

The Truth and the Lie: What About Student Sexuality?

by Mauro Meister

During 2001, I had many opportunities to enjoy family days in Disney World. My family spent one semester in Orlando as I worked on a book. The rides, the roller coasters, and all the fun could not distract me from the fact that God appears absolutely absent and utterly unnecessary in that world. Disney is not unique in that sense. I specifically remember a ride called The Universe of Energy. Its world is explained without any hint that there is a God—it's all about energy—and that description was just my first concern. The conspicuous presence of Ellen DeGeneres as the presenter of that multimedia show hit me in a special way. As you may remember, if you live on planet Earth, Ellen was the actress who openly displayed her homosexuality in a prime-time TV sitcom that carried her own name.

Now, back living in Brazil, where Ellen's sitcom has been relegated to reruns, my family, just like millions of other Brazilians, still has to deal with shows like *ER*, *Friends*, *Six Feet Under*, *Desperate Housewives*, and *Life as We See It*, or whatever else comes to our black box, just as people in all other countries and continents do—one more piece of the globalization puzzle. This is not about Disney, sitcoms, or any other culture carrier in particular; all of these are simply part and parcel of a worldview that slowly reaches into every corner of society and the world. My daughter recently came to me for help; at nine years of age she was concerned about how to handle the fact that a classmate of hers openly calls himself gay. How should she react to a world like that? How do I prepare

my kids to survive in this world and yet not think that certain behaviors are normal and acceptable? How does a Christian teacher handle the type of situation my daughter described?

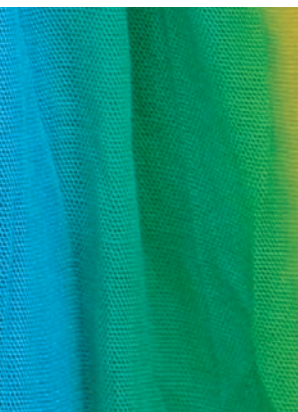
Of course, I will not argue with you if you tell me that these examples of anti-Christian worldviews and behaviors are the predictable fruit of the sinful nature of corrupt humanity. Yet there is a little more to it. The Scriptures actually give us a good map to understand how we've come to this point and how sexuality relates to the whole. The first chapter of Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome is one such map. So that's where we turn now.

In pagan Rome, sexuality was one of the areas most obviously affected by conflicts and confluences of worldviews. That's where the Christians to whom Paul

The Scriptures actually give us a good map to understand how we've come to this point and how sexuality relates to the whole.

was writing had to face their struggles. So right after claiming his right as an apostle to write and instruct the church in Rome, Paul goes straight into a discussion of how the current immorality had a causal chain. A wrong view of the creator and of creation leads to a wrong view of humans, created in God's image.

In verse 18 of that first chapter of Romans, Paul claims that God's wrath is poured on the godlessness



and wickedness of men because they suppress “the truth” (note the definite article). Which truth is this? Creational truth. Though “the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” and “day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge” (Psalm 19:1–2, NIV), people deny these facts. So their suppression of “the truth” is the denial that there is a creator who made all things for His glory. Worse yet, though they should know God’s

character and power by looking at the created world, they deny not only the existence of the creator but also His character and power. Through all this willful self-deception, “their thinking [becomes] futile and their foolish hearts [are] darkened” (Romans 1:21, NIV).

The first thing that comes out of this denial is that those involved in it become foolish, silly, mad: they exchange the glory of the creator God for images and representations of themselves and other created things. Unfortunately most translations miss an important nuance in verse 25; the original there reads like this: “They exchanged the truth of God for the lie.” Again, the word *lie* shows up with the definite article. It is not just any lie, but the lie here stands for the whole anti-Christian worldview. *The* truth is comprehensive, offering a correct view of all things. *The* lie is confusing, giving people a twisted view of their sexuality, themselves, and everything else.

It’s quite simple: deny the truth and you have to live the lie. Humanity is essentially religious; without a clear concept of the true God, the slippery slope to false worship and idolatry is inevitable (Romans 1:25, NIV). Idolatry is something God takes very seriously, and He gives idol worshippers over to their lusts. Imagine this: God gives them over, so what is to stop them from all

sorts of sin, including “sexual impurity” and “the degrading of their bodies with one another” (v. 24, NIV). Philip Hughes (1971) sees it this way: “Nothing is more degrading of the dignity of man than to know the truth about God, and yet suppress it.”

