

CHRISTIAN PARENTING AND HOMOSEXUALITY

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The difficulties encountered in parenting, including that caused by children's depravity, are best resolved through implementing biblical principles. In a society that is permissive and even positive toward the homosexual lifestyle, Christian parents should adopt eleven biblical goals in rearing their children. (1) They should do everything to reflect God and His glory. (2) They should help their children understand the gospel so that they receive salvation. (3) They should protect their children from physical and spiritual harm. (4) They should instruct their children in the truths of Scripture. (5) They should interpret Scripture so as to give their children a Christian worldview. (6) They should prepare their children for the responsibilities of adulthood. (7) They should prevent their children from falling to temptation by teaching them the consequences of sin. (8) They should correct any tendencies their children display toward sinful activities. (9) They should provide for the physical and spiritual needs of their children. (10) They should provide positive behavioral examples for their children to follow. (11) They should establish clear lines of communication with their children. These goals will help them deal with the same morally degenerate world as existed during NT times.

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Parenting is harder than I imagined. My wife and I are parents to three sons who are presently eight, ten, and twelve years old. Along with other Christian parents, we are acutely aware of the daunting challenges and immeasurable joys of rearing children. Admittedly, the ages of my sons reveal the limitations of my experience as a parent. Still, I am persuaded that although experience provides cumulative and exponential advantages to parenting, biblical principles supersede lessons learned from praxis.

The Bible is not only *capable of*, but *indispensable to* Christian parenting. No dimension of child-rearing is beyond the scope of God's Word. But having the

sufficient resource of God's Word does not make this privileged task simpler or easier. Parenting is a multi-level maze of challenges to navigate and sins to mortify—both in parents and in children. The concerns of parenting are as numerous as the number of children. Dealing with the depraved infection natural to our children's souls in the septic morality of our culture is far beyond the intuitive abilities of loving parents. Sin's pulverizing destruction comes from both the outside—culture's moral chaos—and from the inside—the soul's pervasive sinfulness.

Parenting can be wrongly interpreted as a process of keeping our children good and pure. The truth is that every child is born sinful. The goal is not to keep children from becoming messed up by sin; instead it is to see their inborn sin covered by the gospel. As a friend of mine puts it, "Parents can't mess up their children; they come that way as a result of Adam's fall."

Among the sticky issues parents must address in rearing their children, homosexuality is one of the more awkward and unsettling issues to face. However, avoiding it is not an option in the moral sewage of the 21st-century world.

The interest of this article is *parenting and homosexuality*. It will have a deliberate pastoral tone. The purpose is not to debate the legitimacy of homosexuals as parents, but to provide assistance to parents in a world where homosexuality is vying for normalcy. Homosexuals can indeed fulfill the secular roles of guardians/parents and in some states do it legally. But they cannot become biological parents to a common offspring as a result of their union. Even more important, they cannot fulfill the biblical roles and mandates for parenting since these guidelines are comprehensively heterosexual (both explicitly and implicitly) in Scripture. God's creative archetype in Genesis lays an obvious paradigm for heterosexuals as parents. Gordon Wenham insightfully deduces:

In Genesis 2, the Lord is portrayed as doing everything possible for Adam's well-being, providing a well-watered garden full of beautiful fruit trees. Noticing his loneliness, God creates all the animals as Adam's companions, but they did not meet his need. So eventually Eve is created. But is this not a bit mean? God could have provided Adam with other men friends or several Eves. That only one woman is provided by the all-powerful, all-generous God surely is significant: it indicates the divine approval of heterosexual monogamy. One man with one woman is God's model for relations between the sexes.¹

Not only is heterosexual monogamy established in Genesis 2, the command to the first couple to "be fruitful and multiply" would have been impossible with a homosexual couple. Homosexuality has a decidedly *limiting* effect on population growth. The fifth commandment likewise plainly points to heterosexual parents—"father and mother"—(Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16) which is affirmed by the

¹Gordon J. Wenham, "Family in the Pentateuch," in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context*, eds. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 26.

apostle Paul in Eph 6:1-2 where he quotes the fifth commandment.

