

PERSPECTIVE

JULY 2015

Now What Do I Say?

SPEAKING THE TRUTH ABOUT MARRIAGE

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Now What Do I Say? Speaking the Truth About Marriage

On Friday, June 26, the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage is legal in all 50 states. Justice Anthony Kennedy concluded the majority opinion saying gay and lesbian couples' "hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right."ⁱ As evangelical Christians, we must disagree with this decision. But many of our neighbors won't. In Georgia, minutes after the decision was handed down, a lesbian couple exchanged vows at Fulton County courthouse.ⁱⁱ

In light of this, we need to think and speak intelligently from a Christian worldview about a host of issues related to marriage and sexuality. The culture change we are experiencing is overwhelming. Are you prepared to talk about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), and other gender-identity topics? We need to get ready. Trying to wrap my own head around these issues is like trying to take in the Grand Canyon in a single afternoon. That's impossible. It will take time, wisdom, and patience to navigate all of the issues.

Nonetheless, some conversations won't wait. If they haven't asked you already, friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers will soon be broaching the topic of same-sex marriage. When your neighbor asks, "What does your church think about gay marriage?" what will you say? Your answer matters. As Chuck Colson once noted, "Culture can be shifted over the backyard fence and around the barbeque grill."ⁱⁱⁱ

Are you prepared for the cookout conversation? It's here! Silence is not an option. So, now what do you say? In the following words, I want to encourage you to speak the truth about marriage and the gospel with gentleness and respect.

PETER'S COUNSEL TO A CHURCH UNDER PRESSURE

Peter wrote to churches that were slandered, reviled, and maligned for holy living. Those brothers and sisters were unwilling to celebrate a rebellious lifestyle. Peter noted how the believers' holiness surprised their non-Christian

friends: "For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you" (1 Pet. 4:3-4). Peter held out only two options: join the party or be maligned.

They chose to be reviled for their "good behavior in Christ" (1 Pet. 3:16). The pressure to conform to the unbelieving lifestyle was great. Peter counseled them to suffer "for righteousness' sake" (1 Pet. 3:13).

But Peter also told them to speak! "[B]ut in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15). Christians have always been tempted to be silent. Yet a genuine hope in the gospel will not only produce a holy life but a willingness to lovingly address unbelievers who disagree with our positions.

HOW SHALL WE THEN RESPOND?

We are in the midst of a cultural, political, and moral revolution. It's tempting to grow frustrated and angry and to lash out at those with different opinions. Let's be careful. A corrupt culture needs the gospel. As one author wrote, "[T]he church can become defined by what we are against, whom we oppose, and the gospel is lost in the fray."^{iv} We don't want to lose the gospel. We must be clear about what we oppose, but we must be clear in a way that commends the gospel to our unbelieving neighbors.

We may or may not be asked why we live differently. We will certainly be asked our view on same-sex marriage. We will have no choice but to explain why we do not think a homosexual couple can be married. We believe God created marriage as a lifelong, covenantal union between one man and one woman. Any attempt on our part to redefine marriage is a sin against God and bad for the world God made.

How can we share this message the way Peter urged us to share it, with "gentleness and respect?" Here are some ways:

Learn to "love your neighbor as yourself."

Do you genuinely love the unbelievers in your life? Selfless love is a mark of Christians and should typify

our interactions with unbelievers. Rosaria Butterfield was a feminist, lesbian, English professor before she became a Christian. She explains how the Lord used a pastor's genuine friendship to save her.^v Chick-fil-a CEO, Dan Cathy nurtured a friendship with Shane Windmeyer, the Executive Director of Campus Pride, a pro-LGBT organization. Despite their differences both publicly stated their appreciation for one another. We must likewise strive to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mt. 22:39).^{vii}

Are you pursuing relationships with neighbors who disagree with you? Are you interested in their life stories, their interests, and their family? Do you share meals with non-Christians, who don't share your worldview? Loving your neighbor as yourself means investing in others, building trust, and sharing truth.

