

Supporting children in a secular world

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[0 : 0 0] Well, thanks very much to all of you for coming, and thanks to the Western Scotland Gospel Partnership for organising this. We're going to be looking this evening at supporting children in a secular world, and particularly from the point of view of parents.

I don't know if we have any teachers here this evening. I'm speaking to teachers tomorrow, but very much with parents in mind here. And if you're not a parent, it's still, I think, something that everybody within the church can be thinking about, how to support the children within the church family, how to support parents within the church family.

I should say, I'm just another Christian parent and ex-teacher. I don't claim to be a parenting expert, but I do have experience through my work in helping Christians with difficult issues in schools, and in speaking about a Christian view on the hot topics of the day, which are challenging our children.

But I don't want to leap straight into controversy. I want to suggest a framework for thinking about these things, and I want to look at some principles from Scripture.

Not quite yet. So let's think about the children. Let's think about the secular world, and then let's think about how to support children.

[1 : 2 4] So children first. As I said, I'm a parent myself. I have four children, aged 9 to 17. Three girls and a boy, and they are a most precious gift of God.

And although our children are a gift to us as parents, in a sense, they're not ours. Our children don't belong to us because we all belong to God.

Our children are given into our care for a time, but they aren't our property. They're God's property, as are we ourselves. And they also, in another sense, don't belong to us because they're individuals in their own right, growing up to be accountable to God for themselves, to become accountable for their own lives.

But in another sense, they most certainly are ours because God has given them particularly into our care as parents. He's given parents a unique role, a unique responsibility for our children, which rests with us as parents.

And it's with that responsibility I want to begin. Our greatest desire as Christian parents is that our children would come to delight in God, to know his love, and to live to God's glory.

[2 : 4 7] Now, in this life, and in all eternity. To live to his praise, not to ours. And, of course, for that, we depend on his spirit to apply the truth that we teach them to their hearts, so that they respond to what we teach them and choose for themselves to live for Christ.

But we still need to teach them that truth. We still need to bring them up so that their loves and their thoughts and their habits are shaped by God's word.

Because if they're not shaped by God's word, they will be shaped by other influences. Their thoughts will become captured by other things.

They will grow to love things that are opposed to the true God, or give even God's good gifts, the place in their heart that belongs to God alone. They will allow their lives to be shaped into the service of other gods.

Gods of materialism, or gods of fame or popularity, or the gods of the self, self-understanding, self-fulfillment as the goal of life. And those other gods are cruel.

[3 : 56] They enslave people, and they don't deliver on what they promise. But in our thinking about how we can help our children, let's begin with what Jesus described as the greatest commandment.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And the question is, where is Jesus quoting that from? And the answer is from Deuteronomy. And if you read on in Deuteronomy, you will see it continues straight after the greatest commandment with these words.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

This presentation of what Jesus calls the greatest commandment is followed immediately with the instruction to teach children diligently. In a planned way, certainly.

[5 : 03] But also in going about everyday life. Because God and his word are relevant in every circumstance, and should be part of the fabric of our family lives, giving direction in all that we do.

Well, how do we do this, and fulfill our responsibilities as parents in a culture that in many ways is pulling in the opposite direction? I want to suggest three principles, and when I've gone over those principles, I want to come back and show how they can be applied to some contemporary issues that we and our children will face.

So here's the three principles. First one, provide positive direction. We all need that throughout our lives. To set our feet in the right direction and walk in it.

And as parents, we need to be decisively leading our children in that way. In other words, it's not enough to just say no to what is wrong. There are, ultimately, only two directions in life.

The broad road that leads to destruction, the narrow road that leads to life. But the broad way is broad. There are lots of false turns, lots of sinful choices that can lead you into it, and we do need to give clear warnings about those ways, and God's law gives us those warnings and commands.

[6 : 28] But, if someone is asking for directions, we don't usually say, see that road over there? Well, don't take it because it isn't the right way. And see that second turning on the right?

Well, ignore that because that isn't the right way either. Instead, we give positive direction in the right way. Take that road there. That's the right way to go. And Jesus gives us an example of that kind of approach when he's asked about divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19.

The Pharisees are asking about divorce and remarriage on the basis that the Old Testament civil law did provide for divorce, although it regulated it. And the Pharisees continue the conversation in verse 3 of Matthew 19.

