



The Christian Case for Gay Marriage

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Transcript of Address to the Presbyterian Covenant Network Conference (with selected slides)

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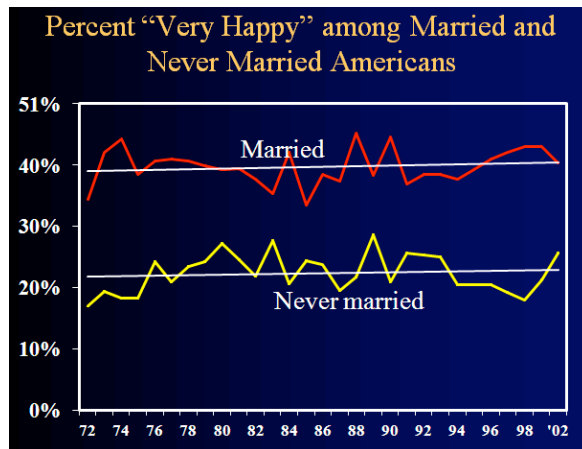
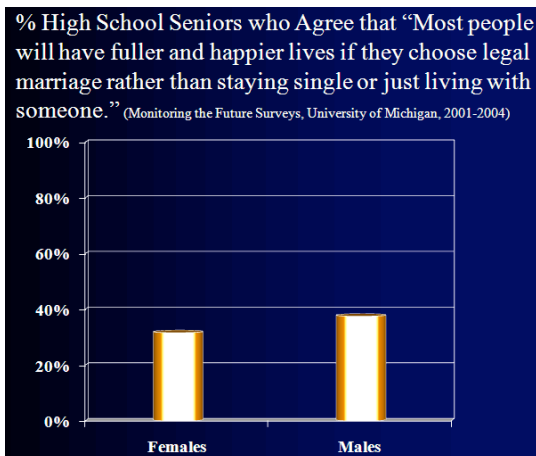
Thank you, David [Van Dyke]. It's great to renew my friendship with you and it's great to honor my Presbyterian roots. I grew up in Presbyterian churches in Seattle, married my Presbyterian wife, whom I met at Presbyterian Whitworth College, and I serve the Presbyterian Church to this day as a trustee of Whitworth, which is contributing lots of pastors into the Presbyterian Church.

I come here today with two purposes in mind – the same purposes behind the writing and the speaking I've done on this subject – and that is to help build some bridges across the divide between, on the one hand, traditionalists who want to support and renew marriage, and on the other hand, progressives within the church who have come to understand that sexual orientation is not a choice and that it's best lived out within the context of a committed partnership.

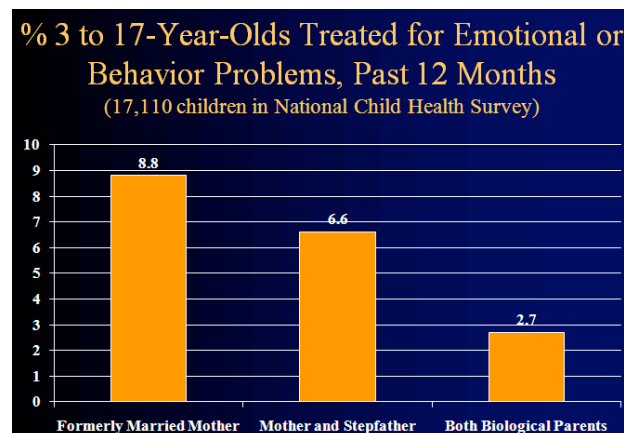
My message is just this: number one, sexual orientation is a natural, enduring disposition; and number two, the world would be a happier and healthier place if, for all people, love, sex, and marriage went together.

That's actually a pretty conservative message, and in fact I've been called a moral conservative for some of my other writings. I serve on the Advisory Board of the National Marriage Project and I come here as a supporter of marriage. It's only because I inserted the words "for all people" that this basically conservative message becomes seen, by some people, as upsetting. But it's a message that needs to be heard, I think.

Here's the percent of high school seniors who agree that most people will have fuller, happier lives if they choose marriage. As you can see, in the United States, less than 40% of high school seniors now believe in marriage. And yet we have ample data that marriage is a positive social good. In the United States among some 50,000 randomly-sampled Americans over the last 30 years, we can see that the percentage of "very happy" married adults is strikingly-higher than the percentage of "very happy"



never-married adults. And if we look at how children are thriving in various social contexts, we see that among 3- to 17-year-olds in the United States, the percent who have been treated for emotional or behavioral problems in the past year is markedly lower among those in intact families than it is in other family structures. And this is after controlling for parental education, parental race, and parental income.



So, it looks very much to us like marriage is a social good:

- Children fare better in households with stable marriages.
- Married adults are happier; they’re also healthier, they live longer, they’re wealthier.
- Communities that have high marriage rates also have less social pathology, less crime, less educational drop-out, less poverty. Show me a neighborhood with a high marriage rate and I’ll show you, probably, a socially-healthy neighborhood.

For all these reasons, it is well that we be concerned about the toxic forces that are corroding the institution of marriage and covenant partnership in the United States today. As a social psychologist who writes about these things occasionally for my textbooks for introductory and social psychology, I have opportunity to bring that research to students.

But that’s not what you’ve asked me here today to talk about. My purpose here today is to talk about matters related to sexual orientation. And in so doing, I do not presume to represent gay and lesbian voices, who can speak for themselves. I do not presume to offer any particular Biblical expertise. Instead, what I want to do is shed a little bit of light from my discipline on sexual orientation. This is not a talk about homosexuality; it’s about sexual orientation – everybody’s. By the way, there is no research on what causes homosexuality any more than there’s any research on what causes left-handedness. There’s research that compares left- and right-handers and gay and straight folks and discerns some

interesting differences, as I'll show you, but it's equally as much about straight people as it is about gay people.

I want to reflect on the attitude in the church – in the culture – regarding sexual orientation and I think I'll be able to leave you with some encouragement as you walk out of here.

Finally, I want to illustrate how Biblically-rooted family-values and support for marriage can happily co-exist with support for gay and lesbian aspirations.

One of the big questions, although I think it's becoming resolved, is at the heart of the Methodists' dispute (and I've had opportunity to speak to your counterpart conference in the United Methodist Church), which as the *New York Times* reported, "is a profound conflict over the nature of homosexuality: is it something you can't control or is it something that's sinful and that should be repented of or something that could be changed?"

"Well," says the past-president of the Southern Baptist Convention, "it's a sin to choose homosexuality as a lifestyle."

A leader in the North American Islamic Network echoes this in stronger words: "Homosexuality is a moral disorder, a moral disease, a sin, a corruption. No person's born homosexual, just like no person's born a thief, or a murderer."

Pretty rough language. Well, you know, folks, "it is not good to have zeal without knowledge" (Proverbs 19:2).

So, let's ask the question: is sexual orientation a choice?

We can answer this from four different directions.

