

Standing Up for Truth and Justice for Children
Daniel 3; Ephesians 6:11-13

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The following sample sermon is dedicated to the unparalleled Christian reformer of culture, William Wilberforce. The elimination of slavery in the British Empire in 1833 came largely through his unceasing efforts during his long career as a member of the British Parliament. The sermon below is aimed at fighting the enslavement of minds by untruth.

On the battlefield of ideas, a war is raging to capture the current and future generations of children. Why? Because, as lesbian author Patricia Nell Warren wrote in 1995: "Whoever captures the kids owns the future." [see: Patricia Nell Warren, *Future Shock*, ADVOCATE, Oct. 3, 1995] The white hot battleground of the moment is the legal definition of marriage.

I challenge each of us to ask and answer this question today: Will I join the battle and stand up to protect children from untruth and injustice, even if it might cost me dearly? To help us think about that question, we'll first look at how the other side fights and how legalizing same-sex "marriage" will have devastating effects on society, children and the church. Next, we'll look at how the current crisis parallels what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced, so that we may be encouraged and inspired to stand our ground. Finally, we will look at how to begin to take a stand.

There is one point I want to make very clear before we go further. Today, we are talking about matters of public policy, including the motives, tactics and goals of activist leaders of the gay agenda. This requires plain talk - no tip-toeing. At the same time, we have a clear command from our Lord to show Christ's love in our personal face-to-face relationships with every person who engages in same-sex practices, including the policy activists. But that is not today's topic.

Understanding the Battle – Knowing the Tactics and Real Goals of the Activists

We are in a war – a war that has been underway since the sexual revolution of the '60's. This war intensified greatly in 1988 in Warrenton, Virginia, when 175 activist leaders of the gay and lesbian agenda convened a "war conference" – their words, not mine. [See Paul to Rondeau's article *Selling Homosexuality in America*] The subsequent fruit of the conference was a long range and comprehensive plan to pressure and use the media to help them make progress toward the creation of a new core cultural value: namely, same-sex desire and practice is normal and good. Put another way, it is "worthy" – worthy of our respect and societal support.

Homosexual activists are trampling biblical truth with technology and technique. Do you ever wonder why positive messages about same-sex desire and practice are delivered winsomely, unceasingly and at ever increasing rates through film, television, music and the news? It doesn't happen by accident. In fact, it's the hard won harvest of an intentional plan to control impressions, opinions and speech about homosexuality. An in depth analysis of this plan is detailed in Paul Rondeau's 2002 article in a law review journal titled *Selling Homosexuality to America*.

Based on the most sophisticated principles of marketing and psychology, the activists developed a three pronged strategy: Desensitize . . . Jam . . . Convert. Rondeau summarizes these terms this way: "*Desensitization is described as inundating the public in a continuous flood of gay-related advertising, presented in the least offensive fashion possible.*" "*Jamming is a psychological terrorism meant to silence expression of or even support for dissenting opinion.*" Conversion "*means the conversion of the average American's emotions, mind, and will, through a planned psychological attack, in the form of propaganda fed to the nation via the media.*" If you only take a moment to look, you will see all around you that the battle is real. It is intense. And it is sophisticated.

Although the mind of every American is in the activists' sights, children are the most important prize. And it is children who are most at risk of being captured. Children are exposed the most to the media's barrage of powerful, mind mangling messages. Children are the most susceptible to being shaped and influenced by the media. The post-Boomer generation was the first to be raised in a pervasive multi-media environment. It should be no surprise they already have more accepting views of homosexuality than their elders. The activists are well on their way to enslaving the minds of the current and future generations of our nation's children with untruth.

Many people ask: What's the big deal about same-sex "marriage"? How will it hurt anything or anyone? This is how: legal marriage for same-sex couples will give the activists much higher ground and much greater fire power to control the landscape of opinions and speech regarding same-sex desire and practice. It will give them a legal vantage point from which to reign down overwhelming force upon anyone who dares express the view that same-sex practices are not good or healthy, either for the individuals involved or for society. What is this force? It's the full force of government, including our legal system and our public school system.