And Pharisees came up to him, testing him, and saying to him, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason? And he, that is Jesus, answered and said to them, Have you not read that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female?

And said, For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So then, they are no longer two, but one flesh.

[7 : 45] Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate. Jesus points back behind the details of Old Testament law to the positive creational purpose of marriage.

And he shows that the provisions for divorce in the Old Testament have to be understood in that light. So with our children, we need to embed those positive understandings, especially in the early years, and especially in the areas where our secular culture is teaching something very different.

But positive direction is not enough. Secondly, we need to protect children from wrong messages. We need to turn down the volume on contemporary secular voices.

Deuteronomy 6 was about how God's word should form part of the fabric of everyday family life. But social media can bring the messages of our confused culture into the pockets of children and young people, and if we let them, into their bedrooms.

Now, of course, we can't create a utopia in our homes, a heaven on earth, because we bring sin with us into our homes. Sin is in our hearts, in the hearts of our children, and because we want our homes to be open to non-Christians, to unbelievers who can come in.

[9 : 10] We want to be hospitable. But we can create homes that are ordered by God's word, where our children can return home from school, for example, and get a break from the pressure of secular culture, and where secular voices are not given free reign.

So that was protect them from wrong messages, but that's not enough. Thirdly, we need to equip children to serve God in contemporary culture.

Whilst we want to turn down the volume of those secular voices in the home, we don't want to silence them to keep our children ignorant. Why? Because we want our children to respond to the gospel.

The gospel call is a call to turn from their sins, to follow Christ, and to live for him. To live for him in the 21st century, and for most of our children, in 21st century Scotland.

And that, in God's purposes, is where and when he's chosen for them to be born. So if they come to faith, they're going to serve Christ and glorify him in 21st century Britain, at any rate.

[10 : 23] They need to be equipped to do so. And that does mean that as they grow older, they need to understand something about 21st century Britain. And we've got an example of that in Scripture as well, in Acts 17, where Paul visits Athens.

And he talks to the Areopagus Council about the altar to the unknown God. Now, a few hundred years before Paul visited Athens, there'd been a plague. And the Athenians kept sacrificing to all the gods they knew of, and still the plague continued to ravage on.

Which god had they failed to placate? So they asked the advice of a Cretan Stoic philosopher called Epimenides. And it's Epimenides that Paul goes on to quote in Acts 17, as well as in Titus.

You're probably familiar with the verse in Titus. Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. Again, that's a quote from Epimenides. Well, apparently Epimenides, in the days of this plague, advised the Athenians to let loose some black and white sheep and to sacrifice one of them in whichever shrine the sheep stopped to lie down in.

And when they stopped somewhere where there wasn't a shrine, they built new altars to the unknown god and sacrificed there to that god. And the story went.

[11 : 44] After that, the plague did cease. So Paul uses that. He compliments them on how religious they are, although the word he uses could also mean superstitious.

He picks the altar to the unknown god as an example, and he uses it to put his finger on where their approach was going wrong. He shows they don't need to grope around in ignorance, trying to placate this god and that god, nor do they have to sacrifice to unknown deities beyond their knowledge, because God, the god they don't know, but who is the true god, not one dreamed up in their own image, has now revealed himself, has made himself known in creation and now in Christ.

And they need to respond to that revelation, and they are accountable to him to do so. So Paul, understanding their culture, was able to put his finger on where they were going wrong.

The key difference in their understanding from the true Christian view, they didn't recognize or respond to God's gracious revelation of himself, but were blundering about in their ignorance, making gods in their own image.

He could show them where their thinking was lacking, and could work from that point to point them towards Christ and his resurrection. In a similar way, we need to understand our contemporary culture, to critique it and to engage with it for Christ, and so ultimately do our children.

[13 : 21] And actually, I don't think it's just about being prepared to speak to those who are outside the faith. When our culture holds up the false gods, makes the false promises, we need to see through them.

And our children need to be able to see through them too, for themselves. So that's the framework I'm suggesting to you. Provide positive direction, protect from wrong messages, but also equip to engage.

Well, let's be specific about some of these issues, and let's look at the big issue of LGBT, where there's the most obvious and most contentious clash between religious views and secular views, and what is now affecting children in schools.

