

A Lesson From 'Sesame Street'

Just when you think things couldn't get more bizarre, they have. This past week a petition was launched calling for the marriage of two iconic characters from *Sesame Street*, Bert and Ernie. The petition asks that the marriage be executed in a "tasteful" way in order to "Let us teach tolerance of those that are different."

The petition was filed on the activist site that has become the equivalent of a national blacklist registry of individuals and organizations who hold to a conservative view on marriage and sexuality. While the site has had some success in intimidating organizations such as Apple and most recently Starbucks to comply with their demands, *Sesame Street* held strong and stated that Bert and Ernie are best friends and as puppets, they do not have a sexual orientation.

My question is how far will this go? A recent Op-ed in the *New York Times* called for the legalization of polygamy between loving and consenting adults. Will we see a petition launched for the marriage of Kermit, Miss Piggy and the Cookie Monster to teach that love between consenting individuals, no matter how many, is acceptable and should be celebrated? Of course, this is an extreme situation. But is it?

The situation with Bert and Ernie is a prime example of an attempt to indoctrinate children and use them as pawns in a cultural agenda. Do we really believe that toddlers and 4-year-olds are struggling to make sense of a fictional relationship between two felt puppets? The innocence of a child should not be required to wrestle with the complexities involving same-sex orientation. Nor should a parent be forced to educate their child on these issues before that child is mature enough to understand and cope with those complexities.

Unfortunately, the current culture is going to force parents

and church leaders to address the issues surrounding homosexuality and same-sex marriage with younger and younger kids. When Tommy comes home from preschool and asks, "Why does my friend Jennifer have two daddies?" we must be ready to provide sound answers grounded in compassion and truth. Theirs will be a generation that must face an assault upon their innocence unlike any generation before.

For families to be prepared, the church must not only be ready but courageous. What does it say when *Sesame Street* shows more resilience and resolve in the face of intimidation than some church and ministry leaders?

I have recently read statements made by leaders saying that the biblical message of homosexuality is a difficult case to make in today's culture and it does not work on a social level. Really? What biblical message isn't a difficult case to make in today's culture?

There is a growing trend to become more vague and ambiguous and leaders who promote this strategy are gaining greater influence. The new ministry model for the church is to become coy and clever when it comes to questions about homosexuality.

Of course we're not going to reach the LGBT community by introducing ourselves with "Hi, before we start this friendship, you need to know I believe homosexuality is a sin." We begin by loving and serving the gay community and those individuals God places in our lives. However, we will not be stewarding the power of God's transformational truth by cloaking ourselves in a shroud of ambiguity.

Yes, I agree that the church has a poor report card in ministering to the gay community. But I am concerned about a drastic pendulum swing of compromise that is being made by some church leaders.

Many are behaving like parents who have been harsh and unloving towards a child and subsequently feel guilty and

realize their sin. In an attempt to make up for their bad behavior, they begin to overcompensate and compromise healthy family values and convictions. From this point on, the family values quickly become family secrets. Likewise, some churches have become embarrassed by what Scripture says about homosexuality and have hidden it in the closet.

In 1991 I decided to leave homosexuality and pursue a life in Christ. I experienced transformational freedom in my life because I found a church that was committed to loving me and being graciously forthright with the truth of God's word. It's because of their loving commitment to the truth that I was able to find freedom. That is what Exodus International believes every person should experience in the local church—an opportunity to be transformed by the message of the gospel.

As the Body of Christ we have a responsibility to be a prophetic voice in the culture. So many are looking for hope but they will never hear Christ's message of grace and truth unless we say the words!

As the culture shoves its message of sexuality into the face of this younger generation, how we will respond? Are we helping them by being coy and clever? That's an easy road. Today Bert and Ernie remain just friends but tomorrow could be a different story. We know this generation has questions. The real question is, "How will we answer them?"

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