Why We Shouldn’t Date Non-Christians

Kyle Skaggs examines theological and sociological reasons why it’s a bad idea for Christ-followers to date unbelievers.

Should you date a non-Christian? The world tells us, “Why not? You can’t help who you are attracted to. As long as you don’t force your beliefs on the person you’re dating, there won’t be a problem.” But what do we say? To provide a biblical answer to this question, let’s assume that you, the hypothetical Christian single, are dating with the purpose of marriage.

According to the Christian worldview, believers are to seek out a marriage that honors God. We are to leave our parents and join as one flesh with our spouse (Genesis 2:24), being faithful by reserving sex and romantic attention for that one person and only that one person (Exodus 20:14, Proverbs 6:20-35, Matthew 5:27). This way, a marriage that honors God places His will above your own desires. In order to best do this, your marriage needs to be religiously homogamous. In other words, you need to marry another Christian.

The scripture concerning marrying a non-Christian is straightforward. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 warns against doing it because being unequally yoked will cause us to stumble in our walk with Christ. While there is no verse that explicitly mentions dating non-Christians, what applies to marriage clearly applies to dating as well. Dating is courtship, an intentional step on the road to marriage. How you go about dating will affect how you go about marriage. There are three areas of concern when it comes to dating non-Christians. The first is your personal walk with Christ. The second is loving and honoring your spouse. Third is raising your children as Christians.

Therefore, I find it's good to explore why we are told not to be unequally yoked beyond "because the Bible says so," as well as the practical concerns of courting non-believers. There are some who would argue that it is fine to date non-Christians. Some of the arguments they give are decent. Others are not so good. I will be paraphrasing some arguments I've personally heard. For context, we must first explore why we are told not to marry unbelievers.

When the people of Israel were preparing to enter the promised land, God commanded them multiple times not to marry or intermingle with the people they were being sent to drive out, because God was having Israel drive them out. They were marked for judgment because of their wickedness. The Lord makes the consequences of intermingling with the Canaanites clear:

> "…lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods." (Exodus 34:15-16 ESV)

Again in Deuteronomy, the Israelites were commanded to drive out the nations who inhabited the Promised Land, "…that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God" (20:16-18 ESV).

"So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth." (Judges 3:5-7 ESV)

Yoking with unbelievers creates a stumbling block for you in

your relationship with God, and as you can see from Israel's history, marriage to unbelievers leads to sin because it is the believer who compromises their faith. Take Solomon as an example. He was a man of wisdom and integrity who built the temple in Jerusalem. Like his father David, he disobeyed the Lord's command to Israel's kings not to take many wives (Deuteronomy 17:17). Unlike his father, many of Solomon's wives were foreigners who evidently did not stop worshiping the gods of their homelands, since Solomon was convinced to build altars for those gods. Why did he marry all these pagan women? I can't say. He probably thought he could handle them.

This set Israel on a cycle of idolatry, oppression, and repentance much like the one in Judges.

To this, some might say, "But we aren't living in the Old Testament," or "that applied to the Hebrews in their particular context of taking the Promised Land.". Even later scripture contains the exact same message.

> Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? . . . What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."(2 Corinthians 6:14-18 ESV)

The believer and the unbeliever live in two different realities. One is light, with God revealing sin and calling the believer to be more like Christ, while the other is darkness, with an apathetic attitude towards God's values. The ungodly do not know or care for God's laws. As the believer pulls towards God, the unbeliever pulls away. They do this

because God intrudes more on the relationship as He changes the believer. Over time, the relationship will most likely become strained and bitter. The believer is forced to choose between pleasing God and pleasing the person they are dating. This conflict is amplified after marriage.

This is supported by scientific studies as well. Studies have found that couples belonging to differing religions have more frequent conflicts than those of the same faith.{1} In South Korea, a study found that Christian couples with similar attitudes towards religion and church attendance reported happier marriages.{2} The same trend was found in an American study.{3} Being unequally yoked has negative effects on your relationship with your spouse.

Being unequally yoked affects more than your relationship with God. It affects your children as well. After you are married, your children will be taught conflicting ways to live, which will more often than not lead them away from Christ. “When couples belong to different faiths or have different levels of religiosity, their children cannot easily acquire a shared set of beliefs.”{4}

It also has a negative effect on your relationship with your children.{5} In a study by George Fox University based on a survey by Knowledge Works, religious discord in heterogamous marriages (marriages between spouses with religious differences) in turn affected the children. Fathers who were more religious than their wives felt less close to their children because of their differing attitudes towards faith. In a study by Petts and Knoester,{6} school-age children with unequally yoked parents are twice as likely to use alcohol and three times as likely to use marijuana than children with same-faith parents.” According to Petts’ study, children younger than school age in low income urban homes have been found to experience a negative correlation between their parents’ uneven religiosity and positive behaviors. In Bartkowski’s 2008 study,{7} the frequency of parental

arguments over religion is negatively associated with child development at kindergarten age. From these studies, it can be inferred that choosing to marry a fellow Christian will benefit your future children far more than yoking yourself to a non-believer.

Some Objections (Good and Bad)

Two objections I have heard after presenting the scriptural and scientific evidence are “I still don’t think it’s a big deal, because God has told people to be unequally yoked,” and “What if I use dating as an opportunity to witness to them?”

A possible third option is the “I don’t care” response, which is not an objection, because there is no argument being made. It is beyond frustrating, because it makes the conversation meaningless. If you find yourself saying something along those lines at this point in the article, then you’ve already made up your mind.

As a Christian, your first responsibility to nonbelievers is to live a Christlike life, showing the love of Jesus with the intent to introduce them to the Good News of the gospel of Christ. This especially extends to your dating. Christians are told to date and ultimately marry other believers because they are taught that marriage is holy before God.

One objection I’ve heard against what I’ve been saying goes: “But didn’t Hosea marry a whore on God’s command? What if God told me to date this person?” This was an attempt to argue that God’s singular exception justifies courting a non-Christian.

Yes, God did tell Hosea to marry a prostitute. No, it is not the same thing, because the woman Hosea married was a sinner, not a non-believer. First, this argument is too divorced from the context of scripture to be valid. Second, Hosea was a unique individual, one whom God raised up as a prophet. Third,

the purpose of this marriage was to show Israel how they were unfaithful to God when the woman inevitably slept with other men! It was certainly not a good marriage. So unless you're a prophet whom God is telling to use your horrible dating life as an object lesson, you can't say that it's good for you to date a non-Christian.

Missionary Dating: A Lukewarm Fantasy

Speaking of exceptions, there is one scenario people have been using to excuse being unevenly yoked for decades if not centuries: missionary dating. There's this prevailing idea among young Christians that you can date someone for the purpose of sharing the gospel with them.

This is the fiction of missionary dating. It is what Christians tell themselves to justify an unwise decision. First, it attempts to wed (pun intended) two activities that do not complement each other. Courtship involves getting to know someone in order to decide whether you will marry them, while evangelism involves getting to know someone as part of a discipleship process. Dating with the intent to bring someone to Christ tries to reconcile the equal power dynamic of courtship with the mentor-student power dynamic of discipleship. This is not a good plan.

Second, missionary dating leaves you as your date's only window into Christianity. Evangelism can require more than one person ministering to the unbeliever. It is a team effort even when we don't see it. Dating, on the other hand, is more exclusive.

Third, no one can serve two masters. You will love one and hate the other. You will favor either ministry or dating to the exclusion of the other. The temptation to stop ministering in favor of dating is stronger. The consequence of this is that you make compromises as all close relationships do, and present an imperfect picture of God's kingdom. If in your

date’s eyes, you live just like everyone else, they will not see what it means to give oneself up to Christ.

When you date someone, always be examining yourself. Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal the contents of your heart to you. The Lord does not tell us to sin against Him. Anything contrary to what God commands us to do in Scripture is from the devil. To that end, missionary dating can only be effective for those who are able to use wisdom and discernment. It is inadvisable for those who are not spiritually mature. I’m sure Christians have been saved because of missionary dating, but they are few and far between.

Sending the Wrong Message

Finally, choosing to date a non-Christian instead of ministering to them is foolish because of the message you send. When you date someone like this, you are telling them that you either don’t care about God or you don’t care they are going to hell. It is more important to you that they pour themselves into a relationship with you then it is for them to come to know Christ. On the other hand, prioritizing evangelism and discipleship shows them you want them to share in the kingdom of God.

In conclusion, dating a non-Christian is counterproductive to your walk with Christ. Scripture warns us against marrying non-believers, so why risk falling in love with one? We see time and time again just how easily it can indirectly damage your relationship with God. They do not know your God, nor do they honor Him. The excuses for dating non-believers are logically unsound at worst, and at best cannot stand the test of God’s word. Dating a non-Christian will also cause unneeded drama, and should you choose to tie the knot, that conflict will become worse. This will make the lives of your future children needlessly complicated, their development will be hindered because of you and your spouse’s fighting, and they

will not be shown what a stable and godly family looks like, nor will you be able to effectively raise them to love and fear God. Missionary dating is counterproductive for both dating and evangelism. The people I know who were successful in it admitted that they went through a lot of unnecessary hardship. It is better to remain as friends at least until they come to know Christ. This shows that you care more for the state of their relationship with God than your own wants, and enables you to minister to them through your relationship.