Sexual intimacy is presented from the outset of Scripture as the blessing of God to heterosexual, *married* couples. All other venues of sexual expression are explicitly forbidden because they violate the divinely established covenant commitment of a man and woman in marriage. Daniel Block observes,

According to the Old Testament, not only do human beings express their humanity and status as images of God within the context of heterosexual relationships, but sexual activity itself has three functions: biological (procreation), social (physical expression of covenant commitment and intimacy) and aesthetic (for pleasure). Within the context of marriage, sexual activity between husband and wife is purposeful, noble, sacred and necessary for the well-being of the family. Homosexuality, premarital and extramarital sexual relations, and bestiality are deemed abhorrent violations of the ethical and ritual order.²

That “homosexuality, incest, and bestiality were legislated against alongside one another in the OT (e.g., Lev 18:6-23)”³ is noteworthy. Teaching the propriety of experiencing sexual intimacy is a serious priority of Christian pedagogy.

The most pressing question for the Christian community in this debate is not the legitimacy of homosexuals as parents. More important is answering the question of how to handle appropriately the subject of homosexuality with our children. As defended elsewhere in this edition of *TMSJ*, this article presupposes that homosexuality is sin, it has no genetic footprint, it is an ungodly threat to marriage, and that homosexuals are invited to repent and believe the gospel along with any other sinner.

Living in a Homosexual Culture

Homosexuality itself is out of the closet. It shows up on the evening news, the front page of the paper, the contents and covers of magazines, TV sitcoms, and dramas, Hollywood’s big screen productions, and the schools and neighborhoods where our children spend a considerable amount of their time. Homosexuality has been taken for granted in our world. Peter Jones notes,

Homosexuality is not a marginal fad of Western culture. Like the Sodomites who pounded on Lot’s door millennia ago, the modern gay movement gathers at the doors of our churches and academies, demanding entrance and full recognition.⁴

²Daniel I. Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003) 85.

³For a fuller discussion on the synonymous culpability of these sexual aberrations, see David W. Chapman, “Marriage and Family in Second Temple Judaism,” *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003) 224.

⁴Peter Jones, *The God of Sex: How Spirituality Defines Your Sexuality* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Victor, 2006) 67.

Thomas Schmit reinforces Jones' warning when he says that homosexuality is "an issue so important that it increasingly appears to be the battleground for all the forces seeking to give shape to the world of the next century."⁵ Schools and media have launched a shock and awe campaign to promote a kind, gentle, culturally accepted homosexuality. What are the basic beliefs of this agenda? Over twenty years ago Randy Alcorn summarized the homosexual movement's basic beliefs. These tenets remain the same and are gaining more acceptance in public opinion.

1. Homosexuality is an inborn nature—not an illness, not a choice, and not subject to change by an act of the will, psychological therapy, or religious experience.
2. Homosexuality is as natural as heterosexuality, it just happens to occur less frequently. It is not an undesirable condition except for its social stigma, which is the result of misguided or hateful homophobics.
3. Homosexuals constitute a legitimate minority as blacks or Chicanos. Homosexual rights are just as valid as women's rights.
4. Homosexuals have made essential contributions to the development of Western culture. (Homosexual literature is often filled with references to famous homosexual artists, musicians, poets, and statesmen.)
5. Homosexuals should openly acknowledge their condition—"come out of the closet"—and live their desired lifestyle. They should be proud, not ashamed to pursue homosexual relationships.⁶

Those homosexuals who claim Christian faith (a significant number) argue that God created them as they are, accepts them as they are, and endorses a lifestyle in keeping with the nature⁷ He has given them.⁸ This assumption, however, is a recent view and

⁵Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995) 11.

⁶Randy Alcorn, *Christians in the Wake of the Sexual Revolution: Recovering Our Sexual Sanity* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1985) 136-37.