Homosexuality is not simply one of the results of this degrading. Instead, I believe that Paul is putting it forth as the bottom line of this degrading, the bottom of the pit. Because the Bible says that “God created man in his own image ... male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27, NIV), it seems to me that if you deny gender distinction you are denying something basic to human nature and you are denying part of the image of God. Denying the creator by rebelling against how He has made the creature then becomes a way of screaming in rage and shaking your fist toward God: “I refuse to be what you’ve made me.” If the narcissism involved in this whole process isn’t bad enough, we do well to remember that worshipping the creature and its images is only half the problem; the other half—even worse—is consciously and willfully denying and dismissing the creator. The same principle operates for any sexual impurity. God created men and women to be monogamous, but humanity insists on adultery and divorce. God created human sexuality to have its full expression in marriage, but our society freely argues for sexual liberation.

Philip Hughes (1971) suggests that the suppression of truth will lead to intellectual futility, spiritual darkness, incredible stupidity, false religion, gross immorality, and social depravity. This claim may seem extreme, but that’s in fact what Romans 1 communicates.

As we therefore deal with these problems, it would be futile to share a chair, or to stand on the same ground, with those who may not like the sexual immorality but don’t mind the anti-Christian worldview or the suppression of truth at other levels. We can’t simply go to a child and say, “Don’t play with that; it’s sinful.” And it is not just a matter of urging children and youth to get away from sexual impurity and homosexual environments.

The “just say no” policy will not cut it. There are steps we must take during their years of character formation to help our students

If you deny gender distinction, you are denying something basic to human nature and you are denying part of the image of God.

Any attempt in forming a biblical worldview must begin with a clear-cut truth about the creator and His creation.

understand and develop a biblical view of their sexuality. It is first a question of teaching them a worldview that acknowledges the creator and responds with grateful worship so that such a worldview will give them the appropriate support for God's moral imperatives.

Any attempt in forming a biblical worldview must begin with a clear-cut truth about the creator and His creation. Any secular worldview, on the other hand, will be human centered or nature centered. We can't help our students develop Christ-honoring character traits without teaching them to see the world biblically, as God describes it, or, in other words, to see the world through God's eyes. This instructional focus produces real change in students and not simple moralistic compliance.

So our great challenge resides not simply in laying down the rules for our students but in the much tougher task of persuading them through the Scriptures to embrace the whole biblical worldview. From there we continue by persuading students that their creaturely condition as images of God includes the important aspect of their fallen sexuality, which must be redeemed as part of God's redemptive project.

What about the fact that our students come to our classrooms wearing "worldview-distorting lenses"? It's the anti-Christian worldview that they absorb, like sponges, from home, from the tube or the big screen, from classmates and friends, and sometimes even from the church. Whether educators teach math, physics, or grammar, they have a unique opportunity to communicate the truth and not the lie to their students. Undoubtedly it will take some effort, time, training, observation, and attentiveness to even begin identifying the lenses these students will be wearing when they come to us. But only then can we proceed to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5, NIV). Our warfare is not fleshly; we must use spiritual weapons in a fight for the minds and the souls of our young ones.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37, NIV)—that's what it's all about—and that's why we must teach our students to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5, NIV).

These verses explain exactly what is our business, if you will, when we teach every subject and every discipline. Bring every thought captive and obedient to Christ, and you have a much better chance of teaching your students a healthy Christian sexuality—actually, the only chance. Fending off the constant bombardment of ungodly values and messages cannot be done in any other way. You obey the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39, NIV) by loving your students enough to persuade them to love and heed the truth instead of the lie.

Reference

Hughes, Philip Edgcumb. 1971. Crucial biblical passages for Christian apologetics. In *Jerusalem and Athens*, ed. E. R. Geehan, 131–40. Grand Rapids, MI: P&R.

Mauro Meister is a professor of Old Testament at the Andrew Jumper Presbyterian Center for Graduate Studies in Brazil. Holding a doctorate in Semitic literature from the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, Meister serves as an officer of the Christian Education and Publishing Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil and a member of the Brazilian ACSI Board.