Notes

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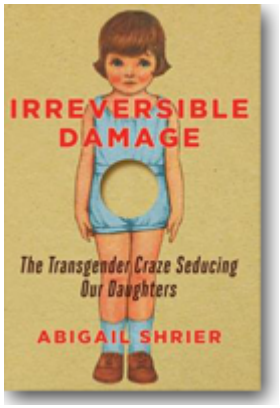
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Transgenderism

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of the transgender craze that has taken over the western world in the past ten years, drawing on startling insights from Abigail Shrier and Ryan Anderson.

Transgenderism is the belief that people have a "gender identity" that is distinct from their sex. If they feel there is a conflict between their gender and their sex, gender identity should take precedence. Although a very small fraction of the population may experience gender dysphoria, the current percentage of Americans identifying as transgender or nonbinary has exploded.

Gender Dysphoria Research



Abigail Shrier wrote about the transgender craze in her book *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*. When she joined me on my Point of View radio program, she explained that "gender dysphoria" was characterized by severe and persistent discomfort in one's biological sex. It typically begins in early childhood. In previous generations, it afflicted a sliver of the population (roughly .01 percent) and occurred mostly in boys.

Prior to 2012, there was no scientific literature on girls (11-21) ever having developed gender dysphoria at all. Then

the Western world experienced a sudden surge of adolescents claiming to have gender dysphoria and self-identifying as “transgender.”

In 2016, Lisa Littman (an ob-gyn, public health researcher) was scrolling through social media when she noticed a statistical peculiarity. Several adolescents (most of them girls) from a small town in Rhode Island had come out as transgender. In fact, they were all from the same friend group.

She admitted that she knew very little about gender dysphoria, but this statistical anomaly was interesting to her. And she then noticed there had been a sudden spike in the western world of girls experiencing gender dysphoria. She immersed herself in the scientific literature on gender dysphoria to try to understand what was happening. Perhaps it was due to increased social acceptance of LGBTQ people, but she suggested in a peer-reviewed paper that the girls might be rushing toward “transition” because of peer contagion. As you might imagine, her suggestion was roundly criticized. She was also accused of anti-trans bigotry.

In a subsequent research project, she collected data anonymously from 256 parents whose kids had not met the criteria of gender dysphoria in childhood, but suddenly identified as transgender in adolescence. She identified 16 traits in common. Here are a few.

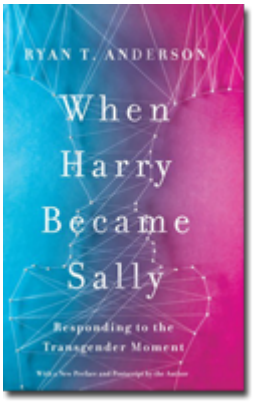
- The vast majority have zero indicators of childhood gender dysphoria.
- Almost a third of them did not seem at all gender dysphoric.
- A majority had one or more psychiatric diagnosis and almost half were engaged in self-harm prior to the onset of dysphoria.

- Nearly 70 percent of the teenagers belonged to a peer group in which at least one friend had also come out as transgender.

- Among parents who knew their children's social status, over 60 percent said the announcement brought a popularity boost.

- Over 88 percent of the parents surveyed reported being supportive of transgender rights.

How to Respond to the Transgender Moment



Ryan Anderson is the author of the book, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*. He explains how transgender ideology promotes the opportunity for children to change their gender with surgery and drugs. And parents "are told that puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones may be the only way to prevent their children from committing suicide."

Ryan Anderson countered that the best studies of gender dysphoria have found "that between 80 and 95 percent of children who express a discordant gender identity will come to identify with their bodily sex if natural development is allowed to proceed." He also documented that even children going through "transitioning" treatment still have an extraordinarily high rate of suicide attempts compared to the general population.

He reminded us that we should be tolerant and loving toward children (and adults) who struggle with their gender identity. But we should also be aware of the potential harm when transgender identity is normalized.

Unfortunately, we are living in a world where transgender activists want more than tolerance and kindness. They demand affirmation. We aren't allowed to question whether using

medical treatments to aid in transgender transformation is positive for children. In his book, Ryan Anderson shows that the best biology, psychology, and philosophy support an understanding of sex as a bodily reality. As he puts it: “Biology isn’t bigotry.”

Abigail Shrier also offers several suggestions. **First, don’t get your kid a smartphone**. She explains that nearly every problem teenagers face traces itself back to the introduction of the smartphone years ago.

Second, don’t relinquish your authority as a parent. You don’t have to go along with every idea your teenager has, nor do you have to go along with every educational or psychological fad being promoted in society.

Third, don’t support gender ideology in your child’s education. She provides an example of what happens when schools do a seminar on anorexia or suicide. Often the prevalence increases. A small number of students may have gender confusion or gender dysphoria. But talking about it will spread confusion.

Finally, don’t be afraid to admit that it’s wonderful to be a girl.

While she talks about the benefits and opportunities of being a girl, Christians can go even further. We believe God is responsible for who we are and what we are. Each one of us is created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26). We can celebrate girls and boys and encourage them to use their gender and their gifts to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 1:31).

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Helping Teens Understand Homosexuality – Facts to Help Youth Withstand the Current Culture

Sue Bohlin provides practical ways to communicate with teens about common misunderstandings and the truth concerning homosexuality. Recognizing that teens deal with peer pressure to experiment and feelings of same sex attraction, she provides real ways to help teens make their way through this maze of contradiction and confusion.



In this article we look at ways to communicate the truth about homosexuality to teens. We examine the lies they are told and the sexual pressure they are under. We also look at ways to help kids process their gender confusion, as well as address helpful ways to encourage teens who already identify themselves as gay or lesbian. And finally, we provide perspective on how to treat those who struggle with same-sex attraction in a compassionate and godly way. By looking at this topic, from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective, we can communicate the depth of God's love and His desire for us to experience the best life possible.

The Lies They Hear

In many schools and in the rest of the culture today, only one perspective is allowed to be heard. Consider four lies that are very familiar to teens today:

First, *"Homosexuality is normal and healthy."* It's neither. The fact that it simply occurs (in about 2% of the population) doesn't make it normal. When we look at the way males and

females were designed to complement each other both emotionally and sexually, that tells us something about the nature of homosexuality, that something has gone wrong somewhere. This is not judging the people who experience same-sex attraction; it's like a red light on the dashboard of a car, denoting that something needs attention.

Acting physically on same-sex attractions is certainly not healthy. Those who do are at far greater risk for sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS; alcoholism and drug abuse; depression; emotionally exhausting relationships; and a shortened lifespan.{1} Please see the "Facts About Youth" website from the American College of Pediatricians, especially this article: Health Risks of the Homosexual Lifestyle.

Lie #2: *"If you're attracted to someone of the same sex, that means you're gay or lesbian."* Not so. It really means that there are unmet, God-given needs for love and attention that were supposed to be met earlier in life. Having crushes on other people, of both sexes, is also a normal part of adolescent development. It means teens are transitioning emotionally from child to adult.

The third lie is, "*Since you were born that way, you can't change.*" First, there is no scientific evidence that anyone is born gay. It's a myth that has been repeated so often that people believe it. Second, thousands of people who were once gay have experienced significant changes in their attractions and behavior.{2} Change *is* possible.

The fourth lie is, "*Embrace and celebrate your gay identity, because gay life is cool.*" Those in ministry to those dealing with unwanted homosexuality have heard many heartbreaking stories of the truth: a dark side of intense and difficult relationships, relational patterns of disillusionment and breakups, physical and emotional unhealthiness.

Countless people have said they wished they never entered the

gay community in the first place, but it’s hard to leave.

Teens and Sexual Pressure

Adolescents are under an extraordinary amount of sexual pressure. They live in a sex-saturated culture, and the messages they receive from the media and, unfortunately, in school, clearly communicate an expectation that sex is just part of having a social life. Rarely do they hear about the heart-wrenching consequences of being sexually active, both physically and emotionally. The agenda pushing sexual freedom is also engaged in trying to normalize homosexuality as well.

Teens are pushed to decide early if they are gay, straight, or bisexual, as young as elementary school. But kids in their early teens, much less even younger than that, are no more equipped to “decide” their sexual orientation than they are to choose a college major and career track. A landmark study done by the University of Minnesota determined that at age twelve, one fourth of the students were unsure of their sexual orientation. Their bodies were just beginning to experience the changes that would turn them from children into adults, and they were being asked if they were gay, straight, or bisexual. No wonder so many were confused! But by age seventeen, that number of kids unsure of their sexual orientation had dropped to 5%.{3}

And psychiatrist Dr. Jeffrey Satinover says, “[W]ithout any intervention whatsoever, three out of four boys who think they’re gay at age 16 aren’t by 25. So if we’re going to treat homosexuality as a state, 75% of ‘gays’ become ‘non-gay’ spontaneously. That’s a statement which I consider ludicrous, but if you accept this tacit proposition—that being gay is an actual state, like being short or being tall, black or white—then in three out of four people that condition changes itself spontaneously. . . That’s with no outside intervention, just the natural processes of development.”{4}

We need to tell teens, “It’s too soon to ‘declare a major’ in your sexuality.”

Teens are also pressured to experiment with both sexes as the only way they can know their sexual orientation. It’s presented as nonchalantly as our cruise ship table partner suggesting we try escargot—”Hey, how can you know if you like it unless you try it out?”

Teenage sexual behavior can have lifelong consequences, but they are not in a position to recognize that. Their brains don’t finish developing until age twenty-five, and they tend to make decisions out of the region of the brain that controls emotion. So they are easily swayed to make dangerous and irresponsible choices, like engaging in any kind of sexual behavior.

Teens need to be encouraged to face the sexual pressures and stand against them.