⁷See Michael Grisanti's article in this edition of *TMSJ* for a study exposing the absence of a genetic footprint for homosexuality. Additionally, Joseph and Linda Nicolosi's research concludes that "[t]here is no evidence demonstrating that homosexuality is mandated by biology. In fact, none of the research claims that homosexuality is mandated by biology. Only the press and certain researchers do, when speaking in sound bites to the public" (Joseph Nicolosi and Linda Ames Nicolosi, *A Parents' Guide to Preventing Homosexuality* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002] 62).

⁸Alcorn, *Christians in the Wake of the Sexual Revolution* 136-37. For more information on pro-homosexual explanation of biblical data, refer to sources cited in Alex D. Montoya, "Homosexuality and the Church," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 11/2 (Fall 2000):155-68.

against the grain of every sector of church history.⁹

In the rip current of the homosexual force, Christian parents cannot afford to play defense alone. A strategic, intentional plan to handle the homosexual question with our children is of great spiritual consequence. Edisio Sanchez identifies the gravity of the problem:

The reasons Christian parents have lost the opportunity to participate as key subjects in the training of their children are varied and complex. In the majority of cases, parents seem incapable of guiding their children through the labyrinths of life on the basis of biblical principles. Decisions concerning faith, morals, careers—to name only a few issues—have been left to schools, colleges, the mass media, schoolmates, or neighbors, and only in small measure to religious centers, much less to home.¹⁰

Under the loving leadership of Mom and Dad and the local church, morals must be guided by informed, purposeful, and systematic biblical instruction. Homosexuality should be understood in the context of a comprehensive parental strategy. Parents would profit from establishing biblical goals which will answer the homosexual questions and shape wholesome heterosexuality in children. Unfortunately, homosexuality is more frequently handled psychologically than biblically in Christian literature. What follows is a macro-strategy for parenting in which the sin of homosexuality may be categorized and addressed. Against the trend of psychological approaches, these biblical goals may serve Christian parents as they grapple with the issue of homosexuality and parenting.

Eleven Biblical Goals of Christian Parenting

1. Glorification. Paul exhorted the Corinthians, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). The aim of glorifying God has a comprehensive application for every dimension of life, even rearing children. Likewise, Peter wrote, “whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; *so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen*” (1 Pet 4:11, emphasis added). Glorifying God is an all-inclusive response to salvation.

⁹After a survey of the church’s traditional position on homosexuality from the church fathers to the modern church, Richard Loveless concludes, “Until recently, the public posture of all sectors of the church toward homosexuality, even including liberal Protestantism, has rarely diverged from the traditional, negative stance. Homosexuals have been (at least theoretically) welcome in the church if they are repentant and sexually inactive, but active homosexuality has been regarded either as sin or, at the least, as a contagious illness” (Richard F. Lovelace, *Homosexuality: How Should Christians Respond?* [Eugene, Ore.: Resource Publications, 2002] 29).

¹⁰Edisio Sanchez, “Family in the Non-narrative Sections of the Pentateuch,” in *Family in the Bible* 33.

Consequently, parenting has primarily an upward direction. Everything parents do should point toward and reflect God and His glory. Since God has revealed Himself and His glory in Scripture, submitting to biblical principles in life and in parenting is foundational. Very simply, every tributary of life should find its end in God.

In relation to sexuality, Peter Jones submits.

There is a deep correlation between a monistic understanding of God and the practical issues of spirituality—particularly, sexuality. The pagan understanding of God as a spiritual force within nature produces a deconstruction of heterosexual norms. Polytheism produces “polygender.” Behind the many sexual choices are many gods.¹¹

In other words, when Christian parents worship the God of the Bible through affection and action, His ways become a transcendent standard for children. God Himself becomes the focus and context of the home. Theology proper becomes the model they see and the air they breathe as it is worked out in the roles Mom and Dad fulfill toward each other.

Children will be informed by example that heterosexuality is not only God’s pattern, but His gift as well. Heterosexual love is glorifying to God. It is not necessary for children to read the Song of Solomon to realize this. Godly parents are an ever-playing video for them to watch and learn.