Some of us have friends or family in an LGBT lifestyle. All of us know people who believe homosexuality is natural and good. We can't control their response when we make our convictions known. But we can treat them with gentleness and respect. By God's grace, we can love our neighbors as ourselves.

I recently had a conversation with some neighbors about the possibility of religious schools losing their tax-exempt status in light of the Supreme Court's ruling.^{viii} This was not a personal conversation, and yet it was still awkward because they knew my position, and they disagreed. Imagine the tension and awkwardness when your gay co-worker announces to you his engagement.

There is no way out of these hard conversations. But wherever possible, help them end with the verbal reinforcement of your love and respect for the person, regardless of how much you may disagree. Let the final words they hear be, "I know we disagree, but please remember that I love you and value our friendship."

Learn to listen

Good physicians and counselors share a common skill—they listen! They know how to ask questions and take in the answers. Probing the thoughts of others and listening

carefully to their response is a key ingredient to engaging with gentleness and respect.

When you take the time to ask a thoughtful question you show you value someone's opinion. Of course, this doesn't mean you agree with his or her opinion. It does mean you care enough to listen, to understand their experience and, as much as possible, to know the person—their story, passions, motivations, fears, etc.

Some conversations won't wait. If they haven't asked you already, friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers will soon be broaching the topic of same-sex marriage. When your neighbor asks, "What does your church think about gay marriage?" what will you say? Your answer matters.

Simple questions go a long way. Try these: is it easier to talk about homosexuality now than ten years ago? Is your family accepting of your lifestyle? What is it like to see LGBT issues in the news everyday? What is one thing you wish people who disagreed with you understood about homosexuality? By asking questions like this, you can get to know the heart of a person, and that's always a good thing.

What if someone asks about your position on same-sex marriage? One writer suggested first answering that question with a question:

You know this is actually a very personal question, and I'm glad to answer. But before I do, I want to know if you consider yourself a tolerant or intolerant person. Is it safe to give my opinion, or are you going to judge me for my point of view? Do you respect diverse points of view, or do you condemn others for convictions that differ from yours?^{ix}

You may or may not like that question, but he makes a good point. The fact of the matter is a lot of people who rail against the intolerance of Christians are actually intolerant themselves.

In any event, we must learn to listen. Listening shows we respect the fact that they bear the image of God. We respect the fact that they have an opinion, even if we believe their opinion is distorted by sin. It is especially important to listen when someone wants to confide in you about same-sex attraction. Sam Alberry, a pastor who has admitted to struggling with same-sex attraction, counsels us not to lump all lesbians and gays together:

[L]isten – carefully. Experiences with SSA vary enormously. Points of sensitivity, triggers for temptation or despair, the issues surrounding and feeding into the feelings of attraction can differ enormously from one person to the next . . . gentle probing and careful listening will help shape what sort of wisdom and counsel they may need. The Christian actively wrestling with these feelings, striving to flee from temptation, wanting to honour Christ and walk faithfully with him—they’ll need encouragement, prayers and people to talk to from time to time.^x

If you are the parent or grandparent of someone struggling with same-sex attraction, remember that if your response to their confession is horror and dismay, they may very well never confide in you again. Your first response is the most important. They may already feel ashamed, embarrassed, and scared. They probably know what you believe about marriage and the Bible. If they are willing to confide, they aren’t looking for a sermon; they are looking for an ear. The sermon can come later. First, listen.

Share your story

Let them know you are a sinner. The good news of the gospel is that God loved you in your sin and called you out of it. Many of us know how to share the facts of the gospel. But can we point out the corruption in our own lives that the good news addressed?

Let’s face it: many people in the LGBT community think all we want to do is yell at them through a microphone. One spectator was kicked out of the Supreme Court during the oral arguments of *Obergefell v. Hodges* for yelling, “If you support gay-marriage, you will burn in Hell! It’s an abomination!” This is *not* communicating with gentleness and respect.