And parents are rightly concerned about what schools will be teaching, especially to young children in primary school. So how can we respond? Provide positive direction.

God made men and women in his image to reflect himself in his creation, to be stewards over his creation. He made marriage so a man and a woman can come together in faithful love, for husband and wife to complement one another, and work together to serve him.

[14 : 38] So let's make sure in our teaching of our children, and perhaps even more importantly, our example in our own marriages, points our children to the right context, for the fulfillment of the sexual desires that God has given us.

But marriage is not ultimate. Marriage points beyond itself to something greater, to God's great, gracious, eternally faithful, sacrificial love for his people, and to his people's loving devotion to him.

Our children's main aim in life should not be marriage, but following Christ. Marriage is described in the Bible as a gift and as a calling. And singleness is described in the Bible as a gift and as a calling.

All of our children are almost certain to be single for at least some of their adult lives. Some may be single for all of their lives. So from their earliest years, let's make sure we point them to Christ to find their ultimate fulfillment.

Let's be Christ-centered. There is a danger of reacting to our culture's idolization of sex in any context by instead substituting for that an idolization of marriage, or even continuing to idolize sex, providing it's within the context of marriage.

[16 : 01] So let's teach our children positively by the example we set, as well as in what we say, the beauty and wonder of what God did when he made us male and female, and in his creation of marriage, without holding it out as the sole aim and purpose of their lives.

Secondly, and this is one I'm going to be spending most time on, protect from wrong messages. We need to know, first of all, what our children are exposed to.

Do they have unsupervised internet access? Do we know what they're looking at? Even if they don't have a mobile phone, are they spending time with friends who do? I said I was speaking particularly about LGBT issues, but often it's not just LGBT issues directly that are dealt with.

Are they and are we watching TV or films or reading books that promote secular assumptions? Because underpinning the whole LGBT movement is a way of understanding human life and purpose.

It says we have unique desires, and those desires define our identity and are what give us human value. If someone doesn't affirm those desires, they are denying who we are.

[17 : 20] It says we must live authentically to our own desires. That's how we can be fulfilled as individuals. Sometimes that's described as desire is destiny. And it says that any external constraints on how we live our lives are necessarily bad.

But as Christians, we believe we live life in all its fullness when we submit ourselves to God's good rule. It does seem to me that a lot of popular culture, TV programs, films and books, push that kind of understanding of life even when it's nothing directly to do with LGBT issues.

There are common themes, common plot lines that reinforce that. So we need to be discerning. We need to think about and be alert to the messages that our children are exposed to and ensure they're not just taken along with them.

But of course, we also need to consider schools. And a great deal of my job is devoted to assisting parents with concerns they have about what is taught in their children's schools.

I want to take some time to look at that in some detail. You'll have heard of the protests about LGBT teaching in Birmingham and the vitriolic reaction against them from all across certainly the political spectrum in Westminster.

[18 : 41] And if the protests were happening in Scotland, I'm sure the same would be true here. So I want to talk a little bit about what schools are actually required to do and what we can do as parents to engage constructively with schools on this.

And the first thing I want to say is there is a great deal of misinformation. And you'll almost certainly have heard some of that misinformation. So let's begin by looking at a little video clip from the BBC.

Look at this one next. What kind of thing is that they're doing? They're doing hungry. They have food for their boots. They smell the heat in their necks at night.

And those are the very first thing within the boots to have food down. The book is based on a true story where two male penguins raised a penguin trip together after a new year too. Some parents say that children shouldn't be taught about being gay or gender identity because of their religious equality.

Sexual orientation, religion and sex are all protected under the same law. That's the equality act, don't you think? Schools have a duty under the act to teach kids British values as a way of reducing radicalisation and bullying.

[19 : 56] Swimmer, sailor, soldier, girl. They all blend in. No girls, they're girls. Well, I've got news for the BBC. There is no mention of British values or radicalisation anywhere in the Equality Act.

Furthermore, the chapter on schools in the Equality Act is explicit. It says nothing in this chapter applies to anything done in connection with the content of the curriculum.

South of the border, British values are a real thing in schools. But here's the Westminster government's advice to schools about British values and none of the examples in here are anything to do with sexuality.

