

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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The Deconstruction of a Civilization: America, Language, and Human Sexuality

It is obvious to everyone: Something is occurring in America right now. There is a sense that things are out of control. What had always seemed right is now called wrong. What had always been considered wrong is now considered right. Language that was once unacceptable for use in public is now common and accepted. Evidence of this cultural upheaval is in the language we use. Presbyterian minister John P. Sartelle writes: “We are witnessing the deconstruction of a civilization. Across our land, the major institutions that are foundational to any nation are in a downward spiral, whether we speak of education, government, business or the family. Isaiah and Jeremiah were observers of a similar deconstruction of their nation and wrote about it. One of the characteristics of that fall was the decline in the civility of everyday language.” The mores of culture are usually reflected in the language of that culture. For that reason, Christians are usually out of sync with the language of culture because the mores of that culture are rejected by Christians. The Apostle Paul understood this, for he wrote, “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place” (Ephesians 5:4). One of the marks of spiritual transformation in a believer’s life is the language that believer uses!! Speaking of the Corinthians, John R.W. Stott once made the point that “When believers rose up out of the environment of the ancient world, they rose up like flowers out of the mud.” As Sartelle argues, “A morally bankrupt culture will use morally bankrupt language. . . Easy, perverse, and multiple sexual relationships have ‘dumbed’ sex down and taken our language with it. The obscenity, vulgarity, and pornography of these lifestyles drag God-created sexuality through the sewer. They are alien to healthy, fulfilling, and godly sexual relationships between husbands and wives.” In short, the language of Sodom and Gomorrah is not the language of Jerusalem. As culture’s vital center is corrupted, marriage, family, and civilization will begin to self-destruct—and the language we use illustrates that! Let me cite several examples:

- First is Anthony Weiner. His practice of “sexting” [really a form of exhibitionism] is repugnant to almost everyone, but to Weiner. His strategy in running for mayor of New York City is obvious: The culture has largely accepted divorce, pornography, unwed parenthood as “normal.” Not too long ago, these practices were deemed vices in our culture. But no longer. Since “everyone seems to be doing these things,” they constitute the new cultural “normal.” Anthony Weiner is using this same logic: Since everyone is now “sexting,” it is the new normal and cannot really be wrong—or really that wrong, can it? Weiner wants the people of New York to accept him, despite his penchant for “sexting,” as a viable candidate for mayor. Columnist Kathleen Parker has appropriately concluded that Weiner is a perfect example of what former senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan once called “defining deviancy down,” normalizing the deviant to accommodate our moral decay. Throughout our culture, what was once thought deviant is now acceptable and normal. Anthony Weiner believes that if he can make his lifestyle

which includes a deviancy—“sexting”—appear as not that bad, as a tolerable form of the new ethical normal, he can be mayor. I am not certain that the people of New York are going to buy this, but, in effect, that is his strategy. Going beyond Weiner, Parker makes an astute observation about American culture’s shift in language: “Technology, ironically, seems to have produced an inverse effect on behavior. The more advanced our ability to express ourselves, the more primitive our expressions. Pornography is the perfect vehicle for the animal tendency toward exhibitionism so perfectly mastered by our baboon brethren. To make the obscene more palatable, we have ‘cutesified’ the language, inventing new words that make serious seem silly and inconsequential. Weiner was only ‘sexting,’ sending out explicit ‘selfies’ to the virtual world.” But, who would actually follow such a man? Until recently, such deviancy would automatically have disqualified someone from public office. But you still hear people saying, but he is, after all, “so smart.” Even the definition of “so smart” has taken on a new meaning!

- Second, consider the language of sexuality itself. The term “homosexuality” is rarely used in our culture anymore. The preferred language is “LGBT”—Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered (or Transsexual). “Queer” is sometimes added to LGBT, for those who are “Questioning” their sexual identity. An “A” is also being added to LGBT for “Asexual,” for those who find their sexuality ill-defined by the existing heterosexual or homosexual categories. An “I” is also being added to include “intersex individuals,” a small but growing number of people whose bodies are “born gender-ambiguous.” So, we now speak of the LGBTQIA coalition. Andy Crouch of *Christianity Today* has made a perceptive observation: “What unites the LGBTQIA coalition is a conviction that human beings are not created male and female in any essential or important way. What matters is not one’s body but one’s heart—the seat of human will and desire, which only its owner can know.” In our culture, as normative sexuality has been redefined, “from an essentially exterior reality uniting male and female bodies to an essentially interior reality expressing one’s heart, the charges of bigotry have been heard more fiercely against those who hold the traditional Christian view. How dare we Christians speak against any person’s heart?” But to genuine biblical Christianity, the body matters; it is of supreme importance. As Crouch argues, “both male and female bodies are of ultimate value and dignity—not a small thing given the continuing denigration of women around the world.” It is a central axiom of biblical Christianity that sexual differentiation “(along with its crucial outcome of children, who have a biological connection to two parents but are not mirror images of either one) is not an accident of evolution or a barrier to fulfillment. It is, in fact, the way God is imaged, and the way fruitfulness, diversity, and abundance are sustained in the world.” Therefore, I believe that the LGBTQIA coalition needs to add an “H” to its label. The “H” represents the remnant of Christians who still teach that God created the human race male and female, who bless marriages that unite male and female, which represents the relationship Jesus Christ has with His church (Ephesians 5:32), and who long for that time when our bodies will be resurrected and will live forever with our Creator, Redeemer God.

Language matters and as much as our culture seeks to redefine words that relate to human sexuality and the very essence of what it means to be human, it will never succeed. God has

established the “community standard” for His world. Those who follow it will be blessed. Those who do not will continue to experience the dysfunction, dissatisfaction and disappointment that accompanies that rejection—and that is just what is occurring in the deconstruction of American civilization today.

See John P. Sartelle in *Tabletalk* (July 2013), 22-23; Kathleen Parker in the *Washington Post* (30 July 2013); and Andy Crouch in www.christianitytoday.com (26 June 2013).