Let’s fight this caricature of conservative Christians by getting our stories out. Our honesty can bring down the wall of hostility. Every believer has a different story. Some of us were saved out of lives of our own sexual immorality, gluttony, alcoholism, and theft. And even if you didn’t act out on all these sins, you know the depravity that marked your heart. “Such were some of you,” wrote Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:11. The church is full of people whose lives were (and in many cases still are) a mess. We don’t claim superiority over our LGBT friends. We are all sinners in need of grace. We will offend them by telling them homosexuality is a sin. We

can’t help that. But, at the very least, we can let them know we are sinners, too.

All of us stood guilty before God, and no one is outside of the reach of God’s grace and mercy. Sharing your story, sin and all, communicates the truth with gentleness and respect.

Speak honestly and directly

The other day my three girls and I passed a transvestite when leaving Publix. My understandably curious 8-year-old asked, “Was that a man or a woman? Why did she look like that?” I have to admit I wasn’t prepared to talk to my kids about the transgender movement in that moment! Thankfully, with as much empathy and compassion as I could muster, I said, “Girls, because of the fall and the sin in our hearts some people feel they are the opposite gender that God made them. It’s sad. That man is confused because of sin. His desires and the way he sees himself are distorted. He has rejected God’s good gift of making him a man, and he needs Jesus Christ. Let’s pray for him.”

We can’t mince words. We must define marriage straightforwardly as the lifelong covenantal union between one man and one woman. Call sin what it is: rebellion against God. If asked directly, “What do you think about the Supreme Court’s decision?” answer directly. Brothers and sisters, gay marriage is not a complicated issue, and it demands a complete answer. When asked a direct question, it is respectful and loving to give a direct answer.

Share the gospel

In Ephesians 5:22-33 Paul gives us the grand theological truth that from the beginning of creation God created marriage to be a visible testimony to the relationship between Christ and the church. Our marriage is to be a display of the gospel. Even non-Christians can bear accidental witness to this relationship as the husband leads sacrificially, and the wife submits respectfully.

This crisis over the definition of marriage is an unparalleled opportunity to explain not only what marriage is but what the gospel is! Everyone is asking all sorts of important questions: What is marriage? Who has the right to define marriage? Who has the right to marry? Why does the state care about marriage?

These questions give us the privilege of responding with gospel truth: “Yes, those are important questions. I do believe God has defined marriage, and I want to tell you why: Because a perfect husband, Jesus Christ, perfectly loved an imperfect bride, the church. Jesus “gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27).

Could it be that God has allowed this “revolution” in the public definition of marriage to give the church the opportunity to stand out and speak up and make the gospel known? Peter urged us to give a reason for the hope that is within us with “gentleness and respect.” My hope is not in America; it’s not in the Supreme Court; it’s certainly not in me. My hope is in the Lord, who loved me enough to die for me. My hope is in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The fact that this gospel is pictured in marriage makes the biblical definition of marriage worth protecting as gently and respectfully as I can.

~Brad Thayer

ⁱⁱⁱ Quoting Colson from Sean McDowell & John Stonestreet, *Same-sex Marriage: A Thoughtful Approach to God’s Design for Marriage*, 115.

^{iv} Peter Hubbard, *Love into Light: The Gospel, The Homosexual and The Church*, 12.

^v Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of An Unlikely Convert*.

^{vi} Shane Windmeyer, “Dan and Me: My Coming Out as a Friend of Dan Cathy and Chick-fil-a,” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/shane-l-windmeyer/dan-cathy-chick-fil-a_b_2564379.html Accessed June 25, 2015.

^{vii} Glenn Stanton has a number of other stories in *Loving My (LGBT) Neighbor: Being Friends in Grace & Truth*.

^{viii} Laurie Goodstein & Adam Liptak, “Schools Fear Gary Marriage Ruling Could End Tax Exemptions,” http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/25/us/schools-fear-impact-of-gay-marriage-ruling-on-tax-status.html?_r=0. Accessed June 25, 2015.

^{ix} Gregory Koukl quoted from *Same-sex Marriage*, 149.

^x Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-sex Attraction*, 83.

