

The Church Must Speak

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As marriage becomes unnecessary, the whole nation will be “living in sin.”

—GENE EDWARD VEITH

“WHAT DIFFERENCE does it make to me?” one man asked when interviewed about same-sex marriages. “It won’t affect the way I love my wife and kids.”

Is it true that same-sex marriages can take place in one part of our society and not affect “the rest of us”? Is this just one more of those issues that we should learn to tolerate in a free and open society?

Imagine that you are on a large boat, hoping to get to the other side of a lake, when one man insists that he has a “right” to drill a hole through the bottom of *his* side of the boat. When you object, he argues for tolerance, and reminds you that you can just stay on your side with *your* friends; what he does on his side has no bearing on what you do on your side. But as the water begins to seep into the boat, you are suddenly

aware, that, like it or not, what one person does on his side of the boat affects everyone in the boat.

We cannot be content to rest secure in our evangelical enclaves. As we saw in the previous introduction, some very smart homosexual activists have spent the last several decades energetically and methodically remaking American attitudes toward what was formerly broadly considered a deviant behavior. These activists have seized the agenda and control the national conversation, putting those who care about marriage and family—and how it has been understood for centuries—on the defensive.

We need, therefore, to understand and respond. And there are three reasons why the church cannot be silent.

WHAT IS A “FAMILY”?

So why should we be worried? First, we need to realize that in some quarters a concentrated push to “reinvent” the family is under way. For example, the San Francisco Unified School District has a lesson plan for teaching kindergarteners and first graders about homosexuality. It defines a family as a “unit of two or more persons, related either by birth or by choice, who may or may not live together, who try to meet each other’s needs and share common goals and interests . . .”¹ Gone is the idea that a family should include a mother and a father in a committed relationship rearing their children. Consonant with the notion that “I and only I define what’s best for me,” we are witnessing an effort to redefine *family*. And, because of the prevalence of divorce, serial marriages, and cohabitation, the effort is pretty effective.

If we want to find out what would happen if same-sex marriages become law, we need only take a look at what is happening in some countries of Europe, where such legislation already exists. The answer, in brief, is that the change in laws has, in effect, wrought the destruction of marriage. For example, in France, “civil solidarity pacts” have been created for homosexuals so that they can file joint income tax returns and receive welfare and unemployment benefits. Obviously, such an arrangement had to be made available to everyone, including cohabiting heterosexual couples, to widowed sisters, even to priests and their housekeepers.

Because these “pacts” are easier to enter and easier to exit, and impose fewer legal obligations, many heterosexual couples enter into these agreements rather than becoming married. If these couples think that these “pacts” provide a stable home environment for children, they should keep in mind that the average cohabitational relationship lasts about five years. David Frum writes, “Apologists for cohabitation praise it as a less burdensome alternative to marriage; the truth is that it is a near-certain prelude to fatherlessness.”²

He continues: “The argument over gay marriage is only incidentally and secondarily an argument over gays. What it is first and fundamentally is an argument over marriage. . . . gay marriage will turn out in practice to mean the creation of an alternative form of legal coupling that will be available to homosexual and heterosexuals alike. Gay marriage, as the French are vividly demonstrating, does not extend marital rights; it abolishes marriage and puts a new, flimsier institution in its place.”³

Consider: If marriage is no longer the union of one man and one woman but rather any two persons who want to cohabit,

who is to say that it must be limited to two people? Why not a trio of three men or women? And why not one man with two wives or ten? After all, we must extend “equal rights” to all individuals to live according to any arrangement they wish. The end result is the destruction of marriage as we know it—with children the losers.

A conference at the University of London called “Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Marriage: A Conference on National European and International Law” explored the question of whether marriage should exist at all. They discussed strategies on how to bypass each nation’s democratic process and use the judicial process to sanction same-sex marriages. They also discussed how adults could be free to pursue any sexual relationship they want, with no legal restrictions whatsoever.⁴

Gene Edward Veith, writing in *World* magazine, summed up the consequences for our society if marriage is redefined:

Under the emerging framework, there will be no difference between a married couple, a homosexual couple, or a couple in a temporary sexual relationship. As many advocates are putting it, “What difference does it make to the government or an employer whom you are having sex with?”