First, we can reflect on our own experience. Did you, did I, choose my sexual orientation? And by sexual orientation I mean, of course, the direction of one's fantasies and longings. I tell students your sexual orientation is whatever flashes up—like a website pop-up ad—with images that sometimes invade your consciousness. That's a clue to sexual orientation. Is it something you chose or is it something that just started popping up in your experience? Most of us know the answer to that question.

We can also ask a second question that really has concerned a lot of people in the culture, and that is whether today's greater tolerance has influenced the population rate of sexual orientation? Would ordaining gay pastors, hiring openly gay teachers, and so forth, serve as role models which would entice more people to become homosexuals and thus would change the rate of homosexuality vs. heterosexuality in the culture? Well, we actually have sort of done that experiment as we have become more open over time in the United States.

In 1988, the National Opinion Research Center, which operates out of the University of Chicago, first took a massive survey of sexuality in the United States, using careful procedures that guaranteed

everybody's anonymity. And they found that 97% of sexually active males had exclusively female partners during the prior year.

In 2004, after 16 years of gay role models and gay folks coming out, they redid the survey. And what did they find? 97% of sexually active males had exclusively female partners, once again.

Or consider these data from the National Survey of Family Growth showing the percent of men and of women who acknowledge having same-sex attractions. This is among 40-year-olds. But, ok, they matured before all this coming-out, before there was a Covenant Network that was promoting inclusiveness, and so forth.

What about the generation of the Coe College students who are here today, people in their early 20s? Maybe we're going to see a higher rate there? Actually, if anything, there's a lower rate of acknowledged same-sex attraction.

Not only is there no evidence that the greater openness of today's culture has led to any underlying change of sexual orientation of the people in the culture, there's direct evidence that it hasn't – it's had absolutely no effect. And, as we'll see, there's very good reason to expect no effect, because the things that affect sexual orientation are not influenced by parenting, by cultural role models, and so forth.

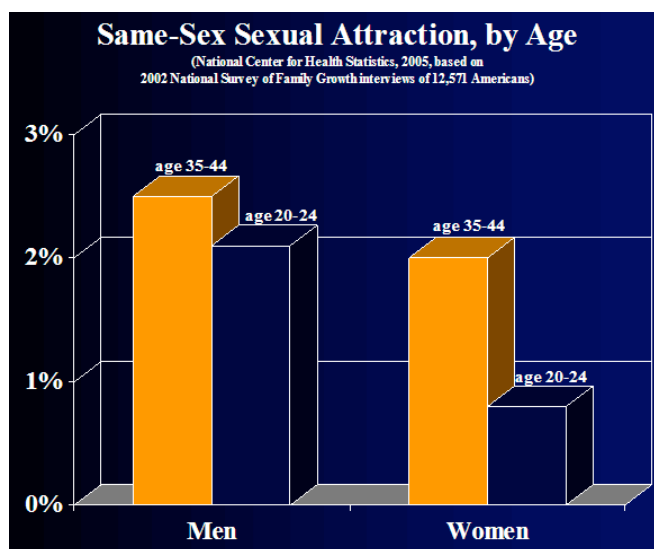
So, is sexual orientation biological? We'll look at some examples of evidence of biological influences.

And then we can also ask whether it is ever the case that people change their sexual orientation and can attempt such with enough hope of change that they should be encouraged to do so if they don't like whatever is their sexual orientation.

First, a couple of caveats. One, the data I'm about to present are clearest for males. Males exhibit less of what psychological science calls "erotic plasticity." Males are less varying in the direction and the intensity of their sexual interests. They are sexually simpler than women. Still, in general, I think the data apply to women, but more clearly so to males. But, males are two-thirds of people with same-sex attraction, so that's most of the population anyway.

Is sexual orientation a choice?

- our own experience: do any of us recall choosing?
- has today's greater tolerance influenced population sexual orientation?
 - 1988: 97% of sexually active males had exclusively female partners during prior year (NORC)
 - 2004: 97% of sexually active males had exclusively female partners during prior year (NORC)



Secondly, this evidence, if it persuades you, as it does me—that sexual orientation is a natural and enduring disposition—does not answer questions of values. You could say it's like handedness: some people are naturally disposed to be left-handed, some right-handed. You know: it's morally neutral. Who cares. Be what you are. Embrace it. Or you could see it as like alcoholism or schizophrenia, which is biologically influenced; but if there was something you could do to remedy it or change it, you would and should. That values question, psychological science can't answer for you.

So, what is some of the evidence concerning the biological influences on sexual orientation? First, we have a number of studies that have identified brain differences between gay folks and straight folks. The best known of these was discovered some years ago by Simon LeVay, who found a little neural cluster called the interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus, which is reliably larger in straight men than it is in women and gay men, and this is known to be a center that influences sexual motivation.

Some people objected, "Well, maybe that difference is just a result of the sexual experience and behavior patterns of gay and straight people." And we do know that experience and behavior lay down fingerprints in the brain. LeVay didn't think so and his argument gained strength with the discovery that...

First, I have to back up. Did you know that about 8% of rams – male sheep – display same-sex attraction? They seek to mate other rams rather than ewes. It turns out that when you sacrifice them and look at their brains, they show the exact same brain difference in the hypothalamus when compared with, if you will, straight rams, as we find when comparing men and women. So, that lends credence to the idea that this is a causal influence. And there are other differences as well in brain asymmetry and structure between gays and straights. We also know that there's certain brain reactions that are just automatic to the smell of somebody of the other sex or one's own sex that are clearly not moral choices that are being made by people.

Secondly, there's accumulating evidence of genetic influences. The available studies show variable results. But if you have a twin, that twin is more likely to share your sexual orientation – gay or straight – if it's an identical twin than if it's a fraternal twin. Researchers have actually been able to manipulate the sexual attraction patterns of fruit flies by genetic manipulation. And, sometime soon, a major national study of what's called *The Gay Brothers Study*, done out of Northwestern University Medical School, will be announcing its results. Watch for this in about a year.

In the meantime, we've learned a lot about prenatal influences. Biological influences – what you're born with – are not just a function of your genetic predispositions, but also of prenatal influences that shape you biologically while in the womb. And we do know that altered prenatal hormonal exposure during the second trimester can influence the sexual orientation of people and the sexual interests of people. And, in fact, in sheep, researchers have actually been able to manipulate the sexual attraction patterns of sheep by hormone administrations prenatally.

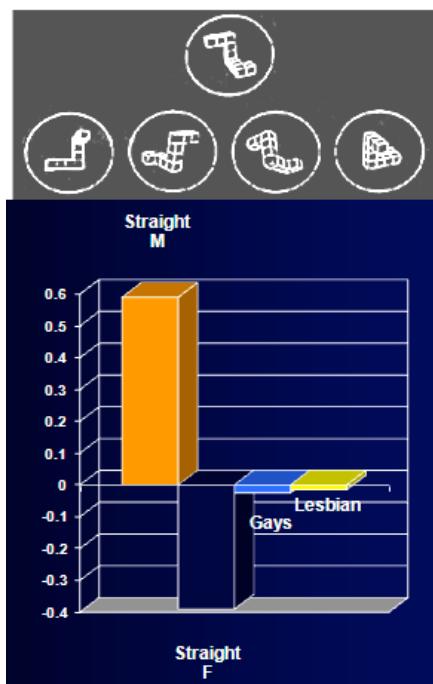
Prenatal influences also have something to do with what's called the older brother effect. This is really kind of weird – it's kind of cool. When I first saw this study, I thought "man...that's...hard to believe"; but then I saw study after study after study. Now, we have a whole line-up of studies that across several

countries have found the same thing: men with several older brothers are more likely to be gay than men with no older brothers.

