

“The Culture Wars Over ‘Family Values’”:
Are Evangelicals Fighting the Wrong Battles
In the Wrong Way and Losing Badly?¹

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For the past three decades conservative evangelicals have been heavily involved in social and political debate regarding issues deemed critically relevant to the welfare of the traditional nuclear family, particularly abortion, homosexuality, religious freedom, and limited government. Many of us have been largely misguided in the “family values” culture war with respect to the choice of issues and the manner in which the “war” has been conducted. I specifically contend that a loving focus on justice and mercy for the oppressed and broken is the most effective and biblical approach to “family values.”

America, along with much of the western world, has experienced tremendous social change in the past several decades. This is particularly true with respect to marriage, family, and sexual behavior.² For instance, in the United States cohabitation before marriage rose from only 10% of couples cohabiting between 1965 and 1974 to over 50% of those marrying between 1990 and 1994.³ Cohabitation rates for those remarrying are even higher. Not only has the institution of marriage weakened, but the very essence and definition of marriage itself is hotly contested. For evangelical Christians, these changes are most disturbing since marriage is understood to have been instituted at the dawn of human creation and ordained by God as the cornerstone of human society. The societal importance of the so-called “traditional family,” i.e., a family unit composed of a monogamous, legally married man and woman and their children, has been increasingly validated in numerous research studies. For adults, traditional marriage is strongly correlated with better physical health, improved longevity, greater sexual satisfaction, lower rates of depression, significantly decreased rates of domestic violence, and greatly lower rates of

¹ This article was published in *Africanus Journal* 3 (2011): 57-76.

² Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, (rev. ed.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Maggie Gallagher, *The Abolition of Marriage: How We Destroy Lasting Love* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1996); William J. Goodie, *World Changes in Divorce Patterns* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

³ Pamela J. Smock, “Cohabitation in the United States: An Appraisal of Research Themes, Findings, and Implications,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 3.

poverty.⁴ Additionally, marriage has great demonstrable benefits for children.⁵ For instance, children of single parents are much more likely to drop out of high school, to get arrested, and to abuse drugs and alcohol.⁶

The challenge of “family values” discussions partially lies in the intensely personal nature of the topic. Family “is the site of our deepest longings and most terrifying fears.”⁷ Furthermore, “family values” discussions have become strained due to the history of its usage in the past two or three decades. In many contexts “family values” has a political meaning associated with a package of specific conservative social values and public policies. In response to this usage of “family values” political and religious liberals have more recently begun to argue that political/religious conservatives do not have exclusive rights to “family values.”⁸ Groups as antithetical to social conservative family values as Planned Parenthood and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays now promote their mission and agendas around “family values.”⁹

I. THE ISSUES

1. Definitions, History, and Participants

For purposes of this study, I define proponents of family values (PFVs) as “political and religious conservatives, most often evangelicals, who view the traditional family as the pillar of

⁴ William Doherty et al., *Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-Six Conclusion from the Social Sciences* (2nd ed.; New York: Institute for American Values, 2005); Jan E. Stets, “Cohabiting and Marital Aggression: The Role of Social Isolation,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 53 (1991): 669-80; Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better off Financially* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000).

⁵ David Popenoe, *Cohabitation, Marriage, and Child Wellbeing: A Cross-National Perspective* (Piscataway, NJ: The National Marriage Project, 2008); Online: <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/NMP2008CohabitationReport.pdf>.

⁶ Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The Divorce Culture: Rethinking Our Commitments to Marriage and Family* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); Benjamin Scafidi, *The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First Ever Estimates for the Nation and All Fifty States* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2008); Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis, and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: The 25 Year Landmark Study* (New York: Hyperion, 2000).

⁷ Jean Bethke Elshtain, “The Heart of the Matter: The Family as the Site of Fundamental Ethical Struggle,” in *Family Transformed: Religion, Values, and Society in American Life*, eds. Steven M. Tipton and John Witte Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 211-24.

⁸ Don S. Browning, “Is the Family a Conservative Issue?” in *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental, Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers in Modern Societies*, ed. Don S. Browning (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 61-74.

⁹ For instance, a search of “family values” on the Planned Parenthood home page (<http://www.plannedparenthood.org>) garners 121 hits, most of which are articles which strategically relate “family values” to the multiple activities and mission of Planned Parenthood. The Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays home page (<http://community.pflag.org>) has fifteen documents which specifically discuss “family values” and seek to show that their mission is truly about “family values.”

human society, and who believe the traditional family must be protected through every means possible, particularly through political activism.”¹⁰ I will focus primarily on evangelical PFVs, but not exclusively since they are often tightly linked with conservative Catholics and Jews who share their values and goals.¹¹

My definition of “family values” is not arbitrary but is a generally recognized descriptive definition which comes directly from the last three decades of American “culture wars” which have largely revolved around competing visions of the family and human sexuality.¹² The current Religious Right “family values” movement grew out of the actions of evangelical leaders in the 1970s.¹³ It is widely believed that the primary impetus for this movement was the landmark *Roe vs. Wade* 1973 Supreme Court abortion decision. Actually, however, the precipitating spark appears to have been fear over Christian schools losing their tax exempt status due to Christian school policies which promoted racial segregation.¹⁴ (Bob Jones University had historically denied admission to African American students. When African Americans were admitted in the 1970s, BJU prohibited interracial dating, prompting the IRS in 1975 to attempt to revoke their tax-exempt status.) The “family values movement” was fully launched in 1979 when evangelical

¹⁰ My definition and subsequent description of “proponents of family values” is similar to religious historian Randall Balmer’s definition of the religious right. He defines the latter as “a movement of politically conservative evangelicals who, since the late 1970s, have sought to exert their influence in political, cultural, and legal matters,” in *Thy Kingdom Come: An Evangelical’s Lament* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), xxvii.

¹¹ For instance, influential conservative Catholic Phyllis Schlafly, who founded the Eagle Forum in 1972, has been a very influential “family values” leader. Other conservative Catholic family values proponents include William Bennett, Richard John Neuhaus, and Robert H. Bork. Some of the influential conservative Jewish PFVs include Michael Medved and Laura Schlessinger. For a detailed treatment of the political alliance of conservative Catholics and evangelicals, see Deal W. Hudson, *Onward Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2008).

¹² For an excellent analysis of the recent “culture wars,” see James D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control The Family, Art, Education, Law, And Politics In America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). Hunter argues that American culture in the latter part of the 20th century experienced a deep realignment of values which led to the conflict and tensions evidenced in the “culture wars.” Contra Alan Wolfe, *One Nation, after All: What Middle-Class Americans Really Think about: God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, the Right, the Left, and Each Other* (New York: Penguin, 1999).

¹³ For an informed discussion of the development and nature of the religious right, see Michael Cromartie, ed., *No Longer Exiles: The Religious New Right in American Politics*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992); William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996). On the recent development of the political right, see John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America* (New York, Penguin: 2004). On the complex nature of evangelicalism, including a more conservative element, see George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

¹⁴ Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 11-17; Cromartie, *No Longer Exiles*, 26; Ralph Reed, *Active Faith: How Christians are Changing the Soul of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996) 105; contra The Moral Majority Coalition, “Moral Majority Timeline,” n.p. [cited 11 November 2008]. Online: http://www.moralmajority.us/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=29.

leaders such as Jerry Falwell, Tim and Beverly LaHaye, Charles Stanley, and D. James Kennedy formed The Moral Majority. The Moral Majority became arguably the most influential “family values” organization. It was dedicated to the bold use of the political system to combat what they perceived as liberal and secular attacks on historic Judeo-Christian morality and to promote “traditional family values.”¹⁵ A decade later the Christian Coalition emerged with an even more purely political agenda for winning the “family values” culture war.¹⁶ The Christian Coalition was particularly influential with the Republican Party in the 1990s and helped advance conservative “pro family” politicians and public policies.¹⁷ These influences continue to the present.¹⁸

Other influential PFVs, all of whom explicitly state a pro family/family values mission, include: James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, one of the largest and arguably the most influential PFVs ministry in the United States,¹⁹ The Family Research Council, a non-profit public policy organization originally begun by Focus on the Family,²⁰ Concerned Women of America, founded in 1979 by Beverly LaHaye,²¹ The American Family Association, founded in 1977 by Don Wildman,²² The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, an entity of the Southern

¹⁵ According to Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority launched “with a pro-life, pro-traditional family, pro-national defense and pro-Israel platform,” Moral Majority, “Moral Majority Timeline.” Falwell disbanded the Moral Majority in 1989, but created a new smaller organization, the Moral Majority Coalition, in 2004 to continue the work of the Moral Majority. The latter organization appears to have only a fraction of the influence the Moral Majority had in the 1980s and early ’90s.

¹⁶ See Christian Coalition, “About Us,” n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://www.cc.org/about.cfm>.

¹⁷ For a first hand explanation of the rise and influence of the Christian Coalition by its then Executive Director, see Reed, *Active Faith*.

¹⁸ For instance, the Republican Party Platform lists “Protecting Our Families” as one of only four of its platform pillars, “2004 Republican Party Platform: A Safer World and a More Hopeful America,” 87-92.

¹⁹ James Dobson, who founded Focus on the Family in 1977, has been incredibly influential in evangelicalism as well as conservative Republican politics for the past three decades. Dobson has been an informal advisor to various politicians, including President Bush. According to their web site, “Focus on the Family-produced broadcasts have a combined reach of more than 220 million listeners daily in 155 countries. . . . The organization’s flagship radio show is the Focus on the Family daily broadcast . . . heard on more than 1,000 stations across the United States by millions of listeners weekly,” Focus on the Family, “Focus on the Family Fact Sheet,” n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://www2.focusonthefamily.com/aboutus/a000001013.cfm>.

²⁰ According to their web site, the “Family Research Council (FRC) was founded in 1983 as an organization dedicated to the promotion of marriage and family and the sanctity of human life in national policy.” Family Research Council, “About FRC,” n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://www.frc.org/about-frc>.

²¹ According to the Concerned Women of America web site, “Beverly LaHaye founded Concerned Women for America (CWA) in 1979 to protect and promote Biblical values for women and families.” “CWA Experts,” n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://gideon.cwfa.org/leadership.asp>.

