

# Land Mines

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Today we minister God's word with an ever shrinking pool of topics with which we may deal without causing great offense for an increasing pool of people. Gone are the days when the gospel (narrowly defined) and only the gospel caused the offense. The exclusive claims of Christ, for example, have long proved scandalous in an age of religious pluralism. However, now we are surrounded by potential land mines of a social nature ready to explode if we fail to nuance our subject *just so*. Or they may explode anyway. Yet every one of these just-below-the-surface IEDs were non-existent prior to more recent times. Here is a partial list of the landmines:

- \* Prohibition of sex outside of marriage of one man and one woman
- \* Primary roles of men and women
- \* Definition of marriage
- \* Leadership in the home
- \* Sex or gender determination
- \* Two-parent ideal
- \* Discipline of children (especially corporal punishment)
- \* The sanctity of unborn human life

Yet the Bible is loaded with teaching which makes normative the traditional Christian understanding of marriage and family. God created us male and female (not just men and women, but masculine and feminine, with distinctive and unalterable gender characteristics). He created one man, Adam, to marry one woman, Eve (not one man and three women or two men). He designed marriage to be the life-long committed context within which reproductive union takes place, for the sake of both the couple as well as their future children. He created the man first that he might lead and the woman second that she might follow (Gen 1:27; 2:18-24; Deut 22:5; Mt 19:3-9; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-7; 1 Tim 2:11-15). He charges mothers *and fathers* with the responsibility to discipline and teach their children (Eph 6:4; Prov 22:6; 13:24; 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15). Unborn human life is sacred and protected (Ps 139:13ff; Ex 21:22-25). Scripture explicitly confirms with commands the implicit principle that the will of God is known

through the acts of God, what He wants by what He designs, what He intends by what He creates (Rom 1:18ff).

Christians happily lived with these principles for nearly 2000 years. Indeed, family life flourished. Because we live in a fallen world, there have always been those who have found these norms difficult. Some people find themselves erotically attracted to persons of the same sex, or to children, or to siblings, or even to animals. Even the latter is recognized by Scripture, addressed, and prohibited (Lev 18:23; 20:15, 16; Ex 22:19). Erotic desire not infrequently may be misplaced. Some people in our fallen world are born with genetically based deformities, with three arms, or six fingers, or both male and female sex organs (and hence are “transgendered” or more accurately “multi-gendered”). They deserve our compassionate understanding. Every descendent of Adam and Eve finds himself or herself drawn to evil, loving darkness, hating the light, rebelling against rather than relishing God’s rule and rules. This has always been the environment in which Christian ministry takes place.

### **Today**

What has changed? Society’s norms have. Freedom to choose, coupled with openness to and acceptance of all choices, without any negative judgments, is the prevailing ethos. Choice is an absolute. The self is sovereign. What one chooses is secondary. The distinction between liberty and license has been lost. Whereas previous generations emphasized identifying “the good” as the goal of one’s choices, today choosing is an end in itself. Today’s secular environment is hostile to Christian marriage and the Christian home because they stand as an implicit criticism of other alternatives. Christianity limits our choices to those approved by God as revealed in His word. It condemns those of which God disapproves. Christianity says that unrestricted choices lead to bondage to our desires, not freedom. Christian sociology and anthropology are heresy in today’s secular society.

### **Our alternatives**

This context for our message leaves us with three alternatives.

First, we may *say nothing*. Since whatever we say may offend couples living together outside of marriage, homosexuals, transgenders, feminists, single parents, those who oppose corporal

punishment and all moral relativists, it is best to leave matters of sex, marriage, and family unaddressed.

Second, we may *preach with apologetic comprehensiveness*. By this we mean that we may deeply research and address with scientific integrity the issues of heterosexuality, homosexuality, transsexuality, marriage, gay marriage, polygamy, male/female differences, two-parent households, single-parent households, and disciplinary alternatives for parents. If we are to do this with integrity, we will need to be able to interact with the latest scientific studies, affirming or rebutting as the case applies. This would allow us to say that “the latest studies confirm what the Bible has always taught. For example...”

Third, we may *proclaim Christ without apology*. We might note that the Apostles ministered in a world every bit as sexually degraded and diverse as ours. Yet the Apostles approach was declarative rather than nuanced. Read again the household codes of Ephesians 5:21-6:4; Colossians 3:18-21, and 1 Peter 3:3-7. Read again the sexual ethics of 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, Ephesians 5:3ff, Colossians 3:5ff. Read again the warnings of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 15-20, and Galatians 5:19, 20. These texts are all un-nuanced. They are direct and declarative. Our equivalent might be to say, “What are we about to study this morning is strange for many of you. You may not have heard anything like this before. Yet it is what the Bible teaches. It is God’s word, and here is what He says...”

Obviously the first alternative is no alternative if we are to be faithful. The third is what we must do, the second which we may if we are able. We must also recognize the built-in tension between what we have to say to the world and what we must say to our own people. We must not neglect to define marriage as between a man and a woman because we may offend the Gay-rights progressives. We must not neglect to define humanity as distinctly and unalterably male and female because we offend those who wish to see transgenderism as a civil rights issue. We must not neglect to teach male headship in the church and home because we may offend radical feminists. We must not neglect to teach child discipline because we may offend those who oppose corporal punishment.

Are we out of step with science? No, the opposite. Recognizing the distinctive humanity of the unborn from conception is dealing with the real world; referring to the fetus as an “embryonic mass” is not. Recognizing that men and women physiologically are designed for reproductive union is dealing with reality; insisting that erotic relationships between men and erotic relationships between women are in any way natural is not. Recognizing that men are distinctively and unalterably men and women are distinctively and unalterably women is dealing with reality found in every cell of their bodies, whereas maintaining that hormone treatments and surgery can turn a man into a woman or a woman into a man is not. Recognizing that foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child and only the rod will drive it out is dealing with reality of fallen human nature, whereas asserting the essential goodness of humanity is not.

Our first responsibility is to teach our own people and teach we must, given the avalanche of contrary propaganda with which the media bombards our people and their children daily. Fail to do so and Christian marriage, the Christian family, and the Christian home may disappear altogether. Fail to “tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord” (Ps 78:4), and Christianity in America may disappear as well.

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