This sort of reductionism—a spouse is nothing more than a sex partner, so a sex partner is the same as a spouse—misses the point of what marriage is and what its role in society amounts to . . . as marriage becomes unnecessary—not just for job benefits but for adopting children, inheriting property, and being socially acceptable—the whole nation will be “living in sin.”⁵

No one knows better than the homosexuals themselves as to what same-sex marriages will mean for society as a whole.

Evan Wolfson, former president of the Lambda Legal Defense and Educational Fund, a gay advocacy group, writes, “We can win the freedom to marry . . . We can seize the terms of the debate, tell our diverse stories, engage the nongay persuadable public, enlist allies, work the courts and the legislatures in several states, and achieve a legal breakthrough with five years . . . This won’t just be a change in the law either; it will be a change in society. For if we do it right, the struggle to win the freedom to marry will be much more along the way . . .”⁶

That “much more along the way” goes far beyond the cozy media portrayals of Norman Rockwell-like gay parents and kids—which is where many good church people stop. George Dent, writing in *The Journal of Law and Politics*, says that once same-sex marriage is affirmed, then other forms of “marriage” will quickly be affirmed as well, such as polygamy, endogamy (the marriage of blood relatives) and child marriage. In fact, the policy guide of the American Civil Liberties Union calls for the legalization of polygamy, stating, “The ACLU believes that criminal and civil laws prohibiting or penalizing the practice of plural marriage violate constitutional protections for freedom of expression and association, freedom of religion, and privacy for personal relationships among consenting adults.”⁷ After all, who is to tell adults how many partners they should have, if they have equal rights under the constitution?

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Part of the strategy of deception undertaken by gays has been to try to convince straight America that they, the gays,

are just like us, except that rather than John and Jane, they come together as John and John or Jane and Jane. The seamier aspects of the lifestyle—the bars, the disease, the cruising, the truly perverted practices—are intentionally downplayed. We will look at homosexual sexuality in an upcoming chapter. But listen to homosexual author Andrew Sullivan (a political conservative and professing Catholic). He says that most homosexuals understand that sexual commitment in a marriage “is much broader than what nearly all heterosexual couples will tolerate.” Homosexuals, he says, have a “need for extramarital outlets” and therefore same-sex marriage will make adultery more acceptable for all married couples.⁸

This battle is not just about the desire of some gays and lesbians to be left alone to live peaceful lives and to be able to “love” like the rest of us. It is not simply about the need for one partner to receive health-insurance benefits from the other’s work. Once the wheels are set in motion, our society will be on a road to a dark and unthinkable future.

WHEN TRUTH BECOMES “HATE SPEECH”

You sit in your church on a Sunday, listening to your pastor. You follow along in your Bible and take notes as he speaks on some issue relevant to your life and to our culture. Surrounded by believers and seekers, you are content.

This Lord’s Day picture is a cherished part of the lives of tens of millions in this land. Yet, should same-sex marriage come to pass in this country, this freedom you and I now possess under the Bill of Rights could conceivably be imperiled.

There are many ways that the radical homosexuals have tried to silence the church. One is by publicizing support for gays by more moderate church leaders who speak favorably of the gay agenda. This is intended to raise questions in the minds of those who take the Bible as God's Word and therefore see homosexuality as an unnatural act. If a part of the church can support gay marriages, why should others oppose it? If mainstream Christianity agrees with them, it is just those "wacky fundamentalists" who are out of step with the gay agenda. So the "radical right," as it is called, is painted as bigoted, intolerant, and hateful—because, as we all know, Jesus supposedly welcomes all and judges none.

We've heard much about hate-speech legislation, which is intended to force us to keep our convictions to ourselves. An assistant state's attorney told me that until now the church has had a niche where freedom of religion can be exercised. But if and when same-sex marriage becomes a reality, churches that refuse to perform such unions will find that their tax-exempt status will soon be revoked. He predicts endless lawsuits that will bankrupt many churches.

The homosexual lobby is not content with "separate but equal." In the words of Joel Belz, "It [the homosexual lobby] seeks instead to ensure that everyone else in society also engages in that behavior or at least gives it tacit approval."⁹ He goes on to remind his readers that the California Supreme Court ruled by a 6-1 margin that the Catholic Charities

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organization is required to provide health insurance for forms of birth control that Catholic Charities finds morally objectionable. In other words, everyone has to do what the minority wants the privilege of doing. Then, Belz adds this, "Nor is it unthinkable in such a climate that courts will soon rule that *World* magazine, and other organizations like us, will be required to hire employees—including editorial writers—who are ardent proponents of same-sex marriage, and of course, who have already entered such relationships."¹⁰

Note it well: when same-sex marriages are legalized, religious freedom will have to give way to constitutional law. We can hear it already: "All people have a constitutional right to marriage, in whatever gender arrangement they desire; the church, therefore, is breaking the law in denying people their constitutionally guaranteed rights."