²² The American Family Association claims to be “one of the largest and most effective pro-family organizations in the country with over two million online supporters and approximately 150,000 paid subscribers to the AFA Journal.” “What is AFA?” n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online:

Baptist Convention, and The Alliance Defense Fund, a “legal defense and advocacy” of traditional family values and religious freedom.²³ In addition to these PFVs who lead expressly Christian ministries, a number of the most popular and successful talk show hosts and journalists, such as Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck, Ann Coulter, and Bill O’Reilly, champion conservative social and political agendas and implicitly or explicitly use “family values” language. Hence many of these individuals are often embraced by evangelical PFVs.²⁴

David Gushee cogently argues that the Religious Right PFVs are losing their dominance and that a more moderate “evangelical center” is emerging in the evangelical church.²⁵ He argues that this “evangelical center” affirms traditional “family values” such as traditional marriage and the sanctity of life but, unlike the Religious Right, is committed to a “broad holistic moral agenda,” and political independence, rejects the “angry nostalgia” and romanticized view of American history of the Religious Right, and is more sensitive to the reality of pluralism in American culture.²⁶ It does appear that we are in the midst of such a transition.²⁷ Yet, given the fact that conservative social/political “family values” have for three decades been pervasive and dominant in evangelicalism and in the Republican Party, and given the fact that some of the largest evangelical parachurch ministries and most popular authors and talk show hosts espouse and promulgate socially/politically conservative “family values,” this transition may only be in its early stages.

2. *Enemies and Strategy*

PFVs tend to view the world in rather binary terms: proponents of traditional values versus “liberals” who are undermining our values and threatening to destroy all we hold dear. As

<http://media.afa.net/newdesign/about.asp>. They also claim on their home page to be “America’s largest pro-family action site.”

²³ www.alliancedefensefund.org.

²⁴ Note, for instance, the recent cover article in *Citizen*, a magazine published by Focus on the Family, praised Rush Limbaugh for his “robust presentation of traditional values and conservative views on the airwaves.” They also put a picture of conservative talk show host Sean Hannity on the cover of the magazine and state, “Talk show hosts like Sean Hannity bring pro-family values to millions of Americans.” The article also positively noted Glenn Beck. Bale B. Buss, “Radio Revolution,” *Citizen*, (October 2007):18-23.

²⁵ See, for example, Joel C. Hunter, *A New Kind of Conservative* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008).

²⁶ David P. Gushee, *The Future of Faith in American Politics: The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 3, 88-89.

²⁷ Michael Luo and Laurie Goodstein, “Emphasis Shifts for New Breed of Evangelicals,” *New York Times* (May 21, 2007): A1. Cited 19 November 2008. Online: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/21/us/21evangelical.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=new+breed+of+evangelicals&st=nyt&oref=slogin.

one PFV's states, "When it comes to confronting evil, the fact is that there are essentially two types of people: those who are willing to fight it, and those who try to excuse it—or worse, deny it even exists."²⁸ The precise enemies who threaten traditional values, including family values, are commonly identified by PFVs as: the ACLU, whose goal is a secular America and who is at war with traditional American values;²⁹ secular liberalism;³⁰ secular humanism;³¹ big government;³² feminists whose goal is to eradicate the traditional family and destroy marriage;³³ liberal judges who are hijacking America and allowing activists to ram an anti-Christian, anti-family agenda into mainstream America;³⁴ and the homosexual movement.³⁵

The homosexual movement is most repeatedly and emphatically identified as the great enemy of the family. James Dobson declares that for sixty years the homosexual movement has sought to destroy the family and it is now an overwhelming "tsunami" so that, "barring a miracle

²⁸ Sean Hannity, *Deliver Us from Evil: Defeating Terrorism, Despotism, and Liberalism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 4-5. See also Newt Gingrich, *Winning the Future: A 21st Century Contract with America* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2005), xiii-xiv. Gingrich begins his book with a diagnostic test of ten short statements including: "everyone should learn English"; "schools should teach new immigrants about American values"; I am "proud to be an American"; I "believe in God"; "The United States should put its own interests first." The higher one's score on this test the more he or she favors the family destructive "secular left-liberal system." The lower one's score the more he or she leans toward "traditional American values," xi-x.

²⁹ Alan Sears and Craig Osten, *The ACLU vs. America* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 5-6.

³⁰ Gingrich, *Winning the Future*, xiii. Similarly, Robert H. Bork states, "There is currently a widespread sense that the distinctive virtues of American life, indeed the distinctive features of Western civilization, are in peril in ways not previously seen. . . . The enemy within is modern liberalism, *Slouching toward Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 4.

³¹ Tim LaHaye and David Noebel, *Mind Siege: The Battle for Truth in the New Millennium* (Nashville: Word, 2000); see also the evangelical ministry The Christian Voice which identifies secular humanism as the primary threat to the family and the moral fiber of our nation. *The Christian Voice*, "About Us," n.p. [cited 19 November 2008] Online: <http://www.christianvoiceonline.com>.

³² Tom Delay, *No Retreat, No Surrender: One American's Fight* (New York: Sentinel, 2007), 38, 172-78; Rick Santorum, *It Takes a Family: Conservatism and the Common Good* (2nd ed.; Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006).

³³ Pat Robertson, *The Turning Tide: The Fall of Liberalism and the Rise of Common Sense* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 186-89. Phyllis Schlafly, *Feminist Fantasies* (Dallas: Spence, 2003). Among conservative evangelicals, one of the most detailed assertions that feminism is one of the greatest enemies of the family is by Mary Kassian, *The Feminist Mistake: The Radical Impact of Feminism on Church and Culture* (rev. ed.; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005).

³⁴ D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *How Would Jesus Vote?: A Christian Perspective on the Issues* (Colorado Springs, CO: Water Brook, 2008), 174. Similarly, James Dobson declares Justice Anthony Kennedy, the judge who wrote the majority opinion in Lawrence vs. Texas (overthrowing laws prohibiting sodomy), "the most dangerous man in America," in James Dobson and Shirley Dobson, *Marriage under Fire* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 40-41. For a thorough PFV's treatment of the judiciary, see Phyllis Schlafly, *The Supremacists: The Tyranny of Judges and How to Stop It* (Dallas: Spence, 2004).

³⁵ For a more academic assertion of how and why homosexuals seek to destroy traditional marriage, see Daniel R. Heimbach, "Deconstructing the Family," *The Religion and Society Report* Online Edition, 22:7 (2005). n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: http://www.profam.org/pub/rs/rs_2207.htm.

the family as it has been known from time immemorial will crumble.”³⁶ Hence, “Western civilization itself appears to hang in the balance.”³⁷ Louis Sheldon is even more pointed in identifying “the homosexual threat.” He asserts that the family is “the foundation and building block of the community and the cornerstone of social well being. Yet, this is now the target of the homosexual agenda. . . . The great aim of the homosexual lobby . . . is to eradicate the moral framework of American society.” Furthermore, we who believe in the traditional family and God are in a battle to the death against “the forces of darkness and legions of angry homosexuals and lesbians determined to abolish Christian virtue and moral judgment in any form.”³⁸

Many PFVs personalize their opponents since they believe their “liberal” enemies want to harm them and take away their liberties. Thus, much of the PFVs literature chronicles specific instances of persecution against Christians and warns of even greater persecution as religious liberties continue to erode.³⁹ Orchestrated malevolence toward Christians is often attributed to homosexuals. For instance, Janet Folger argues that “the ultimate goal of the homosexual movement is the criminalization of Christianity.” Hence, “the greatest threat to our freedoms comes from the homosexual agenda.”⁴⁰ At best, the opponents of traditional values/family values are repeatedly described as being guilty of systematic slander and verbal attack against conservatives in general and Christians in particular.⁴¹

Given the black and white manner in which PFVs view the enemies of the family, it is no surprise that they continually employ militaristic language to describe how we must respond to

³⁶ James Dobson, *Marriage under Fire*, 20-21.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁸ Louis P. Sheldon, *The Agenda: The Homosexual Plan to Change America* (Lake Mary, FL: Front Line, 2005), 8, 240.

³⁹ D. James Kennedy, *The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail: The Attack on Christianity and What You Need to Know to Combat It* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996); Robertson, *The Turning Tide*, 305-20. See also *Speechless: Silencing the Christians*, a seven episode DVD set hosted by Janet Parshall. This educational tool has a web site (<http://www.silencingchristians.com>) and is being broadcast nationally.

⁴⁰ Janet L. Folger, *The Criminalization of Christianity* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2005), 14, 16; see also Sears and Osten, *The Homosexual Agenda*.

⁴¹ Ann Coulter, *Slander: Liberal Lies about the American Right* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2002), 166-96. This book was at the top of the New York Times best seller list for seven weeks. The irony is that, while Coulter opines against slandering liberals (the last line of the book asserts that they are often “savagely cruel bigots who hate ordinary Americans and lie for sport”), she is notorious for her outlandish, cruel statements towards others. For instance, she describes housewives whose husbands were killed in the 9/11 attack as follows: “These broads are millionaires, lionized on TV and in articles about them, reveling in their status as celebrities and stalked by grief-arazzis. I’ve never seen people enjoying their husbands’ deaths so much,” *Godless: The Church of Liberalism* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), 103. On “The Big Idea” show with host Donny Deutsch in 2006, she said President Clinton showed “some level of latent homosexuality.” Later she told Chris Matthews on MSNBC that former Vice President Al Gore was a “total fag.”

the enemies of the family and traditional values who have hijacked America. PFVs declare, “We have not yet begun to fight.”⁴² America--with its traditional family values--is “our country,” so “let’s take it back.”⁴³ We “must be willing to fight. . . . We must resist them at every turn.”⁴⁴ The enemies of the family (homosexuals) have left us with only two options, “either meekly acquiesce to a wide range of revolutionary cultural demands, or stand up and fight.”⁴⁵ We must boldly stand up and take back America from the enemies.⁴⁶ We must “blast the enemy from its positions.”⁴⁷ We must launch a counter offensive against the enemy (homosexual activists) and “engage this perverse enemy in every area of society.”⁴⁸

PFVs’ strategy for fighting and defeating the enemies of the family most often centers on gaining and utilizing social and particularly political power. James Kennedy asserts that the heart of America’s moral problem, including decaying family values, is that Christians are not in the positions of social and political power. We need to be “the controlling force” passing the laws, printing the books, and controlling the television networks.⁴⁹ While noting the importance of local, “grassroots” influence, Marlin Maddoux argues that the “ultimate goal” is to claim the top of the “power pyramid.” Hence, “if we have any hope of saving our country,” we must “take back the Congress.”⁵⁰ Dobson declares that the key to defeating the greatest threat to marriage in the history of civilization, homosexual activists, is to pass a Federal Marriage Amendment.⁵¹ Pat Robertson says the key to “turning the tide” against the liberal forces attacking the family is to elect more “pro-family activist” political office holders, for then “the bureaucracy will be

⁴² D. James Kennedy, “Forward: We Have Not Yet Begun to Fight,” in *The Salt and Light Solution: A Guide to Reclaiming America for Christ* (Reclaiming America for Christ Conference; Fort Lauderdale, FL: Coral Ridge Ministries, 1999), vii-ix.