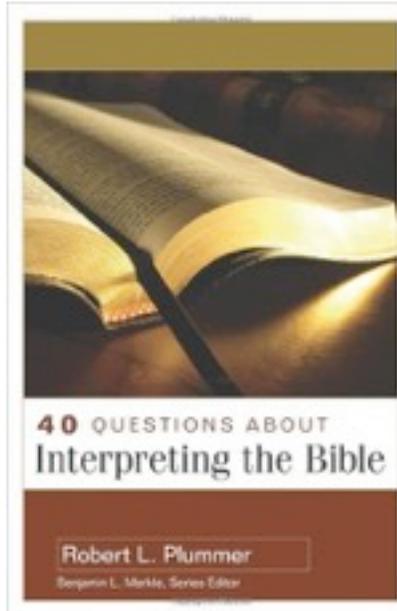
ⁱ *Obergefell v. Hodges*. http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf Accessed June 26, 2015.

ⁱⁱ Bill Rankin, “What the Same-sex Marriage Ruling Means in Georgia.” <http://www.ajc.com/news/news/local/what-same-sex-marriage-ruling-means-georgia/nmkqj/> Accessed June 26, 2015.

40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible

Written by Robert L. Plummer

Bookstall Price \$16



Not that long ago, a friend and I had an interesting conversation about the Bible. During our discussion, he said he found it difficult to believe that the Bible is infallible. In his view, if man is fallible, and man wrote the Bible, then the Bible too must contain error.

This conversation captures one of the deep and important questions for Christians and non-Christians alike: How are we to interpret the Bible? As students of the Word of God, the importance of proper biblical interpretation cannot be

overstated. We should all aspire to better understand and faithfully interpret Scripture.

This is no easy task. Like the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:31, we too can benefit if someone guides us in interpreting Scripture. Robert Plummer, in *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*, has sought to address the principle questions concerning hermeneutics (biblical interpretation) in a way that is accessible to readers yet not too simplistic. Just a brief scan of the contents reveal a host of questions many of us have probably asked ourselves or been asked by others. As for my friend, I would lead him to question 3 (Who Wrote the Bible – Humans or God?) and question 4 (Does the Bible Contain Error?).

40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible is not a novel. In fact, in his introduction Plummer says the book would ideally serve as a textbook. However, the book is very approachable and the question and answer format is particularly appealing because it allows the reader to narrow in on specific topics they are interested in. While this may not be your first choice for some light reading before bed, this book will absolutely serve as a valuable resource for studying the Bible and better inform us all concerning how we can rightly handle the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

– RECOMMENDED BY SCOTT HARTY

Excerpts from the Book

1

“To engage in interpretation assumes that there is, in fact, a proper and improper meaning of a text and that care must be taken to not misrepresent the meaning.”

– Why Is Biblical Interpretation Important?, p. 79

2

“To affirm the divine and human natures of Christ and the divine-human authorship of Scripture, one need not be able to explain fully the mystery of these revealed truths.”

– Who Wrote the Bible—Humans or God?, p. 35

3

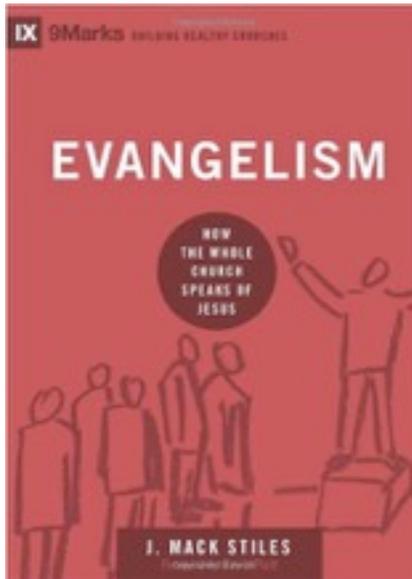
“All interpreters come to the text with biases, both perceived and unperceived. The families we were reared in, our church upbringing (or lack of it), our education, our jobs, our life experiences – all of these influence our thinking.”

– Why Can't People Agree on What the Bible Means?, p. 181

Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus

Written by Mack Stiles

Bookstall Price \$13



In Matthew 28, Jesus gave us the Great Commission: go and make disciples. The Apostle Paul also told us that “faith comes through hearing and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). Yet, no one can hear unless someone preaches, and no one can preach and unless they are sent. The point I’m making is that we must be committed to sharing our faith if we want to see others come to faith.