As far back as 1994, a gay activist proposed a change in policy of the American Psychiatric Association that would make it a violation of professional conduct for a psychiatrist to help a homosexual out of the lifestyle, *even at the patient's request*.¹¹ This in spite of the fact that one of the association's own professional standards holds that psychiatrists need to accept a patient's own goals in treatment. Only when objectors threatened a lawsuit against the APA, forcing it to reopen the decision of 1973 that redefined homosexuality as normal—only with such a threat did the activists back down.

But the point for our interest is that this gay task force made clear that it not only wanted to prevent psychiatrists from those therapies that would lead homosexuals out of the lifestyle, but they also had in mind social workers, counselors, and pastors.¹² If same-sex marriages were legal and homosexuality were in all respects given the same status as

heterosexuality, the argument could be made that it is both prejudicial and contrary to existing laws of equality to help someone change from one sexual orientation to another. Such help implies that one orientation is better than other, which some will protest as hateful and bigoted.

The Canadian experience is instructive. Hate speech legislation, intended to silence the church, is already law in Canada where one cannot speak against homosexuality in the media; heavy fines are levied if one says that homosexuality is a sin. Indeed, Focus on the Family has had programs taken off the air in Canada because they were deemed “hate speech.”

In Canada, Bill C-250, which is on the brink of becoming law, would make public criticism of homosexuality a crime. The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission ruled that a newspaper ad listing passages that oppose homosexuality was a human-rights offense. The paper and the man who placed the ad each had to pay three homosexual men \$1,500, because they objected to it. In British Columbia a teacher who wrote a letter to the newspaper saying that homosexuality was not a fixed orientation was suspended.¹³

Please don't misunderstand: Even if freedom of religion is taken away from us, the church will continue to fulfill its responsibility of representing Jesus Christ in the world. Study church history and you'll discover that almost always the church has had to cope in a hostile culture with virtually no freedom. Repeatedly, the church has proved that it does not need freedom to survive. Ultimately the church is in the hands of Jesus—not the ACLU.

In the meantime, the “mainstream” media continue to demonstrate astonishing bias against orthodox believers—bias that would not be tolerated against gays themselves. In my own city, newspaper columnist Richard Roeper wrote an opinion piece critical of President Bush’s announcement supporting a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages. He sarcastically wrote,

Thank God for Bush’s stance in favor of constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. Because of course, God hates the gays. And we can’t go around legitimizing their depravity, or God might come to hate us too.¹⁴

He mocked the phrase “sanctity of marriage” and the idea that it should apply to heterosexuals only. He described “hundreds of gay couples joyously celebrating their love, and lots of protestors showing up at such ceremonies to voice their loathing of the homosexual lifestyle.” He also said that he receives e-mails from people who hate gays.

I wrote a detailed reply, pointing out that his article is a good example of the strategy that is often used to silence opposition to the gay agenda: portray those who are opposed to the imposition of gay values as hatemongers, and portray the gay community as the loving, caring part of our society. Unfortunately, such tactics have intimidated many people who don’t want to be branded as hateful and vindictive. I concluded the letter by saying,

Let those religious people who “hate gays” repent of their sin; let those who foment hate against those of us who oppose gay marriages come to their senses. Those who disagree with what I have written are free to do so. But let them respond with thoughtful respect rather than with the smear tactics that have so often been used

in this controversy. We do after all share this planet with diverse people, and our responsibility is to show love and respect despite our deeply held disagreements.

Interestingly, no part of my letter was printed in the newspaper.

ARE WE MISREADING THE BIBLE?

Many within the radical homosexual movement do not pretend that their lifestyle is consistent with the Bible. But others argue that the church has “misunderstood” what the Bible actually says about homosexuality.

As we know, the Episcopal Church, contrary to its own rules, has ordained an openly gay bishop. Keep in mind that previously he was married to a woman whom he divorced to live with a man in an unmarried relationship. Interestingly, if a divorced man were to live with a woman to whom he was not married, even the most liberal church leaders would probably demur. But, as we have learned, special exceptions are often made for homosexuals

because of the perceived prejudice against them. All this is done under the banner of *love*, which supposedly cancels all of the Scripture that condemns the homosexual lifestyle.