Nothing to do with the example given in that BBC video. And the Christian Institute will shortly be publishing a booklet that sets out what equality law actually does require and what it does not require.

And actually in many cases, the Equality Act and human rights law, which are the same in England, Scotland and Wales, support the position of Christian parents and pupils. So do look out for that.

[21 : 08] If you're signed up as a supporter of the Christian Institute with your postal address, then we'll send you a copy. If you're not, then on your chairs are these postcards. If you'd like to fill one of these out and then just pop it in the blue box over here on the table, we'll add you to the database and you'll get a copy of it when it comes out.

We're just putting the finishing touches to that booklet. And Scottish law, in fact, agrees with the biblical principle we discussed earlier.

Children are primarily the responsibility of parents. Here's the 1980 Education Scotland Act. And what that sets out is that education is the responsibility of parents, not the state.

They can fulfil that responsibility by delegating it to a school if they wish to, but it is still delegated from the parents. And Section 28 of the same act talks about the responsibility of state schools.

Heading there, I'll read it out, that pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents. In the exercise and performance of their powers and duties under this act, the Secretary of State and Education Authorities shall have regard to the general principle that so far as is compatible with the provision of suitable instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents.

[22 : 42] So state schools in Scotland are acting on behalf of their local education authorities so this law applies to them. Of course, fee-paying schools are acting on behalf of the parents who are paying them and he who pays the piper calls the tune.

And here's the 1998 Human Rights Act. No person should be denied the right to education in the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the state shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.

And the courts have ruled that religious and philosophical convictions includes convictions about sex and relationships. Now, these laws don't mean that schools have to do exactly what every parent wants.

that would not be workable if you've got a class of 30 children with 30 different sets of parents all holding 30 different ideas. Parents do have to respect also the professional expertise of teachers.

teachers. But the courts have considered this and they've interpreted it to mean that where schools teach something about which some parents may disagree, they must teach in a way which is objective and critical and pluralistic.

[24 : 13] So that means that where there are different opinions, those different opinions must be presented. Schools can't push, just push one viewpoint. pupils must be helped to consider these different views critically and they must be taught objectively.

To put it another way, schools must educate, not indoctrinate. Now, I'm well aware that there are many schools where that's not happening. But as parents, you do have the power to hold those schools to account.

Schools are often ignorant of their legal duties. I was a teacher for years and years and had no idea about these laws. It was never part of my training as a teacher. Schools may simply be ignorant.

And simply drawing the school's attention in a wise way to these things can work. If it doesn't, then all schools have formal complaints procedures, or ultimately that can be a local authority complaints procedure in Scotland, and you can follow that complaints procedure.

And that does make a difference. And we're able at Christian Institute to help parents through that process. So just give us a ring or drop us an email. And another way that parents can have an influence is through the parent council.

[25 : 40] So all schools in Scotland are meant to provide for there to be a parent council. Head teachers don't have to do what the parent council says, but they can't just sideline the parent council and simply ignore them.

I do know one school in Scotland where the parent council was highly effective in voicing its concerns about LGBT inclusive education and expressed that in a whole series of unanimous votes.

There were a couple of Christians on that parent council, but by no means were all those parents who were voting Christians, but they had that shared view. And that held back the school's plans.

parents. In the end, they were overruled by the head teacher with the support of the local education authority, but representatives of that parent council will be present during some of the presentations given in the school, and it's likely that their presence and their ongoing concerns will act as a brake on the more radical approaches at the school.

And if you get involved in the parent council, then depending on how it's constituted, there might be the opportunity to stand as a chair or vice chair, and that could give you more opportunity to have a positive influence.

[26 : 53] Now, as some of you probably know, the Scottish government and local authorities are in the middle of introducing two new initiatives. The first one is a new version of relationships, sexuality, health, and pregnancy education, RSHP for short, and the second is LGBT inclusive education across the curriculum, about which we'll in a moment.

But crucially, the laws I mentioned earlier are not changing. So whatever schools do as part of these initiatives, they have to deliver what they teach in an objective, critical, and plural manner.

They mustn't compel children to express support for a particular opinion. they mustn't promote prejudice towards Christians or promote misunderstandings of what Christians believe, and they mustn't marginalise Christian pupils.

To be clear, I'm well aware there are Scottish schools that are already breaching those requirements.

