyard have been vague and evasive. Even so, the folks at the Vineyard have nearly all denied that Steve told them, with the exception of a limited disclosure to Jaime Moyers of "a one time homosexual experience." Because of this and the marked change in the narrative of "the right people knew," I do not find Steve Morgan's word credible against Steve Nicholson's. Steve has either been outright dishonest, or he has communicated in such a way as to lead folks to a conclusion favorable to him by leaving out important details. It is hard to imagine a skilled communicator doing so accidentally. It is even harder to imagine a skilled communicator doing so accidentally on an issue as intensely important to him as this, when he has had a very long time to consider how to manage this situation.

While I remain concerned about Steve Morgan's behavior in the 80's and his concealment in the process of being ordained and planting Vine, the clearer and more present concern that I have is that I do not believe that Steve Morgan has been honest recently. "Steve Nicholson knew" is the word that we've been given from Steve Morgan, but now Nicholson is saying it is not so, and Steve Morgan thereafter revised this position, now saying that he told Steve Nicholson **after** Vine was planted. This has been, at a minimum, double-tongued. This is even more fully true now that the criminal sodomy episode is publicly published - all the more time to provide precise information to support the account. It is hard to arrive at any other conclusion than Steve purposefully availing himself of the vagueness of his responses so that folks will draw particular inferences which are not explicitly spoken and are themselves untrue.

This concern is exacerbated by the fact that communication is only available through proxies. When I sought to send an email to Steve asking these questions, I agreed to route it through Tony. Instead of having the four specific questions addressed, Tony called back and gave me the answer that Steve Morgan told Nicholson at Vine after Vine had already been planted. I expressed my concerns

about that to him - that we've been led to believe that Steve Nicholson knew at the right time, which would have been *before* allowing Steve Morgan to plan Vine.

In this conversation, Tony indicated that the reason for the use of proxies is to protect Steve. While I understand and can relate to the protective instinct, the communication by proxy has had an extremely harmful effect of muddying things at a time when precise communication is called-for. Furthermore, the priority for the shepherds should be to protect the sheep, not the other shepherds. This behavior is prioritizing the leader over those of us who are led, who are deeply concerned.

[Name Redacted] told me that by having concerns about this that I am denying the power of the cross. I do not deny that Jesus has forgiven and will continue to forgive Steve, I rejoice in it. My concerns are presently primarily related to whether Steve told the truth in 1995 and on, and whether Steve has been telling us the truth recently. I believe that he has not told us the truth. Whether he has explicitly lied or whether he has prevailed upon and benefitted from strategically chosen ambiguous statements, I believe that he is disqualified presently inasmuch as he has been double-tongued (disqualifying him from the office of deacon, let alone overseer / pastor) and not above reproach.