But why don’t we share our faith? For one, the church has twisted evangelistic practices to look more like the world’s efforts to attract people, rather than what committing to biblical principles. We also fear what non-Christians will think of us, and don’t want to jeopardize our image. Some in the church are ill equipped to share the gospel, and may rely on the others to evangelize for them.

That’s where Mack Stiles book, *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus*, comes in. He helps bring some corrective instruction and biblical encouragement to our lack of evangelism.

He begins by explaining what evangelism and the gospel are and are not. Once these two foundations are laid, he describes a culture of evangelism in a local church. He helpfully explains that if we don’t get church right then we won’t get evangelism right. In the latter half of the book, Stiles illustrates what intentional evangelists look like in a healthy church. Along the way, Stiles provides many personal examples that really help the reader visualize the practices he describes in their own lives.

This book is extremely easy to apply to the Christian life and the life of the church. But most importantly, let us be bold in sharing the good news of Christ with all the unbelievers God has placed in our lives.

– RECOMMENDED BY CHUCK STONE

Excerpts from the Book

1

“The hope in evangelism is that we so steep ourselves in gospel truth and gospel living, and so apply ourselves to gospel study, that the gospel can’t help but come out of us.”

– Of Altar Calls and Laser Lights, p. 34

2

“In a culture of evangelism, people who love Jesus work together as instruments in the grand symphony of God’s work. We don’t always know what the next piece will be—the Holy Spirit orchestrates that. But if we are focused on him and his direction, we get to be a part of his work in people’s lives.”

– Intentional Evangelists in a Culture of Evangelism, p. 81

3

“I would like to make the case that the biggest reason churches’ evangelism cultures are sick is not that we have a fear of man or that we don’t have right strategy or method of evangelism—as big as those issues may be—but that we do not understand the church.”

– Connecting Church and a Culture of Evangelism, p. 67

if I
ASCEND
= TO
HEAVEN
YOU ARE THERE

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.
Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
— Psalm 139:6-8

We continue in our pursuit to memorize psalm 139, as we have been for the last two months.

David has contemplated God's intimate knowledge of us (vv.1-5). Our God is the all-knowing, ever-present Lord of the universe. He even knows our thoughts.

Now in verse 6, David has one response to this truth – humble praise! He cannot begin to comprehend God's omniscience and omnipresence. It is "too wonderful" and impossible for him to comprehend. He is but a lowly creature unable to attain it.

Brothers and sisters, David is a good example of how meditating on God's incommunicable attributes (i.e., the characteristics he does not share with us as creatures made in his image) leads us to worship. If we want to *feel* deeply about God then we have to *think* deeply about him. I was recently moved to tears as I meditated on how Jesus "in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). I was overwhelmed by such sinless perfection of how my Savior could withstand every temptation unique to *everyone* of God's children past, present, and future. I wept as I poured my heart out over such perfection that I never can never attain. They

IF I MAKE
MY BED IN
SHEOL
YOU ARE THERE

were tears of joyful praise. Learn to think deeply so that your soul can be moved by the majesty and glory of your God and King.

Begin by learning to meditate on his omnipresence that David, again, mentions in verses 7-8. He asks if it's possible to escape the Spirit of God. The answer is no. In David's mind, "heaven" and "Sheol" (the "grave" as some translations say) represent the highest and lowest points in space and time. If he were to go to the highest point – heaven – he would know the unending and most blissful experience of God's presence. And if he went to the lowest point – Sheol – he would know the unending and most terrifying experience of God's presence. He cannot escape God's presence there or any where in between.

In your worst of days – overwhelmed with fears and uncertainty or feeling the crushing weight of sin and guilt – God is there! In the best of days – the unprecedented joy of holiness and fellowship with others in the gospel and God's good gifts of creation – God is there! Be encouraged Christian! Your Lord and King is there in it all.

— BRAD THAYER

Graphic courtesy of The Verses Project. For more devotional material and memorization tools, visit www.theversesproject.com.



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