⁴³ Dick Army, “Let’s Take It Back,” in *The Salt and Light Solution*, 8-9. Army is a former congressman who served as the House Majority Leader from 1985 to 2003.

⁴⁴ Sean Hannity, *Let Freedom Ring: Winning the War of Liberty Over Liberalism* (New York: Regan, 2002), 294-95.

⁴⁵ Dobson, *Marriage under Fire*, 66.

⁴⁶ Sears and Osten, *The ACLU vs. America*, 189-93.

⁴⁷ Pat Robertson, *The Turning Tide*, 301.

⁴⁸ Rick Scarborough, *Liberalism Kills Kids* (Lufkin, TX: Vision America, 2006), 205. Scarborough is the founder of Vision America and is endorsed by James Dobson, Alan Keyes, D. James Kennedy, Tim LaHaye, and Rick Perry, Governor of Texas.

⁴⁹ D. James Kennedy, *The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail*, 199; see also Robertson, *The Turning Tide*, 301.

⁵⁰ Marlin Maddoux, *A Christian Agenda: Game Plan for a New Era* (Dallas: International Christian Media, 1993), 89-90. Maddoux, who died in 2004, was a very influential radio broadcaster and the founder of the USA Radio Network.

⁵¹ Dobson, *Marriage under Fire*, 79.

changed, and along with it the entire liberal agenda.”⁵² One final reoccurring strategy is for Christians to assert their legal rights.⁵³

3. Core Values and Concerns

Since the political process is so important to PFVs, the popular voters’ guides produced by various PFVs’ organizations are a particularly telling measurement of their core values and concerns. I have analyzed the content of over a dozen PFVs’ voters’ guides and found that, on the whole, PFVs’ voters’ guides are remarkably homogeneous in content and appear to reflect very similar concerns, perspectives, and ideologies. One of the greatest emphases in the guides is on homosexuality—supporting a federal marriage amendment effectively banning gay marriage, and in some instances questioning support for other types of homosexual rights and protections. Most reflect a primary concern for small government and lower taxes. Most reflect an unqualified pro business and pro military ideology. Noticeably lacking in almost all of the PFVs’ voters’ guides, designed to help the reader determine which candidates are most “pro family,” are any questions that would reflect concern for the rights of workers and their families, the rights and needs of the poor and their families, the right and needs of immigrants and their families, the right and needs of ethnic minority families, the potential for big business to take advantage of workers and their families, or the reality and impact of physical and sexual abuse on families. In short, it might be logically concluded from the voters’ guides that the rights and well being of middle and upper class white Christians is a primary concern to PFVs. These same omissions are frequent in PFVs’ books and web sites.⁵⁴ A specific analysis of some of the more popular PFVs’ voters’ guides reveals the following.

The American Family Association (AFA), one of the largest and most active PFV organizations, issues a voters’ guide used by many evangelicals and conservative churches. It

⁵² Pat Robertson, *The Turning Tide*, 65.

⁵³ Kennedy, *The Gates of Hell*, 243-47; Reed, *Active Faith*, 246-57; see also the Family Research Council’s web site which has as one of its primary resources for pastors a “Legal FAQ” created in partnership with the Alliance Defense Fund “to help pastors and churches understand their liberties” n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://www.frc.org/get.cfm?c=PASTORS>.

⁵⁴ A notable recent exception is Harry R. Jackson Jr. and Tony Perkins, *Personal Faith, Public Policy* (Lake Mary, FL: Front Line, 2008). Perkins and Jackson consider themselves part of the “Religious Right” and can be fairly identified as PFVs. In spite of their unfortunate assertion that most Americans who fall below the poverty line are not really poor (99-100), they show much more sensitivity to the needs of the poor, ethnic minorities, and the oppressed than most PFVs. Theirs is also one of the few PFVs books that asserts all Americans should have access to health care (124), that develops a “pro life” position considerably beyond abortion/cloning and extends it to the mistreatment of POWs, child abuse, the elderly, sex trafficking, and illegal immigrants (59-60, 70-78, 81-95).

claims to have over two million online supporters, run a web site which receives over five million visitors per month, and own and operate close to two hundred radio stations across the country.⁵⁵ Its 2008 *Presidential Primary Voter's Guide* contains nine short easy to use questions, since all are framed in such a manner that the moral, pro family answer is clearly understood to be "yes."⁵⁶ The nine questions deal with abortion and human life, a constitutional marriage amendment, gun owner rights, opposition to pro homosexual curriculum and gay pride celebrations, business freedom, and the Iraq war. Almost half of the questions (four) deal directly with homosexuality. Several other PFV organizations offer voters' guides that are almost identical to this one.⁵⁷ An evaluation of several other lengthier PFVs' voters' guides reveals all of the same core concerns and ideology with a few additional questions about issues such as pornography, the environment, parental rights, and border security.⁵⁸

4. Affirmations

I affirm many of the cardinal values and assertions of the PFVs. I wholeheartedly agree that the traditional family is the cornerstone of human society and it is in trouble. Furthermore, I embrace the conviction that the traditional family composed of one husband and one wife united for life is what God instituted in the Garden of Eden. So sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage are forbidden by Scripture and not in individuals' or societies' best interest.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁵ "What is AFA?" n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://media.afa.net/newdesign/about.asp>.

⁵⁶ "AFA 2008 Presidential Primary Voters Guide," n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://www.afa.net/pdfs/08vg.pdf>; accessed 8/2/08.

⁵⁷ "Christian Coalition Voter's Guide for 'Pro-family' voters, [2006] AZ Guide," n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://www.cc.org/voterguides2006/Arizona-Senate%20and%20House.pdf>; The Florida Family Council, "Voter's Guide 2008 Presidential Primary," n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: http://www.flfamily.org/welcome_letter.php?aboutid=3; The Wallbuilders, "Voter Guide 2008 Presidential Primary," n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=5386>.

⁵⁸ For instance, The Family Research Council Voter's Guide has questions about border security, gun control, parental rights, religious liberty, border security, the federal estate tax, and government land seizure. "Values Voter Guide for 2008 Presidential Candidates," n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://downloads.frcaction.org/EF/EF08B08.pdf>. Concerned Women of America's Voter's Guide has eleven categories of quotes from candidates, including all of the expected categories with the additions of energy and the environment, "2004 general election Presidential Voter's Guide," n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://www.cwfa.org/articledisplay.asp?id=6591&department=CWA&categoryid=misc>. The Center for Arizona Policy Voter's Guide had thirteen questions dealing with taxes, abortion, religious rights, and gay rights, including five questions on pornography and sexually oriented businesses, "2007 Voter's Guide Survey Questions [Tucson City Election]," n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <https://www.azpolicy.org/pdf/vgtuccity07print.pdf>.

⁵⁹ For a basic overview of the biblical and scientific evidence for a sexual abstinence outside of marriage, see Steven R. Tracy, "Chastity and the Goodness of God: The Case for Premarital Sexual Abstinence," *Themelios* 31 (2006): 54-71. On the biblical/theological arguments that homosexual practice is morally forbidden, see Thomas Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995) and Donald Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). On the scientific and social science data arguing against homosexuality being a genetically determined lifestyle no more or less healthy than

creation account, along with many other Scripture passages, convinces me that all life is sacred and should be valued and protected. This certainly includes unborn children.⁶⁰ At the same time, I and many other evangelicals who deeply value the family and want to nurture and protect it are deeply troubled by much of the agenda, strategies, and impact of PFVs. My concerns largely revolve around what I believe are misplaced emphases and misunderstandings of the issues.

II. OBSERVATION AND CONFESSION

1. Observation

The “family values” strategy of the past twenty-five years does not appear to be working. For some three decades, PFVs have created numerous large and well funded non-profit organizations, developed extensive ministries reaching millions, and have carried out effective political strategies. They are largely responsible for putting President George W. Bush in office. But, upon closer inspection, it seems PFVs have gained power and won elections, but have largely failed to win hearts or greatly strengthen families. For instance, when non Christian young adults (ages 16 to 29) were asked about their perceptions of Christians in a major national survey, their four most common perceptions were that Christians are: anti-homosexual (91%), judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), and too involved in politics (75%).⁶¹ I believe the rhetoric and strategies of PFVs largely accounts for these perceptions. Other studies of non Christians yield similar perceptions of Christians.⁶² Furthermore, the sexual behavior of Christians and the condition of their families is not significantly different from that of non Christians. Given the fact that PFVs are perhaps best known for condemning the sexual sins of unbelievers and for asserting that homosexual unions are not true marriages, this makes evangelical PFVs look quite hypocritical. While surprisingly little research has been conducted on the impact of religion on

heterosexual marriage, see Stanton L. Jones & Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000); Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007); Jeffrey Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

⁶⁰ One of the best recent philosophical and legal defenses of the pro life position on abortion is Francis J. Beckwith, *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case against Abortion* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007). On the biblical and scientific pro life arguments, see J. P. Moreland & Scott B. Rae, *Body & Soul: Human Nature & the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 231-60.

⁶¹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 27.