2. Salvation. A second principle involves the goal of our children’s conversion to faith in Jesus Christ. Though only God can save children, their salvation ranks as the greatest desire for any believing parent. Aiding children in their basic and advancing understanding of the gospel is the linchpin of Christian parenting. Practically, this means teaching them about the person, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is followed by calling them to respond to these facts in faith and repentance. What does the gospel have to do with homosexuality? In 1 Cor 6:9-11 Paul¹² explains the relationship when he says,

Or 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 effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were

¹¹Jones, *God of Sex* 17.

¹²Andreas Kostenberger makes an important observation about the apostle Paul: “The major source concerning the New Testament’s view of homosexuality is the Apostle Paul, who uses the term *arsenokoites* (not previously attested) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 and refers to homosexuality in an important passage in Romans 1:27” (Andreas Kostenberger, “Marriage and Family in the New Testament,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003] 242).

sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Notice the implications regarding homosexuals. First, the roll call of hell includes homosexuals, while the roll call of heaven excludes homosexuals. Second, homosexuality and salvation are mutually exclusive. Finally, Jesus Christ and homosexuality cannot reside in the same soul. Note the imperfect tense in 1 Cor 6:11, “such *were* (ἦτε) some of you.” Some were *effeminate* (μαλακοί), a term appearing two other times in the NT (Matt 11:8, Luke 7:25) that refers to soft clothing (cf. Matt 11:8) and at its root has the meaning of “smooth” and “effeminate.”¹³

Some debate whether this term relates to homosexual prostitutes or all forms of homosexual behavior. Dionysius of Halicarnassus applies the term to a male prostitute.¹⁴ In Hellenistic literature, however, it is translated as effeminate.¹⁵ It described “men and boys who are sodomized by other males.”¹⁶ It did not merely refer to male prostitutes,¹⁷ rather, there is a broad agreement that μαλακοὶ refers to “the passive ... partner ... in male homosexual relations.”¹⁸ Moreover, the parallelism in verse 9 between fornication and adultery, and effeminate and homosexuals indicates that Paul is addressing two manifestations of heterosexual sin and two manifestations of homosexual sin. With this background, it is reasonable to conclude that μαλακοί (effeminate) is best translated as a passive homosexual partner while ἀρσενοκοῖται (homosexual) refers to the active partner.

The point is clear: participants in homosexuality will not inherit the kingdom of God. But a collateral lesson is taught here as well. Paul unmasks an agenda of deception when he exhorts the Corinthians, “Do not be deceived” (1 Cor 6:9). The protocol of the homosexual agenda is to deceive people into believing that homosexuality is under the blessing of God, and His divinely designed sexual

¹³Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 166.

¹⁴Dionysius Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romance* 7.2.4.

¹⁵Dio Chrysostom 49[66]; Diogenes Laertius 7:173 (cited by Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000] 448). Cf. R. K. Harrison, “Weakness,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 3:999.

¹⁶Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University Press, 2000) 613.

¹⁷John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University Press, 1980) 107, 341-44; R. Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 85-88.

¹⁸Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 449; C. K. Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 140.

orientation for some. The apostle could not be more clear or foreboding: salvation through Christ will not be extended to (“inherited” by) practicing homosexuals. But the good news is that “such were” some of the Corinthians. The Corinthian church had *former* homosexuals on its membership roll.

Instructing children about salvation includes detailed discussions about repentance. Homosexuality is one of the explicit sins Paul mentions that require categorical repentance.

3. Protection. Christian parents have a strong desire to safeguard children from physical and spiritual harm. Solomon says, “My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you” (Prov 3:1-2). Parental care involves giving our children “length of days and years of life.” The book of Proverbs showcases the parental role and responsibility to provide protection for their children. This protection is spiritual, physical, moral, social, financial, and emotional. Homosexuality, however, poses an epic threat to our children in every one of these areas. It threatens to expose children to sexually transmitted diseases, HIV, emotional scarring, mental confusion, relational trauma, and manipulative predators. A large part of protecting children from homosexual influences is awareness of the entertainment industry’s homosexual agenda, which aims to normalize homosexuality by portraying it as simply an alternative, though wrongly maltreated, lifestyle.