If you're a man and have no older brother, the chances are about 2% that you will have an enduring and strong same-sex attraction pattern. If you have one older brother, it's about 3%. Two older brothers is about 4%. If you have five older brothers, the chances are you're still straight, but you're much more likely to have a same-sex attraction pattern than a man with no older brothers.

The researchers don't know the reason for this, but they think it has something to do with the maternal immune response to the repeated presence of this foreign male object within her, and that influences the developing fetus. Evidence and support of that comes from the fact that this turns out only to be true of biological older brothers. If you have six adopted older brothers, that doesn't make a difference. It's something biological that is creating this effect.

Well, these brain, genetic and prenatal hormonal influences combine to create what is a whole host of other gay/straight differences in walking motion, rates of left-handedness, eating disorders, the nature of the hearing system, the organization of the fingerprints. Let me just pick out one that's especially well replicated, and that is spatial abilities. Men and women average the



Biological Correlates of Sexual Orientation

The brain

- hypothalamic cell cluster larger in straight men than in women & gay men
- ditto for "gay" sheep (the 8 percent of rams that display same-sex sexual preference)
- brain asymmetry & structures: gay men/heterosexual women, lesbians/heterosexual men
- gay men's hypothalamus reacts like a straight woman's to smell of sex-related hormones

Genetic influences

- elevated concordant sexual orientation among identical twins vs. fraternal
- genetic manipulation of sexual attraction in male fruit flies

Prenatal influences

- altered prenatal hormone exposure leading to homosexuality in humans and other animals
- men with several older brothers more likely to be gay

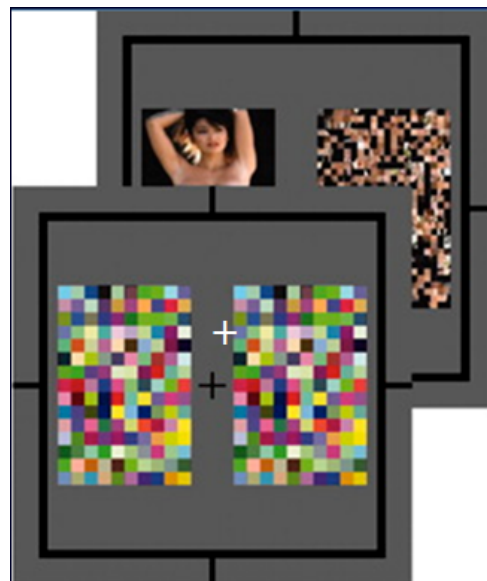
These influences likely contribute to gay-straight differences in

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| - spatial abilities | - relative finger lengths | - sleep length |
| - fingerprint ridge count | - gender nonconformity | - brain response to sex-attractant hormones |
| - eating disorders | - age of male puberty | - hearing system |
| - handedness | - male body size | - physical aggression |
| - occupational preferences | - eyeblink startle response | |
| - walking motion | | |

same in intelligence; but women are a little better at some cognitive tasks and men are a little better at another cognitive task which is spatial ability, illustrated here by mental rotation tasks. A typical puzzle asks you to find which of those four, when rotated, can match the target task. Here are data from the United Kingdom where this task was given to sixty straight men and sixty straight women, and this is a very typical garden variety finding. The men were about a half-standard deviation above average in performance on such questions; the women about a half-standard deviation below average. But gays and lesbians were exactly intermediate.

And this has been found in a number of other behavioral traits as well. Again, we're not talking about a moral choice here; we're talking about a natural disposition which has consequences for a number of other traits – some of them biological, some of them behavioral.

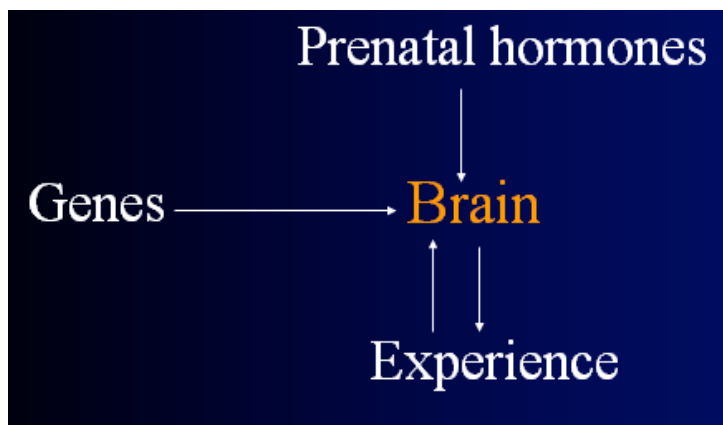
Here's another interesting experiment that illustrates how deeply imbedded in who you are your sexual orientation is. The researchers had people look at a dot at the center of a screen. Ok, you're staring at the screen and then they flash very briefly a nude male or female in either the left or right half of your visual field as you stare at that screen. And then they immediately mask that stimulus. The flash of that nude goes by so fast – it's so brief – you don't consciously know where it appears. And in fact, if asked to guess what you saw – was it a male or a female – consciously you don't know and you don't know which side it was in. But if they then show you a figure that's orientated either this way or this way, very briefly in either the left or right half of the visual field, you more accurately guess, just by intuition, the orientation of that figure, if you've seen a nude figure corresponding to your sexual attraction patterns, in that same part of the visual field. So, if you're a straight man and you've just seen this slide here, you're more likely to guess the orientation of that figure, if your attention has been unconsciously drawn to the left half of the visual field, thus enabling you to intuit the orientation of that figure. If you're, for example, a gay man, and there's a man in that place, you're more likely to intuit it than if the man was shown over there or if you were shown a woman.



What this suggests is that sexual orientation is so fundamental to who we are, it operates even before the level of our conscious awareness. Clearly, it is not a matter of conscious, moral choice.

So, it's looking like sexual orientation is shaped by genetic influences on the brain, which is also influenced by prenatal hormones and by our ongoing experience.

In addition, we have, as many of you are aware, observations of some 450 animal species which have shown same-sex attraction patterns or same-sex behaviors. So we have female bonobos, male African elephants, we have male white-tailed deer [pictures shown]. That's enough to give you an idea, though I could show you a lot more pictures.



Thus, Glen Wilson and Qazi Rahman in their book *Born Gay* conclude that "modern scientific research indicates that sexual orientation is largely determined by the time of birth, partly by genetics, but more

specifically by hormonal activity in the womb.” Rahman later amplified his point: “There’s no argument anymore. If you’re gay, you’re born gay.”