⁶² For instance, a Lifeway Research study of the unchurched conducted in 2007 found that a full 72% believe the church is full of hypocrites. Mark Kelley, “LifeWay Research Unchurched Americans Turned Off by Church, Open to Christians,” n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/article_main_page/0%2C1703%2CA%25253D166950%252526M%25253D200906%2C00.html.

abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual activity rates among adolescents and young adults, the few studies which have been done suggest that the sexual behaviors of evangelical youth are not significantly different than those of non-evangelical youth⁶³ and that differences that exist do not last.⁶⁴ In fact, one of the largest (and most recent) studies found that evangelical youth begin having sex at a younger age than their liberal Protestant peers and are far more likely to have had three or more sexual partners than their non-evangelical peers (13.7% versus 8.9%).⁶⁵ Other studies of the influence of evangelical “family values” strategies on actual behaviors suggest the influence is superficial: we live like the unbelievers we condemn. For instance, a staggering percentage of evangelicals view pornography. According to a *Christianity Today* survey published in 2001, 33% of clergy and 36% of laity admitted visiting porn sites.⁶⁶ A 2003 survey by *Today’s Christian Woman* found that 34% of their female readers admitted to intentional access of Internet porn.⁶⁷ Research by the Barna Group on self-professed “born-again” similarly found that there was no difference evident between “born-again” and “non-born-again” when it came to the likelihood of viewing pornography, in spite of the fact that “born-again” were twice as likely not to watch a movie because of its rating.⁶⁸ Finally, when it comes to divorce, perhaps the acid test of the effectiveness of “family values” efforts, Christians divorce at rates similar to non Christians.⁶⁹

⁶³ Amy Adamczyk, “The Effects of Religious Contextual Norms, Structural Constraints, and Personal Religiosity on Abortion Decisions,” *Social Science Research* 37 (2008): 657–72; Rachel K. Jones, Jacqueline E. Darroch, and Susheela Singh, “Religious Differentials in the Sexual and Reproductive Behaviors of Young Women in the United States,” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 36 (2005): 279–88; Gregory S. Paul, “Cross-National Correlations of Quantifiable Societal Health with Popular Religiosity and Secularism in the Prosperous Democracies,” *Journal of Religion and Society* 7 (2005): n.p. [Cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/2005/2005-11.html>.

⁶⁴ One of the few studies conducted on the impact of Protestant religion on the sexual behavior of adolescents found that fundamentalist white women in the 1980s, when “family values” organizations had begun to be highly active in promoting sexual abstinence, were significantly less likely than other women to have sex before marriage, but, once they became sexually active, these differences largely vanished, Karin L. Brewster, et al., “The Changing Impact of Religion on the Sexual and Contraceptive Behavior of Adolescent Women in the United States,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60 (1998): 493-504.

⁶⁵ Gene Edward Veith, “Sex and the Evangelical Teen,” *World Magazine* 22:29 (August 11, 2007): 9. This article is reporting on the work of sociologist Mark Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶⁶ Christian J. Gardner, “Tangled in the Worst of the Web,” *Christianity Today* 45:4 (March 5, 2001): 42-49.

⁶⁷ Ramona Richards, “Dirty Little Secret,” *Today’s Christian Woman*, 25:5 (September/October 2003): 58.

⁶⁸ “Survey Shows Faith Impacts Some Behaviors but Not Others” in *The Barna Update* (Oct 22, 2002): n.p. [cited 21 May 2009]. Online: <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/83-survey-shows-faith-impacts-some-behaviors-but-not-others>.

⁶⁹ One Barna study found that, among adults who have been married, born again Christians and non-Christians have essentially the same probability of divorce (about 33%). “The Year’s Most Intriguing Findings,

2. Confession

I am ashamedly confessional when I assert that many of us have been largely misguided in the “family values” culture war. I stand condemned by much of what I am about to say. I have spent all too many years smugly proud of my self-righteousness and pro-family theology, calling myself a Christian leader, yet all the while failing to live like my savior, whose “family values” methodology focused not on attacking broken sinners but attacking the self-righteous religious conservatives like me and embracing broken sinners in the most costly, risky manner imaginable. I confess that all too often I have looked at homosexuals, militant feminists, and even inner-city single mothers who live on welfare with disdain and at times contempt. Surely my self-righteousness and disdain for sinners is one of the most anti-Christian and anti-family postures one could have. Furthermore, for all too many years, and all too often in the present, I have arrogantly condemned theological liberals for ignoring a few select biblical texts about sexuality while I myself ignored literally hundreds of biblical passages about justice and mercy for the oppressed and abused. I continue to struggle to take the commands of Scripture seriously and to love and sacrifice as I am commanded. So I confess that, as I critique the religious right for their approach to “family values” and at times reflect deep frustration and even anger at their tactics and actions, my own failures are no less odious in God’s nostrils.

III. SPECIFIC CONCERNS ABOUT HOW WE ARE OFTEN WAGING THE FAMILY VALUES WAR

1. We Often Use the Wrong Moral Template

Evangelical PFVs tend to focus on holiness or righteousness as the dominant template for determining morality. This helps explain their fixation with homosexuality and corresponding lack of attention to numerous other moral issues such as the rights and needs of immigrants, women, the poor, etc. Some evangelical PFVs would object to criticism of the narrowness of their stated concerns by retorting that they are simply prioritizing the most important issues, not denying the validity of others.⁷⁰ But that is precisely the problem—they are using the wrong moral template. In the first century, the Pharisees elevated holiness or righteousness as the quintessential guide for morality. Hence, much of the conflict they had with Jesus was over

From Barna Research Studies” in *The Barna Update* (December 17, 2001): n.p. [cited 21 May 2009]. Online: <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/64-the-years-most-intriguing-findings-from-barna-research-studies>.

⁷⁰ Richard Land, *The Divided States of America* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 23-25.

issues of ceremonial or social purity.⁷¹ For instance, when the Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with tax collectors and other impure “sinners,” Jesus asserted that they had missed the heart of biblical morality, which is mercy for the broken: “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this [Hosea 6:6] means, ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt 9:12-13). In other words, Jesus, drawing on the moral tradition of the Hebrew Prophets, gives us a pivotal moral template, namely, mercy for the broken. The Hebrew Scriptures develop this ethic in terms of mercy and justice. Mercy is an active commitment to alleviate human suffering regardless of the cause. Justice is an active commitment to insure that all humans, particularly those with the least status and power (since they are most often recipients of injustice) are treated with value, respect, and fairness. It also means standing with the oppressed, fighting against oppression, and confronting oppressors.

There is a growing body of evangelical scholarship demonstrating that justice and mercy, especially for the vulnerable, oppressed, and broken, is a canon-wide, moral priority.⁷² So I will simply summarize some of the strands of biblical data supporting this thesis: (1.) It explains what God desires of his people⁷³ and “what it means to know God” (Jer 22:3, 13-17). (2.) It offers some of the surest evidence of conversion and godliness.⁷⁴ Hence, care for the hungry, naked, sick, and imprisoned is the basis for the final judgment (Matt 25:31-46). (3.) It forms the basis for particularly rich blessings⁷⁵ and particularly harsh judgment.⁷⁶ (4.) It lay at the heart of Jesus’ ministry and message.⁷⁷ In Jesus’ first public sermon recorded in Luke, he summarized his

⁷¹ Matt 9:9-12; 15:1-20; 23:23-28; Luke 7:36-50; 11:37-41; 15:1-31.

⁷² There is a large body of literature on this multi-faceted subject. The following are some of the works I have personally found most helpful: Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1999); Ron Sider, *Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Ron Sider, “Justice, Human Rights, and Government: Toward an Evangelical Perspective,” in *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy*, eds. Ronald J. Sider and Diane Knippers (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 163-193; Ron Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 5th ed (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2005); Glen H. Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2003); John Stott, *Human Rights and Human Wrongs: Major Issues for a New Century* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

⁷³ Amos 5:11, 21-24; Micah 6:8; 7:2-3; Jas 1:27.

⁷⁴ Job 29:12-17; 31:13-22; Ps 112:1-9; Prov 31:20; 29:7; Jer 22:3, 13-17; Ezek 18:5-17; Matt 25:33-46; Luke 19:5-9; 1 John 3:16-18.

⁷⁵ Ps 41:1; Prov 19:17; 22:9; Is 33:14-17; 56:1-2; 58:6-14; Jer 22:3-5; Luke 14:12-14.

⁷⁶ Ex 22:22-24; Is 5:6-8; 59:1-4, 7-9, 12-15; Ezek 22:27-31; Joel 3:19. The Babylonian captivity was God’s judgment for Judah’s failure to practice justice and mercy to the poor, marginalized, and oppressed (Jer 7:5-15; Ezek 22:27-31; Zech 7:7-14).

⁷⁷ Is 11:3-5; 16:5; 42:1-7; Matt 9:9-12; 35-36. Stassen and Gushee are particularly helpful in demonstrating that love and justice lie at the heart of Jesus’ “kingdom ethic” which in turn is drawn from the Hebrew prophetic

ministry as a divine anointing to set captives free and release the oppressed (Luke 4:18-21; Is 61:1-4).⁷⁸

We can now bring this discussion back to family values. Using the wrong moral template of holiness/righteousness instead of a template of justice and mercy has led to some glaring and damaging inconsistencies in our use of Scripture. For instance, one of the more frequent assertions of evangelical PFVs toward theological liberals is that the latter do not truly respect or submit to the Scriptures, especially regarding currently unpopular teachings that are not “politically correct.” So evangelical PFVs frequently, boldly, and sometimes stridently use Sodom and Gomorrah to demonstrate God’s condemnation of homosexuality. For instance, one influential denominational leader states, “Homosexuality is an abomination to God...the proof of which is in God’s own version of the Extreme Makeover at Sodom and Gomorrah.”⁷⁹ Other PFVs, including one former denominational vice president, insist on referring to homosexuals as “sodomites.”⁸⁰ There are solid exegetical reasons for asserting that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were judged for homosexual acts,⁸¹ but biblical “sodomy” relates to social justice for the poor and oppressed as surely as it relates to homosexual practice. In fact, Sodom’s apathy toward the poor is the only sin expressly cited by the prophet Ezekiel: “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy” (Ezek 16:49). The Genesis account of Sodom and Gomorrah also links “sodomy” with mistreatment of the vulnerable for “the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah” is what stimulated divine judgment (Gen 18:20, ESV). The Hebrew word used for

tradition, particularly Isaiah, *Kingdom Ethics*. See also Richard A. Burrige, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); John Stott, *Human Rights and Human Wrongs*.