I get phone calls from parents in Scotland, certainly every week, if not quite every day. But the law is the law, and where schools breach that law, parents have the power to hold them to account.

[28 : 17] And as parents, there's a lot that we can do to protect our children. And let me talk about RSHP, Relationship to Sexuality, Health and Pregnancy Education, first.

If you want to find out what's going to be taught, or what could be taught, then the place to look is the website on the screen there, rshp.scot. It's a very well organised website, it's very easy to find the relevant materials for the age of your child.

And when you look at that, do check the links, do watch the videos on those links. There will be some variation from one local authority to another, and to some extent from school to school, and indeed from teacher to teacher, in how these things are implemented and out of all the resources on there, which ones are chosen, but that website gives you a good indication of the kinds of things that are likely to be taught at the different ages.

Having looked there and identified anything you're not happy about, you can approach a child's school and ask whether they will be using those lesson plans, activities, or resources.

If there are alternatives suggested on that website that you're happy about, which deal with the same subject, you can make that clear. If the school is not prepared to change its approach, then you do have the right to withdraw your child from RSHP teaching.

[29 : 42] There's no law which says schools must use the materials on RSHP. Scott. There is, however, statutory guidance for schools issued under Section 56 of the Standards in Scotland Schools Act 2000 on the implementation of RSHP and schools are required by law to have regard to that.

I'm just going to give you a taster of some of that guidance now. This is the legal guidance that schools have to have regard to. I'd really actually encourage parents to read all of this.

The second bullet point on the screen there gives you the place to look to find that guidance. The first one is the curriculum materials which are not statutory. Schools can choose from or they can choose other things that are on there.

The second one is the statutory guidance. Here are some helpful things in there that you can quote back to the school if you familiarize yourself with it. First of all, there's an emphasis on the role of parents.

The Scottish government believes that all education should be a partnership between schools, parents, carers, children and young people. This is a particular relevance in areas like RSHP education.

[30 : 53] Many think of parents as a child's first teacher, a role that continues for life. Parents and carers play a key role in all aspects of their children's education and the collaborative partnership between them and schools should be a key element of RSHP education delivery.

Second, parents must be consulted on this teaching. It should be standard practice for schools to consult with parents and carers when they're developing or reviewing their program of RSHP education.

And because they're bringing out new materials now, as a Scottish government initiative, that's something all schools should be doing at the moment. All parents and carers should be given the opportunity in advance to view key teaching materials, to ask questions about any aspect of the program.

Joint work between schools, parents, children and young people should be founded on full and frank information sharing on the curriculum materials with appropriate and clear communication mechanisms.

Arrangements should be in place in schools to respond promptly and fully to any concerns which parents and carers may express about the content or teaching approaches within an RSHP education program, as there should be for any other aspect of the curriculum.

[32 : 09] In the first instance, parents and carers should be encouraged to raise concerns directly with the school so they can be resolved quickly, but there also should be mechanisms for prompt referral at local authority level, where the parent or carer is still dissatisfied after consulting with the school.

I will stop reading that section and move on. Parents may withdraw their children from the teaching, as I said before. This is what the guidance says, where after due consideration and subject to paragraph 58, which is about children being able to withdraw themselves, the parent or carer decides to withdraw a school-aged child from sexual health education lessons, arrangements should be made for the child to have alternative positive educational provision which meets the health and well-being outcomes.

Two more things I want to draw to attention from the guidance. Different views should be represented, says the guidance. Schools should ensure the child has access to information and material from a diversity of sources.

The education of the child should be directed to the development of respect for the child's parents, his or own cultural identity, language and values. That can include Christian values.

Point 47 in the guidance, RSHP education should present facts in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner. The last thing from this guidance that's helpful is there is some emphasis on the importance of love and commitment, including in marriage.

[33 : 43] Children and young people should also be encouraged to understand the value of love and commitment in relationships and partnerships, including marriage and civil partnership. Educators must be aware that children and young people come from a wide range of backgrounds, that includes a Christian background, and respect this in their teaching practices.

So because schools will be consulting parents about the new approach to RSHP, you have a good opportunity to help schools understand the Christian perspective, to respect it in their teaching, so that they are fulfilling their duty to provide teaching that's appropriate to the children's religious background.

