

# ***Discipleship in a Gender-Confused Culture***

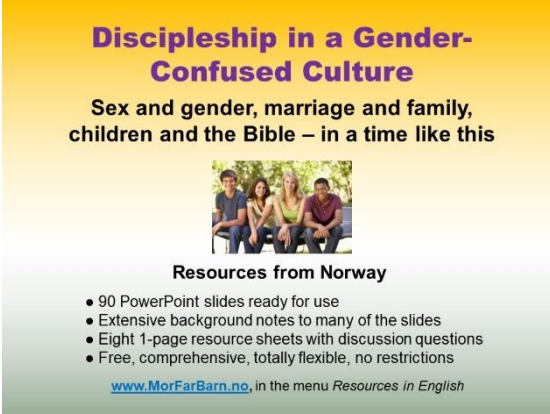
***The Bible, sex, gender and family ethics***

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**Menu: Resources in English**

## **Topic 1:**

***“The marriage and gender debate in  
church and society”***



**Discipleship in a Gender-Confused Culture**  
Sex and gender, marriage and family,  
children and the Bible – in a time like this



**Resources from Norway**

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**Detailed background material for:**

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Love from Norwegian brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, our Lord!

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### Some crucial questions



- **Are the world and mankind created?**  
**Is there a Creator who holds us responsible?**  
– Or do we live in a universe without a Creator or God?
- **Is marriage God's design for one man and one woman?**  
– Or is marriage a 'social construct', a man-made invention, which we are free to define and redefine as we like?
- **Is it a God-given right for children to know their father and mother?** – Or is planned fatherlessness or motherlessness in a child's life in accordance with God's will?
- **Are homosexual relationships in harmony with God's will?** – Or does the Bible teach that sexual relationships belong within a marriage between a man and a woman?
- **Is biological sex and gender defined on the basis of feelings and preferences, or on biology?** How many biological sexes are there? What about XX and XY chromosomes?

### SOME CRUCIAL QUESTIONS

During the last few years the debate about gender and sexuality, intimate relationships, marriage and children has been intense in different contexts and in many parts of society. There are now radically different opinions about issues which were taken for granted by the majority of people just a few years ago.

Throughout history, and indeed up to fairly recently, most people would have agreed on the answers to the questions on this slide. They affect us all, not least our children and grandchildren, so we think you will find these questions worth pondering.

A lot of Christians feel very challenged by the way our society is developing. Furthermore, many are uncertain and perhaps a little confused, as they are unsure what to think regarding the pressure exerted on them by the media, friends, youth culture and the educational system.

## The example and teaching of Jesus

### CREATED AND LOVED BY GOD

Everyone is created by God, loved by Him and has the same worth as all other human beings.

### LOVING MY NEIGHBOUR

As Christians we are called to meet everyone with the love of Jesus – in words, attitudes and actions.

### GRACE and TRUTH

Both are necessary and biblical – not *only* grace, or *only* truth. They are like two wings, two oars, or train tracks. Both grace and truth are important and indispensable.



## THE EXAMPLE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

Jesus' teaching and His example give us all we need in order to meet other people in a warm, respectful and friendly way. We are not called to judge them, regardless of how much we disagree, and regardless of how they live. On the contrary: Jesus calls us to tell people that they are loved by God and valuable in His eyes, and that His will is best for everyone, even though it may not be easy.

The question *What would Jesus do?* is very relevant to us, especially concerning the topics included in this teaching. We need to learn from Jesus concerning our words, attitudes and actions.

We want to look at three foundational truths in Christian faith and ethics:

- CREATED AND LOVED BY GOD
- LOVING MY NEIGHBOUR
- GRACE AND TRUTH

■ **CREATED AND LOVED BY GOD.** A lot of secular people think that Christians judge them, that we think we are better than others, and that we think we are more valuable and more loved by God than they are. The truth is that we are all in the same boat. We are all made in His image, loved and valuable, at the same time, however, we continually live at odds with His will and we need His forgiveness and a new start every day.

Everyone is loved by God, but not everything in the world and in our lives is aligned with His will. Due to the effects of sin and our weakness, egoism and wounds, we all need God's guidance and leading, His forgiveness and power.