⁷⁸ On the manner in which Jesus’ first public sermon in Luke summarizes his ministry and message, see Joel Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 76-101.

⁷⁹ Kenyn M. Cureton, “Stand for Marriage,” n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://www.baptist2baptist.net/b2barticle.asp?ID=289>; accessed 8/18/08. Cureton was Vice President for Convention Relations and served on the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention.

⁸⁰ See statements by pastor and talk show host Wiley Drake, who was elected second vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 2006 and was an unsuccessful candidate for the denominational presidency in 2008, Bob Allen, “SBC Officer Faulted for Support of Killer,” *Ethics Daily*, April 27, 2007.

⁸¹ John Boswell and others have argued that Sodom and Gomorrah were merely judged for inhospitality. However, Lot’s offer of his virgin daughter in response to the men’s desire “to know” the visitors (Gen 19:5-8), the literary structure of Gen 18-19 and Judg 19, the reference in Ezek 16:50 to their sin as an abomination (cf. Ezek 22:11; 33:26, where this term is clearly sexual), and the explanation in Jude 7 that Sodom and Gomorrah “indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh” all indicate they were condemned for sexual sin, Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007) 145-49, 162-64; James B. DeYoung, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), 38-40; Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

“outcry” (*za`áqat*) “is a technical word for the cry of pain or the cry for help from those who are being oppressed or violated.”⁸² Jeremiah 23:10-14 also links the sin of Sodom and Gormorrah with the unjust use of power (v. 10b) and with spiritual leaders who “strengthen the hands of evildoers” (v. 14). A study of Jeremiah strongly suggests that the latter involves the prophets and priests' collaboration with the rich and powerful to defraud, oppress, and abuse the weak.⁸³

Thus, condemnation of the kind of biblical “sodomy” which harms families must include a condemnation of oppression and abuse of the weak and indifference by the wealthy toward the poor.⁸⁴ One searches far and wide to find a single PFVs who makes such a biblical connection in spite of the fact that thirty-seven million Americans live in poverty⁸⁵ and one in five Americans (59 million people) are currently not able to obtain or have to delay needed medical care.⁸⁶ This connection is also absent in PFVs public policies. For instance, one of the clearer examples of the way the wealthy oppress the vulnerable poor is seen in the proliferation of “pay day” loan companies which charge exorbitant fees (450% on average) for short term loans to the poor. A recent study found that a \$325 two week loan would typically carry a finance charge of \$52, yet the average borrower, being poor and economically desperate, cannot pay the loan off promptly and ends up paying approximately \$793 on a \$325 loan.⁸⁷ Amazingly, this same study found a strong positive correlation between the geographic national density of payday lenders and the

⁸² Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2006), 359; see also Richard Nelson Boyce, *The Cry to God in the Old Testament* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). *za`áqat* is used to refer to the cry of the poor (Prov 21:13), outcry due to famine and destruction (Jer 18:22), and the cries of the oppressed and afflicted (Job 16:18; Is 15:5; 65:19), including the oppressed Israelites (Neh 5:6; 9:9; Esth 9:31).

⁸³ Cf. Jer 2:26-34; 5:25-31; 6:13-15; 7:3-11; 17:11; 19:1-5; 22:1-4, 13-17; 23:2-5, 13-17; 30:10-12; 32:32-35; cp. Lam 2:14; 4:13-14.

⁸⁴ William H. Brownlee thus states, “‘Sodomy’ (so-called) in Genesis is basically oppression of the weak and helpless,” in *Ezekiel 1-19* (WBC 28; Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 248.

⁸⁵ Carmen DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette D. Proctor, and Cheryl Hill Lee, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-229, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004* (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2005).

⁸⁶ Peter J. Cunningham and Laurie E. Felland, “Falling Behind: Americans’ Access to Medical Care Deteriorates, 2003-2007,” *Tracking Report* 19 (June 2008): 1-5. Cited 19 November 2008. Online: <http://www.hschange.org/CONTENT/993/?topic=topic02>. This figure is for 2007 and represents a dramatic increase (39%) from 36 million people in 2003.

⁸⁷ Christopher Lewis Peterson and Steven M. Graves, “Usury Law and the Christian Right: Faith Based Political Power and the Geography of the American Payday Loan Regulation,” *Catholic University Law Review* 57 (2008): 637-700. On the actual costs of payday loans see Uriah King, Leslie Parrish, and Ozlem Tanik, “Financial Quicksand: Payday Lending Sinks Borrowers in Debt with \$4.2 Billion in Predatory Fees Every Year” (Durham, NC: Center for Responsible Lending, 2006), Online: http://www.responsiblelending.org/pdfs/tr012exec-Financial_Quicksand-1106.pdf. On the systemic injustice of traditional banks and pay day loans toward the poor, see Steven M. Graves, “Landscapes of Predation, Landscapes of Neglect: A Location Analysis of Payday Lenders and Banks,” *The Professional Geographer* 55 (2004): 303-17.

political clout of conservative Christians. In other words, the largest concentration of these predatory lenders is found in the very areas where PFVs have the greatest political clout. Oppression of the poor is not on the conservative “family values” radar.

2. We Often Prioritize the Wrong Families

We noted earlier that PFVs tend to prioritize the needs and concerns of traditional, middle, and upper middle class Christian families. This focus may reflect myopic self interests; it may also reflect a defensive reaction toward social liberals who seek to downplay the importance of the traditional family. Yet, we do not strengthen the traditional family by prioritizing it. The very Scriptures that affirm life-long heterosexual marriage as the divinely ordained cornerstone for human society⁸⁸ place tremendous emphasis on the proper treatment and care of “non-traditional” families, particularly single parent, immigrant, ethnic minority, and poor families. Scripture consistently and emphatically prioritizes the rights and needs of “widows,” “orphans,” “aliens,” “strangers,” and the “poor.”⁸⁹ These are not entirely distinct groups, for they share a critical common experience: they lack power, status, and material resources. Thus, they often experience deprivation and suffering and are vulnerable to oppression and various forms of injustice. For this reason, Scripture frequently combines two or more of these marginalized, needy groups, almost always making them the prioritized recipients of care and protection.⁹⁰ The extent to which God prioritizes such non-traditional families is evidenced in hundreds of different Scripture passages.⁹¹ Religious and civic leaders have a particular responsibility to protect, insure justice, and provide material care for the marginalized.⁹² Those with food and other material resources are obligated to share with the hungry and respond to the cries of the

⁸⁸ On “family” in Scripture, see Ken M. Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2003); Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R., eds., *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Household and House Churches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Leo G. Perdue, et al., eds., *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

⁸⁹ Unfortunately D. James Kennedy distorts biblical teaching on justice as well as mercy by asserting that biblical justice “is blind” and “must treat all people equally” without consideration of their marginalization or economic standing (“class,” “race,” or “gender”), *How Would Jesus Vote?*, 113.

⁹⁰ For instance, in the NASV, “widow(s)” is found in 90 verses, “orphan(s)” in 36 verses, “poor” in 136 verses, “alien(s)” in 73 verses, and “stranger” in 36 verses. “Orphan(s)” and “widow(s)” occur together in 28 passages (in a three verse context) and all but three of the 36 references to “orphan(s)” occur with another marginalized group.

⁹¹ Pss 68:5; 146:7-9; cf. also Job 5:11-15; Pss 113:5-9; 140:12.

⁹² Lev 19:15; Job 34:17-28; Pss 72:1-4, 11-14; 82:1-8; Prov 29:14; 31:8-9; Is 1:17; 10:1-3; Dan 4:27; Ezek 22:25-31.

needy.⁹³ Craig Blomberg carefully analyzes the biblical theology of possessions found in each genre of the Hebrew Scriptures. His summary is quite applicable to American “family values” debates. He states, “The key to evaluating any individual church or nation in terms of its use of material possessions (personally, collectively, or institutionally) is how well it takes care of the poor and powerless in its midst.”⁹⁴

All too often non-evangelical PFVs patronize and even deprecate the poor, single mothers, and immigrants. For instance, Robert Bork, in a book praised by other influential PFVs such as Ralph Reed, Michael Novak, and William Bennett, ridicules the concept of “social justice” for the poor and suggests that the only real moral problem with inequalities of wealth is created by the poor who envy the rich and want to see them fail.⁹⁵ His utter disdain for the marginalized is staggering when he argues that our social policies have created a large class of dependent people, particularly single mothers, who are “of substandard intelligence, self-discipline, and motivation; otherwise they would not be in the predicament they are.” They are in fact of such poor character that they are virtually uneducable, are “unlikely to [ever] make good employees,” and will always be a drain on society.⁹⁶ Evangelical PFVs are more respectful of the marginalized, particularly of the poor, but often fail to understand or truly prioritize the marginalized. This is particularly seen in the “compassionate conservatism” embraced by the Bush administration and most evangelical PFVs.⁹⁷ The widely recognized manifesto for “compassionate conservatism” was written by Marvin Olasky in the early nineties.⁹⁸ It largely explains the evangelical PFVs’ public policies and responses to poor families. Olasky (and most evangelical PFVs) correctly note that government assistance can create unhealthy dependency, consistently receiving money one does nothing to work for can be very damaging to one’s character and self esteem, and human needs are best met by other humans rather than by impersonal bureaucracies.

⁹³ Deut 15:7-11; 24:17-22; Prov 21:13; Ezek 16:49-50.

⁹⁴ Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 84.

⁹⁵ Bork, *Slouching towards Gomorrah*, 68-75. In view of Ezek 16:49, this book title is particularly disturbing.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 162-63.

⁹⁷ Note, for instance, that George W. Bush wrote the forward to Marvin Olasky’s book *Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Transform America* (New York: Free Press, 2000), xi-xiii.

⁹⁸ Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Washington, D.C.: Regener Gateway, 1992). This book strongly influenced the second George Bush administration and the Republican Party. For instance, House Speaker Next Gingrich gave it to all incoming freshmen Congressmen in 1994.