Gender Insecurity

At a conference I attended, author and ministry leader Andy Comiskey{5} shared a painful experience in junior high where one day, out of the blue, the whole school was abuzz with the rumor that Andy was gay. There was even graffiti about it on the wall. He struggled with his sexual identity, but he had never acted out. He walked into a classroom on an errand and on his way out, two boys called “Faggot!” He was crushed and humiliated. Later on, he made it into a self-fulfilling prophecy and immersed himself in the gay lifestyle.

I went up to him and asked, “If you could rewrite the script of that incident, knowing what you do today, what would it look like?” He said, “Oh, I wish there had been some sensitive adults, especially in the church, to talk freely with me and other kids about ‘gender insecurity.’ They wouldn’t even have to talk about homosexuality or use the word—many kids can

relate to the idea of 'gender insecurity.' It would have been so freeing for me to have someone acknowledge that it's a real thing, but it didn't mean I was gay. I wish there were people who could have spoken truth into my life at that point."

One kind of truth that kids should hear is that around age ten, attraction for the same sex begins. This attraction is emotional, non-sexual, and involuntary. It doesn't mean teens are gay or lesbian; it means they are transitioning through normal adolescent development. We have to learn to attach to people of our same sex before we can learn to attach to people of the opposite sex. But most teens don't know this.

Some kids don't feel secure in their masculinity or femininity for a variety of reasons, usually having to do with not being affirmed by parents and peers. God gives each of us needs for attention, approval and affection. When those needs are not met, the onset of hormones can sexualize this "hole in the heart." Some teens can find themselves longing for the attention, approval and affection of people of their same gender. When others put on them the false and hurtful labels of "homo," "fag," or "lez," they can easily find themselves believing the lies.

When teens are not secure in their gender, they *don't* need to be pointed to gay groups at school. They need to be affirmed and encouraged to develop their innate, God-given masculinity or femininity, to see their gender as good. They need to have other kids reach out to make them feel "one of the guys" or "one of the girls." They need time to finish growing up.

Teens Who Identify as Gay or Lesbian

Growing numbers of teens are self-identifying as gay or lesbian. In many circles, being gay—or claiming to be gay—is now considered cool, especially among girls.

Teenagers experiment with same-sex relationships for a variety

of reasons. Some experience normal crushes on same-sex peers and think this means they are gay—or their friends *inform* them that's what it means. What it really means is that they are learning to form deep and intense attachments which is a necessary precursor to maintaining long-term adult relationships like marriage.

Others experiment with same-sex relationships out of a legitimate need to belong. Some kids are simply curious; they just want to try it out like a new shade of lipstick.

Some teens experiment with same-sex relationships because others have labeled them gay or lesbian, and they wonder, "Am I? Do they know something I don't know? Maybe I am and I need to go in that direction." This is one reason it's so important to impress on all kids the absolute unacceptability of name-calling and other cruelties. It's not only bullying behavior, it can have terrible emotional consequences.

Some adolescents pursue same-sex relationships because they are anxious about growing into adolescence and the responsibilities of adulthood. So they hide behind immature and emotionally volatile same-sex feelings and behaviors.

Often, what teens are attracted to in same-sex peers are the characteristics they wish they had in themselves: popularity, good looks, a winsome personality, a strong physique. This kind of jealousy doesn't mean they are gay or lesbian; it means there is an area they need to build confidence in!

Most girls who get involved in same-sex relationships start out in friendships that grow increasingly controlling and needy. In these emotionally dependent relationships, girls can get so enmeshed with each other that their relationship turns physical.

Many people who later identify as gay or lesbian report feeling different from others, feeling like they don't fit in or belong. Girls can feel like they don't belong to the world

of girls, and guys almost always feel like they can't measure up in the world of males. This is gender insecurity, not homosexuality, but teens usually don't hear this message. They need to.

Labels such as "gay" and "lesbian" and "homo" and "dyke" are incredibly hurtful, and it is easy for those who are slapped with those labels to believe them. But God doesn't call anyone homosexual or lesbian; those labels are man's invention, not biblical truth. It's essential for teens to know who they are in God's sight—beloved, precious, and stamped with the imprint of His acceptance and delight.

When Teens Struggle with Same-Sex Attraction

If you know teens who are struggling with feelings of same-sex attraction, or who seem to be experiencing gender insecurity, let me make some suggestions on how to minister to them.

First, don't address the issue of homosexuality head-on. Same-sex strugglers are always wrestling with feelings of inferiority, rejection, shame and fear, so it's extremely uncomfortable for anyone to bring up the subject. The heart of the issue for kids who find themselves attracted to others of the same sex are these dark and negative feelings. It's much better to ask indirect questions that encourage them to talk about the underlying feelings of disconnection with a parent, or the ridicule of their peers, or depression and sadness.

Second, don't use any labels. Teens who struggle with their gender identity already have a huge struggle with feeling that the rest of the world has put an unwelcome label on them. The false, man-made labels of "gay" and "lesbian" are hurtful, false, and restricting.

Consider what it would be like if we created a label such as "angro" for people who are easily ticked off and walk around

in a continual low-level state of hostility. What if people went around saying, “I’m an angry person. That’s just the way I am—that’s WHO I am. I’m an angro.” They might believe they were born angry, that they have an “angro gene.” Not only is the label of “angro” false and misleading, but it can lead people to believe the lie that it is a permanent state or condition rather than a description of one’s current feelings.

That’s what happened with the relatively recent labels of “gay” and “lesbian.” They can become like jail cells, making people feel hopelessly trapped in a state or condition. It’s much better to help teens deal with the fact that they are experiencing some attractions to their same gender, and those feelings are like the red light on the dashboard of a car. They mean there’s something going on inside that needs some attention. And that’s literally true: God creates all of us with the need for attention, affection and approval, and those are the things adolescents are craving when they have feelings for people of the same sex. The needs are legitimate; we need to help them be met in healthy ways. This is where the church and other Christian youth organizations can make all the difference in the world.

Third, communicate to kids who struggle that God did not make them gay. God doesn’t make anyone gay, and there is no scientific evidence that there is a biological basis for homosexual feelings or behavior. Even if they feel that they were born gay, this is the result of being told a fairy tale. Were American kids born English speakers? That’s all they ever knew, right? No, they weren’t *born* English speakers, they were born *language* speakers. Which language they speak is a matter of the shaping influences of their upbringing. Kids who experience same-sex attraction were born to be relational creatures, but how those relationships shape their souls is a function of their temperaments, their home life, and how they relate to other kids.

Fourth, give them a safe place to process their feelings

without being shamed or condemned. For many teens, this unfortunately rules out their home, school, or church. I'm sure it grieves God's heart that for many people, church is the most unsafe place on the planet for those who struggle with various life-controlling sins and urges. But there is a great free, online support group for struggling youth, moderated by an experienced and understanding youth pastor, at www.livehope.org. Kids can safely talk to others like themselves and learn how intimacy with Jesus Christ brings healing and change to broken and wounded hearts.

Fifth, many students who experience same sex attraction often feel fake if they don't choose to identify with or act on their feelings. They have believed the lie that gay or lesbian is what they are. They want to be real. But getting real is becoming who God created them to be, despite their feelings of what whose around them might say.{6} Finding out who God says they are is the true path to being real and not fake.

The Call to Understanding and Compassion

Many teens feel, "I just don't get this whole gay/lesbian thing." That's perfectly understandable. Only 2-3% of the population deals with same gender attraction. The fact that it's such a huge issue in our culture is completely out of proportion to the actual number of people experiencing it.

Kids need to know a few things about those who do struggle with same-sex attractions and feelings. First, they didn't choose it. It's something people *discover*, not something they *decide on*. And almost every single person who discovers they have strong feelings and fantasies about the same sex is horrified and terrified by this discovery. It's a very painful part of their life, so it's important for others to be respectful and kind.

Second, having crushes and strong feelings for friends and teachers of the same sex is a normal part of adolescent

development. It doesn't mean a teen is gay or lesbian. When other kids assure them that it does, it is slapping a false and hurtful label on them that they may find almost impossible to take off. If someone walked up to you and put a "Hi, My Name Is" nametag on you that had someone else's name on it, you probably wouldn't have any trouble taking it off and saying, "There's a mistake here—that's not who I am." But when kids do the same thing with the "nametag" of "gay" or "lesbian," they usually put it on kids who don't have the security and self-confidence to realize that's not who they are, and they can go through the rest of their lives believing a lie.

Third, be compassionate. People don't know who around them is struggling, either with their own same-sex desires and attractions, or the painful burden of knowing a family member or loved one has them. They only have to show contempt once for those who experience same-sex feelings to show that they're not a safe person.

Fourth, be respectful. That means cutting phrases like "Oh, that's so gay" out of their vocabulary. It means not throwing around words like "homo" or "fag" or "queer." Every gay joke or insult is like sticking a dagger in the heart of those who carry a painful secret.

The bottom line for helping teens understand homosexuality is to call them to see God's design as good, and show grace and compassion to those who don't see it. Be "Jesus with skin on" in both His holiness *and* His kindness.