Not everyone is tempted by homosexuality. For many it is a repulsive thought, but for others it is a serious desire. The objects of each person’s sinful temptations are on a broad spectrum of lusts. It is very possible that Christian parents have a child who has a sinful proclivity towards same gender attraction.¹⁹ In this case he or she must be protected from himself/herself. The well-known passage in 1 Corinthians provides hopeful insight, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (1 Cor 10:13). Any child who wrestles with inappropriate attraction to his/her own gender can be guided by this hope. A way of escape exists for any temptation and grace to endure it also—even homosexuality. But that hope is offered only to believers. Here again is the paramount importance of the gospel as the answer to any sin and lustful temptation.

4. Instruction. It should be the parents’ goal to teach children biblical truth

¹⁹It is beyond the parameters of this article to delve into the needed counsel for shepherding a child and family through the many issues associated with a child’s homosexual attractions. For an excellent starting point, see Bob Davies’ two chapters: “Church ministry to Persons Tempted by Homosexuality” and “‘Someone I love is Gay’: Church Ministry to Family and Friends,” in *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood*, eds. Wayne Grudem & Dennis Rainey (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2002) 209-46.

and its wisdom. John Younts notes that “in the era of cable TV it seems almost absurd to turn to God and His Bible to understand sex. The idea that sex is God’s creation and gift to man does not compute in the 21st century world.”²⁰ We have succumbed to a revisionist or selective approach to the Bible. Revisionists dumb down and edit the Bible so much that the meaning is changed. This is the hermeneutic of *Veggie Tales*. In the selective hermeneutic, the interpreter simply skips parts that he does not think are appropriate for children.

The reality is that one encounters heterosexuality in the first two chapters of the Bible and homosexuality in the thirteenth chapter of the Bible. By simply opening the first book of the Bible, the reader is obligated to deal with sexuality.

Further, parents ought not to neglect the pronounced emphasis on sexual purity in the book of Proverbs, which is defined as sexual relations between a man and woman in marriage (Prov 5:1-21). Moreover, children are to be brought up in the “instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:1-4). The Great Commission’s emphasis on instruction in discipleship applies to our children. Premarital instruction and counseling does not begin when our children become engaged; it starts when they come home from the hospital after birth. Wholesome teaching about Christian marriage and modeling of a Christian marriage may be the best antidote for homosexual temptations. It is a beautiful thing when our children want a relationship with a spouse who will model Mom’s or Dad’s relationship. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is a paradigmatic passage about parental instruction. Parenting is to occur for the duration of the parents’ life, not merely when children are young. Moses indicates that this instruction is both formal and informal and in the context of every phase of life.

This raises the bar for parents to be familiar with the teaching of both testaments concerning homosexuality.²¹ Genesis 19 paints a scene of divine disapproval of homosexuality in the account of Sodom and Gomorrah. Leviticus 18:22 clearly commands that a man “shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.” Leviticus 20:13 furthermore states, “If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their blood-guiltiness is upon them.” This concept is not merely effective in the OT, but is applied in the NT by

²⁰John A. Younts, *Everyday Talk: Talking Freely and Naturally about God with Your Children* (Wapwallopen, Pa.: Shepherd, 2004) 110.

²¹For comprehensive defenses of the Bible’s condemnation of homosexuality, see James R. White & Jeffrey D. Niell, *The Same Sex Controversy: Defending and Clarifying the Bible’s Message About Homosexuality* (Bloomington, Minn.: Bethany House, 2002); and James B. DeYoung, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000). Chapter 8 of DeYoung’s volume provides an excellent and succinct summary, as well as interaction between revisionistic and biblical arguments about homosexuality.

Paul²² in 1 Cor 6:9-11 where he uses the term ἀρσενοκοίτης to refer to a “male who engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex, pederast.”²³ This term is never used to refer to heterosexual intercourse.²⁴

It is most appropriate to break open the Bible’s sealed book—Song of Solomon—as we teach our children the principles of heterosexual relationships. Certainly discretion is needed to determine appropriate age and maturity for teaching the content of Solomon’s sexual education, but there is a time for exposing children to the fact that sex is God’s gift and beautiful in the context of heterosexual monogamy. Christian parenting needs to be built on purposeful instruction about sexuality—both its propriety and its aberrations.