Even Focus on the Family, when it hosted *Love Won Out* on its website, acknowledged, “We do not believe anyone chooses his/her same-sex attractions.” Nonetheless, they were still holding out hope that you might be able to change those, and become a heterosexual, as love would win out over your same-sex attraction patterns.

I expect you’ve all read a lot in times past about sexual orientation: “Well, it’s a complex thing and it’s determined by biology and by parenting and by culture and all these things working together.” It’s looking like it’s actually simpler than that; it’s biology, at least for . And, in fact, I think a reasonable conjecture is that the parental influence on sexual orientation is zero. At least all the efforts that have been made to find correlations between parenting-style, or how distant the father is, or whatever, and the sexual orientation of the child, have come up with nothing.

If a young couple were to ask me, “Dr. Myers, you’ve been reading and reporting on this research for a couple decades now. Tell me, what can we do to influence the sexual orientation of our child?”

My honest answer would be, “I’m not saying there isn’t any influence; but if there is, I don’t know and nobody in my field knows what it is. So all I can say is that we don’t have a clue. And in fact, we have some evidence that probably that influence is very close to nil.”

The largest twin study of same-sex sexual behavior has just been reported, and part of what they were able to do is analyze to what extent is sexual orientation influenced by genetics, by what’s called the shared environment that twins experience together – the same parents, the same schools, the same church, I mean anything that they share, the neighborhood – and then the third fact would be the unshared – the unique experiences of each.

What was – and this would be including the parenting affect – what was the shared environment affect? It was 0.00. I mean, that’s weird because you don’t get numbers like that.

The one place where I get my back up a bit, is the “reparative therapists.” They’re a very Freudian group that have been kind of

baptized by the Religious Right. They suggest that if you have a gay son, you have a bad dad. You have a distant father, and you need to repair that relationship with the father. For those who are displeased with the sexual orientation of their children, that is laying a really bum rap, a guilt trip, on the parents, who are much better advised just to accept and love their child for who that child is.

Well, what do you think? Despite this biological reality, might people change their sexual orientation? Hope sprang up several years ago when a major study was massively publicized in the United States, and

Parental influence = 0?

From the “largest twin study of same-sex sexual behavior”:
Contribution of “shared environment” to men’s having same-sex sexual partners =

0.00

(N. Långström, Q. Rahman, E. Carlström, & P. Lichtenstein, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 2010, 39, 75-80)

thus Focus on the Family could announce in a news release that homosexuality is now known to be “preventable and treatable.”

Robert Gagnon, the Presbyterian biblical scholar from Pittsburgh Seminary, wrote that for any given homosexual person, “hope exists for forming a heterosexual union.” The American Family Association headlined in response to the same study, “Psychiatrist now says homosexuals can change.”

Let me unpack this study for you. It was done by Robert Spitzer, who kindly sent me these slides. The reason it got so much attention is because he was the editor-in-chief of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders*. He had been challenged for a lot of years after the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder, to look at claims of “ex-

gays” who through reparative therapy or some other kind of ministry, maybe by an Exodus-type ministry, had changed their sexual orientation. In response to that he said, “Ok, ok. Send me their names and give me their phone numbers.” And all the reparative therapists, all the ex-gay ministries in the United States – everybody was invited to send in names. The first interesting fact is that they only found 200

people who were willing to make such claims for themselves and be interviewed. That’s an infinitesimal percentage of the millions of people who have spent money and agony, trying to change their sexual orientation. And, when they called up and interviewed those people, they found that only about half of them actually claimed to have been exclusively homosexual before their supposed change experience. Among the males, who were three quarters of the people in this population of 200, only 17% were actually claiming now to be exclusively heterosexual. In fact, when asked what they fantasize while engaging in sexual self-stimulation, beforehand, people were having same-sex fantasies, but among males, half were still acknowledging that’s what they were fantasizing afterwards.

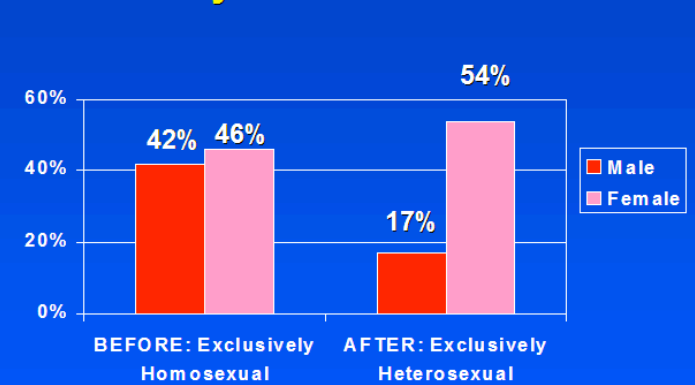
“To my horror,” said Spitzer, in response to these media reports, “some of the media reported the study as an attempt to show that homosexuality is a choice and that substantial change is possible. In fact, I suspect the vast majority of gay people would be unable to alter, by much, a firmly established homosexual orientation.”

Additionally, we have very good reason to view with some skepticism even those relatively few self-reports of change.

200 Subjects Who Claim to Have Changed Their Sexual Orientation from Homosexual to Heterosexual

Robert L. Spitzer, M.D.
Columbia University

Exclusively Homosexual BEFORE Exclusively Heterosexual AFTER



We have many studies in psychological science that have compared people's testimonials retrospectively of what they've experienced to measurements of what they actually experienced. We have studies of people in weight control, anti-smoking, academic support, and delinquency prevention programs, where if one surveys the people, one finds them testifying to substantial benefits: "I would have lived a life of crime were it not for this anti-delinquency program, like Scared Straight, that I went through."

And yet, when you actually do a clinical trial and assign people to either be part of the treatment condition or a control condition, and compare their behavior – like their grades, or their smoking, or their crime rate – before and after, you find no effect whatsoever of programs about which people are retrospectively making glowing accounts. That happens because of a phenomenon we know as memory construction. As a couple of my colleague researchers have said, "The speed, magnitude, and certainty with which people revise their own histories is striking."

If you've invested enormous emotional energy and money in a program of change, you are strongly-motivated to create a memory of yourself in the past that was worse than what it was, and then report your current status in a way that's better than what it is in order to justify what you've invested.

By the way, this memory construction was acutely illustrated by John McCain, who recalled, "When I voted to support this war, I knew it was probably going to be long, and hard, and tough" – although he actually said, five years earlier, "I believe the operation will be relatively short and easy."

My point is not about John McCain; this is true of any of us: we all construct our past. So what we need is a simple experiment.

Researchers at Northwestern University have told me that they've thought about doing this. To date, to my knowledge, it has never been done. What we need is a population of volunteers that would like to change their sexual orientation. And then, we need to verify what their sexual orientation is by measuring their response to same- vs. other-sex erotic stimuli. I won't give you the details, but it's sort of like measuring Pinocchio's nose, and there are instruments...

Then, we need to assign them to either a therapy or ministry program that purports to change people's sexual orientation, or to a control condition – a wait-list control condition. And, then, when they've completed that program, bring them back and ask them, again, to report on their sexual interests and activities and also, again, measure their responsiveness to same- vs. other-sex erotic stimuli.