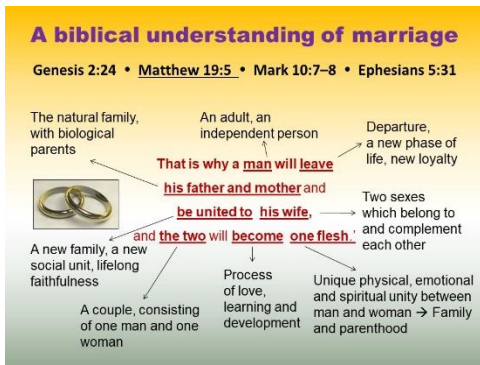
■ **LOVING MY NEIGHBOUR.** If Jesus is our role model, and if we want to follow Him and become more and more like Him, then loving our neighbour is extremely important. Jesus said that the command to love your neighbour as yourself is as important as loving God, see Matthew 22:34–40.

Love is not an emotion, it is words, attitudes and actions that show that we desire the best for people, regardless of who they are, what they think or how they live. True Christian love is characterised by loving people *despite* what they say and do, not *because* they agree with us.

■ **GRACE AND TRUTH.** See John 1:14+17. Jesus brought both grace and truth: they are interwoven. Grace without truth becomes kindness for its own sake, relativism and an unbiblical message. On the other hand, truth without grace can soon develop into self-righteousness, pride and hardness of heart. Jesus showed that the order is often important: first comes grace, then truth.

Two wings, two oars, train tracks: if one wing falls off a plane there will be a disaster. If we only row with one oar, we will go round in circles. If one of the train tracks is damaged or removed the train will have an accident.

**Ephesians 4:14-15:** Our ideal, even in the midst of false teaching, confusion and manipulation is to be 'speaking the truth in love'.



## BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE

This slide illustrates the Bible's teaching on marriage. The verse is found in the Creation story and is quoted and confirmed by both Jesus and Paul.

This verse has been one of the core texts in every Christian wedding in all denominations throughout history.

Throughout church history the idea that marriage is God's design for one man and one woman has been one of the teachings which is most agreed upon across all denominations. This continues to be the case. There is just a small per cent of Christian denominations and churches worldwide which have redefined marriage at its very foundations. (An overview article in a Christian newspaper in Norway some few years ago showed that just two-three per cent of the world's Christians belong to such denominations.)

In the Bible text it is interesting to realise the meaning of the expression 'hold fast to/joined to' (*dabaq* in Hebrew). This word may also be translated 'to be glued together'.

**Radical gender-neutral ideology**

This ideology is the main challenge (and problem). Homosexuality is only the tip of the iceberg. Radical gender-neutral ideology is in conflict with fundamental truths in Christian theology, teachings and ethics about human life.

1. **Biological sex**
2. **Gender**
3. **Sexuality**
4. **Parenthood**
5. **Children**
6. **Marriage**
7. **Family**

## THE CHALLENGE FROM RADICAL GENDER IDEOLOGY

This is a radically new way to think about biological sex, gender and sexuality, and in Western countries it is making rapid inroads into most areas of society, from kindergartens and schools to the arts, politics and legislation.

This new ideology will probably be an increasing challenge for individual Christians, churches and Christian organisations. Large parts of the population seem to be changing their perspective on:

**1. Biological sex.** Biology shows without any doubt that there are only two biological sexes. There are only two types of reproductive cells: male sperm and female egg. Reproduction in other ways does not exist. This is the case for both the animal kingdom and the botanical kingdom.

Confusing sex and gender is serious and has to be explained and exposed. There exists a great diversity of subjective genders dependent on subjective feelings and preferences, but no diversity of sexes.

**2. Gender.** In some parts of the West the general understanding of biological sex and gender is changing rapidly. The definition of man and woman, and mother and father, is often trivialised. Our own children and grandchildren may very well be taught in kindergarten and school that there are lots of genders, and that some children are 'born in the wrong body'. An increasing number of people in the West think that gender is not decided by biology, but by their emotions. According to this way of thinking, a person *is* the gender they *feel* they are.

**3. Sexuality.** In this ideology the understanding of the reason and framework for sexuality is redefined from its very core. The context of sexuality and the connection between sexuality and love, sexuality and faithfulness, and sexuality and parenthood is being dissolved.