Unfortunately, Olasky, and the majority of PFVs who follow his model, make erroneous assertions about the etiology of poverty, the essence of compassion, the character of the poor, and the potency of labor. The following four flawed assertions undermine a biblical prioritization of marginalized families:⁹⁹ (1.) Olasky views poverty as largely the result of laziness and lack of character.¹⁰⁰ While there are some biblical passages, especially in Proverbs, which do assign blame to the poor for their condition,¹⁰¹ Scripture overwhelmingly attributes poverty to other external factors, particularly oppression.¹⁰² Oppression continues to be a major factor in American poverty. For instance, a twenty-five city study commissioned by the U.S. Conference of Mayors identified domestic violence as a main cause of homelessness in almost 40% of the cities studied.¹⁰³ The long-term impact of childhood physical and sexual abuse is also a major factor in American homelessness.¹⁰⁴ (2.) Olasky asserts: it is good for the lazy and immoral to suffer and hence it is not compassionate to help those suffering because of their own moral failures¹⁰⁵; we should generally not extend compassion or help to the poor and needy unless and until they repent; we should only help the “worthy” poor.¹⁰⁶ This view of compassion is supposedly grounded in the character of God who is not “a sugar daddy who merely felt sorry for

⁹⁹ Olasky basis his analysis on American history and gives minimal discussion to biblical texts. His historical reconstructions have been strongly criticized by various reviewers. For instance, see Kurt C. Schaefer, “The Privatizing of Compassion: A Critical Engagement with Marvin Olasky,” in *Toward a Just and Caring Society: Christian Responses to Poverty in America*, ed. David P. Gushee (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 144-61.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 7-12, 109-14, 119-21; see also Kennedy, who in an entire chapter on economics praises capitalism and says nothing about oppression or injustice yet emphasizes laziness as the cause of poverty (“loafers” shouldn’t eat), *How Would Jesus Vote?*, 101-02.

¹⁰¹ Ron Sider offers a helpful summary of the causes of poverty, including: sinful personal choices (Prov 6:6-11; 14:23; 23:21); unbiblical world views; natural disasters; lack of technology; inequalities of power that are fueled by oppression, *Rich Christians*, 121-32.

¹⁰² For instance Ps 72:1-4, 12-14; Prov 14:31; Is 25:4; 58:6-7; Ezek 22:29; Amos 4:1; Jas 2:1-7; 5:1-6. Thomas D. Hanks surveys 164 biblical texts and ten Hebrew root words to support the thesis that “in biblical theology oppression is viewed as the basic cause of poverty,” *God So Loved the Third World: The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 38. The most common term for the poor in the OT (80 occurrences) is *‘ānî*, and it connotes economic oppression, unjust legal treatment, and victimization by means of deception, J. David Pleins, “Poor, Poverty,” *ABD*, 408. Similarly, Christopher J. H. Wright argues that oppression is “by far the major recognized cause of poverty” in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the OT, “poverty is caused. And the primary cause is the exploitation of others by those whose own selfish interests are served by keeping others poor,” *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 170.

¹⁰³ The United States Conference of Mayors, “Hunger and Homelessness Survey: A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America’s Cities, a 25-City Survey,” (2003): 71-72; Cited 19 November 2008. Online: <http://www.usmayors.org/uscm/hungersurvey/2003/onlinereport/HungerAndHomelessnessReport2003.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴ Angela Browne, “Family Violence and Homelessness: The Relevance of Trauma Histories in the Lives of Homeless Women,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 63 (1993): 370-84; Nadine Rayburn, et al., “Trauma, Depression, Coping, and Mental Health Service Seeking among Impoverished Women,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 73 (2005): 667-77.

¹⁰⁵ Olasky, *Tragedy of American Compassion*, 8-11, 230.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 12, 104-13, 217-19.

people in distress.”¹⁰⁷ Olasky’s understanding of compassion reflects a gross distortion of Scripture. No suffering human sinner is truly “worthy” of a holy God’s favor and assistance (Rom 6:23). This is precisely what makes God’s grace so incredible.¹⁰⁸ He showed compassion to us while we were sinful rebels (Rom 5:8; Eph 2:1-8). It is specifically due to his compassion that God “does not deal with us according to our sins nor reward us according to our iniquities.”¹⁰⁹ Hence, God calls his children to extend compassion to all who suffer and are in need, regardless of their moral condition.¹¹⁰

(3.) Olasky argues that we can and must discern the moral character of the poor and needy, for this is essential in identifying the “worthy” who alone should receive care. This reflects considerable naivety regarding the complexity of human behavior. It can also easily create a judgmental posture which undermines biblical compassion toward human suffering.¹¹¹ Scripture gives us guidelines for identifying unhealthy and morally inappropriate behaviors, but only God can see a person’s heart, perfectly discern motives, capacities, and vulnerabilities, and assign the appropriate moral judgment. This principle is particularly relevant to the negative effects of deprivation, trauma, and abuse and the vulnerabilities they can create which can in turn greatly increase the likelihood of poverty and other forms of suffering. For instance, childhood abuse often creates long-term shame, emotional distress, and intrusive memories. Hence, abuse survivors often chemically numb their pain and in time become alcoholics and addicts.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 113.

¹⁰⁸ Eph 2:1-10 says while we were dead in our sins, following the path of Satan, living in and indulging our sinful lusts, God poured out his love to us in Christ. He did this in order to show the “riches of his grace.”

¹⁰⁹ Ps 103:8-10; cf. also Rom 5:8; I Tim 1:15-16.

¹¹⁰ Prov 25:21-22; Some may assert that I am idealistic about the realities of working with those who suffer due to their own irresponsibility and hence we must limit compassionate assistance. One of the best responses to this is given by Tim Keller, who argues that we should not limit our compassion but should let “mercy limit mercy,” *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road* (2nd ed.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1997), 96. By this, Keller means we initially offer mercy (aid) freely, and then seek to help the person at deeper and deeper levels, which may prompt some needy people to withdraw from aid.

¹¹¹ Note Matt 9:36 where Jesus looks at the multitudes with compassion, seeing their suffering state. As Jesus is the holy, sinless Son of God, one might well expect that he would first and foremost see their sin, but instead he saw the tragic results of sin in their suffering.

¹¹² For a survey of several studies showing the greatly increased risk of alcohol and drug dependency for sexual abuse survivors, see Anna C. Salter, *Transforming Trauma: A Guide to Understanding and Treating Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 239-40. A more recent major study of adults in treatment for alcohol dependency found that almost 60% of the participants reported lifetime abuse: Christopher Rice, Cynthia D. Mohr, Frances K. Del Boca, et al., “Self-Reports of Physical, Sexual and Emotional Abuse in an Alcoholism Treatment Sample,” *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 62 (2001): 114-23. In a recent study of middle adults (mean age 40 years) who had a court documented history of childhood abuse or neglect, the abuse survivors were found to be one and a half times more likely than the control group to have used illegal drugs the previous year, used a great number of illicit drugs, and had more substance abuse related problems than the control group: Cathy Spatz

Chemical addiction in turn dramatically increases the likelihood of poverty. Similarly, childhood sexual abuse is strongly correlated with increased levels of promiscuity and high risk sexual activity for male and female survivors.¹¹³ This most likely reflects both the precocious sexuality created by abuse (premature sexual knowledge and experience) as well as a trauma reenactment triggered by powerlessness, especially within women. Again, such destructive sexual behavior increases the likelihood of additional suffering and deprivation. The point here is not to excuse destructive behaviors that often lead to poverty and suffering, but to note the complexity and danger of making evaluative moral judgments on the poor. Finally, even if we had the ability to discern the moral condition of the poor and denied assistance to the “unworthy,” this would inevitably compromise aid and compassion to their “worthy” children who are not responsible for their sinful choices. Given the fact that 17.8% of all American children live in poverty,¹¹⁴ and 35.2% and 29.1% of Black and Hispanic children under six (respectively) live in poverty,¹¹⁵ this would be a grave error. (4) Olasky repeatedly asserts the potency of individuals getting jobs and working hard as the God-ordained means of avoiding and overcoming poverty, hence making government assistance generally unnecessary and harmful.¹¹⁶ God does ordain personal responsibility and hard work, but this significantly overstates the potency of American free market capitalism to prevent poverty. In our current economic climate, no matter how hard one works, it is extremely difficult and sometimes impossible for unskilled workers to support their families adequately with full time minimum wage employment.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, our current health care system creates tremendous challenges for the working poor and working middle

Widom, Naomi R. Marmorstein, and Helene Raskin White, “Childhood Victimization and Illicit Drug Use in Middle Adulthood,” *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* 20 (2006): 394-403.

¹¹³ Mary Jane Rotheram-Borus, Karen A Mahler, and Cheryl Koopman, “Sexual Abuse History and Associated Multiple Risk Behavior in Adolescent Runaways,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 66 (1996): 390-400; Theresa E. Senn, Michael P. Carey, and Peter A. Vanable, “Childhood Sexual Abuse and Sexual Risk Behavior among Men and Women Attending a Sexually Transmitted Disease Clinic,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 74 (2006): 720-31; Maria Testa, Carol VanZile-Tamsen, and Jennifer A. Livingston, “Childhood Sexual Abuse, Relationship Satisfaction, and Sexual Risk Taking in a Community Sample of Women,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 73 (2005): 1116-24.

¹¹⁴ Ron Sider, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in the United States* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 35; DeNavas-Walt et al, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004*, 18.

¹¹⁵ Michael Yates, “Poverty and Inequity in the Global Economy,” *Monthly Review* 55 (Feb 2004).

¹¹⁶ *Tragedy of American Compassion*, 6-12, 50-59, 71-79, 104-12, 121, 190, 207-16, 227-29. Similarly, Santorum, while acknowledging the “marketplace can be brutal,” still believes in it “over the power of the government” to help the poor, *It Takes a Family*, 121.