When that experiment is done, you can guess, and you can also guess what my guess will be, as to what the results will be, given what we've learned about sexual orientation.

The consistent result of research comparing testimonials of change to actual effects:

- Participants in weight-control, anti-smoking, academic support, and delinquency prevention programs typically
 - testify to substantial benefits but
 - display modest, if any, effects
- Memory construction: "The speed, magnitude, and certainty [with which people revise their own histories] is striking." ~D. R. Wixon and James Laird

In the meantime, what we're left with are anecdotes, anecdotes that are massively publicized. Most publicized was the case of John Paulk, who, with his wife Anne, claimed that they changed from a life of same-sex debauchery to heterosexual harmony in their marriage. Paulk headed Focus on the Family's gay outreach program, and was Chair of the Board of Exodus Ministries – until he was discovered in a gay bar in Washington, DC.



News

Chairman Disciplined for Gay Bar Visit

*** For Immediate Release ***

Dated: October 3, 2000

SEATTLE--The Exodus North American board of directors voted today to remove John Paulk as board chairman--but to retain him as a board member on "probationary" status--after confirming media reports that he was photographed in a gay bar in Washington, DC, on the evening on September 19.

I have nothing to say about this particular case or about John Paulk or his sexual orientation; I have not a clue what happened in that particular incident. What I do know is that this case reminds me of a lot of other cases of what are now called "ex ex-gays," people who have led ex-gay ministries but have now stepped back from that to

say that, truth be told, they never changed and never knew anybody who ever did.

Bob Davies, the North American director of Exodus, said, "All these so-called ex ex-gay stories sound the same. In virtually every case, men and women abandon their previously held view that homosexual behavior is sin. Ultimately, they go with their feelings, rather than going with scripture."

But, hold it. If they're going with their feelings – their same-sex feelings – then those haven't changed. So, what's the claim here? The claim is that the program is helping control or restrain behaviors which may be unhealthy in some instances, and that's probably a good thing. But, changing sexual orientation? That's a really, really tough thing – especially for guys – to do.

This was plainly evident in the United Kingdom. There, the ex-gay ministry program was called Courage; it claimed to be helping people come out of homosexuality. I had to go to the way-back machine to get their website page, because their website page today makes clear that they've given it up. They said, "Nobody we knew ever changed."

So they're now a gay support ministry – under the same name.

Just a couple other points here. I'm not the Biblical scholar, but when I talk to people, they often ask me, "What's the Bible say? Isn't Charles Colson right, for example, that as a Christian, you already know that homosexuality goes against the clear readings of scripture?"

Here's one thing I did – you could, too – just do a computer search on the word “homosexuality” in scripture in the RSV, in the NIV. The word doesn't appear, and of course it doesn't appear because the concept is only 140 years old or so. The word didn't exist before that.

Now, when we look at the Bible, we find that it has 31,103 verses, of which the famed seven “clobber passages” deal with same-sex behavior. Everything else deals with something else. So, one question for the Presbyterian

The Bible

- Of 31,103 verses, some 7---.0002---deal with same-sex behavior; .9998 deal with something else
- Most of the seven “clobber passages” involve adultery, promiscuity, prostitution, child exploitation, violence, or idolatry

of verses. But when we look at what the Gospels and Jesus, in particular, had to say about homosexuality and same-sex relationships and sexual orientation, we come up empty-handed. The Bible is about other things.

Lewis Smedes, who was an acquaintance of mine, a Fuller Seminary professor, and a kindred spirit on these matters, wrote in his book *Sex For Christians* that homosexuality is a burden that homosexual people are called to bear and bear as morally as possible even though they never chose to bear it.

Six months before his accidental death, he sent me an email, in which he said, “If I could rewrite that, I would add one more sentence today: It is a burden most obediently and creatively borne in a committed, love partnership with another.”

Charles Colson (5/15/2006 Breakpoint letter):

“As a Christian, you already know that homosexuality goes against the clear teachings of the Scripture.”

RSV:

Search: for the phrase “homosexuality” within Entire Bible

Your search yielded no results.

NIV:

Sorry. No results found for “homosexuality” in Keyword Search.

Church is, Where should its attention be riveted?

Where should its passion be focused? Where

should its outreach be driven? Is it on the 0.0002 of the Bible, or the 0.9998 of the Bible?

Obviously, Biblical scholars have unpacked those seven passages and debated what they're really about, and will continue to do so. If we look at what the Gospels have to say about the poor, and injustice, and so forth, we can find a whole, long list

What the Gospels to say about . . .

The poor:

- “The poor have good news brought to them.”
- “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. . . .”
- “For I was hungry and you gave me food. . . .”
- “The spirit of the Lord . . . Has anointed me to bring good news to the poor . . . to let the oppressed go free.”
- “Go out at once . . . and bring in the poor, the crippled, and the lame.”
- “And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus. . . .”
- “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”

Homosexuality, homosexual behavior, and sexual orientation:



That leads us, then, to the case for that committed, love partnership: the Christian case for gay marriage. It's rooted not only in an understanding of the whole of Scripture and its message of inclusive grace, that you are celebrating here this weekend, but also in what we social psychologists have come to know as the human need to belong. A profound human need, illustrated by the surge of social networking in the United States in the last decade, is the need to connect in close, supportive, intimate, caring, self-disclosing relationships with significant other people. This is just fundamental to who we are; we are social animals. And covenant partnership is an affirmation of that at the deepest level.

There's also the question of justice. The Federal Register has identified more than 1,000 legal rights that are associated with the institution of marriage—many, but not all of which, are conveyed by civil unions. And, so, it's a matter of justice: should only some people, or should all people, have access to the legal rights that come with legal marriage?

And there's also the matter, not only of rights, but of responsibilities. Because a covenant marriage entails certain legal responsibilities to the partner, that one does not easily and readily walk away from, and, so, one has to decide whether one wants to make that choice.

Now, as I engage the case against gay marriage, I kept hearing several different arguments as to why gay marriage, and, similarly, gay ordination, should not be introduced into the United States.

First, we hear that same-sex marriage is a contradiction: it would change the definition of marriage. It would be a fundamental change in marriage. Well, think about this: marriage has changed over the years from polygamy to monogamy, from arranged marriages to romantic choice, from marriage as a second-class status – “better to marry than to burn” – to marriage as something that is to be commended, at least equal in status to being single; from patriarchal relationships to egalitarian relationships; from shunning interracial marriage, about which the same scare scenarios were given a half-century ago, to accepting interracial marriage; and from the church's disciplining to welcoming divorced people. The church is a hospital for sinners, and that's all of us. We all are here and covered by this grace. And in extending the marriage possibility to the additional 3% or 4% of the population, are we not just doing a more minor adjustment or fine tuning of marriage than what has been done in the past? Certainly, it's less radical than a Rotary Club admitting women. Numerically, it's less radical.