5. Interpretation. It is the responsibility of the parents to provide their children a Christian worldview. Parents should function as spiritual optometrists who help their children interpret their world through corrective theological lenses. Children are naïve and ignorant about the inherent deceptions of sexual sin. Paul warns the Ephesian church about this deception of sexual sin when he writes,

[B]ut immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. *Let no one deceive you* with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience (Eph 5:3-6, emphasis added).

Every sin, including homosexuality, needs to be exposed as a dangerous lie. A part of parental responsibility is to instill in the minds of children a proper category for sin. That is different than categorizing sin’s evil. Homosexuality is a serious sin, but it is a no-more damning sin from any other.

Both over-reacting and under-reacting to homosexuality are dangerous. Interpreting homosexuality in the light of a world ruled by the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2) will put it in a proper context. Parents need not be surprised by this issue, but rather anticipate dealing with it alongside their children. Isolation from sin is not as wise as communication about it. No matter what a parent does, children will eventually have to face the sin of homosexuality and generate a response. Helping them formulate convictions about sexual sins and sexual purity while they are in the home and under the direct influence of parents is better than sending them

²²Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow* 95.

²³Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Literature* 109.

²⁴Witherington, *Conflict & Community in Corinth* 166 n. 18.

off to college and hoping their convictions work themselves out.

6. Preparation. Parents have an inherent duty to prepare children for the responsibilities of adulthood. Peer pressure situations arise at an early age and children are vulnerable to capitulate from biblical convictions. These convictions should not be based on parental admonitions alone, but grounded in the commands of God. Children, and especially teens, are ripe for purposeful discipleship. The right training about marriage will hopefully prepare their hearts for the gospel. According to Ephesians 5, the gospel has a reciprocating pedagogical relationship with marriage. Marriage is designed by God to be an earthly illustration of the gospel and the gospel serves as pattern for marriage.

But what happens when children encounter homosexuals? Christian love is not limited to heterosexuals alone. The saving gospel of Jesus Christ is offered to any sinner, regardless of the depth or breadth of sin. Julia Johnston is right in her hymn “Marvelous Grace”; grace is truly greater than all our sins. Sinners are the objects of God’s affection in the sacrifice of His Son, not the objects of His (or our) ridicule. It is an unfaithful gospel witness to laugh at homosexuality, whether it is portrayed on the screen or encountered in reality. Jesus wept over sin; how can we entertain ourselves with it?

In Rom 1:32, Paul hints at the notion of being entertained by sin. He writes “although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also *give hearty approval* to those who practice them” (emphasis added). Those who are entertained by sin fall into the category of the individuals who “give hearty approval” to sin. Parents can influence their children to have a mindset that mourns over all sin,²⁵ including homosexuality. This attitude is foundational for evangelistic motivation.

7. Prevention. The next goal is prevention. Any Christian parent desires to deter sin in children and equip them for the battle with temptation. In Psalm 73, Asaph contrasts the life of the wicked with the life of the righteous. He reminds the reader that immorality has destructive physical, emotional, and social consequences. Yet, he honestly portrays the pleasures of sin as attractive to the flesh. Asaph cites the consequential judgment of God as the perspectival deterrent for enjoying the pleasures of sin (Psa 73:17-20).

Preventing children from experiencing the wrath of God (Eph 5:2-6) necessitates honest discussions about the attractiveness and damnable consequences of sin. Since homosexuals cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-11), discussions about the eternal danger of homosexuality can occupy early discussions

²⁵Note the response of Daniel to the sin of Israel (Daniel 9), Jeremiah to the sin of Judah (Lamentations 1), Ezra to the sin of the exiles (Ezra 10:6), and the psalmist to sinners in general (Psa 119:136).

with children as the subject is engaged.