The stakes are huge for our entire society. Dismantlement of the traditional family as the core institution of society leads to more crime and other social problems at a high cost. Admittedly, due to a number of factors, not the least of which is our fallen nature, many children do not have the opportunity to be raised to maturity in a traditional family. But just because marriage as an institution is deeply wounded in our culture today is not a reason to abandon the God-ordained ideal and intentionally hasten its demise. Yet that is exactly what same-sex "marriage" will do.

Why? Expanding the definition of marriage to include arrangements that are not truly marriages strips the institution of any real meaning. It literally demeans the institution and diminishes its appeal to male/female couples. Evidence from other countries that have legalized same-sex marriage clearly shows disastrous aftereffects: marriage rates have plummeted and the number of children raised without the protective umbrella of marriage has increased significantly.

Children will suffer terrible injustice if we give in to the personal, self-centered desires of a tiny group of adults. Legal marriage for same-sex couples will give them the right to adopt children on the same basis as traditional married couples. The ludicrous notion that children do not need a mother and a father will be engrained in our laws, despite thousands of years of experience and wisdom and much modern research to the contrary. The law is a teacher and the lesson being taught will be that society as a whole blesses and approves this notion as well as same-sex marriage itself.

Children will suffer as they are forced to live in and affirm unnatural and confusing parenting arrangements that contradict what is written on their consciences. They will feel compelled to say to their legal parents and to others how good these social experiments are, especially their own living arrangements. These "Catch-22" affirmations gradually will overtake and bury what they know deep down inside to be true. Their hearts will harden. Eventually, they will begin to believe what they say. And that will increase the risk that they will be more willing to experiment with same-sex behavior.

For followers of Christ and the church, the stakes are even higher – the Great Commission itself! The successes of the activists must surely delight the Father of Lies. It serves well his much bigger agenda: separate children from Jesus, the Living Word. How? Separate them from the Bible, His written Word, by making it seem unbelievable! After all, if the Bible is unenlightened and untrustworthy regarding homosexuality, how can it be trusted concerning anything else?

Having already become masters of the media, homosexual activists are now seeking to leverage our legal system, primarily through the courts. But the political questions are now being considered in many legislative bodies as well. Every legislative decision involves balancing competing interests in search of the common good. Justice involves getting the right balance and it requires protection of the voiceless and powerless. That's why this battle is about justice for children.

The present battle squarely pits two sets of interests against one another. One is the best interests of children, who are indeed voiceless and powerless. The other is the self-centered interests of an

extremely small but politically powerful segment of our nation's adult citizens. This group seeks to wrest from the political system total endorsement and affirmation of their personal behavior patterns. Make no mistake, there will be a winner and there will be a loser. We can't have it both ways.

If children are the losers, it will be a grave injustice to them, for reasons already mentioned. Traditionally, our laws relating to child custody have always given priority to the best interests of children over the desires of adults. The activists would have us turn these priorities upside down. When you cut through all the positioning and sophistry orchestrated by the activists, their claim amounts to no more than this: "Freedom means you must give me what I want because I want it, regardless of its impact. And if you don't, you are a moralistic, hate filled, backwards, ignorant bigot, especially if you believe in the authority of God's Word." Is this worthy of our support as a nation? Will we stand for justice for children?

As we think about this, let's not overlook Jesus's priorities. He reserved a special place in His heart for children. The disciples didn't want people to bother Jesus by bringing little children to meet Him. He had a different view, "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.*" Matthew 19:14. In this setting He demonstrated giving priority to the needs of children over the agendas of adults. In another setting, Jesus displayed how deeply He cared about protecting children. Do we view misleading and mistreating children as seriously as Jesus does? Recall these words to His disciples: ". . . *'Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.'*" Luke 17: 1-2

Standing for Truth and Against the Culture in Babylon

Let's go back to the future! We will see how today's reading about three Hebrew heroes from a time so long ago is a picture of the future we are living in right now. Let's take a look at what King Nebuchadnezzar and his culture shaping cohorts did.

The King was a law giver who understood the power of the arts, the media and the big picture. It seems he wanted to know where every governmental official stood, so he devised a loyalty test. He directed the making of a huge statue of gold. At 90 feet high and 9 feet wide, sitting out on an open plain outside the City of Babylon, it would be hard to miss. The gold glittering in the sun must have helped its visibility at a distance and conveyed the unmistakable message that this mere man-manufactured thing was highly valued and valuable - it was worthy.