You can point out as a parent where schools are promoting one particular viewpoint to the exclusion of others. You can suggest approaches that you think will be helpful. It's obviously important not to miss that opportunity for consultation, so it's probably worth being proactive and asking the school what its plans are for consulting parents on RSHP.

And if all else fails, you can make use of the local authorities complaints procedure. If you need help with that, then please do contact us. So that was the first of those two initiatives, so just a reminder, we have updated RSHP education, and the second is LGBT inclusive education across the whole of the curriculum, embedded in different subjects of the curriculum.

So, this, across the curriculum, is more challenging because obviously it's harder to know when it's going to come up.

[35 : 24] It could be in any subject, and it's harder to know what will be said. But nevertheless, schools should be open with parents when asked about what they will be teaching and when.

The laws, fundamental laws from the Equality Act and from the Human Rights Act that we discussed earlier, require schools to provide an education in an objective, critical, and pluralistic manner. That still applies to cross-curricular LGBT teaching.

And again, if you need help, then contact us. Now, you may remember I suggested three principles earlier, and we've only got to number two in thinking about LGBT issues.

So let's deal with number three. supporting our children in a secular culture is not all about sheltering our children from any message with which we don't agree.

That's not a helpful preparation to serve God in our society, and it's not possible anyway. Even if we had complete control over what was taught, other children would be suggesting other ideas.

[36 : 31] And once they're at high school, it's likely nowadays that other young people at that school will be openly identifying as gay or lesbian, some as transgender. And our children need to be able to relate to those fellow pupils positively, but at the same time be secure in their own beliefs.

And the first thing that I suggest is that we as parents talk about these things with our children, and that we aim to be the first people to talk to our children about them.

why wait until our children have already heard distorted ideas about human sexuality before we talk to them about it ourselves as parents?

Why wait until our children have heard about pornography from their friends, or worse, seen it before we talk to them about it? You know, a maths teacher would not wait until children have been taught how to solve a quadratic equation incorrectly before teaching them how to do it correctly.

So why wait until children have been taught the wrong things about sex before teaching them the right things? The aim should be that Christian children hear about same-sex relationships, gender identity, et cetera, first from their parents, and that they hear a balanced Christian perspective.

[37 : 53] They need to learn that their parents are a trusted source of information on these issues to whom they can go to for help. We want our children to feel the home is a place where they can talk about these issues and where they can come to us as parents for a view they trust.

Another way of looking at it is to say we need to inoculate our children. We don't want to leave them unprepared and vulnerable. So what can we say? Number one, we can point them to Christ.

As I mentioned before, we can show them the beauty of faithful marriage without holding up marriage as the aim of their lives. The aim of their lives is following Christ, whether that's in singleness or in marriage.

As Christians, we believe that we are defined by God. He has made us in his image, and that's what makes us human. However we feel about ourselves, we have that dignity, and that's an objective reality because we are all God's image bearers.

our children need to learn to contrast that with the messages of secular culture, which says what we feel defines us, that we need to look inside ourselves to find our identity.

[39 : 10] So our feelings about ourselves are our identity. If you feel an attraction to someone of the same sex, then that defines you as gay. It is your identity. And secular culture says that everyone's different identities must be affirmed, otherwise you're not affirming their humanity.

But Christianity says we must affirm our common humanity, that every individual has immense value because we're all made in God's image. But we mustn't affirm sinful desires.

That distorts the image of God in us and enslaves us to those sinful desires and behavior. That stops us experiencing the fullness of our humanity.

Secular culture says that repressing our desires is harmful and denies our identity. Whereas Christianity says sexual desire in itself is not bad, but our sexual selves are fallen just as the rest of us is.

It's probably true that every adult and every teenager has sexual desires which are wrong, whether homosexual or heterosexual. Self-control and self-denial aren't the only response to our sexual desires, but they need to be an important part of the response for everyone.

[40 : 28] And secular culture says people who cannot be sexually fulfilled can't have a fulfilled life. But we find fulfillment in Christ, not in sex.

Making sex into an idol enslaves us to it and does not lead to true fulfillment. It forces us to sacrifice things to it which we should not sacrifice. sexual fulfillment is not an end in itself.

It's a way in which a married couple are united in love and which can enable them, often anyway, to bear children in whom their natures are united in one, but who are themselves unique individuals made in God's image.