¹¹⁷ For an excellent personal series of case studies of the difficulties of living on full time low wage jobs, see journalist Barbara Ehrenreich, “Earth to Wal-Mars,” in *Inequality Matters: The Growing Economic Divide in America and Its Poisonous Consequences*, eds. James Lardner and David A. Smith; (New York: The New Press, 2005), 41-53 and *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Owl Books, 2001).

class.¹¹⁸ For instance, a 2005 study led by two Harvard researchers revealed that the majority of bankruptcy filings are caused by medical debts.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, 90% of those who filed for bankruptcy because of medical debt were in the middle class, most were employed, over 75% had medical insurance at the time of the onset of illness, and before filing bankruptcy 22% had gone without food, 30% had their power shut off, and 61% had struggled without important medical care. Biblical “family values” requires us to begin to prioritize marginalized “non-traditional” families and attend to their needs in much deeper ways than we have been.

3. We Often Focus on the Wrong Threats

The greatest enemy of the Christian family is not homosexuals, liberal democrats, or revisionist judges bent on restricting the rights of Christians. PFVs seem to have forgotten history—Christianity often flourished in a context of oppression, persecution, and sexual hedonism. In many respects, we are our own worst enemy. Perhaps the most poignant example of this problem is the recent homosexual prostitute and drug scandal involving Ted Haggard, the former president of the National Association of Evangelicals. It is noteworthy that Jesus and the Hebrew prophets frequently and extensively warned their audiences about threats to the spiritual well-being of the community, including families. Yet, they all focused not on external but internal threats. For instance, Jesus had very little to say about the threats created by unjust Roman authorities, hostile judges, or immoral Gentiles. Rather, he trained his cannons on the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders. The Hebrew prophets did condemn pagan nations for their sin, but devoted the bulk of their rebukes to fellow Jews. Similarly, the Apostle Paul was far more concerned about the internal moral threat of the fleshly nature than the external threats of liberal unbelievers.¹²⁰ Ironically, it seems that PFVs often have too low a view of the power of the family so they overestimate the power of outside influences. Conversely, because we often have a “Pollyanna-ish” view of the Christian home, we underestimate the threat of hypocrisy, abuse, and oppression from within. Rodney Clapp gives a helpful analysis of the true enemies of the family. He states:

¹¹⁸ On the vulnerability of the fifty-four million Americans in the lower middle class, the “working nearly poor,” including their challenges in getting medical insurance and adequate health care, see Katherine S. Newman and Victor Tan Chen, *The Missing Class: Portraits of the Near Poor in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).

¹¹⁹ David U. Himmelstein, et al., “Illness and Injury as Contributors to Bankruptcy,” *Health Affairs* 24 (2005): 63-73. In a subsequent article, the same authors respond to their critics, “Discounting the Debtors Will Not Make Medical Bankruptcy Disappear,” *Health Affairs* 25 (2006): 84-88.

¹²⁰ Cf. Rom 7:7-35; 8:5-8; Gal 5:13-26; Eph 4:17-25; also 1 Cor 5:6-13.

If asked what most threatens families today, Christian family advocates present a list commonly including pornography, drugs, public schools and secular humanism. I agree that such factors challenge and can hinder Christian family. But two things bother me about the accepted list of enemies to the family. First, the list lets Christians off the hook. It shoves the real enemies of our family outside the camp...[Second] it does not go deep enough.

We must not let ourselves off the hook by focusing on external enemies, though this is very tempting. In spite of the external attacks on marriage, young adults still long for a loving marriage. The problem is that they have seen it so rarely that they do not believe it is possible.¹²¹ PFVs often claim Matthew 5:13-14 when they condemn abortion and homosexuality and assert that they are being salt and light as Jesus commanded. But Jesus' command actually centers on our deeds not our words: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16). Protecting families by being salt and light primarily involves PFVs offering a strong winsome example of family health and sexual morality. All too often this is not the case. For instance, according to a survey of pastors conducted by *Christianity Today*, 51% of the pastors said internet pornography is a temptation for them, and over one-third admitted viewing online pornography in the previous year.¹²² And as we noted earlier evangelical youth are less sexually moral than their peers; evangelical divorce rates are not dramatically lower than those of the population at large.

Finally, one of the greatest threats to genuine family values is abuse. All too many Christian families experience one or more types of abuse, but evangelical PFVs rarely address the issue of abuse, and when they do they often minimize its prevalence and significance.¹²³

¹²¹ For instance, see Jillian Straus, *Unhooked Generation: The Truth about Why We're Still Single* (New York: Hyperion, 2006). Strauss as a secular writer argues that a high percentage of singles value marriage but avoid it because they have never seen a healthy one and do not believe they could create one.

¹²² The editors, "Pastors Viewing Internet Pornography," *Leadership* 23 (2001): 89. Similarly, a 2002 online survey of 6,000 pastors by Rick Warren revealed that 30% of the pastors admitted viewing pornography in the previous month, Mark Bergin, "Porn Again," *World Magazine* 20:16 (April 23, 2005): n.p. [cited 21 May 2009]. Online: <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/10555>.

¹²³ On abuse prevalence and evangelicals' failure to address it, see Steven R. Tracy, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50 (2007): 573-94. For examples of evangelical PFVs who minimize abuse prevalence and significance, see Beth Impson, *Called to Womanhood: The Biblical View for Today's World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 61-64;

There is a massive amount of research demonstrating the devastating impact of abuse on families. Abuse has been shown to have a dramatic role in increased rates of sexual activity among adolescents, teen pregnancy, abortion, lower marital satisfaction, and increased divorce rates.¹²⁴ Abuse is particularly relevant to the issue of homosexuality, because it often creates great confusion and distortion regarding gender and sexuality. For instance, in one recent study of male rape survivors, 70% reported long-term struggles with their sexual orientation and 68% questioned their masculinity.¹²⁵ In spite of denials to the contrary, abuse is prevalent in American society and American families, including Christian families.¹²⁶

Making matters worse, we often hypocritically fixate on the sins, particularly sexual, of non-PFVs, while ignoring or minimizing our own.¹²⁷ But judgment must begin in the household of God (1 Pet 4:17). It is patently clear that some conservative evangelical leaders live a double

Rebecca Jones, *Does Christianity Squash Women? A Christian Looks at Womanhood* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 187; Martha Peace, *Damsels in Distress: Biblical Solutions for Problems Women Face* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 136-38.

¹²⁴ For a documented survey of the effects of abuse, see John N. Briere, *Child Abuse Trauma: Theory and Treatment of the Lasting Effects* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992); Claire Burke Draucker, *Counseling Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (2nd ed.; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000); Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); see also Robert F. Anda, et al., "Abused Boys, Battered Mothers, and Male Involvement in Teen Pregnancy," *Pediatrics* 107 (2001): e19. On the dramatically increased rates of abuse among women having one or more abortions, see Dore Hollander, "Does Abuse Lead to Abortion?" *Family Planning Perspectives* 30 (1998): 203; William A. Fisher, et al., "Characteristics of Women Undergoing Repeat Induced Abortion," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 172 (2005): 637-41; Anna Whitehead and Janet Fanslow, "Prevalence of Family Violence amongst Women Attending an Abortion Clinic in New Zealand," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology* 45 (2005): 321-24.

¹²⁵ J. Walker, J. Archer, and M. Davies, "Effects of Rape on Men: A Descriptive Analysis," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 34 (2005): 69-80. On the elevated rates of historical abuse among gays and lesbians, see S. Bryn Austin, Hee-Jin Jun, Benita Jackson, Donna Spiegelman, Janet Rich-Edwards, Heather L. Corliss, and Rosalind J. Wright, "Disparities in Child Abuse Victimization in Lesbian, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Women in the Nurses' Health Study II," *Journal of Women's Health* 17 (2008): 597-606; K. F. Balsam, E. D. Rothblum, and T. P. Beauchaine, "Victimization over the Life Span: A Comparison of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Siblings," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 73 (2005): 477-87; Jessica F. Morris and Kimberly F. Balsam, "Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Experiences of Victimization: Mental Health, Revictimization, and Sexual Identity Development," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 7 (2003): 67-85.

¹²⁶ Christopher G. Ellison and Kristin L. Anderson, "Religious Involvement and Domestic Violence among U.S. Couples," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40 (2001): 269-86; Christopher G. Ellison, John P. Bartkowski, and Kristin L. Anderson, "Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?" *Journal of Family Issues* 20 (1999): 87-113; Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul*, 13-20; "What Does 'Submit in Everything' Really Mean? The Nature and Scope of Marital Submission," *Trinity Journal*, 29:2 (Fall, 2008): 285-312.

¹²⁷ We also often fail to acknowledge the sins of non-evangelical PFVs. For instance, Rush Limbaugh is wildly popular among conservative evangelicals for his attacks on liberals ("family values" opponents) but evangelicals have essentially ignored Limbaugh's hypocrisy and the damage done to family values by his meanness as well as his three divorces, arrest on prescription drug charges in 2006, and his airport detention in 2006 for having Viagra without a prescription. His response to the latter was to joke that he got the Viagra tablets from the Clinton library and that he "had a great time in the Dominican Republic. Wish I could tell you about it," Jarrett Murphy, "Rush Limbaugh Detained with Viagra," CBS News (June 27, 2006), n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/06/27/national/main1753947.shtml>.

life and engage in the very sexual sins they so adamantly denounce from the pulpit.¹²⁸ Harmful “family values” hypocrisy is also rampant among conservative political leaders. For instance, in 2007 PFVs Congressman Larry Craig was forced to resign from the U.S. Senate due to a homosexual sex scandal. In the previous decade, there had been ten sexual scandals involving Republicans, many or most of whom were PFVs, which was twice as many as the sex scandals involving Democrats.¹²⁹ Also in 2007, David Vitter and Newt Gingrich, two other powerful evangelical PFVs congressmen, acknowledged they had been having affairs while in office.¹³⁰ The supreme irony is that all three of these men had helped lead the charge against President Clinton during the Monica Lewinsky scandal, and Gingrich was having his own affair while he led the impeachment trial against President Clinton.¹³¹ Until we begin to acknowledge our own sins, model sexual and family health, and take Scripture more seriously, we can hardly expect unbelievers or our own children to take our family values more seriously. A godly example is the most powerful “family values” apologetic.¹³²

4. We Are “Fighting” in the Wrong Manner

The fact that military language is so commonly used by PFVs toward their “enemies” reveals how far we have strayed from biblical teaching. Worse yet, our tone is often strident and self-righteous instead of humble and gracious.¹³³ This is utterly antithetical to the example of Jesus. He was compassionate, gentle, and loving to sinful humans, especially to those who

¹²⁸ For instance, an anonymous 1987 *Christianity Today* survey of three hundred pastors found that 23% admitted that while they were in pastoral ministry they had engaged in some form of sexually inappropriate behavior with someone other than their spouse, yet only 4% said their immoral behavior had been discovered, and all were still in pastoral ministry: “How Common is Pastoral Indiscretion” *Leadership* 11 (1988): 12-13.

