

Protecting or Overprotecting Our Children?

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Question: "My husband's two sisters are lesbians who are raising children with their partners." So you've got this Christian couple, and the guy has two sisters who both have lesbian partners, and they're raising children with their partners. "My husband and myself have six children, and we get together with his family." So, at least these two sisters and probably their partners and the kids and maybe even more family, but obviously these lesbian couples are in the crowd. "We get together with his family for birthdays and various other things. However, I'm very confused as to how I should view this situation, as I worry about the exposure of their lifestyle to my children. Especially, given that it is a sin that is so celebrated in society today. But on the other hand, I want to love them and hope that one day God may use us to bring them into a relationship with Him. Am I potentially doing great harm to my children by allowing them to be exposed to this lifestyle? What is the correct biblical way to view this situation? We're due to move to the country soon and given we will be a 2 1/2 hour drive from one of his sisters, she has suggested they set up a tent in our backyard and come and stay with us for a night or two. I just feel so uncomfortable about this and unsure of how to respond, yet if it were my brother or my husband's mom, or any other person I know who is living in sin, I don't think I would feel quite so awkward about it. This is kind of off the subject, but I love both Frances Chan and Paul Washer, yet both appear to view raising children very differently. It seems Paul Washer very much protects his children from the outside world as much as possible, and his children are homeschooled. Frances Chan puts his children in the public school system as he wants them exposed to the world as much as possible, as he sees it as a greater opportunity for them to share their faith. This is my dilemma. I can't seem to discern what is the biblically correct thing to do. As much as I'd love to protect my children from the world, I know this is not possible, yet does that make it okay to just blatantly throw them into situations that their minds simply can't comprehend? Where do I draw the line?"

Discussion:

Tim: So, what sayest thou? What do we do with that? I mean, come on, we've got parents here who obviously have thoughts. If you have children, you are undoubtedly if you're a Christian, at least beginning to think about this. (Incomplete thought) You know when you have little ones? Everything seems so protected before they're school aged. (Incomplete thought) There was a time we had a 5 year old, a 3 year old, and a 1 year old. Everything's pretty protected. You can regulate movies and computers and TV and who comes in your house. They're with you all the time. Most of the time these days I don't know where my children are. I mean, I could take good guesses, but they're here, they're at school, they're with friends, they're working. I don't know where they are. I could ask Ruby. She typically knows better. When they're little, you've got them all, at least relatively speaking, they're safe. All it takes is them to get to school age, because then you've got to make decisions about schooling. And then they start to get to that age where they want to do stuff on the cell phone or they want to do stuff on the computer.

Then you've got to start making decisions about that. And usually, you know, you let them do a little. And they always want to take more than what you let them. You try to put up these fences. What are we watching on TV? You get your computer deal there and you start looking them up. What's the foul language? What's this content? Then somebody wants them to spend the night somewhere, and it's like, no, we don't want to do that. And even if it's grandma and grandpa - yeah, but grandma and grandpa aren't saved. Do we do that? Or don't we do that? Or even somebody in the church is saying can we have your child stay over and you're like I don't know if we should do that. All these decisions come up. And you live out in the country - you live where Paul Washer does, and you're out there in the mountains and kind of secluded and probably have acreage and you can hunt; you've got woods around you.

I remember calling Bob Jennings. Bob, you had a farm and you could put all the kids to work. I'm in the city. We try to let our child play with the kids in the neighborhood. Then they come back and they're using this language. And it's like, okay, we can't do that anymore. You're making these decisions all the time. And then schooling, as they start getting older. They're getting in the higher grades. And then you've got some that are saved or some that are marginally saved or some that are definitely still lost. You're trying to figure it out. There's something in you that just wants to move to Little House on the Prairie if you can find where that is and just live there. Protect everybody and be "Pa" and "Ma."

But we live in a real world. And then there's the Frances Chan reality too - are we supposed to be salt and light and how are we supposed to do that? You know, what if God leads you to start a church in the inner city? And actually, this is a tame inner city compared to St. Louis or Detroit or Washington D.C. But, still... my kids see things here on the East side that most kids don't see. Ruby was saying just how interesting it is just to drive from our house over to the highway, and the things you see on the East side. So what do you do? Do you buy a little compound and move everybody in the church on it and everybody's protected? Or do you throw your children into the public school? Do you say, no, it's got to be home schooling? Do you sit there and curse the people who put their kids in public school? Like, you're messing up our church! Most of us are homeschoolers and you're the aberration. Why do you do that?

Okay, come on, this lady's on the phone with you and this is your sister; this is your cousin, and she's gotten saved and she's got these problems now. Her husband has two lesbian sisters and they've got partners. They've adopted kids and the whole thing's just deviant. What do you do? What Scripture do you apply?