**4. Parenthood.** Parents are not necessarily mother and father. For more and more people, having two mothers or two fathers is seen to be just as natural, and just as good, not only for the child, but also for the parents, relatives and society. Who are a child's parents? There are now lots of different answers to this, and all types of parenthood are seen to be just as natural, normal and child-friendly – both for individuals and for society in general.

**5. Children.** Children no longer have a God-given right to their own mother and father. The planned absence of a father or mother in a child's life is defined as ethically defensible and good. Children are no longer seen as a gift, but as a right. An increasing number of people think it is absolutely fine to get a baby through the international multi-billion fertility market, where the trade consists in sperm, eggs, donors and surrogate mothers.

**6. Marriage.** Marriage is no longer understood as God's institution for a man and a woman. Rather, it is perceived to be a social construct, something man-made which any parliament has the authority to change. In several countries there is no longer an objective, established definition of marriage. The effect of this is that people now ask the following: if two women can get married, then why not three? Is their love of less value? Is there really anything sacred about the number/digit 2? We can see examples of this in several countries, for instance in Norway, where the organisation PolyNorge (PolyNorway) is trying to gain the acceptance of, and a legal framework for, marriage-type relationships between more than two people.

**7. Family.** The understanding of family and relatives is being changed at its foundations. The mother-father-child relationship is no longer understood as unique, and no longer has a special position. It is now classed as just one type of relation among many definitions of a normal family that are of equal value. The phrase 'nuclear family' comprising mother, father and child now sounds negative to many people. The nuclear family is often not seen to be the basic and most important building block of society, as it traditionally has been in more or less all civilisations and societies.



## The fertility market

This slide – which is a copy from a Norwegian website called foreldre.no (meaning «parents.no» in English) shows in a dramatic way how many people's view regarding conception, children and parenthood is undergoing a radical change in our days. The message stands in sharp contrast to the biblical theology of conception, parenthood, family and children's rights to both their mother and father.

The introduction to the article reads: «Do you want a child with a cool donor who has higher education and dark hair? Or would you prefer a blond and blue-eyed

baby? Just get out your credit card and order your dream baby.» The rest of the article tells Norwegian women how to about in order to contact a fertility clinic in Denmark and buy insemination with semen from a donor.

This example may seem far-fetched to some people, but it is in fact a reality that thousands of women in many countries make use of each year. The fertility industry is a big billion dollar business.

Even many top politicians endorse this business. Below you see a translated quotation from a book written in 2017 by a well-known Norwegian politician (together with a former leader of the biggest LGBT organisation in Norway). The book has the title «Homo», with the following sub-title: «For you who are, wondering if you are or want to become homo». This politician has recently been a minister in the Norwegian government.

### «Yes, you can have children

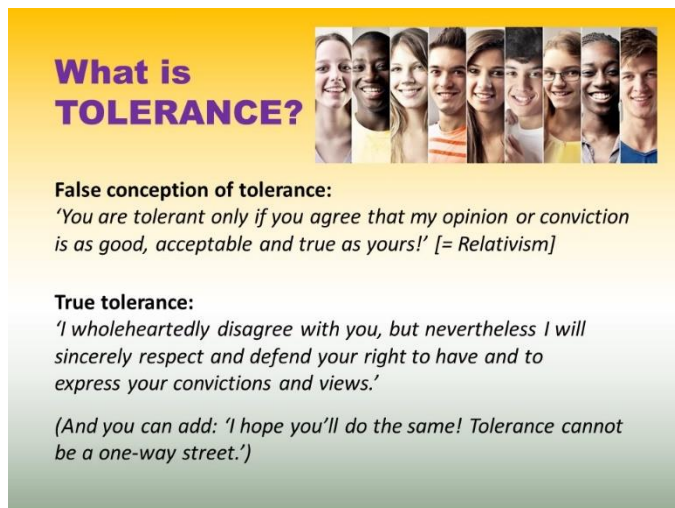
There is a multitude of websites and fertility clinics which sell semen. They offer varied information about the person you are buying from. In most cases you get to know height, education, colour of hair and eyes, and also the health profile of the donor you choose. Other clinics give you more information. You can buy childhood and adult pictures of the donor, soundtracks of his voice, video interviews, supplementary profile with personality tests and the impression that the donor has made on the staff of the clinic. You can shop the characteristics you want, dependent on what you are willing to pay.» (page 223)