¹²⁹ Jonathan Alter, “Is GOP Collapsing Under the Weight of Sleaze?” *Newsweek* (September 10, 2007).

¹³⁰ Susannah Meadows, “Evangelicals and the Vitter Effect,” *Newsweek Web Exclusive* (July 19, 2007): n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/19852389/site/newsweek/page/0>.

¹³¹ “Gingrich affair coincided with Lewinsky fight,” *Los Angeles Times* (March 9, 2007): n.p. [cited 21 May 2009]. Online: <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/mar/09/nation/na-gingrich9>. Incredibly, Gingrich said that he had not been a hypocrite in this because unlike Clinton he hadn’t lied under oath. For another dramatic example of hypocrisy among the most powerful evangelical PFVs leaders, see James Carney, “The Rise and Fall of Ralph Reed,” *Time Magazine* (July 23, 2006): n.p. [cited 21 May 2009]. Online: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1218060,00.html>.

¹³² The God ordained power of Christians’ behavior to transform those hostile to Christian values is found in the results of extensive surveys conducted between 1991 and 2007 of 750 people from thirty different countries who had converted to Christianity from Islam. The leading influence in their decision to follow Christ was “the lifestyle of Christians,” J. Dudley Woodberry, Russell G. Shubin, and G. Marks, “Why Muslims Follow Jesus,” *Christianity Today* (October 2007): 82.

¹³³ On the dangerous failure of the Religious Right to be civil and gracious, see Os Guinness, *The Case for Civility and Why Our Future Depends on It* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008). On gracious Christianity more broadly, see Douglas Jacobson and Rodney J. Sawatsky, *Gracious Christianity: Living the Love We Profess* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

rejected and killed him.¹³⁴ The Apostle Paul, who had experienced life-threatening persecution, wept over his enemies and felt such pain over their rejection of the truth that he said he wished he could be damned for their sake.¹³⁵ He also said we should be gentle and courteous toward unbelievers since we were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved to various lusts and pleasures (Titus 3:2-3). Furthermore, when Paul compared himself to others, expressly including homosexuals, he humbly saw himself as the “worst of sinners” redeemed only by the grace of God through Christ (1 Tim 1:10, 15). The Jesus we claim to follow taught us how to respond to our enemies: turn the other cheek when struck, give your possessions when sued, go an extra mile when forced to go one mile, and love (Matt 5:39-44). Unfortunately, much PFVs methodology is fueled by fear of our opponents and how they might harm us, making it virtually impossible to respond to them in a loving manner.¹³⁶ The New Testament tells us we should not fear our opponents. Rather, we should expect and joyfully welcome opposition and suffering as necessary consequences of following Christ and a most powerful means for opponents to experience the life-transforming love of Christ.¹³⁷

Furthermore, effective “family values” ministry does not flow out of our strength, our perfect families, or our use of power. God works most powerfully through weak, common, and fragile believers who lay aside their rights and humbly serve others.¹³⁸ The world uses power, the way of the kingdom is humility, gentleness, and servanthood.¹³⁹ God delights in transforming hard hearted unbelievers and eliminating their sinful practices not through political fights or

¹³⁴ Matt 9:36-38; 11:28-30; Luke 7:34-50; 23:34; 1 Pet 2:19-23.

¹³⁵ Phil 3:18; Rom 9:3. See also Acts 20:19, 31; Rom 12:20; 2 Cor 2:4; 2 Thess 3:15.

¹³⁶ For instance, Dobson lists eleven horrible consequences if the homosexual opponents win the battle over the legality of gay marriage. His incredible, fear-inducing list includes: severe strain and perhaps the collapse of our health care and social security systems, loss of religious freedoms, the splintering of families throughout the entire world, and the “severe curtailment” of the gospel, *Marriage under Fire*, 45-64. For an excellent Christian analysis of fear, see Scott Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007).

¹³⁷ Matt 5:10-12; John 15:18-21; Acts 5:40-41; Rom 8:17; Col 1:24; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 4:12-19. The power of suffering and persecution to bring the reality and love of God to hardened sinners is seen in numerous passages, including Dan 6:1-27; Acts 7:58-8:1; 8:1-5; 11:19-21; 16:22-34; Phil 1:12-14.

¹³⁸ Matt 18:1-4; 23:11; 1 Cor 1:26-31; 2 Cor 4:4-12; 12:9-10. On God’s use of flawed families for his redemptive purposes, see David E. Garland and Diana R. Garland, *Flawed Families of the Bible: How God’s Grace Works through Imperfect Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007).

¹³⁹ Matt 5:5, 39-42; 20:25-27. On the manner in which American Christians have often been seduced by worldly use of power which stands at odds with a kingdom of God ethic, see Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). A non-evangelical treatment of this issue is Chris Hedges, *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

policy statements but through Spirit-empowered Christians who love sacrificially.¹⁴⁰ Jesus and the early church are our best examples of this—they did not address the political systems of their day. They did not organize protests or boycotts. Rather, they embraced broken sinners at great cost.¹⁴¹ Much of the PFVs agenda centers on fighting for Christians’ rights, in spite of the fact that we are to follow the example of Christ who surrendered his rights to serve sinners, loving them in the most costly manner possible.¹⁴² This is particularly critical as we minister to the very ones we say we are so concerned about—those having abortions, those struggling with same sex attraction, and promiscuous singles. These are individuals who have often experienced great pain leading to and resulting from these practices. The last thing they need from us is more rejection, harshness, and militaristic rhetoric. Rather, our humble, gentle love coupled with our own example of godly living is what is most powerful in reaching them with the life changing gospel of Christ. This is what will bring about “family values.”

V. CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

I have observed that we are currently losing the culture war for family values due to a misplaced ethical grid, misidentified enemies and families, and a misguided strategy. What would it mean to win? It would mean that we follow the broad teachings of Scripture, not select passages. It would mean that we demonstrate to the world the whole character of God, especially His love, mercy, and justice just as forcefully as his holiness. It would mean that we demonstrate in our actions, priorities, and teachings the heart and passion of God, which is to care for poor and needy families and to champion the cause of the oppressed. Our culture has tragically distorted understandings of families, sexuality, and human life because of distorted views of God--the One who created life and family. This makes living out biblical family values very challenging, but it also creates tremendous opportunities.¹⁴³ We most powerfully engage in “family values” ministry when we live out the life of Jesus to those around us broken by sin

¹⁴⁰ In their study of 750 Muslims who had converted to Christianity, the researchers found that the love of Christians was one of the most significant factors in Muslim conversions: Woodberry, Shubin, and Marks, “Why Muslims Follow Jesus,” 82-85.

¹⁴¹ This is not to say we should not speak out on political issues but that this should never be the lynch pin of our strategy, cf. Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson, *Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

¹⁴² Phil 2:1-8. The Apostle Paul’s ministry in Philippi is a powerful example of this principle. He laid aside his rights as a Roman citizen and joyfully accepted a beating and imprisonment, which led to the conversion of the jailor and his family. Only after he was freed from jail did he mention his citizenship and assert his legal “rights” (Acts 16:23-39).

¹⁴³ Sider, *Just Generosity*, 286; David Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 20.

(their own and others'). Our daughter Abby is involved in some of the most extreme and daunting "family ministry" imaginable in Kampala, Uganda. She lives and ministers in squalid slums to street children made homeless by AIDS, abuse, and poverty. These children are truly the most despised and rejected members of society. Virtually all of them have putrefying sores and infectious diseases worsened by their illegal drug usage and gasoline sniffing. They survive by engaging in immoral and criminal activity. They epitomize the antithesis and destruction of family values. Abby recently wrote the following about her redemptive ministry to create a new family for these children by becoming "God in skin" to them.

It is the most amazing blessing to work with street kids. I often feel sorry for anyone who has never gotten a chance. Yet working with street kids carries a heavy responsibility.

You become the one person who doesn't beat them, who tells them you love them, that Jesus loves them, that they are special. . . . You become for them a picture of what God looks like and that is a heavy responsibility but one that I wouldn't trade for anything. . . .

The other day as we were walking down the streets of the slums I had two street kids on my arms, Joseph on one and Nyanzi on the other. As we were trying to maneuver our way through the slick, grimy, crowded, and narrow passages a small group of people began to insult the boys in English. 'Don't touch them! My *** what are you doing? Have you seen their sores? You are going to get a disease from those disgusting kids.' Yes, I had seen Nyanzis' sores. I had been treating his sores. . . . Instead of dignifying their insults with a verbal response I removed my hands from the grips of those two precious boys and instead slipped my arms around their shoulders as I hugged them and pulled them close.

As Christians we were made to utterly and completely change the way others see God, especially those stomped on by everyone else. . . . Every evening I put lotion on the boys

at our house who want it (which is all of them) and rub their backs. Every time I do this I pray that as I rub their scarred backs, legs, and arms that I am erasing just one of the scars on their hearts created by their physical wounds. . . . The boys have started initiating saying “I love you” to me and calling me mother Babirye instead of auntie. I know that God is answering my prayers.¹⁴⁴

May God give us the courage to wrap our arms around confused teenage parents, ostracized lesbians, unwed mothers, poor immigrants, shame-filled divorcees, and promiscuous singles in the name of Jesus. Then we will begin to win the “family values” culture war.

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¹⁴⁴ Abby Tracy, “Street Kids” (September 20, 2008). n.p. [cited 19 November 2008]. Online: <http://africa-love.livejournal.com>. The concept of believers being God to the needy comes from one of the early church fathers, Ep. Diognetus 10.