The King summoned all the governmental officials to show up at the dedication of the statue. It seems he enlisted the Babylonian version of the news media - the herald - to get the message out to the rest of the citizens, many of whom apparently attended the dedication. I say that because we are told the herald was at the dedication and addressed a message not only to governmental officials, but to "*peoples, nations and men of every language.*" Then came the time to move to the King's music. The herald "*loudly proclaimed*" that "*at the sound of . . . all kinds of music*" everyone "*must fall down and worship the image of gold.*"

What a multi-media experience! The visual arts, music, the news media, the sight of the crowd and the threat of the fiery furnace! All these were tightly and masterfully orchestrated to create a cultural moment - and almost irresistible pressure to conform. Undoubtedly, the show producers were expecting everyone would comply.

Enter the astrologers to tattle on Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, because, in their words to the King, they "*pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.*" Why did the astrologers care? Because they were among the visionaries, the cultural agenda setters, the ones who determined cultural direction and values. You can bet they manipulated the King and put ideas into his head time and time again. But the three young Israelites threatened their cultural agenda when they stood their ground and would not fall down. So the astrologers wanted to silence their witness forever and teach everyone else a lesson. The King, inflamed by the culture makers, turned up the heat of the furnace 7 times.

Even so, the King gave the three Hebrew youth one more chance to fall down before the idol. Their response is truly inspiring:

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷You have no authority over what we think and believe; we answer only to God. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

They would not fall for a lie no matter what the cost. They were thrown into the furnace because they stood for the truth. Even in the furnace they were seen "walking around"— still standing for the truth.

These young men showed a courage that would be incredible at any age. But they did have an advantage. Commentators suggest they were separated from their families and brought into the King's court for training when they were in their early teens. So they had a full childhood of training in the knowledge of the God of the universe before they made their decisions to stand. No doubt it was that very training that enabled them to stand. As we consider our present situation, we need to consider the impact on those who have not yet had deep training in our faith. Would a 10 year old know the truth well enough to be able to stand up for it? An 8 year old? What about a 5 or 6 year old?

What happens when all public school text books present same-sex couples and child rearing by same sex couples as natural, normal and on a par with traditional marriages and families? What happens when schools teach children constantly and ever so subtly that denying this new man made image of "total equivalence" is unenlightened, false, intolerant, discriminatory, bigoted, extremist, even hateful? What happens when all of that teaching is reinforced by the ever present media outside of school? What happens when carefully orchestrated peer pressure teaches them that those who hold such views must never express them in public and ought to be marginalized, pitied or shunned, like today's cigarette smokers, or much worse?

Before we move on, we must also note that it's not just children who are at risk. What happens when the heat is turned up seven more times on organizations like the Boy Scouts and the Salvation Army, and ultimately even churches? What happens when the fire comes in the form of laws and boycotts mandating or pressuring organizations to conform their operations to the agenda of the activists regarding hiring, benefits, core values, etc.? What happens when preaching biblical truth about homosexuality in American churches becomes prohibited hate speech, as it already is becoming in a number of other countries?

If we allow same-sex "marriage", the heat will be turned up at least 7 times.

How to Take a Stand for Truth and Justice for Children

What then can we do? There are three areas for action.

First, we must always remember that we are engaged first and foremost in spiritual warfare. We should remember and do what we heard from Paul this morning in his letter to the Ephesians:

"¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." [emphasis added]

Three times Paul tells us to stand, but only while wearing the full armor of God. And later in the passage when he describes that armor he starts with the "belt of truth" and ends with the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God". He begins with truth protecting our midsection, our center of gravity. Why? So that when we take a "gut check" we will not grow faint, and so that we will stay aligned with truth and balanced between truth and love so that we do not fall. Paul also ends with

truth - the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. It's our only offensive weapon. And then he urges us to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions." We must do all of this daily, without fail.