The quotation in the original Norwegian text:

### Joda, du kan få barn

«Det finnes et mylder av nettsider og banker som selger sæd. De gir ulik informasjon om hvem du kjøper fra. I de fleste tilfeller får du vite høyde, utdanning, hår- og øyefarge samt helseprofil på donoren du velger. Andre klinikker gir deg mer informasjon. Du kan kjøpe barnebilder, voksenbilder, lydfil av stemmen, videointervju, utfyllende profil med personlighetstester og inntrykket den aktuelle donoren har gitt personalet ved klinikken. Du kan shoppe de egenskapene du vil, avhengig av hva du er villig til å betale.» (side 223)



**What is TOLERANCE?**

**False conception of tolerance:**  
*'You are tolerant only if you agree that my opinion or conviction is as good, acceptable and true as yours!' [= Relativism]*

**True tolerance:**  
*'I wholeheartedly disagree with you, but nevertheless I will sincerely respect and defend your right to have and to express your convictions and views.'*

*(And you can add: 'I hope you'll do the same! Tolerance cannot be a one-way street.')*

## WHAT IS TOLERANCE?

Christians are often accused of being intolerant. Is this correct? It may certainly sometimes be correct, but very often it is not true. It is actually no problem to disagree deeply but still showing deep and true tolerance. In fact, tolerance presupposes disagreement! You don't need to be tolerant if you agree with one another.

**A. A common misunderstanding:** The word tolerance is often misunderstood today. On many occasions it is confused with relativism, which

states that there is no absolute truth, but that everything is equally good. ('Everything is relative'). Many young people think that tolerance means not criticizing the opinions of others. Or they may say that a person is intolerant because he defends his own argument as better and more true than the arguments of the opponent. This is of course not true.

**B. True tolerance:** A classic definition of the word tolerance is this: *"I profoundly disagree with you say, but I will respect and defend to the death your right to say it."*

(This quote is often attributed the French author and philosopher Voltaire, who played an important role in the 18th century Enlightenment.)

Therefore: True tolerance is not about agreeing or thinking that everything is just as good, true or valid. True tolerance means that you respect and defend your opponent's freedom and right to hold a different conviction than you yourself hold.

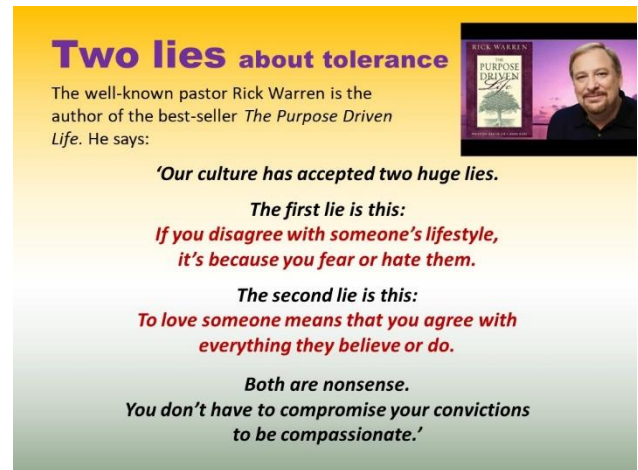
Tolerance is not a one-way street, it has to go both ways. Sometimes the people who say they are very tolerant are in fact the ones who judge their opponents most harshly.

Christian individuals, churches and organisations do not want to force others to live at variance to their beliefs, nor to dictate the law. But as all other citizens we ought to have an unquestionable right to debate and work for what we believe to be true, good and right, and that which is best for society, without being accused of being intolerant, judgemental or lacking in love.

## TWO LIES ABOUT TOLERANCE

This slide looks at the word *tolerance* from different angles than the previous slide, *What is tolerance?*

Rick Warren's quote is thought-provoking. Reflect on its content and on any experiences you may have relating to this.