Notes

1. Peter Freiberg, "Study: Alcohol Use More Prevalent for Lesbians," *The Washington Blade*, January 12, 2001, p. 21. Karen Paige Erickson, Karen F. Trocki, "Sex, Alcohol and Sexually Transmitted Diseases: A National Survey," *Family Planning Perspectives* 26 (December 1994): 261. Robert S. Hogg

et al., “Modeling the Impact of HIV Disease on Mortality in Gay and Bisexual Men,” *International Journal of Epidemiology* 26 (1997): 657. Also note this article by Dr. John R. Diggs, Jr.: The Health Risks of Gay Sex (catholiceducation.org).
2. Read a few of the testimonies at the Living Hope Ministries website, www.livehope.org.
3. www.freetobeme.com/yw_minn.htm
4. Homosexuality and Teens: An Interview with Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, Massachusetts Family Institute. www.mafamily.org/Marriage%20Hearing%202003/satinover2.htm
5. Founder and Director of Desert Stream Ministries, author of *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness and Strength in Weakness*.
6. www.becomingreal.org

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See also: answers to many questions in **“Probe Answers Our E-Mail: Homosexuality”**

“I’m Looking for a Way to Deprogram Homosexuality”

I’m a licensed counselor looking for ways to de-program homosexuality.

I’m afraid we don’t know any formulaic means for de-programming homosexuality. And neither Probe nor Living Hope Ministries (a ministry that helps people with unwanted homosexuality) does “conversion therapy.” In my 20+ years with LHM, the only method I have seen that makes a difference is the time-honored process of Christian discipleship, where we point people to Jesus and walk with them in submitting to Him

and His word, cooperating with the Holy Spirit in facing the wounds and hurts of the past and grieving them, forgiving those who hurt us, and obeying God's commands because they are given to protect and bless us. The fruit of this process is transformation from the inside out (Romans 12:2), because Jesus doesn't make things better, He makes things new.

What I have personally witnessed over and over is that God helps the person reframe their understanding of their lives, especially the hurts of the past (and there is always pain in the past) and their sinful responses to those hurts. This is true of any believer, not just those dealing with homosexuality. As the person invites Jesus to be Lord over more and more internal real estate, He brings change and understanding. For example, I keep seeing that men reframe their craving to connect with other men sexually as their heart's cry for healthy attention, affirmation and affection from other men, either (or both) a father figure, or a best-friend kind of relationship. In women, I see that women reframe their craving to intensely connect with another woman, as their heart's cry for those same 3 As from a mother or a best friend. When those legitimate needs are met in healthy relationships with other believers, the craving subsides. One of my closest friends, who spent 25 years as a lesbian activist before becoming a Christ follower, says that what used to be screaming in front of her face (her same sex attraction), is now white noise in the background of her life. It's not totally gone, and she can feed it when she's stressed which means additional temptations, but its control over her life has been replaced by intimacy with Jesus and with healthy relationships with women.

I don't know how this happens outside of the grace and power of God in a believer's life and in the context of community, because we need each other.

I'm glad you asked. And by the way, I see from your email address that you utilize EMDR in your therapy. God bless you

for that! I am the beneficiary of its effectiveness as I have seen my husband healed of childhood traumas through EMDR. A number of the people at Living Hope—and friends fro church as well—have found EMDR helpful in their counseling, which makes sense because trauma is part of so many people's stories who now deal with same-sex attraction.

Blessing you today,

Sue

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"How Would You Respond When Someone Prefers to be Called by Their Opposite Gender?"

Sue, my friend texted me this:

"How would you respond (or how have you responded) when someone prefers to be called by their opposite gender? I had a man correct my daughter (she's only two, almost three) today because she referred to him as 'he.' I told him out of deep love for him I could not in good conscience refer to him as 'her' but how do I explain that to an almost three-year-old?"

I answered, "Oh wow. That hasn't happened to me yet. My big kids know and we said that sin clouds their judgment and how they see/feel so they think they will be happier living life as a different gender, but then we remind them that God doesn't make mistakes and He chooses gender. He made us in His image (like Him) and His design is perfect . . . people mess

it up, not Him.”

I tried, but would love to learn from your response also!

Sweet friend, LOVE your answer!! I would explain that sometimes people are confused in their thinking. God made that man a boy and so that is what we call him.

How do you lovingly respond to the gender confused person?

It depends on how the conversation goes, but I would remain warm and cordial while not backing down by embracing a delusion.

Think “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” Just because everyone appears to be celebrating something that doesn’t make sense, doesn’t make it true. And just as the crowd shushed the little boy who piped up with what everyone could plainly see—the emperor didn’t have any clothes on at all—people are being shushed and canceled when they speak up about the transgender delusion.

One of the reasons the transgender folly continues is people going along with the game of pretend. (And when I say “transgender folly,” I am referring to the ideology, not the people caught up in it who need compassion, not judgment. I believe they are objects of spiritual warfare, being attacked by the enemy of our souls through an insidious lie. Just like in Genesis 3.)

When the man crossed the line to correct a stranger’s little girl, he escalated from confused soul to transgender activist. And activists want the whole world to agree with a delusion. A lie. And we need to push back.

If it were me, I would suggest saying to my child, with a kind voice, “This man is playing a game of pretend, but we’re not playing that game.” This of course would infuriate the man, but he is deliberately pushing an agenda of unreality on the

world in general and my child in particular, and that's not okay. It's my responsibility to teach and defend truth to my children, and here's a guy lying to my child and instructing her to participate in that lie.

It's one thing to present oneself as the other sex, and quite another to cross the line into "incorrecting" a child who could see for herself that he was male! I would let my Mama Bear come out—with gentleness and respect, as 1 Peter 3:15 says—but firmly stating the truth in the face of an egregious lie.

Blessing you,
Sue Bohlin

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"Our Granddaughter is Severely Confused About Her Gender Identity"

I just read an article by Sue Bohlin on transgender and God's view on it. We completely believe our granddaughter is severely confused and we believe her gender identity is being greatly influenced by the people she is hanging out with. She is almost 22, we have told we love her unconditionally but do not support her lifestyle as it goes against God's Word. She understands that we will not compromise our faith and what the Word of God says. But we have been reaching out to pastors and they have offered zero spiritual guidance. In fact they really do not want to discuss it. Our pastor told me to buy a secular

book on homosexuality from Amazon. I told him I do not need or want the world's view on it, I need spiritual guidance. He had nothing. I'm reaching out because I agreed 100% with what Sue said and we still need spiritual guidance. We love our granddaughter and pray for her all the time but we are struggling with how to deal with it.

I am so very, very sorry for the pain you are experiencing in this spiritual battle. The enemy has gone after your beloved granddaughter, deceiving her with lies and demonic schemes about her true identity. You are undoubtedly right about the influence of the people she's hanging out with, and that would extend to (and may even entirely consist of) the voices she is listening to on social media.

In terms of how to deal with it, let me encourage you that you are already doing the two most important things: loving her and praying for her. Your love will be a beacon for her to find her way out of spiritual darkness back to truth, and your prayers are powerful for the pulling down of strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). This is a battle that has to be fought on your knees, using the supernatural weapon of prayer. Trying to convince her out of her delusion won't work; it has to be God's power.

You will need encouragement from others who are also in the battle for their children and grandchildren. Let me suggest two places to find that. One is the Friends and Family forum at Living Hope Ministries. www.livehope.org. The other is to request access to the private group "CHANGED Movement" on Facebook, where you will find very encouraging testimonies from those who have come out of the LGBTQ community.

Let me close with a story I hope encourages you.

A couple were heartbroken that their daughter had jumped into the LGBT community and identity, and needed to know what to do about it. On the recommendation of a mutual friend the husband

called me; as we talked, the Lord dropped an idea into my head, which he followed.

He took her out for a meal and said to her, “Sweetheart, I want to tell you something, and I’m only going to say this once, so pay attention.

“Your mom and I see that because of your choices, it’s like you’re on the Titanic, and we know that eventually it’s going down. But we’re out here in a lifeboat, rowing around the ship, and we will never stop rowing. We’ll be here to love you and pray for you, and we’ll be here to help you when you realize you’ve got to get off a sinking ship.” They were so faithful in daily praying for her.

Ten years later, their daughter showed up on their doorstep. When Dad opened the door, the daughter asked, “Are you still in the rowboat?”

That was *ten years later*.

And many many prayers later, they just celebrated the one-year anniversary of her repentance . . . of her recognizing the ship was sinking and she got in the lifeboat with her parents. This man said that in all his many years, he has never seen such a full and beautiful repentance as what his daughter exhibited.

Recently, in fact, he and his wife and their daughter stood in front of his Sunday School class to tell their story. For the first time, the daughter told her side; can you imagine what it was like for the parents to watch their beloved daughter give testimony to God’s goodness and her parents’ faithfulness in praying for her? In fact, she had sent an email at one point that said, “Mom and Dad, thanks for never giving up rowing.”

The dad had also told his story to a men’s conference, sharing the rowboat part, and said the other men, all fathers who

would do anything for their children, were in tears. They all understand how hard it is, especially as men designed to “fix” things, not to be able to fix their children’s hurt or destructive choices or the consequences of those choices. But the power of a praying parent can redeem the pain and the choices and the consequences.

So. . . don’t give up rowing!

And [please hear my voice being very very gentle here] let go of your expectations for God’s timetable. He knows how long it will take for her to see the light, in a way that will bring the most glory to Him and the greatest benefit to your granddaughter.

I’m sending this with a prayer that God does amazing things in your family. Please remember—if it’s not good yet, God’s not done yet!

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

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The Lies You Hear About Transgender

Sue Bohlin exposes some of the lies being told about the transgender deception in our culture.

I am deeply concerned about how the cultural narrative about transgender keeps ratcheting up. I believe this is a massive display of spiritual warfare, where the enemy of our souls is

screaming lies about gender and identity—especially to teens and younger and younger children. Jesus warned us that the devil's agenda is to "steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10), and this deception about gender is, I believe, one of the most wicked and insidious deceptions he's ever come up with.

