

How Should You Talk to Your Children About Same-Sex Marriage?

By Russell Moore

With the Supreme Court decision last week legalizing same-sex marriage in the United States, some Christian parents wonder how they ought to explain all of this to their small children. So how does one teach about the law and the controversy, without exposing one's children to more than they can handle?

First of all, make no mistake: you *should* talk to your children about this. No matter how you shelter your family, keeping your children from knowing about the Supreme Court's redefinition of marriage would take a "Truman Show"-level choreography of their lives. That's not realistic, nor is it particularly Christian.

The Bible isn't nearly as antiseptic as Christians sometimes pretend to be, and it certainly doesn't shirk back from addressing all the complexities of human life. If we are discipling our children, let's apply the Scriptures to all of life. If we refuse to talk to our children about the reality of the world they live in, our children will assume we are unequipped to speak to it, and they'll eventually search out a worldview that will.

This doesn't mean that we rattle our children with information they aren't developmentally ready to process. But we know how to navigate that already. We talk, for instance, about marriage itself, and we give age-appropriate answers to the "Where do babies come from?" query. The same is true here. There is no need to inform small children about all the sexual possibilities in graphic detail in order to get across that Jesus calls us to live as husbands and wives with fidelity and permanence and complementarity.

Some parents believe that teaching their children the controversies about same-sex marriage will promote homosexuality. Christians and non-Christians can agree that sexual orientation doesn't work that way. Moreover, the exact opposite is true. If you don't teach your children about a Christian way of viewing the challenges to a Christian sexual ethic, the ambient culture—which is now codified in our legal system—will fill in your silence with answers of its own.

You can explain to your children what the Bible teaches, from Genesis to Jesus to the apostles, about a man and a woman becoming one-flesh. You can explain that as Christians we believe this marital relationship is different than other relationships we have. You can then tell them that some people have relationships they want to be seen as marriages, and that the Supreme Court agreed with them, but that we as Christians cannot.

You can then explain that you love your neighbors who disagree with you on this. You agree that they ought to be free from mistreatment or harassment. But the church believes government can't actually define or redefine marriage, but can only recognize what God created and placed in creation. Explain why you think mothers and fathers are different, and why those differences are good. Find examples in your own family of how those differences work together for the common good of the household, and point to examples in Scripture of the same.

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Don't ridicule or express hostility toward those who disagree. Don't give into panic or rage about the country. You might have gay or lesbian family members; be sure to express your love for them to your children, even as you say that you disagree about God's design for marriage. You probably have already had to do that with family members or friends who are divorced or cohabiting or some other situation that falls short of a Christian sexual ethic. If your children see outrage in you, rather than a measured and Christlike biblical conviction, they eventually will classify your convictions here in the same category as your clueless opinions about "kids these days and their loud music."

The issues at stake are more important than that. Marriage isn't ultimately about living arrangements or political structures, but about the gospel. When your children ask about the Supreme Court, be loving and winsome and honest and convictional and kind.

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