The second comment that's given is that marriage implies procreation and gay people can't procreate. After I gave a talk one time, there were people lined up to talk to me afterwards and somebody made this point. And, as he was making this point, it was so ironic that the couple in back of him were a couple who were about 80 years old, both widowed and recently remarried. I was so tempted to ask him to turn around and make that argument to the people behind him.

Or, what about my daughter-in-law, who had uterine cancer and a hysterectomy: what does that do to the possibility of valid marriage. Of course we don't believe that marriage is just for procreation, nobody believes that.

“Children need a two-parent, mother-father home.” James Dobson has made this point repeatedly, and he points to all the thousands of studies. Folks, this is my field, I know this literature. And, he's right,

and I showed you a glimpse of it at the beginning of this talk. Children thrive better when co-parented by two adults who love each other and love that child; it's a great social context.

All that research is about different family structures; it's not about comparing gay vs. straight parents. Now, since the advent of civil unions, we have a new generation of studies that have actually done that. There aren't thousands; there are a few dozen studies. And they find, over and over, that children who are raised by gay or by lesbian parents are doing just fine; they're healthy.

Many of these kids, by the way, were adopted out of situations of abuse and neglect. The real question is, "Are they doing better than they would have if they'd been left in the situation where they were?" Certainly they seem to be. And most of them are growing up straight, because sexual orientation is biological influenced – that's what you would expect – not influenced by the parents.

Another point is, "It's never going to work because gays are so promiscuous." Now, what they're really talking about is gay men are promiscuous; lesbian women are not. But in fact, if you ask men – like unmarried, young, college men – how many sexual partners they'd like to have, ideally, if they could have whatever they wanted, and if you ask single college women the same thing, you get huge differences. Men desire many more partners than do women. And so, the problem with gay male promiscuity is not with those guys being gay: the problem is with them being men. And we can ask, if that is a problem, isn't a covenant partnership, a public commitment, socially sanctioned, supported by family and friends, a legally binding relationship, at least a partial antidote to the problem of unhealthy gay promiscuity; and shouldn't we, therefore, for that very reason, be welcoming gay marriage?

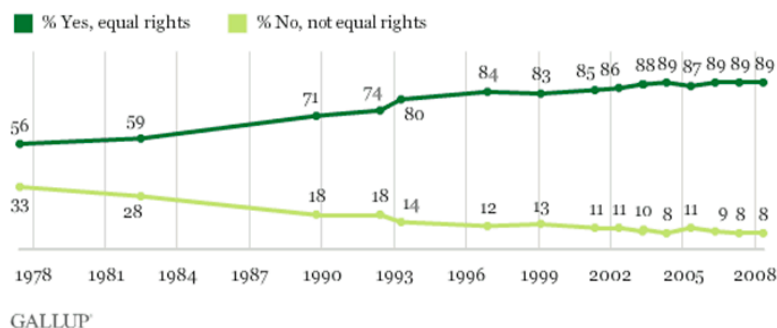
"Well, ok, but if marriage is redefined to include two men in love, on what grounds can it be denied to three men in love," and then you start to hear about the domino effect. To which the conservative supporters of gay marriage say, "Hold it, time out. We're not talking about any fundamental change in marriage here. Marriage would continue to be monogamy, a socially sanctioned, financially and romantically interdependent, legal covenant between two human beings." That's what it is, and that's what it'll continue to be. One can draw a line there. It's very clear.

"But, gay marriage will undermine traditional marriage," the point is made. Well, in response to that, we wonder, what really threatens marriage in an era where pornography has become bigger business than professional football, when more than 40% of children are born to unwed parents, where most marriage relationships are now preceded by cohabitation? I mean, there are things for us marriage supporters to be concerned about. It seems to me that if you really care about marriage, keeping gay folks unmarried shouldn't even be on the list compared to some of these other things.

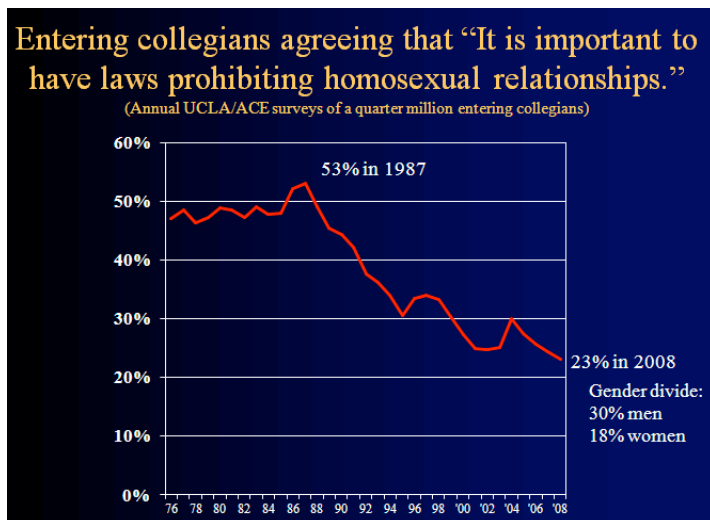
Well, I promised to send you out the door here with some encouraging words. And, my encouraging word is that times are changing, things are changing.

Here's the percentage of Americans who favor equal employment rights for gay people: as you can see, that's now up to 90% in the United States.

As you may know, there has been considerable discussion in the news regarding the rights of homosexual men and women. In general, do you think homosexuals should or should not have equal rights in terms of job opportunities?



Entering collegians illustrate this sea-change in public understanding. The percent who favor laws prohibiting homosexual relationships was about 50% during the 1970's and '80's, and it has just been heading downhill ever since. It was 23% the last time they asked the question. In fact, they've stopped asking the question now.

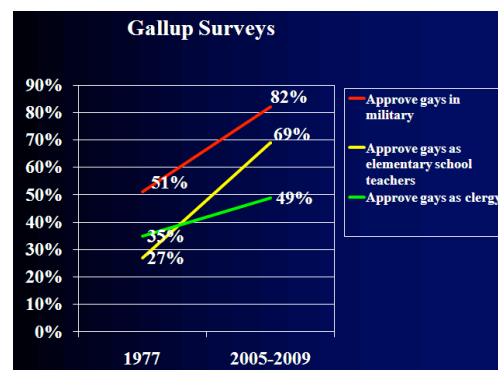


period, as did Gallup.

Now I'm going to give a couple "shout-outs" to the Coe College students who are here. Iowa is right smack in the middle of the national spectrum of opinion. Last Tuesday, it voted out three judges who had enabled same-sex marriage in the state of Iowa; but, they did so with 45% of the people voting for those judges and thus implicitly voting for what those judges had stood for. And that's just about where you would expect it to be, given where Iowa is right at the middle of the spectrum of national opinion.

But times are changing; and in every one of the states, as we look over time from where people's opinions were about same-sex marriage back in 1995 to where they are today, everywhere, things are improving. And, in fact, projections have been made, given the trajectory of opinion change in the fifty states of the United States, at what point each state would vote against a same-sex marriage ban. Coe

Over time, we can see that the percentage of people approving gays in the military, gays as elementary school teachers, gays as clergy, even, has dramatically risen.