Consider some of the lies that have become commonplace:

"People can be born into the wrong body."

This represents a thinking disorder, not a biological problem. There is no such thing as being born into the wrong body; God creates each person's body exactly as He wants us (Ps. 139:13-16). There *is* a false dichotomy between the body and the person, as if they could be separated. But God makes us spirit/soul/body, a unified whole.

Studies have reliably demonstrated that the vast majority of children allowed to go through puberty resolved their discomfort with their bodies. There is something about going through puberty, with the massive hormonal changes that bring a child's body into adulthood, that resets the vast majority of discomfort-which is a normal part of adolescence. Change is uncomfortable for most people, but it's an essential part of being human. The best solution to gender dysphoria is "watchful waiting."

The idea of being born into the wrong body is as nonsensical as being born into the wrong species.

"If you are uncomfortable with your body, it probably means you're transgender."

Traversing the path from child body to adult body can be hard and confusing. There is a massive influx of sex hormones on top of significant body changes that can happen relatively quickly. No wonder there can be discomfort in the adolescent body!

Particularly in our highly sexualized culture, many girls are dismayed by the attention they receive from their developing breasts. One teenage boy told me that he hated the internal storm that higher levels of testosterone caused in his brain. These are normal degrees of discomfort. The solution to this kind of discomfort is to grow in resilience, not to embrace the magical thinking that being the other gender will solve the problem.

One parent made this insightful comment on the online Substack "Parents with Inconvenient Truths about Trans":

"I know we did it from love, but we raised a generation of children who have NEVER been uncomfortable. We've loved them and sheltered them and kept them from all harm, and then they hit puberty, which is inherently a time of uncomfortableness. Then we tell them that if they are uneasy about these changes they are trans. It's like we wrote a script for this to all happen." (pitt.substack.com/p/an-unremarkable-story-from-the-age/comments)

Kids who are uncomfortable with their bodies need compassion and understanding. They need to be reassured that "this too shall pass." They do not need to be given an untrue label.

"People *are* the gender they prefer to be."

Feelings do not determine reality. If someone feels like they want to be a cat or iguana or peacock, that doesn't make it so. Feelings need to be submitted to the reality of the world God created.

Transgender ideology elevates feelings above what is objectively true. That doesn't work with gravity; it isn't going to work with gender issues either.

Social contagion (especially those on Tumblr) results in massive numbers of teen girls identifying as trans. The same social pressures that have resulted in anorexia and cutting in

the past are now producing huge numbers of girls declaring they are trans.

The very wise Abigail Shrier, author of *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Crazy Seducing Our Daughters*, writes, "The teen girls susceptible to this social contagion are the same high-anxiety, depressive girls who struggle socially in adolescence and tend to hate their bodies." [Gender Ideology Run Amok | Imprimis (imprimis.hillsdale.edu/gender-ideology-run-amok/)]

"Transwomen are women."

No. People with XY chromosomes are male.

Only people who possess female biology are female.

Males who possess larger lung capacity, longer and stronger bones, higher metabolism, greater strength and speed than females, have an advantage over females.

People born male, who can only father babies and never give birth to them, are not women.

Men declaring they are women are trying to erase the boundaries of femaleness, which is a form of bullying and disrespect.

"Mental health issues and autism have nothing to do with transgender."

There is a very high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and self-harm in those identifying as trans. Instead of referring to a gender clinic, it would be wiser and more loving to investigate the mental health pressures experienced by those who say they are trans.

Many people embracing a transgender identity are on the autism spectrum; they already feel a lack of connection with others. It's not surprising they also feel a lack of connection with

their own bodies.

“For those therapists (gender idealogues), the parents are the problem. Not the child’s social anxiety, autism, irrational thinking, or social media addiction. No, the issue is mom and dad’s refusal to embrace their teen’s two-week-old identity and allow a kid to run the show.” -Dr. Miriam Grossman, psychiatrist and therapist (thefederalist.com/2021/11/11/therapists-have-betrayed-the-parents-of-gender-confused-kids-and-therell-be-hell-to-pay/)]

“Social transitioning and medical transitioning (puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones) are reversible.”

Pretending to be the other sex (social transitioning) can’t be undone because it creates personal history. For example, a boy identifying as and pretending to be a girl lives a childhood of practicing lying about reality. He will never experience getting his first period as girls do because he will never menstruate. He cannot enter the world of females because he’s not a female.

Medical transitioning—administering cross-sex hormones and puberty-blockers— results in:

- Deepened voice and hair loss in females
- Decreased bone and muscle growth
- Infertility
- Vaginal and uterine atrophy
- Preventing the body from maturing sexually (ending up with a child’s genitals), which also prevents the possibility of normal sexual experience or pleasure
- Greater risk of: heart attack, endometrial cancer, testicular cancer, obesity

There are no longitudinal studies on use of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones in children. It is wrong and evil to make this promise when we just don’t know the long-term effects of unnatural chemicals in the body.

Adults taking hormone replacement therapy, such as menopausal women and rare medical conditions, are warned of the health risks. Going on hormones that are natural to one's sex can make one a permanent medical patient. Going on hormones of the opposite sex will make one a permanent medical patient. (Which also means a vast, reliable stream of income to the pharmaceutical industry and the hormone-prescribing physicians.)

Amputating healthy body parts does not create the opposite sex, it mutilates one's body. Surgeries cannot be reversed. This is a particularly evil and heartbreaking lie.

"Not allowing someone to transition will make them commit suicide."

There is little evidence of this in children/teens. The few studies that exist were poorly constructed and poorly analyzed.

Kids are instructed via social media on what to say to get their way. Playing the suicide card is breathtakingly effective to get parents to give in.

In reality? A Swedish study discovered that those who transitioned were 19 times more likely to attempt or commit suicide than the general population.

We are called to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), not cooperate with a delusion or fantasy. The pro-transgender idealogues are lying, whether they know it or not. At the very least, they are being used as puppets by demonic forces that are out to hurt and destroy people loved by God, made in His image, and created with His good choice of either male or female.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/the-

lies-you-hear-about-transgender/ on July 19, 2022.

What God Says About Sex – A Christian Perspective on Human Sexuality

Sue Bohlin provides us a succinct Christian perspective on human sexuality. She points out that God created sex and has a purpose for it defined within the context of marriage. When we lose sight of God's perspective, sex can degrade into a pastime for pleasure that will ultimately hurt us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The Pickle Principle



It's not surprising that in a time of growing biblical illiteracy, so few people have any idea what God thinks and says about the extremely important subject of sex. The world holds the Christian view of sex in contempt, considering it prudish, naïve and repressive. But the Bible elevates sexuality as God's gift to us that is both sacred and mysterious. The world's perspective degrades it to just something that feels good—another form of recreation or socialization.

Counselor Waylon Ward offers an insightful way to understand the problem, which he calls "the Pickle Principle." In order to make pickles, we put cucumbers in a brine solution of vinegar, spices, and water. After a cucumber soaks in the brine long enough, it is changed into a pickle. Most of us are like pickles. We sit in the brine of a sex-saturated culture,

absorbing its values and beliefs, and it changes the way we think. Even most Christians are pickled today, believing and acting exactly like everyone else who has been sitting in the brine of a culture hostile to God and His Word.

The world's sex-saturated brine includes the belief that sex is the ultimate pleasure. The message of much TV, movies, and music is that there is no greater pleasure available, and that it is the right of every individual, even teenagers, to have this pleasure.{1} Another aspect of this pickling process is the belief that no one has the right to deprive anyone else of this greatest of all human pleasures, that no one has the right to tell anyone else what is right or wrong about the expression of his or her sexuality.{2}

If the purpose and goal of sex is primarily pleasure, then other people are just objects to be used for sensual gratification. Since people are infinitely valuable because God made us in His image, that is a slap in the face whether we realize it or not. The Christian perspective is that the purpose of sex is relational, with pleasure as the by-product. The Bible teaches that sex welds two souls together.{3} It is so powerful that it is only safe within a committed, covenant marriage relationship. It's like the difference between the wild energy of lightning compared to the harnessed power of electricity. God knew what He was doing when He limited sex to within marriage!

God wants to get His "pickled people" out of the world's brine and into an intimate relationship with Him. He wants to change our thinking and beliefs to be in alignment with His.

Sex is God's Invention! The Purpose of Sex

Sex is God's idea. He made it not only efficient for making babies, but pleasurable and deeply satisfying. He designed men's and women's body parts to complement each other. He

created hormones to make everything work right and make us want to be sexual. Unlike animals, whose mating behavior is purely instinctive for the purpose of reproducing, human sexuality has several wonderful purposes. God means for all of them to be contained within marriage.

In a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between husband and wife, we can express and enjoy God's two major purposes to sex: fruitfulness and intimacy. His first command to Adam and Eve was to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28); one very foundational purpose of sex is to create new living beings. Fruitfulness is not limited to having children, though. A mutually loving and serving sexual relationship between husband and wife can produce emotional and personal fruitfulness as well. Both people are nurtured to grow, develop, and soar, becoming more of what God means them to be.

The other big purpose for sex, emotional and physical intimacy, is only possible within marriage. In his little gem of a book called What God Says About Sex,{4} Eric Elder says that intimacy really means "into-me-see." It is only safe to reveal the fullness of who we are, "warts and all," to someone who loves us and has committed to be faithful and supportive "till death do us part." The fullest experience and freedom of sex is found within the marriage bed, which God says to keep holy or set apart.{5} God says that we are to use self-control to keep all expressions of sexuality limited to marriage.{6}

Sex also builds oneness, a mystical union of two lives and souls into one life together. The one-flesh union of sex is a picture of the way two souls are joined together into a shared life. In fact, we could say that sex is like solder that is used to fuse two pieces of metal together. Once they are joined, it is a strong bond that helps keep marriages and families intact, which is God's intention for our lives. Another purpose of sex is the pleasure that comes from being safe in another's love. The entire book of Song of Solomon is gorgeous poetry that glorifies married sexual relations.