We must point out that the Bible does not speak about homosexuality with a muffled voice. In their book *The Same-Sex Controversy*, authors James R. White and Jeffrey D. Niell do a

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careful study of all the different methods of interpretation used in a vain attempt to insist that homosexuality is compatible with the Scriptures. They point out that any fair reading of the book of Leviticus proves that God calls homosexuality an “abomination,” and these opinions cannot be set aside as we do the dietary and civil codes of the Old Testament. What is more, the New Testament speaks with the same clarity as the Old on the subject.¹⁵

The strong condemnation of sexual sin in the Bible—whether homosexual or heterosexual—is further proof that we as fallen creatures are prone to deception in matters of sexuality. Here as nowhere else are we often subject to the error of arguing from our passions back to what God must or must not approve. We are tempted to fall into the “My feelings are right about this, and therefore the people around me in general and God in particular, had better agree with me” syndrome.

Let those churches committed to the Scriptures ask themselves: What should our stance be toward same-sex marriages? Can we afford to remain silent? Since God has not been silent on the subject it is difficult for us to justify our own penchant for looking the other way. Yes, the church must speak, but what does it have to say?

WHAT THE CHURCH HAS TO SAY TO THE GAY COMMUNITY

What would we say to the gay community if we were actually granted a hearing? Let’s admit that there are many radicals who will not listen; their ears are closed, their hearts are hardened so nothing we say will make a difference. They have

dismantled any bridges of communication with those who disagree with them, except to call them names.

But there are others—perhaps a majority—who are in the homosexual lifestyle and would leave it if they thought they could. Their consciences are awakened to the wrongness of what they do, and yet they feel trapped. I believe that we as evangelicals have failed these people, many of whom populate our churches.

As a pastor I've listened to their stories of brokenness and heartache. I've heard stories of molestation, of the emptiness of sex without commitment, without love, without caring. No matter what we see on television, the gay community is hurting, compulsively acting out behavior to cover their pain. These are the people for whom we must have compassion, understanding, and care. It's a hurting world out there, and all of the wells are dry.

Several years ago when I was invited to speak at an Exodus conference (an organization dedicated to helping gays come out of their lifestyle), I was awakened to the pain in the gay community and determined to never speak about homosexuals without compassion and humility. At a breakfast table with four or five lesbians, I learned that 80 percent of all lesbians had been molested or otherwise mistreated by men—often by the father, a baby-sitter, or a stranger. Their hatred for men drove them into same-sex relationships that were difficult to break. To quote the words of one woman who came out of the lifestyle, "If you'd asked me a year ago if I could have come out of the gay movement, it would have been equivalent to asking me to move this building . . . *impossible!*"

So whatever we say must be said with understanding, compassion, love and hope. But because we love and because we care, we must speak.

THE GAYS AMONG US

We must begin speaking of our own sins, the sins we tolerate in our own lives and the lives of our churches. We must repent of the double standard that sees the sin of homosexual behavior in a different category than adultery, premarital sex, and pornography. We must plead guilty to the charge of bigotry, for we have acted as if our sins are minor in comparison to those of the homosexual community, whose sins we think are of a different nature and category. This attitude of condemnation has caused us to lose our voice in the wider culture.

We have an obligation to maintain the biblical standards without wavering, but also speak with a healing and redemptive voice. This we have failed to do.

We must also confess that we have failed to make a distinction between the agenda of the radical gay community and the young people in our churches who might be confused about their gender. Or between the radicals and the son or daughter who has adopted the gay lifestyle, but is looking for a way out.

We have closed our eyes to the fact that there are many gay people in our churches who wish that they could be different, but have been indoctrinated by a culture that insists that no one can change, and therefore a homosexual lifestyle is inevitable. As one homosexual said to me, "This is the card I have been dealt." These are the hurting people we have too often alienated and have not helped. Whatever criticisms I have made of Richard Roeper's article, I am grieved when I

hear that people send him e-mails saying they hate gays. Thus the stereotype that all of us do is inevitable.

I've had the experience—as I'm sure you have—where a high-profile religious leader has been interviewed by the press, only to make some extreme statement that does not represent my own convictions. Yet those of us who are evangelical pastors know that we will be painted with the same brush.