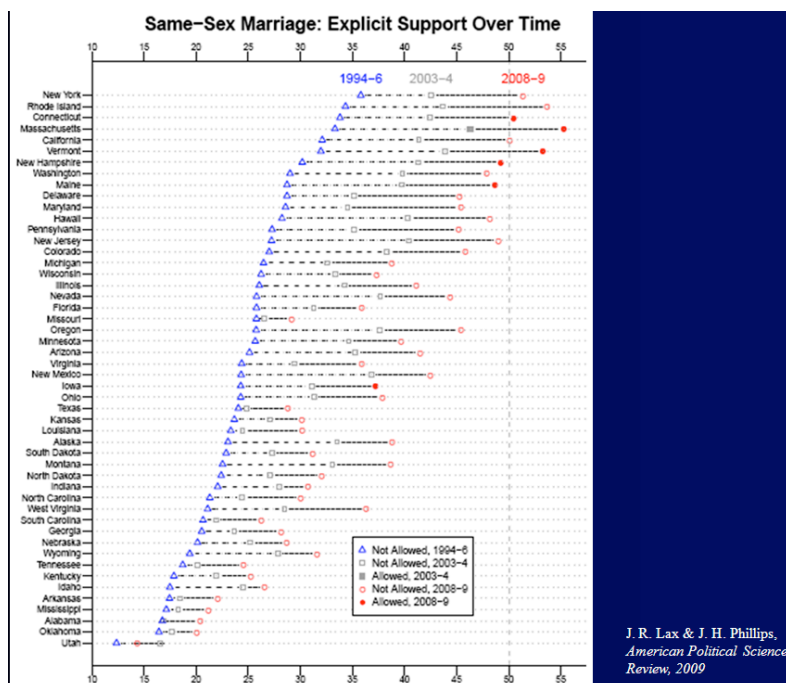


By the way, this survey, like so many others, illustrates a very substantial gender divide. Men are more troubled by the idea, and more revolted by the idea, of same-sex relationships, than are women, who are much more supportive.

Support for same-sex marriage has increased in the United States from 27% in 1996, to 44% today. The Pew Survey Research Center recently announced results of a national tracking and they had virtually the exact same results over that exact same time

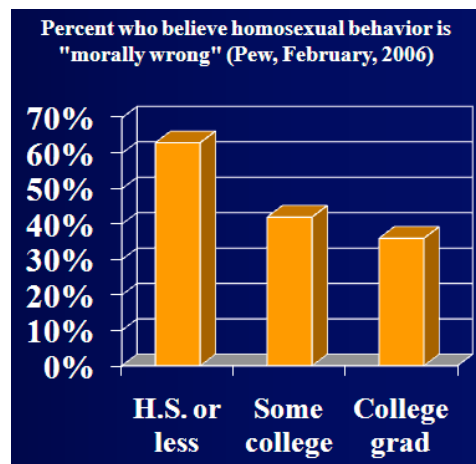
College students, 2013 is your projected cross-over point, where, if we could re-run the election of last Tuesday, we might get at least a 50-50 result and, thereafter, a positive result.

Moreover, support for same-sex marriage, and for ordination of clergy, is likely – almost surely – to increase for several reasons. First, attitudes tend to follow social practice. And, social practice is changing in the United States. The percentage of Massachusetts residents supporting same-sex marriage increased substantially from the year before to the year following its introduction of same-sex marriage.



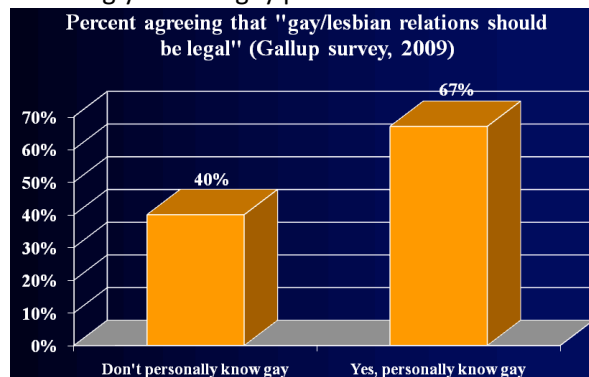
Secondly, there's a growing public understanding of the realities of sexual orientation. I'm privileged in my writing to participate in that educational process to the students that read my materials, and many others are as well. Thus, as you can see, whereas back in 1977, only 13% of Americans thought homosexuality is something a person is born with, that's now up to 41%, and rising, and is even higher in Canada and the United Kingdom.

The numbers of those who believe homosexual behavior is morally wrong is dramatically lower as a function of increasing education. So, the more educated people have become, the more accepting and inclusive they've become in their attitudes.



Third, gay folks are coming out. And, it's not just what you know, it's who you know. The percent who agree that gays should be able to marry is dramatically higher – double – among those who knowingly have a gay friend or family member, than it is among those who don't knowingly know a gay person.

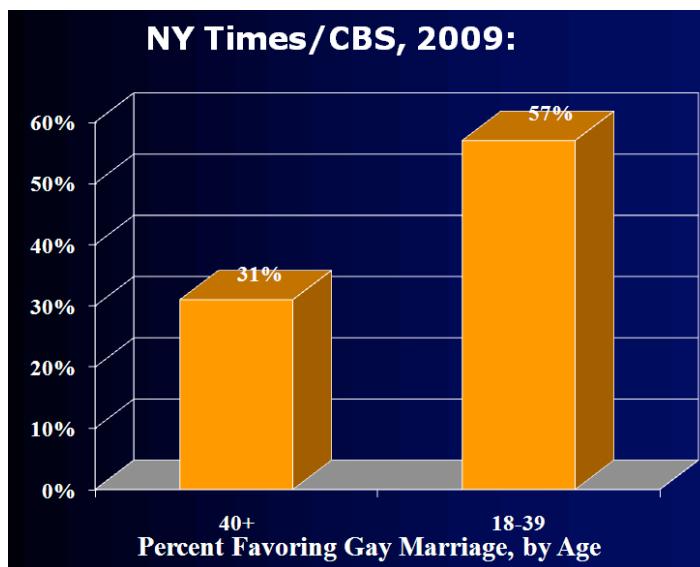
The percent that agree that gay/lesbian relations should be legal is, again, dramatically higher among those who personally know a gay than among those who personally don't know a gay, in a Gallup survey.



And, guess what. The percent of folks today who knowingly know a gay person, is triple what it was a quarter-century ago. So, that helps account for

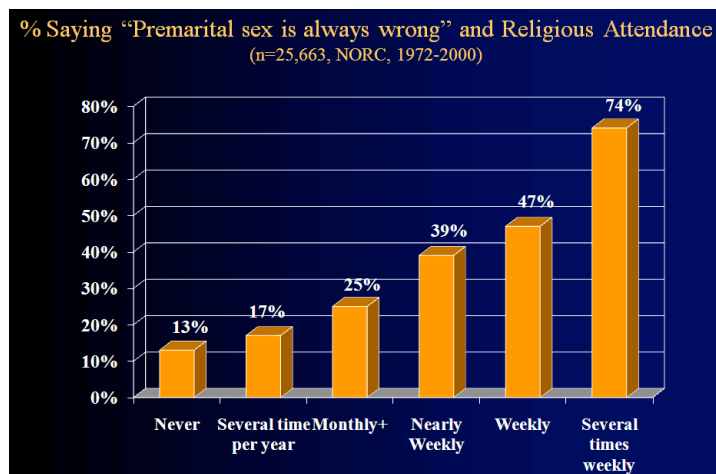
the changing attitudes, as well as the changing understanding.