What if a child experiences homosexual temptation, him- or herself? Scripture offers sufficient grace for repenting from this sin. Homosexuality is merely a sin, even if it is a more gross and depraved sin according to the sensibilities of some. The power of the gospel enables the believer to deny self and be victorious over all fleshly desires (Rom 6:11-14; Gal 2:20). A child does not have to “give in” to his or her temptation, but rather rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the temptation (1 Cor 10:13) because of saving faith in Jesus Christ. The process of repenting from homosexuality is no different from that of any other sin. Since the Bible provides no special approach to this sin, it can be safely assumed that the common means of grace for any other sin may be applied.

8. Correction. Christian parents are entrusted by God to identify sin in children and help them repent of it with gospel truth. Within the context of homosexuality, it is the obligation of parents to watch for signs of cross-gender behavior and correct it. Moses forbids such behavior in Deut 22:5 where he says, “A woman shall not wear man’s clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman’s clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.” Boys should act like boys and girls like girls. There is a certain intuition about this. Biblical masculinity and femininity should be a part of the stated and modeled curriculum of Christian parents. Fundamentally, parents ought to assume that children’s views of sex will need correction, especially during the teenage years. Left to their own lusts and imaginations, wrong conclusions about sex and sexuality are guaranteed. Correcting and shaping the minds of children about homosexuality will obviously take on different intensities and details depending on age.

Here is an obvious assumption. For parents to be able to correct the sinful inclinations of their children, a thorough knowledge of biblical principles and personal knowledge of each child is needed. Personal holiness, biblical knowledge, a credible example, and a working knowledge of the functional centrality of the gospel in parental lives are the foundations for correcting sinful behavior and attitudes in children.

9. Provision. A ninth goal of parenting is to provide for the physical and spiritual needs of children. Parents, especially fathers, have a serious responsibility to provide for their children. The apostle Paul imposes significant responsibility on fathers in 1 Tim 5:8 where he teaches, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Not only is this kind of man not qualified for spiritual leadership (see larger context of the passage), but he is worse than an unbeliever. If parents do not meet the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of their children, they will be vulnerable to anyone who will—including homosexuals.

Fathers have specific admonitions about the responsibility to be the role

model in the lives of their children. Throughout the book of Proverbs, the father is the primary teacher of his sons as he passes the baton of life to them. As Dad works on having a biblical, fatherly relationship with his children, care must be taken not to exasperate his children (Eph 6:3), but rather bring them up in the discipline (or instruction) of the Lord. The relationship between a father and a son will affect the choices the son makes. One survey of 117 homosexual men details the childhood relationship with their fathers. The results are alarming:

- 86% spent little or no time with their fathers
- 50% believed their fathers did not love them
- 45% said their fathers humiliated them
- 44% were neglected by their fathers.²⁶

Fathers need to understand that their relationships with their sons affect their choices in life.²⁷ Perhaps the most influential provision a father gives a child is personal care and a loving relationship.

10. Imitation. Not only are parents responsible to provide spiritually and physically for their children, but they are to lead exemplary lives worthy of imitation. They are to maintain a godly example for children to emulate. Reading and honoring Scripture, loving one's spouse, humble dependence on the Holy Spirit and His convictions, softness to correction, and quick repentance are only a sample of the characteristics that parents are to instill in their children and exemplify with their lives. Children are quicker to imitate than obey. Christian parents do well to remember this principle every time they make a decision that may conflict with their verbal profession.

Again, parents are especially to model a godly marriage. What a legacy for children to observe their parents, and say, "My parents' relationship is so rich and meaningful, I want one like it." Mom and Dad's relationship should stimulate children to pursue marriage, not avoid it.

The importance of Dad's influence on his sons and Mom's influence on her daughters cannot be overstated. In Titus 2:2-6 Paul describes discipleship taking place within genders (older men and women with younger men and women, respectively).

²⁶Chad W. Thompson, *Loving Homosexuals as Jesus Would* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004) 114.