So we have to remember that the radical gay community does not speak for all gays. When we read that NAMBLA, the North American Man-Boy Love Association, wants to lower the age of sexual consent to 13, and when we read that a book has been published that advocates sex with children, we must remember that the authors do not speak for all of the homosexual community. Indeed, such writers might speak only for a small fraction of it. If we don't like it when others paint us with a big brush, let's not do the same with the gay community.

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In my own ministry, I've always tried to distinguish between the advocates of the radical gay agenda and the gays that attend our services who are seeking help and hope. Our sensitivity antennae must be more finely tuned. There are many young people in our churches who fear they might be gay and yet cannot talk to anyone about it, expecting rejection and ridicule. Thus they suffer alone, managing their sexuality as

best they can. Secrecy forces them to become preoccupied with their sexuality, and soon they begin experimentation. We do not help them by singling out homosexuality as the one great sin and then doing double damage by lumping them with the radicals whose agenda we oppose.

To speak plainly, I believe we have failed to properly represent Christ and the gospel in the wider world, including the gay world. We have contributed to the cultural vacuum that has allowed the radicals to establish their turf and promote their demands. When we hear that the television viewing habits of Christians and non-Christians are about the same, is it any wonder that we have lost our voice in society?

We cannot lay all the blame for what is happening at the door of the church, because there are many streams that feed our culture. But we must humbly admit that culture has influenced us more than we have influenced the culture. And worse, we have been content with ourselves, without the hint that we desperately need to be broken before God about our own failures.

Our first word to the homosexual community is that we ourselves need repentance.

WHAT ARE WE TO SAY?

We have to emphasize to the gay community that opposition to same-sex marriages is not about *hate*, but about *debate*. Opposition to what some of us see as a devastating move that will further weaken the family and harm children—such opposition is not hateful. Morality is not bigotry.

In their excellent book, *The Homosexual Agenda*, from which I have already extensively quoted, authors Alan Sears and Craig Osten give this illustration which I've summarized: Imagine that you are standing at the bottom of a cliff and you are watching as someone on the ledge above you is walking backwards, and in a few steps he will surely fall over the precipice. You shout, warning him to stop, and before you know it, a crowd gathers around you, snapping your picture and accusing you of "hate speech." You are being warned to keep your prejudices to yourself. After all, who are you to tell someone where they can and can't walk? Who are you to say that someone can't walk backwards? You are dumbfounded, but there you are, the object of everyone's wrath.¹⁶

To the skeptics reading this: Just suppose for a moment that the Bible is the Word of God, and this same Word condemns homosexuality. Suppose, furthermore, that God created children to need both a father and a mother to model gender diversity. Suppose that homosexuality in the end is destructive not just to society but to the individual homosexuals themselves. Supposing all the above are true, would it be "hateful" to oppose same-sex marriages?

We believe we are derelict if we allow the pro-gay culture to dictate what we can and can't say; we are shirking our duty if we are silenced because we will be called names and otherwise derided. Is not the Christian faith best seen in the light of false accusations, misunderstanding and being the object of "focused hatred"?

THE CHURCH AND FORGIVENESS

Finally, we must send the message that homosexuality is not an unpardonable sin. Neither is adultery, nor even incest. This is why the Bible frequently lists a host of other sins right along with those related to sexuality: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19–21). The list looks like a description of our culture.

To those who are still listening, we must say that at issue is not the greatness of our sin, but the wonder of the righteousness which God credits to those who believe in His Son. It has been correctly said that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. We all come as needy sinners; we all come with the same need for the pardon that God alone can give us.

Visualize two roads. One is rough and rutted; the other smooth and well maintained. Their differences are apparent to all who pass by. But when a blanket of snow comes—let’s say twelve inches—then the roads look the very same. Just so, regardless of our past, we urge all who come to Christ, “Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (Isaiah 1:18). In the same way, the righteousness of Christ covers us as sinners, and we stand before God without shame and condemnation.

To the person reading this—homosexual or otherwise—I urge you to come to Christ *as you are*. Come to Jesus as a homosexual, as a heterosexual, as a thief, as an alcoholic, but *come*.

We come to Jesus as we are, but as someone has said, He loves us too much to leave us that way. Hear His words, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

As we are fond of saying, "There is more grace in God's heart than there is sin in your past." A friend of mine, quoting a Puritan divine, said, "God is a better Savior than you are a sinner."

And yet there is more to be said.