**Two lies about tolerance**

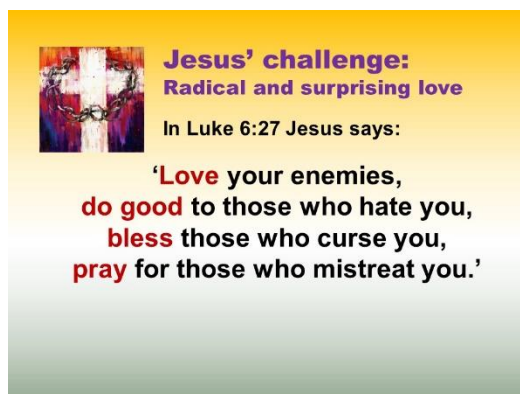
The well-known pastor Rick Warren is the author of the best-seller *The Purpose Driven Life*. He says:

**'Our culture has accepted two huge lies.**

**The first lie is this:**  
***If you disagree with someone's lifestyle, it's because you fear or hate them.***

**The second lie is this:**  
***To love someone means that you agree with everything they believe or do.***

**Both are nonsense.**  
***You don't have to compromise your convictions to be compassionate.'***



**Jesus' challenge:  
Radical and surprising love**

In Luke 6:27 Jesus says:

**'Love your enemies,  
do good to those who hate you,  
bless those who curse you,  
pray for those who mistreat you.'**

## THE CHALLENGE OF JESUS

Staying true to the Bible's message about biological sex and gender, sexuality, marriage and children can be extremely demanding in different areas of life, for example at work, in public and in our private lives.

It is of utmost importance trying to communicate our beliefs with *knowledge* and true Christian *love*, inspired by Jesus Himself, in the situations in which we find ourselves.

## RADICAL LOVE

We can't produce this kind of love ourselves, it is a fruit of a living relationship with Christ.

Many persecuted Christians around the world are examples showing us that such a love *is* possible – with God's help – when we are grafted into the vine. See John 15:1–17. It is thought-provoking to read the words of verse eighteen, when Jesus says: 'If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.'

The Christian faith is basically not a RELIGION with rituals and rules, but a RELATIONSHIP with the resurrected, living Jesus Christ.

## FAITHFULNESS TO THE BIBLE, AND BROTHERLY LOVE

As Christians we have to take the fact seriously that being faithful to the Bible is also about our love for our fellow man. The well-known text in 1 Corinthians 13 gives a crystal-clear, heart-searching message about love:

■ *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.* (1 Corinthians 13:1–3 NIV)

If we live in a culture which is often at odds with our deepest convictions, it is fitting for us to remember this very important text written by Paul in 2 Timothy 1:7:

*The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us **power, love and self-discipline.*** (2 Timothy 1:7 NIV)

We will certainly need more of these three qualities and values in the coming years.

**Communicating the truth:  
A positive message  
regarding fundamental values**

- **YES** to the Bible as our authority for faith, doctrine and life
- **YES** to marriage as God's design for one man and one woman
- **YES** to the uniqueness and significance of the mother-father-child relationship
- **YES** to children's God-given right to know their own mother and father
- **YES** to the perspective of the child in the theology and practice of the Christian church
- We are not called to **win** discussions, but to **witness** about what we believe, in whom we believe, and why we believe



## COMMUNICATING THE TRUTH: A MESSAGE OF 'YES' TO FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

The Christian's starting point and motivation in a lot of different conversations and debates should be to say a resounding 'YES!' to God's will, more than saying 'NO' to certain opinions and ideologies.

A consequence of saying Yes to important values that we defend, of course implies that we say 'no' to the opposite of what we believe. But the best strategy is often to start with what we are FOR, and not

what we are against.

If we were to define the debate about biological sex, gender, sexuality and intimate relationships as a sort of cultural battle, then our part of the battle is predominantly *defensive*. We are defending values, truth, God's design and an understanding of reality that we are convinced of.

At the same time, the Bible encourages us to expose, uncover and counter ideologies, systems of thought and trends which go against God's will and His truth. See 2 Corinthians 10:3–5; 11:3–4 and Ephesians 6:10–20. But this should be done in a God-honoring way, not treating our opponents as enemies, but as fellow citizens created in the image of God and adversaries in opinion and belief.

It should be our desire to focus on God's will and His commands, while simultaneously showing Christian love to everyone, including those who sharply disagree with us. We need to distinguish between *ideologies* and *individuals*, between issues and opinions on a certain topic and the person(s) we are discussing with. We want the best for everyone and ask God to help us meet everyone with friendliness and respect.