

Teenage Promiscuity

Rod S. Mays, B.A., M.Ed., D.Min.

Dr. Mays is currently pastor of the St. Paul Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi. This article also appeared in a recent issue of Restoration, a publication of Family Counseling and Resources, Inc.

Popular campus speaker Josh McDowell announced in February to the National Religious Broadcasters the results of a survey concerning sex among evangelical young people. As one who has spent extensive time counseling teens and their parents, as well as doing pre-marital counseling, I do not find the statistics to be shocking, but I am alarmed. However, the fact that teens in conservative congregations are only 10-15% behind the general population in respect to sexual activity may be surprising to some pastors, youth workers, and parents. By age 19, the poll revealed that 43% of those surveyed had experienced intercourse, with another 12% reporting sexual activity short of that.

The Barna Research Group, which did the research for McDowell, reported what appears to be the major contributing factor to this problem. Of young people surveyed, an average of 34 hours a week was spent watching television or listening to the radio. They only talk to their father "about things that really matter" 12 minutes a week and 27 minutes a week with their mother. The Bible ranked low as a source of sexual information. Parents came in third, after peers, and movies.

An evaluation of these contributing factors reveals the following:

(1) Most television programming is committed to a secular and humanistic view of the church and family. Adultery, fornication and homosexuality are often pictured as glamorous and acceptable.

(2) It is most often assumed that if a teenager listens to the radio or music on tapes or records, he listens to "rock" music whose lyrics and performers leave something to be desired. As Dr. D. James Kennedy

pointed out in a Coral Ridge Ministry report on pornography in music, if evangelical teens are listening to the following, it is obvious why they have a problem with promiscuity:

Motley Crue (TOO FAST FOR LOVE - album) "Live Wire" - Ill either break her face or take down her legs . . . Get my way at will; Go for the throat, never let loose, Going in for the kill . . . "Piece of Your Action" - Tight action, rear traction; so hot you really blow me away. Fast moving, wet and ready. Time is right so hang on tight. Live wire, night prowler lay back and take me inside. I want a piece of your action.

Prince (DIRTY MIND) "Sister" - I was only 16, but I guess that's no excuse. My sister was 32, lovely and loose. My sister never made love to anyone but me. Incest is everything it's said to be.

Twisted Sister - Atlantic Records; "We acted out a scene in a middle-American home with a strict father who yells and screams at his son for listening to rock and roll. He lays a tirade on his son and the last line is 'what do you want to do with your life?' Instead of being like a beaten dog, the kid says in an exorcist-like voice, 'I want to rock!' and gets transformed into me! I change my brothers into the other band members and we proceed to destroy Daddy: smash him with doors, pull him by the hair . . . " (The father is pulled down the stairs by his hair . . . Blown out a bedroom wall . . . etc...)

(3) If a child is only spending 12 minutes a week in serious conversation with his or her father and 27 minutes a week with his or her mother, it is obvious that the child's values are being shaped by someone or something else. What does this say about our view of

parental roles?

(4) Since the Bible ranked low as a source of information on sex, is it any wonder that a different world view is shaping the minds of our children? This definitely reveals a lack of consistent teaching of a Biblical world and life view in our churches. Also, this low ranking of the Scriptures calls into question the curricula of Christian schools. How many of these young people surveyed were enrolled in Christian schools? (We already know the content of the curricula of public education.)

(5) Movies and friends outrank parents as a source of information about sex. Again, whose values are being taught? Paul Vitz, writing on "Theories of Moral Education" in Whose Values: The Battle for Morality in Pluralistic America, edited by Carl Horn says. . . "However, it would be a mistake to assume that the removal of these egregious examples of publicly supported moral subjectivism would suffice to solve the ethical problems of modern American society. Although exposing "the myth of values neutrality" surrounding such liberal secular ideology is itself a desirable end, our

efforts must go much further than that or, as in the biblical parable, we may find "seven worse demons" coming in to fill the void. First, our arguments must not be directed exclusively at this or that theory. Rather, we must make our case at the presuppositional level, and this requires something of a developed "world view." Those with traditional beliefs and values must learn to identify faulty assumptions whether about the nature of man, the existence of higher law, the role of families in the formation of character, or a host of other basic issues. Second, those who object to secular, relativistic approaches to the teaching of moral values must do more than just complain. Alternate theories and models must be developed, proposed, and supported in the marketplace of ideas. Thoughtful alternate programs and textbooks must be developed. Parents must be concerned enough about the education of their children to become intimately involved in the process, something which can require great personal sacrifice. And finally, religious believers should be most careful not to make the same rationalist mistake of assuming that morals are mere cognitive commitments. We all know it is usually

not so hard to know what is good - the hard part is to do it. The moral life is a **way of life**, made possible by God's grace and involving all that man is: intellect, heart (emotions), and will. Let us pray that future generations will be given every opportunity to choose this way of life for themselves."

