

Erwin W. Lutzer. *The Truth About Same-Sex Marriage*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004. 118 pp. \$7.99 (paper). Reviewed by Don Green.

Erwin Lutzer, the long-time pastor of historic Moody Church in Chicago, provides this brief contribution to the current literature on homosexuality. Unlike White and Niell, Lutzer is more concerned to give an analysis of the contemporary problem of the legalization of same-sex marriage from a biblical perspective (9).

Lutzer writes with a pastoral warmth and a polemic urgency on the modern issue. He calls the church to examine itself before speaking against homosexuality, stating among other things, “We must be as concerned about our own sins as we are about the sins of the homosexual community” (11), and “We must repent of the double standard that sees the sin of homosexual behavior in a different category than adultery, premarital sex, and pornography” (38).

He also urges believers to recognize that not all homosexuals are extreme radicals trying to advance “the homosexual agenda.” Some are simply confused young people; others have adopted the homosexual lifestyle but are looking for a way out (38). The discerning pastor will heed Lutzer’s distinctions so he can minister either a word of rebuke to the radical or a word of hope and forgiveness to the homosexual under conviction of sin.

Lutzer seems to have two main purposes in writing the book. First, he explains why homosexuality is wrong. He defends that thesis by briefly affirming the biblical view of marriage that consists of one man and one woman (45-50). Sexual relationships outside of marriage—including homosexual relationships—can only lead to brokenness as God’s design for marriage is abandoned (53-56). He also pertinently warns against the consequences of same-sex marriage upon the children who are raised in the midst of such a relationship (57-70). Finally, he gives concise responses to arguments advanced in favor of homosexual marriage (71-88). All of these sections are helpful at some points.

Secondly, he issues a call to the church to respond to these developments in American society. He says the church must work internally to strengthen its families and the lives of the unmarried (91-96). In the neighborhood and in the marketplace, Christians must be vocal to express their values in a loving but firm way (96-100). In politics, Christians must support political efforts to support opposition to homosexual marriage (100-104). Finally, he issues a call to watchful prayer as the only hope for success (105-109).

While much of Lutzer’s book is profitable, some readers will have important differences with him. As he calls Christians to political involvement, he exhorts the reader to set aside doctrinal differences with others who also oppose homosexual marriage. He includes Catholics as compatible comrades (100). One may legitimately question whether present political expediency is sufficient grounds to set aside the doctrinal issues that launched the Reformation, and

whether there is eternal value in a superficial unity with those whose “doctrinal differences” actually indicate that they need to repent and believe in the gospel. Unfortunately, as a practical matter, the call to set aside doctrine for the sake of politics will always lead to a setting aside of evangelism. Such alliances are not the path to building the kingdom of God (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).

Lutzer also does not explain how his call to political action can be reconciled with his other comments exhorting the church to reach out to the homosexual community. The very nature of the American political process forces confrontation with the opposing agenda. It will become a stumbling block to the gospel. How can Christians legitimately treat homosexuals as opponents in one breath and preach the gospel to them in the next breath? Is the church’s mission one of political reform or evangelism (cf. Matthew 28:18-20 and 2 Corinthians 5:20)? Let Christian leaders choose wisely; ultimately they cannot have it both ways.

Ultimately, homosexuality is a spiritual problem that shows the hovering wrath of God (Romans 1:18-32). As such, it requires the spiritual solution found only in the gospel. Political victories may produce a society that is outwardly more moral, but they cannot turn away the wrath of God. We must distinguish between the agenda for a moral America and the agenda for a flourishing church. The two are not equivalent.

Finally, today’s Christian leader must remember the pastoral needs of his flock as he addresses this issue. Perhaps America *is* changing irreversibly. Perhaps our children *will* inherit a society more openly wicked than what we received from prior generations. But that is hardly cause for despair! Pastors need to remind their flocks that the Bible said that evil men would proceed from bad to worse (2 Timothy 3:13). So why are we surprised and frightened when we see that happen in real life? More than a call to political action, believers today need to hear the triumphant certainty of a sovereign God who still reigns over all, and they need to hear the call to live a godly life in the midst of a crumbling society. Just as righteous Boaz and Ruth honored God in the wicked days of the judges, so the tender believer of this generation can live righteously even if the most radical of homosexual agendas becomes reality.

The Truth About Same-Sex Marriage hints at these surpassing truths and makes many helpful observations along the way. Lutzer will helpfully stimulate thinking on some issues, but the limitations of the scope and content of the book mean that it will not be the final stop on analyzing this crucial matter.

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