The fourth factor – and this is huge, and it is inevitable, and there is nothing stopping it – is the changing of the generations. The percent of Americans who favor gay marriage is 31% among those over 40 years old, and approximately 60% among those under 40. And between those 65 and older, and those 18-29 year olds, it's just an enormous generation gap. Coe College students, you and your grandparents live on different planets when it comes to this topic. It is inevitable – I'm sad to tell you as an over-65 person – that the Coe College generation is going to be replacing us in our churches, and in our General Assemblies, and in our Presbyteries.



Because generational change is our destiny. And so, we've got two things happening. We've got some social forces that are driving, year-by-year, changing understandings and attitudes regarding sexual orientation. And on top of that, we've got the inevitability of generational succession. Those two forces today tell me, with virtually no uncertainty, where the Presbyterian Church will be in ten years, if not sooner. You are floating on a rising tide. Stay with it, be patient. If the outcome you want doesn't happen this year, it will. Believe me, within a very short period of time.

So what should the church be doing? Now, it's interesting that on matters of sexual ethics, when it has to do with relationship, the church's teaching looks like it may be having an effect. The percent who say that premarital sex is always wrong, is dramatically higher among those who attend church several times weekly than among those who attend church never. So, it looks like church's teachings – obviously, interpreted by families, and the rest – are, maybe, making a difference.



What about when it comes to sexual orientation? Has the church's traditional message about sexual orientation made a difference? This is the percentage of men who've had a same-sex partner in the past two months, in the most recent National Opinion Research survey. This is what it is among those who rarely, if ever, attend church (less than monthly, probably never). 3% of those men who don't darken the door of a church, have had a same-sex sexual partner. And, what about those who attend weekly or more? 3%. If anything, it's a little higher. I say to the church: if you care about marriage and the family, even if you don't think like I do on this subject, why don't we invest our energies in an area

where it can make a difference, rather than in an area where it 's making absolutely, demonstrably no difference?

Actually, it's having a negative effect. That's what Robert Putnam (Harvard) and David Campbell (Notre Dame) discern from the available data: that "intolerance of homosexuality" is proving to be "the single strongest factor" in alienating today's youth and youth adults from the church. This suggests that, alas, an anti-gay religious posture can have an unintended anti-evangelism effect that wounds the church.

We do see among the various denominations a wide variation in opinions changed, from the Episcopal and United Church of Christ where 70% support homosexuality being accepted, with the Presbyterian Church at 52%. Culture war. That national survey just mirrors the Presbytery votes coming up, doesn't it? The issue is upon us. This is an invigorating time to be here. It's a time of transition.

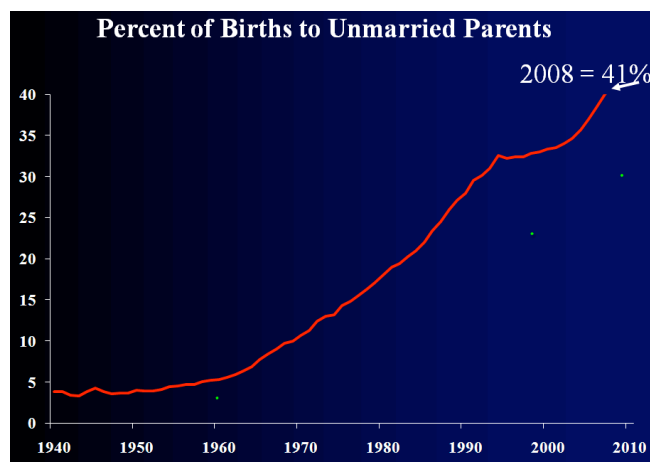
So, ok, wrapping up, what should we do? Seems to me, first we might ask, "What would Jesus do?" Maybe what we should do is be Jesus-people. Put on our radar screens what Jesus had on his radar screen.

Secondly, if we're going to risk error (and this is what I had to think about when I was trying to decide whether to screw up my courage to attempt to write the book I did), whether to be wrong – if I'm going to wrong – on the side of judgment and exclusion, or to err on the side of grace and inclusion. And I decided, if I'm going to be wrong, I think I'd rather be wrong in the second way than the first.

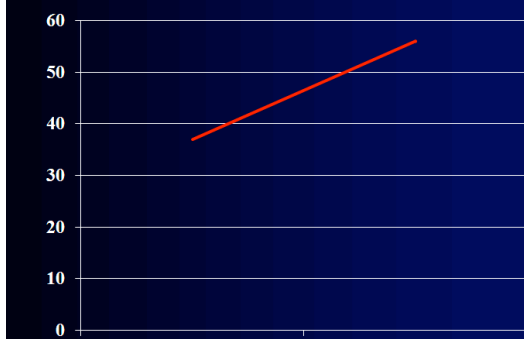
Finally, maybe might we *re-focus on the family*? That is, on supporting marriage and co-parenting? Or, is there somewhere a case to be made, which I haven't yet found, that in order to support marriage among heterosexuals, we must keep homosexuals unmarried?

There is a need to support marriage. The percentage of births to unmarried parents, as I indicated earlier, was 5% for much of the last century, and it has now gone up to, at the last count, 41%.

The percentage of high school seniors who say that having a child without being married is experimenting with a worth-while lifestyle, not



% High School Seniors who say "having a child without being married is experimenting with a worthwhile lifestyle or not affecting anyone else."
(Monitoring the Future Surveys, University of Michigan)



affecting anybody else, that it's just of no consequence if a child has married parents, or not – that has gone up to the majority now. This is the family problem. This is the family issue that the church should have its attention focused on. So, yes, let's focus on the family – on the pertinent

family issues, which are fidelity, commitment, covenant partnership.

To conclude, it seems to me, as we look at the evidence, that sexual orientation is not a choice, and suggesting otherwise to people is a source of enormous guilt, frustration, potential loss of faith, and sometimes failed marriages. Encouraging people who are attracted to their own sex into heterosexual marriages is not a way to support marriage.

Second, we all have a need to belong.

Third, the Bible assumes and supports male-female union, but it has little, if anything, to say about sexual orientation as we have come to understand it.

Fourth, family values, a priority on covenant relationships, a celebration of marriage, a high view of Scripture: all these can co-exist with full and equal participation of gay and lesbian people in the life and the culture in the church.

And, finally, attitudes and assumptions are in a rapid state of transition. We're right in the middle of a very interesting time. This story is to be continued. It's going to be played out in the Presbyterian Church this year, and in years to come.