Both marriage and singleness are God's good gifts. And if our families and our whole church families are living in a way that reflects that, then in the words of Ephesians 5, we are walking as children of the light and living that way exposes the unfruitful deeds of darkness.

Our children should be able to see the contrast between the peace that we know in the church and the insecurity and unfruitfulness of lives lived in slavery to fragile internal senses of individual identity slavery to shaping lives around fallen desires.

[41 : 53] All the outcomes of that for a large proportion of the children who come from broken homes. It's interesting, I think, to notice and for us to help our children notice that the sexual revolution, beginning in the 1960s, has utterly failed on its own terms.

I'm quoting here from Professor Stan and Brenner-Jones' book for teenagers called Facing the Facts. The 1960s cultural revolutionaries said, overturn the old ways of thinking, we'll make it better.

And sex, enjoy it as you see fit. For some, the more the better. And for others, do as your conscience dictates, but be genuine to yourself and follow your feelings, including, especially, even especially including your sexual feelings.

They've promised to follow us and our plan and life in general. Relationships and sex will all get better. And that's what our culture has done. Well, if they were right, then people now should be having more sex, should be happier in their intimate relationships, regardless of whether they're married or not, and better connected to family and friends.

They should be happier overall and doing so well that their children are flourishing as a result. Now, just to be clear, I don't think these things on their own should be the primary aims for society, but they were the aims of the sexual revolution.

[43 : 21] So, 50, 60 years on, have the changes they have brought about in society succeeded in terms of their own aims? Well, in Britain in 1990, both women and men who were sexually active reported engaging in sexual relations five times per month.

In 2010, it had fallen to three times per month. And I'm sure I've seen statistics going further back into the past that are even more striking, and I'm afraid I couldn't find them to verify that for this talk.

But it's pretty clear that there's a cross next to the first aim. Are people happier in their intimate relationships as a result of the sexual revolution?

Well, last year, the Westminster government appointed the very first minister for loneliness, such is the concern about loneliness in society.

So I don't think we can say that people are happier in their intimate relationships. Are people happier overall? Well, there are huge concerns about suicide amongst young people, especially when they're starting university, especially amongst young men.

[44 : 30] women. There's massive prescribing of antidepressants, especially if they're not exclusively to young women. What about outcomes for children?

Well, more and more children are not being brought up by both their biological parents in a stable marriage. And we know from rigorous academic studies that children who've experienced family breakdown are over twice as likely to experience homelessness, twice as likely to be in trouble with the police, or spend time in prison, almost twice as likely to experience educational underachievement, almost twice as likely to experience not being with the other parent, almost twice as likely to experience alcoholism.

So it goes on. So the list goes on. I won't read all the way down it. I wouldn't want anyone here who is being brought up by a single parent, or has been, or is a single parent themselves, to think that means those are inevitable outcomes with the support of the church family, and with God's grace above all, far from it.

But on average, there can be really no doubt that the sexual revolution has harmed children. And Christian young people will see that contrast between children growing up securely in families that are seeking to live according to God's word, and classmates from families which have rejected that to follow secular ideals.

families. Whilst what's happening to our society, and to the friends at school, is deeply depressing, it shouldn't make us feel superior or judgmental.

[46 : 08] It should fill us with concern, but thinking back again to Ephesians 5, it should also be an encouragement to our children to persist in following in God's way.

So, the fruit that they bear in people's lives is testimony to the rightness of God's ways. So, let's keep praying for and encouraging our young people to live for Christ, understanding the world that they're living in.

And let's keep praying for and encouraging one another as parents within our churches. churches. And as I would say, as a former teacher myself, please do pray for Christian teachers as well and encourage them.

It can be very, very tough for Christian teachers at the moment in schools. And let's hold fast to the good way God has set out before us and live as God's people as a clear witness to him in a society that is abandoning the truth.

And let's equip our children to follow us in that way. So, I've spoken deliberately for a good bit less than an hour because I'm anticipating that there will be lots of questions.

[47 : 28] So, I hope that there are. So, please, if you've got a question you want to ask, then do raise your hand. And also, if you want to catch me individually at the end to discuss a situation in the school or whatever, then please do so.

But has anyone got any questions that they want to ask now? Gentleman over there. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.