God also says that an important purpose of sex is to serve as an earthbound illustration of the mystical but real unity of Christ and the church, where two very different, very *other* beings are joined together as one. This spiritual component to sex is what helps us see more clearly why any and all sex outside of marriage falls far short of God's intention for it to be holy and sacred—and protected.

So . . . What Does God Actually Say?

A lot of people believe the Bible says, "Sex is fun and it feels good, so don't do it." Nothing could be farther from the truth! Sex was God's great idea in the first place! But God's view of sex as a sacred and private gift to married couples, as well as a gift each spouse gives to the other, is at great odds with the world's perspective of sex as simply a pleasure no one should deny him- or herself.

The overarching statement God makes is that sex is to be completely contained within marriage.{7} As I said above, sex is so powerful that it's like the difference between the wild, uncontrollable power of lightning compared to the safety of harnessed electricity in our buildings. God wants us to harness the power of sex within marriage. This means that all other expressions of sexuality are off-limits, not because God is a cosmic killjoy, but because He loves us and knows what's best for us, namely, not playing with lightning! So God says not to engage in sex with anyone before marriage, with anyone else once we are married, with anyone of the same sex; or with prostitutes, or with family members, or with animals.

God says that sexual purity is a treasure to be guarded and valued. It is a reflection of God's own character, which is what makes it so valuable. In our culture, many people have been deceived into thinking that their virginity is worthless, something to get rid of. But God says it is special,{8} a gift that can we can only bestow on one person, one time. God calls us to purity after marriage as well by remaining faithful to

our spouse. Purity before and during marriage prevents "ghosts" in the marriage bed; comparisons are nowhere as deadly as in the intensely intimate realm of sex. We glorify God in our sexuality by using self-control to stay pure if single, and by loving our spouse sexually if married.

The good news is that purity can be restored if we confess our sin and put our trust in Jesus to forgive us and give us a new, holy quality of life. The Bible promises, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."{9} God stands ready to forgive and cleanse us, and restore our purity the moment we ask.

God says that sex is to be reserved for adults only. Three times in the Song of Solomon, a beautiful book extolling the glory of married sex, it says, "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires," which means "until the time is right."{10} As I minister to sexually broken people,{11} most of them bear the still-painful scars of childhood sexual abuse from people who never should have opened a door to sexual experience. Their entire view of sex has been warped and skewed. God never meant for children to be introduced to sex. It's for adults. *Married* adults.

God wants us to actively fight sexual temptation. The battle is harder than it's ever been because of our sex-saturated culture. He says to flee immorality.{12} In fact, God says to offer not even a *hint* of sexual immorality.{13} That means that it is a violation of His intentions to engage in phone sex with strangers, or virtual sex in chat rooms and porn sites. The fact that you're not physically touching another person's body doesn't mean it's not sin, because Jesus said that sexual sin happens in the mind first.{14}

Eric Elder suggests asking a powerful question to help clarify the battle against sexual temptation: will this lead to greater intimacy and fruitfulness with the husband or wife God

has created for me?{15} This filter is helpful for both married people and singles. If an action doesn't build intimacy or fruitfulness, it probably destroys them. Another question to ask is, Can I glorify God in what my flesh wants to do? Can I invite Jesus into what I'm about to do? If the answer is no, God invites us to meet the struggle with *His* supernatural energy instead of our own puny human strength.{16}

Outside of the safety of marriage, sex is wounding and hurtful, but God created it for our pleasure and delight. In the Song of Solomon, God enthusiastically invites the newlyweds to enjoy His good gift of sex, where He says, "Eat, friends, and drink, o lovers!"{17} In fact, God wants married couples to bless each other by enjoying sex often and regularly.{18}

Are you surprised by what God says about sex?

Why Sexual Sin Hurts So Much

Pastors and counselors will tell you that there is a greater intensity of shame and pain in the people they counsel when the issues involve sexual sin.{19} Paul says that all other sins are outside our bodies,{20} but sexual sin touches you deep in your heart and soul.

As mentioned above, it may be helpful to think of sex like solder. God created it to make a strong, powerful bond that creates healthy, stable families into which children are welcomed. But when people fuse their souls through sexual sin without the safety and commitment of marriage, it causes tremendous pain when the relationship rips apart. (Have you ever seen a broken weld? It's pretty ugly.) When sex is disconnected from love and commitment, it also disconnects the body from the soul. This inflicts deep wounds of shame and guilt on a heart that has been used for gratification instead of love.

Waylon Ward says that sex sins expose and exploit our deepest emotional and spiritual vulnerabilities. He writes, “In the counseling office, individuals rarely if ever weep scalding tears about any other sense of loss like they do for a sexual relationship when it ends. There are soul ties that bind two partners together in unseen ways and there is a sense that part of you has been stolen. There is a hole in your soul where the connection was ripped from you.”{21}

The pickling brine of our culture’s increased sensuality says, “If it feels good, do it. You’re entitled.” But while this belief about sex may *feel* good, it is most definitely not good for us. Note the runaway epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases, and the resulting increase in infertility. Note the number of broken hearts and broken families. Note the alarming amount of sexual abuse. Note the soaring rates of depression, especially in teens, much of which is related to sexual activity outside of marriage.

God invented sex for His glory and our benefit. His basic rule—keep sex inside marriage—isn’t meant to be a killjoy, but to protect our hearts and bodies and relationships and families. He knows what He’s doing, and we do well to follow.

Notes

1. Waylon Ward, *Sex Matters: Men Winning the Battle* (McKinney, Texas: Allison O’Neil Publishing Company, 2004), 7.

2. Ibid., 8.

3. Genesis 2:24;1 Corinthians 6:15-16.

4. Eric Elder, *What God Says About Sex* (Inspiringbooks.com, an imprint of Eric Elder, 2006). Contact theranch.org/2006/07/03/bookstore-what-god-says-about-sex/ for more information.

5. Hebrews 13:4.

6. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

7. There are 44 prohibitions of *porneia* (sexual expression outside of marriage, usually translated “sexual immorality”), just within the New Testament alone. This is where God draws the line between sex within marriage and sex outside of marriage, which determines what is sin and what is not.

8. Song of Solomon 4:12.

9. 1 John 1:9.

10. Song of Solomon 2:7, 3:5, 8:4.

11. I have the privilege of serving with Living Hope Ministries (www.livehope.org), a support group for those dealing with unwanted same-sex attractions, and the families of those who struggle. (Or who don’t struggle because they are just fully immersed in a gay identity.) I mainly minister to women, for whom a history of sexual abuse has long been a common denominator.

12. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

13. Ephesians 5:3.

14. Matthew 5:28.

15. Elder, *What God Says About Sex*, 37.

16. Colossians 1:29, Ephesians 6:10.

17. Song of Solomon 5:1.

18. 1 Corinthians 7:5.

19. Ward, *Sex Matters*, 16.

20. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

21. Ward, *Sex Matters*, 17.

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Probe Survey 2020 Report 5: Sexual Attitudes and Religion vs. Science

Steve Cable continues his analysis of Probe's 2020 survey of American religious views moving over to consider their response to sexual mores of today and how they navigate religion and science.

The previous reports on Probe Survey 2020 were primarily focused on religious beliefs and practices. In this report, we will look at how these beliefs impact Americans as they deal with sexual issues and with navigating the relationship between religion and science. In general, the survey results confirm a continuing degradation in Americans', and particularly Born Agains', view of sex within a heterosexual marriage. We find that fewer than one in five Born Again Protestants affirm a biblical view in this area. On the other hand, Americans still tend to consider religious views at least as important as scientific positions in establishing their beliefs.

American Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

We asked four questions regarding sexual attitudes and behaviors in this survey.

1. Sex among unmarried people is always a mistake: from Agree Strongly to Disagree Strongly

2. Viewing explicit sexual material in a movie, on the

internet, or some other source is:

a. To be avoided
b. Acceptable if no one is physically or emotionally harmed in them.
c. A matter of personal choice
d. Not a problem if you enjoy it
e. Don't know

3. Living with someone in a sexual relationship before marriage:

a. Might be helpful but should be entered into with caution.
b. Just makes sense in today's cultural environment.
c. Will have a negative effect on the relationship.
d. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God

4. People attracted to same sex relationships are:

a. To be loved and affirmed in their sexual choices.
b. To be avoided as much as possible.
c. To be accepted while hoping they realize there is a better way.
d. To be loved and told God's truth regarding our sexual practices.

First, let's see how the different religious affiliations impact the answers to these questions.

Sex Among Unmarried People

First, let us establish the biblical standard for sexual relations outside of marriage. Is there clear teaching on this topic? Consider Jesus' discussion in the Sermon on the Mount where He said, "You have heard that it was said, '**Do not commit adultery**.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in

his heart."{1}

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Paul writes, "For this is God's will: that you become holy, that you keep away from sexual immorality." And then in 1 Peter 2:11, Peter writes, "I urge you to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul." It is very clear that the biblical standard calls for all sexual relations to occur within a marriage between one man and one woman.