²⁷Mark Penn cites three studies suggesting that "gay men outnumber lesbians in America by approximately 2 to 1" (Mark Penn, with E Kinney Zalesne, *Mircotrends: The Small Forces Behind Tomorrow's Big Changes* [New York: Twelve, 2007] 3). If these studies are right, a focus on the issue of homosexuality with boys more than girls is a considered response. Interestingly, Raphael Patai notes, "It is remarkable that while men and women are warned against the practice of bestiality, no reference at all is made to female homosexuality in the Levitical law, nor anywhere else in the Bible" (Raphael Patai, *Family, Love, and the Bible* [London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1960] 152).

Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. Likewise urge the young men to be sensible.

If this is the pattern for discipleship in the church, how much more should it be a parental blueprint? Paul's instruction about mentoring involves skills and character. Both categories find unique and specific applicability in same-gender mentoring. It is from older believers that younger believers find direction for God-honoring spousal relationships. Parents are on the front lines of this modeling. Children first and most influentially learn how to relate to both genders by observing their parents.

Although preference for one another and interaction with the opposite sex is critical for healthy development of a child, the most important virtue to model is the preeminence of Christ in all things (Col 1:18). The most overarching lesson for parents to teach children is the supremacy of Christ in practical Christianity. Christ will be the final Judge of every person (John 5:22) and every knee will bow before Him (Phil 2:9-11). When children see that their parents live in the awareness of such realities, imitation is a beautiful result.

11. Communication. Finally, parents are to interact purposefully with children as authoritative consultants for life. A good communication bridge allows children's sexual curiosities to be answered by Mom or Dad instead of by experimentation and sinful observation through entertainment media. Sally Leman Chall observes, "Almost all parents talk *to* their children, but Christian parents need to make a concerted effort to talk *with* their children."²⁸ No subject can be off limits for discussion with our children. Obviously, age must be considered with any discussion, but the topics of conversation ought to include a comprehensive spectrum, including sexuality.

Communication with children will no doubt be proactive and reactive. This is especially true with the subject of homosexuality. Young children and teens will inevitably want to process their thoughts about homosexuality through conversation. The challenge is making sure that these conversations are between parents and children. Left to peers and the media, it is unlikely that an accurate biblical perspective will be presented. A ready parent will anticipate the subject of homosexuality arising and be prepared to provide biblical context for it as sin.

Conclusion

Where do we go from here? A glimpse of the moral decay of society will

²⁸Sally Leman Chall, *Making God Real to Your Children* (Grand Rapids: Spire, 1991) 86.

hopefully motivate people to apply these goals in parenting. Imagine a world in which sexual immorality is promoted, available, and accessible, a world in which adultery is common, prostitution legal, drunkenness normal, and theft a constant threat, a world in which most children rebel against their parents and fornication and incest are rampant, God is openly hated, the justice system rarely works for the innocent, and Christianity is illegal. Imagine a world in which homosexuality is out of the closet, is publicly recognized, and enjoys promotion and protection from the government. This is not an imaginary world, nor is it a glimpse into the future. It is a description of the world of the NT. Jesus lived in this world and the gospel was cradled in this kind of society. It is at this point that Solomon should be heard: “there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9). Homosexuality has not taken God by surprise, but God’s nature is to take homosexuals by surprise with the saving truth of the gospel.

The problem is parenting, not homosexuality. In Rom 1:24-27, Paul says that having rejected God, society defaults to a destructive and perverted lifestyle. The only antidote for this sinful spiral is the gospel. The earlier the gospel is embraced, the better equipped children will be to have footing on the slippery slopes of a godless, sin-promoting society.

In the midst of a morally deteriorating Greco-Roman culture, Paul instructed the Ephesian believers to

walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness (Eph 4: 17-19).

Participation in “every kind of impurity”—which includes homosexuality—is the consequence of being “excluded from the life of God.” Christian parents can mitigate the influences of homosexual temptations and the homosexual agenda by guiding children into this life in God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Tedd and Margy Tripp say it well:

In all our nurturing as parents the gospel must be central. It is the only hope for forgiveness. It is the only hope for deep internal change. It is the only hope for power to live. The grace of the gospel is the center of everything for Christian parents.²⁹

²⁹Tedd and Margy Tripp, *Instructioning a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, Pa.: Shepherd, 2008) 180.