Dealing with promiscuity among our teenagers must involve at least two **fundamental presuppositions**, both of which involve the ministry of the church.

(1) The family is given prominence in the Bible. Therefore, the covenantal structure of the family and parental roles clearly give parents the responsibility to nurture their children on the authority of the Word of God. Marriage was instituted at the outset of human history. (cf Gen. 2:21-24; Matt. 19:5, Mark 10:6,7). Marriage models itself after the awesome mystery of Christ's union with the church (Eph. 5:32). The promises of the covenant are given to believers and their children (Gen. 17; Acts 2:39). The family is of such importance that God protects it with His law. All of the Ten Commandments apply to the protection and maintenance of the family. (1-4 the importance of knowing God and honoring Him in true worship, in order for the family to be blessed, 5th obligation of children, 6th - protection of the existing family as well as the unborn, 7th - purity of marriage, 8th - right of private property, 9th practice of integrity and honesty, **10th** contentment.) All of these references show the family to be so basic to the fabric of our society. One of the reasons for rampant social disorder and the drastic erosion of authority and promiscuity among teenagers is clearly the proliferation of weak, unhealthy families. Weak, undisciplined families almost assure a disintegrating society. The education of children is primarily the responsibility of the parents. **This includes sex education.** There is a growing tendency for all aspects of education to be removed from the parent's oversight. Sometimes this responsibility is deliberately forfeited by the parents. On the matter of sex education, prominent radio speaker and psychologist Dr. James Dobson believes that this should begin at age 3 or 4 and should continue in an open, frank and honest fashion through puberty, certainly with more specific issues being addressed all through adolescence. Only parents can provide this in an

atmosphere that does not divorce Biblical morality and responsibility of sex from a study of anatomy and physiology. **Amorality or neutrality in sex education is as dangerous as a cocked gun.** If parents fail in this responsibility, or if they are unqualified or reluctant, the church must step in and assist the parents. If not, McDowell's survey will continue to be proven true in **that our children's values about sex will be developed by a biased media, or immoral friends.**

The family is a place of fellowship. Our society specializes in cutting people off from each other and alienating us from the idea that family relationships are very important; proven by the fact that the teens in this survey spent 12 minutes a week in meaningful conversation with their father and 27 minutes a week with their mother. **To counter promiscuity,** we must emphasize the home as a place of communication and fellowship. We must shape the minds of our children with Biblical self-control. **We must teach them that it is better to be alone than to be in bad company.** (I Cor. 15:3) If we do not teach them, their peers will influence their sexual behavior.

The family is a place of refuge. It not only provides an insulation against our culture. Within the family structure there is accountability. We must not allow our children to "Get in over their heads." The question is not how much can they "get away with" and still survive, but what can they do to bring glory to God?

(2) The second fundamental presupposition has to do with our use of language in dealing with sinful sexual behavior. A Biblical definition of promiscuity is understood to be indiscriminate sexual behavior, even though the editor of a prominent magazine has defined promiscuity as having sex with more than one person in one day.

A common phrase, that sometimes defuses a good theological or philosophical debate, is: "It's just a matter of semantics." Words mean different things to different people in different times. This is especially true with non-Christian social language, i.e., psychological labeling, however there's more involved than semantics. For instance, so much altered language or "newspeak" intentionally removes the edge of descriptive Biblical

language that takes into account sin. Adultery is now an affair. Teenagers who commit fornication are considered sexually active teens. Homosexuals are now gay; their sodomy is expressed in the freedom to practice an alternative lifestyle. Abortionists do not call themselves pro-death. Therefore, they are pro-choice (everyone has a "free will"). They are free to choose to murder the unborn. However, this phrase "pro-choice" breaks down for the feminist when it's applied to child abuse or wife-abuse. What about the alcoholic?" What happened to drunkards? "Alcoholism" has universally been considered a disease until a recent Supreme Court decision declared it to be willful neglect or a moral failure. If it is a disease; is it fair to arrest someone for "a disease"? Also, to be consistent, cocaine or heroin addiction must also be a disease. Drunk driving should be alcoholic driving. You see, all of this re-labeling and "newspeak" softens the blow of Biblical language and opens the door for numerous inconsistencies and unbiblical explanations. Of course that's what a humanistic culture wants. Sin can not be eradicated, diverted or altered. It can be forgiven in Christ. God takes it seriously and so must we!!

*If we are going to refute the findings of this survey, we must once again use Biblical language. **To remove the edge of descriptive Biblical language is not really loving our teens.** To love them is to tell them the truth. The truth is that sin has consequences. The epidemic proportions of sexual disease along with the threat of the new plague AIDS may indeed curb fornication. But for our covenant children, we want their behavior shaped not just by the fear of disease, but more importantly, by the fear of God.*