Results from the first question are plotted in Figure 1. As shown, here and in the next three graphs, we will look at those ages 18 through 29 next to those ages 40 through 55 to see if there are differences based on age. If there is a trend or variation seen in the 30 through 39 age group, then that one is also shown as seen for Born Again Protestants in Figure 1.

The graph shows the older group of Born Again Protestants is much more likely to Strongly Agree that fornication is always a mistake than the youngest group, dropping from almost one half to a little over one quarter, 46% to 29%. **Over two thirds of Younger Born Again Protestants have adopted the common view of the culture** that sex and marriage are not necessarily related. Note that even among the older group, **less than half of them strongly agree that sex outside of marriage is always a mistake**.

Looking across other religious affiliations, we see that the vast majority said they Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed with this statement{2}. They generally believe that sex outside of marriage by unmarried people is not an issue. This is particularly true of the Unaffiliated with close to 90% (nine out of ten) disagreeing.

How have these views changed among born again young adult individuals over the last decade? Looking at the GSS survey from 2008, we find that over one in three (37%) Born Again

Christians ages 18 through 29 agree with the statement, “If a man and woman have sex relations before marriage, I think it is always wrong.” Now in 2020, we find that over one quarter (27%) of Born Again Christians agree that it is always wrong. Although the questions asked were not identical, they are close enough to indicate that the drop of ten percentage points is a significant decline in young adult, Born Again Christians who take a biblical position on sexual activity outside of marriage.

Pornography.

The second question deals with views on the acceptability of viewing pornographic material. What does the Bible tell us about feeding our minds with sexually immoral material? Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:19, “For out of the heart come evil ideas, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” We are warned in 1 Corinthians 6:18, “Flee sexual immorality! Every sin a person commits is outside of the body but the immoral person sins against his own body.” And further in Ephesians 5:3, “But among you there must not be either sexual immorality, impurity of any kind, or greed, as these are not fitting for the saints.” Clearly, avoiding sexual immorality in all forms includes avoiding explicit sexual material.

The results are shown in Figure 2. Once again, we see that Born Again Protestants are much more likely to say that we should avoid exposure to such material. Both the younger group and the older have more than 50% who say it is “to be avoided.” However, the data also shows over four out of ten Born Again Protestants believe it is usually okay. Given what we know about the negative effects of pornography on healthy living and relationships, this result is surprising.

All the other religious affiliations have only a small percentage of people who think that explicit sexual material should be avoided. Only about one in five Other Protestants and Catholics affirm that pornography is to be avoided. Once

again, the Unaffiliated lag those affiliated with some religion having only about one in twenty (5%) that think pornography should be avoided.

For those who are not Born Again Protestants, around 10% to 20% say that such material is okay if no one is hurt in them. These people fail to realize that the person being hurt by these materials is themselves and their loved ones. More surprisingly, the vast majority of these people selected “a matter of personal choice” or “not a problem if you enjoy it,” implying that if people are shown being harmed in this pornographic material, that is perfectly okay if you enjoy it or want to put up with it.

Living Together Before Marriage

What does the Bible tell us about living in a sexual relationship before marriage? In Colossians 3:5, Paul states, “So put to death whatever in your nature belongs to the earth: sexual immorality, impurity, shameful passion, evil desire, and greed which is idolatry.” The current philosophy of “try before you buy” is popular but totally contrary to biblical instruction for a rich, fulfilling life. This philosophy clearly “belongs to the earth.”

The third question examines views on whether it is a good thing to live together in a sexual relationship before committing to marriage. The results are summarized in Figure 3. This is another question where Born Again Protestants show a significant difference based on age. The older group, 40 through 55, shows almost 60% who say that it should be avoided as instructed by God. The younger group, 18 through 29, shows only 40% with the same viewpoint. Across all age ranges only about one half of Born Again Protestants say that this practice should be avoided. So, even among this group, over half believe that it is okay and might be helpful.

Once again, this question reveals a stark difference between

Born Again Protestants and all other religious affiliations. Other Christian groups show **much fewer** than one in five adherents who believe this practice should be avoided. And we see the Unaffiliated lead the other viewpoint, with about nine out of ten of them saying the practice "might be helpful" or "makes sense in today's culture."

Same Sex Relationships.

The fourth question deals with how people react toward those who profess to have a sexual attraction towards those of the same gender. What does the Bible say about same sex relationships? Let's consider the instruction from 1 Corinthians 6:9b-11, "Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolators, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you once lived this way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

The verse above tells us two things. First, that someone who is given over to homosexual activity (like those given over to idolatry, sexual immorality, and greed) are not true followers of Christ. Even in Paul's era, many were apparently saying they would inherit the kingdom of God and so Paul begins the statement by saying "Do not be deceived." But it also clearly states that such a one can be washed, sanctified and justified in Jesus Christ. As Christians, we should love them and tell them the truth that God has a better way for their life.

Note that our question does not distinguish between those experiencing same sex attraction and those actively involved in living out their attraction through homosexual activity. Both categories of people need to be loved and told the truth.

The results for this question are summarized in Figure 4. As

shown, we see some difference based on age for Born Again Protestants. However, it is not as pronounced as for the question on fornication above. Looked at as a group between age 18 and 55, less than one half of Born Again Protestants selected loving them and telling them what the Bible says about homosexual practices.

Once again, all other groups are much less likely to take a biblical position. However, when we add in the answer about "accepting them while hoping they find a better way', the other religious groups (excluding the Unaffiliated) show almost four in ten who desire them to find a better way.

Note that Other Protestants are most likely at 20% (about one out of five) to say they would try to avoid people attracted to the same gender.

Combining Questions for Born Again Protestants.

How many Born Again Protestants take a clear biblical view of all four questions concerning sexual attitudes and behaviors? Results are shown in the adjacent chart. The chart begins with results by age for the first question concerning fornication. As you move to the right, additional questions are added to the questions already addressed to the left. Thus, the bars on the right include those who took a biblical position on all four of the questions.

Clearly, ones in the older group are more likely to take a biblical view on sexual behavior. In fact, on the far right, we see that those 40 to 55 are twice as likely as those 18 to 29 to hold to a biblical view. However, more important, is that over 80% of the younger ages and over 75% of the oldest ages do not hold to a biblical view on these combined topics regarding sexual behavior.

To understand how disturbing these results should be, consider **Born Again Christians with a biblical view on sexuality as a percentage of the entire United States population. The results**

are 2% for 18 through 29, 3% for 30 through 39, and a whopping 6% for 40 through 55. In other words, a slim remnant of adults in America hold to a biblical view of sexuality. A secular view promoting no relationship between sexual behavior and marriage and no limits on satisfying one's lusts currently dominates our national thinking.

Don't Do What You Say You Will Do.

We will address this topic more fully under Topic 10 but it is relevant to thinking about the Combining Question topic above. We asked this question:

When you are faced with a personal moral choice, which one of the following statements best describes how you will most likely decide what to do?

One of the answer choices is "Do what biblical principles teach."

Almost half (47%) of Born Again Protestant young adults (18 through 39) selected that answer. They would follow biblical principles in making moral decisions. Yet as just seen, only about 15% of Born Again Protestant young adults selected biblical principles on all four questions regarding sexual behaviors.

Although we can't be certain, it appears that many Born Again Protestant young adults either don't know what topics are covered under moral choices OR they don't know what biblical principles teach OR both. Clearly, almost half of Born Again Protestant young adults think that they are choosing to think biblically about moral choices, but most of them are not living the way they think they are.

Responding to These Results on Sexual Attitudes

All of the results presented above show that a large majority of young adult, Born Again Protestants do not adhere to a

biblical position on topics related to sexual morality. The data also shows that when Born Again Protestants enter the world of higher education and secular careers, they are surrounded by an even greater majority of people who believe that pretty much anything is acceptable in the area of sexual relations. Among other conclusions, we can be sure that these two data points tell us that while young adults were involved in church as teenagers, they were not adequately taught the basics of Christian doctrine in the area of sexuality and did not receive a good explanation as to why the Christian attitudes are much, much better than the free license rampant in our society today.

Christian teaching on sexuality must occur more frequently from the pulpit, in bible studies, in small group times. If we think that parents as the only source of information are sufficient to set up young Christians to be an example of godly sexuality, the data says “not so fast.” However, we do not equip parents to discuss these matters with their children. We cannot allow their peers to set the bar on acceptable behavior.

American Attitudes Concerning Science and Religion

We included three questions probing people’s views on the relationship between science and religion. The first question relates to any apparent conflicts between current scientific theories and their beliefs based on their religion. From the answers, one can tell whether the respondent puts more credence in current scientific theories or in their religious beliefs. The question is:

Question #1: When apparent conflicts appear between science and religious teachings, one should:

1. Ignore science, accepting that when science learns more it will agree with your

religion.

2. Examine your religious teachings to determine if the scriptures are in conflict or it
is just someone's interpretation of the scriptures that conflict.

3. Change your religious views to align with current scientific views.

4. Abandon your religion as being false.

The first two answers are consistent with a Basic/Enhanced Biblical Worldview, reflecting 1) a view that their scripture is informed by a higher source of truth than simple science can draw upon, 2) a recognition that generally accepted scientific viewpoints have often changed over time, and 3) on the type of scientific questions being addressed here, there are in most cases a variety of theories supported by different groups of scientists. The second answer includes the possibility that the person's holy scriptures do not directly address the topic at hand, but that some religious leaders have inferred a position on the topic from their interpretation of scriptures.

The second two answers, i.e. 3 and 4, reflect a view that scientific teaching communicates truth that religious teachings are unable to counter. The third answer results in a religious viewpoint that will vary over time as scientific ideas gain or fall out of favor in the scientific community.