The second thing we must do is take the logs out of our own eyes before we take on the distorted vision of the activists. We must each repent of our own sins – all of them. Given that the current crisis involves sexuality, our sexual sins may especially wound or paralyze us so that we cannot or will not stand strong on this battlefield, or even enter the battle at all. Only by coming clean before the Lord and seeking His forgiveness will we be able to hear His healing and guiding voice: "*Get up . . . and walk*". John 5:8 And we must never forget that no one is beyond God's redemptive power, even those who oppose His Word. We are called to be agents of His redeeming grace for those we meet in the course of the battle. We must pray for them and be prepared at all times to speak the truth in love to them as the Holy Spirit leads us.

The current spiritual warfare is being played out in the real world in the form of a legal battle. So the third thing we must do is participate in obtaining the best legal solution. How? Become educated voters and vote. Study today's Bulletin insert and the resources it points you to. Know where candidates for election stand on these issues. Influence them as you are led by your conscience. But make sure it's a fully informed conscience, scripturally and from a worldly perspective. Remember that Jesus calls His followers to be wise as serpents. As we exercise stewardship over the gift of the right to vote that God has given us, we need to seek the Lord's help and direction and then listen and obey when he shows us the way.

When speaking to others in the marketplace, the public square or over the back yard fence, be confident and do not be defensive. We can take a lesson from the heroes of the fiery furnace when they told the King, "*O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷You have no authority over what we think and believe; we answer only to God.*" Do not fear the heat of rejection. Instead let it get you fired up to continue standing your ground.

People may act like they do not care what the Bible says, but don't worry. God's truths found in the Bible are also wired into the core of every human being. As one professor of philosophy puts it, they are things "we can't not know." [see: J. Budziszewski's *What We Can't Not Know*, (Spence 2003)] Referring to the Bible or God is not necessary to present the nature of and need to respond to the current attack on truth, justice and the well-being of children. The appeal can be made purely on the basis of evidence, reason and common sense. At times, this type of appeal will be the only one appropriate to the particular situation. However, as followers of Christ we should never be ashamed of the gospel and never shrink from sharing biblical truth on this topic or any other whenever we genuinely sense the leading of the Holy Spirit. We must always remember that it is in the gospel – not worldly arguments – that is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes resides. Such faith comes through hearing the Word of God.

Conclusion

Every citizen will be involved in the outcome of this critical battle. None can escape playing one of three roles: support the same-sex activists; stand for truth and justice for children; or ignore the situation and let others decide the outcome. But to those who would take a pass on this crisis, please consider these words from Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "*If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.*"

If you choose to stand for truth and justice for children, the going may get rough. Never be discouraged. Sometimes important battles take years. William Wilberforce needed 20 consecutive years of effort in the British Parliament to achieve the elimination of the slave trade in the British Empire .

On the other hand, sometimes taking a stand when the heat is hottest can result in quick changes. Let's return to that fiery furnace in Babylon. After the three heroic youth were miraculously preserved and released, God used their witness – their willingness to stand - to work a change in the law of the land. King Nebuchadnezzar decreed that no one may speak against the God of the Bible. And then he did something else: he promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to positions of greater responsibility in the Kingdom of Babylon. So be encouraged! Taking a stand can result in good laws and more opportunities to serve in the Kingdom – in our case, the Kingdom of Heaven.

Slow or fast, the battle is the Lord's. But we must be his soldiers. Our role is to stand – stand on and for the truth of His Word. As Paul urged the church in Corinth: *"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."* 1 Corinthians 15:58

The idol called same-sex desire and practice has already been skillfully crafted and strategically positioned in our culture. It glitters like gold as the media presents its many facets to us unceasingly. But only its most attractive features are ever permitted to be seen or discussed. All of the cracks in its foundation are hidden in darkness. The idol continues to be repositioned and refined to appear ever more visible, attractive and even celebrated – in summary, more worthy. Yet no matter how relentless and sophisticated the marketing of the idol, the truth of God's Word does not change. We must stand for the truth and not fall for fiction. The slumbering Body of Christ must rise up to be the culture preserving salt and truth revealing light God intended us to be.

Will you stand your ground? Will you stand for children? Will you take a stand to preserve marriage and protect children from untruth and injustice? I pray you will.