As shown in the figure, the majority of American young adults do not accept that science is infallible (by supporting answers 3 or 4). Less than 10% of Born Again Protestants selected one of these answers. And even among the Unaffiliated, less than half of them selected an answer where scientific theories trump other sources of beliefs.

At the same time, those who selected a view that ignores

science all together (answer 1) were a small minority as well. Less than one in five (20%) of the Born Again Protestants and slightly over one out of ten for the other religious groups.

So well over 50% of all religious groups selected answer number 2, showing a willingness to go against science but also a desire to meld the views of science into their religious views. We did not ask a follow up question as to what they would do if they determined there was an unresolvable conflict with the current position supported by most scientists. There are not many unresolvable conflicts if one is willing to adopt a position supported by a reputable minority of scientists, e.g. intelligent design.

Question #2: My understanding of human origins is the result of:

1. Using the Bible alone with no regard for the findings of science.

2. Using science to better understand what the Bible teaches us about origins.

3. Not sure

4. Accepting a completely naturalistic view, i.e. no intelligence involved in the process.

Note these answers follow a similar pattern to those of the first question, but now they are applied to a specific question where many people assume there is no meeting ground between science and religion.

The answers are shown in the adjacent graph. On this more specific question, the percentage of each religious group that is going to look at the Bible alone for their understanding hovers around 30% for all religious groups but plummets to under 8% for the Unaffiliated.

Conversely, only the Unaffiliated show more than three out of

ten who “accept a completely naturalistic view” (choice #4). Born Again Protestants show only about one out of eight who select such a view. This result is amazing given the concerted push by some educators to force our students to accept a completely naturalistic view of creation. However it is consistent with the current state of the research on the origins of man, including new reports from 2021.{3}

The majority for each group of people selected “Not sure” or said they would use science to help them better understand what the Bible teaches.

Question #3: All real scientists believe that science is the only source of real truth.

The potential answers ranged from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree and included Neither agree or disagree.

First note that if we strictly define real scientists as individuals meeting these qualifications—1) a Ph.D. in a scientific field, 2) actively involved in the field, and 3) published in reputable scientific journals—we will find many scientists who agree that there are other sources of truth outside of science. So, we can say with confidence that **the statement in question #3 is objectively, verifiably not true**. However, there are certainly some believers in scientism [the belief that science is the only way to know ultimate truth] who claim the statement is true. They accomplish this trick by claiming that anyone who does not believe that science is the only source of real truth cannot by definition be a real scientist.{4} In other words, they use circular reasoning.

But there is certainly a movement to instill scientism as the favored viewpoint in society.{5} How successful are these proponents of scientism? Looking at the answer shown in the adjacent chart will throw some light on this question.

We would like to see the answer: Strongly Disagree. This answer aligns with the objective truth discussed above. But

what we find is that only one out of five (20%) of Born Again Protestants profess this view. Among Other Protestants and Catholics only about one out of twenty (5%) profess this view. Adding some uncertainty by adding those who say they Disagree, increases those amounts to two out of five (40%) for Born Again Protestants and one out of five (20%) for Other Protestants and Catholics.

Those who agree with the statement range from one out of four (25%) Born Again Protestants up to nearly one half (almost 50%) of Other Protestants and Catholics. Clearly, the proponents of scientism have done a good job of skewing our understanding of who scientists are and what they believe.

Combining the Questions

What do the results look like when we combine these questions? In our opinion, there are a number of different answers that could be consistent with a biblical worldview. Starting with the strictest view of relying on the Bible rather than science and then adding in those who would look at the results from science to obtain a clearer understanding of what the Bible teaches or those areas where the Bible is silent. Then, we add in their view on scientism which as already discussed is demonstrated by a long list of scientists who disagree to be false, thus being a source of strong disagreement.

The results from this comparison are shown in the adjacent figure. The first thing to notice is that the percentage of Born Again Protestants who take a more fundamental position, i.e. science should be ignored as a source of information, is low for one question and goes down to only a few percentage points when all three questions are combined.

The right hand side of the chart considers all combinations of answers that reflect a commitment to biblical truth above current scientific theories combined with a willingness to

consider what science has to offer. As shown, the combination of the first two questions has a large percent of Born Again Protestants, ranging from 55% for the youngest age group and growing to over 65% for the older age group. Since only a minority of Born Again Protestants stated Strongly Disagree that all scientists are adherents of scientism, when we add that question to the mix on the far right, we see less than one in five take a Biblical position on all three.

Effect of a Basic Biblical Worldview.

A natural question to ask is, "Does having a Basic Biblical Worldview correlate with having a biblical view on these science issues?" We can look at this question by comparing Born Again Protestants with a Basic Biblical Worldview with Born Again Protestants without a Basic BWV. The results are shown in the adjacent figure.

At a top level, we can see a correlation between a Basic Biblical Worldview and a biblical understanding of the relationship with science. This correlation appears to be strongest with those ages 18 through 29. We see that those with a Basic Biblical Worldview are about twice as likely to have a biblical view on all three of the questions related to science.

Responding to These Results on Science and Religion

As we can see from the first two science questions above, the majority of Americans do not buy into the idea that the only real source of truth is science. They don't believe that scientific positions automatically take precedence over their religious beliefs. Perhaps one factor supporting this stance is an understanding that scientific hypotheses and positions have changed fairly often over the years, particularly in the areas of the origin of life and the role of evolutionary processes on our current bounty of life forms. Certainly, it is not the public school system which has attempted to promote

concepts which current day scientists studying the field do not support.

However, Americans do have a skewed view of scientism, with a vast majority believing that all real scientists support this religious concept. This position is a little surprising given that the view is demonstrably false.

In one area, sexual behavior, even American Christians have thrown out the teaching of the Bible. At the same time, they are resisting the call to make science the ultimate source of truth.

Notes

1. Matthew 5:27-28
2. There is also a small number of those answering Don't Know included in the number of those who do not state that they Strongly Agree or Agree Somewhat with the statement.
3. In March, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Brian Josephson declared that "intelligent design is valid science." In April, researchers writing in the journal *Current Biology* asked whether Darwin's "tree of life" should "be abandoned."
4. See for example: Daniel Dennett, Breaking the Spell, 2006.
5. See for example the book by J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 2018.

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Who Told You That You Were Naked?

Sue Bohlin reflects on God's question to Adam after he fell and broke the creation.

There is a most interesting interaction in Genesis 3 between Adam and God after the Fall, when Adam and Eve sinned by rebelling against God's command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God calls to Adam, who is hiding among the trees of the Garden of Eden, "Where are you?" Adam explains, ". . . I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."

And the Lord God said, "Who told you that you were naked?" (3:11)

Hmmmm. Interesting question, one that Adam doesn't answer.

The first thing the newly fallen man tells his Creator is that he was afraid, and he was naked. Up to this point, in a literally perfect world, there was no fear, and there were no clothes. How did he know to identify this new feeling of being afraid? And "naked" is the opposite of "clothed." In a world without clothes, "naked" has no meaning, right?

When Adam says he was afraid because he was naked, my guess is that this was how he described the new, unwelcome feeling of *shame:* the horrible awareness of being very not-okay, of being vulnerable and embarrassed and exposed.

But I've been munching for days on the next question: *"Who told you that you were naked?"*

In Genesis 3:7, we read that as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, "Then the eyes of both of them opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." Apparently there was an immediate and awful awareness of a change, of something very very wrong.

(I personally think they might have been previously enveloped with light and glory. Psalm 104:2 tells us that God, who made them in His image, "covers himself with light as if it were a garment." The moment they sinned, I think they lost their light.)

But God didn't ask, "How did you know you were naked?" He asked, "*Who told you* that you were naked?"

There are only four characters in the garden: God, Adam, Eve . . . and the serpent, who we find out later is "the devil who deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9).

So, although Adam doesn't answer God's question, it sure sounds to me like it was the nasty serpent.

And I wonder if that question is in the scriptures to direct us to pay attention to the voices that speak to us:

- Who told you that you were too much?
- Who told you that you were not enough?
- Who told you that you were fat?
- Who told you that you were ugly?
- Who told you that you were dumb?
- Who told you that you were incompetent?
- Who told you that you were a loser?
- Who told you that you were too old?
- Who told you that you were too young?

And now I'm seeing the pattern extend to the broken sexuality in our culture:

- Who told you that you were a boy in a girl's body?
- Who told you that you were gay or lesbian or bisexual?
- Who told you that you were asexual or polyamorous?

Social media has given the enemy of our souls a megaphone for his devious, destructive lies.

I thank God for His clarifying question that is just as salient today as it was the day the creation broke at the Fall: "Who told you that you were _____?" We need to look beyond the message to the WHO behind it, the source of the voice planting doubt and lies in our souls.

And instead of listening to the voice of the one whose native

tongue is lies (John 8:44), we should listen to the One who speaks loving truth to us about ourselves:

• You are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13)
• You are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14)
• You are blessed of the Father (Matthew 25:34)
• You are more valuable than many sparrows (Luke 12:7)
• You are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you (John 15:3)
• You are the branches (John 15:5)
• You are My friends (John 15:14)
• You are the called of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:6)
• You are beloved of God (Romans 1:7)
• You are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you (1 Corinthians 3:16)
• You are Christ's body, and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12:27)
• You are a letter of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:3)
• You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26)
• You are sons of light and sons of day (1 Thessalonians 5:5)
• You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9)

Now when we hear, "Who told you that you are _____?" we can say, "YOU did, Lord! You told me in Your word!"

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