(from the room): I would say if you can't convert them, maybe try to keep your distance. Because my step-father raised me, and he divorced my mom later in life. He became gay, or maybe he always was, I don't know. He has this man and lives here in San Antonio. He wants to come over to my house sometimes. I've let him come over once before with his boyfriend. Everything seemed to be okay for a while, then they started getting more casual and started kissing in front of me and in front of my family. After a while, I was just like, I can't take it. It just drives me nuts. I have to have them out. I've never invited them back again. It's just too much.

I've talked to him. He knows my stance, and I'm definitely familiar with his stance. So, I don't know. He's not going to change my way, and I'm not going to change his as far as how we are right now.

I think that maybe the first thing to communicate with the sisters is letting them know that we do not agree with your lifestyle. Just making that the first thing they know and then decisions after that, I don't know.

Tim: But that is how it is. I mean, I think that's key that we need to figure out what's non-negotiable for us. This lies in an area where we need to be careful. We need to be really careful that we're not judging one another. I think there's a lot of Romans 14 issues at stake here. And I think what happens is each one of us needs to figure out where are the non-negotiables and where are the areas that for instance, as my children grow and mature, or perhaps get saved, what I'm willing to allow to happen to my family, or what I'm willing to allow in my home, or what I'm willing to allow concerning their schooling may actually change. One of the things I think is we don't want to just take a static position on this.

For instance, when I read this, one of the first things I thought about - Corrie Ten Boom. Corrie says that when she was young, her teacher at school mentioned sex. She didn't know what that was. She came home and she asked her dad. "Dad, the teacher today spoke about sex." It came up with him. And he said Corrie, when we go to Amsterdam, he said, you know I take my heavy piece of luggage. He said, "do I ask you to carry that?" "No, papa. You carry that." He said, "that's right. It's too heavy for you." And he said it's the same with this. It's too heavy for you right now. So he used that. (unintelligible)

But anyways, I think that's a good example right there is we as parents need to figure out what our children can handle. Now, I recognize, whether or not you're going to let lesbians stay in a tent in the backyard, that may have to do more with some other principles than how old my kids are or what I want my kids to be exposed to. I've thought about these things before. If there was somebody like, I thought about this, parents get put in really difficult situations when their children - especially Christian parents - their children turn out to be gay or lesbian.

And I've thought about that. What if that kind of situation ever happened to me? And I thought, I would want my child and their partner at this table at Thanksgiving. But they would not be able to stay here in the same room together. They would be able to manifest zero homosexual behavior. But I want to be light. And I think if you just shut the door, then we're not being the salt and light. We need to figure out how to be salt and light, and yet, this is my home and my property. And so, on my property, lesbians aren't going to stay in the same tent together. You want to set up a tent in back and one of them stays there and one stays in the bedroom or something and let the kids stay wherever. But, I would want to have impact into their lives. But still, this is my home, my property. I'm going to set the guidelines. And homosexual behavior like kissing? No way. No way. First time that happens, they need to be told, stop. You cannot do

that here, or you need to go. That would be the guidelines for me. As far as what you're exposing your children to, we don't want to be pragmatic.

What does that mean? Basically the ends justify the means. I could say this. Hey, all three of Papa's children are saved. He sent them all to public school. So therefore, conclusion, let's all send our kids to public school because all Papa's got saved. Obviously we don't think like that. But I think on the other hand, when it comes to schooling, she's wanting to compare Frances Chan and Paul Washer. Well, you know, like I say, a lot of it, you can't raise your family in a log cabin in the woods, which is where I'd like to raise mine. I'd like to raise mine where Paul's raising his. But, Ruby and I felt like - I felt God was calling me to the city. And I didn't feel like planting a church in the city and living way out in the country was the way to go about it. I felt like I needed to be here.

Okay, well that had to do, I think, with my calling in the ministry. So then, the next thing is, okay, how do you live in the inner city and raise four children? What do you do? And then we started making decisions from there. I'd love to have a farm just like Bob Jennings had. But I said, Bob, what do I do when I don't have a farm? What am I supposed to do? I don't want my son growing up on the computer all the time. Like that's his only outlet. So, you begin to figure out how to make choices. The thing is too, we don't want to just fall into this mindset that this certain Christian subculture. And that can be easy. Like, you know you go to a church and everybody does it this way. And so you just kind of fall into conformity with it, rather than really in Christian freedom trying to figure out what really is good, what really is best. Sometimes, it's experimentation. We're always sorry for the oldest child. Right, Cheyenne? You get the lousy position. Charity's like, she looks at Joy, and Joy gets away with all sorts of stuff, or Joy gets this, or I had to fight for this. It's like you're done fighting by the time the fourth child comes. It's like you just give them the cell phone or whatever. Whereas Charity, everything was new. Everything had to be scrutinized very closely. No, you can't do that. Once she starts doing it, well, then you let all of them do it even though they're two years apart. There's a lot of experimentation. You're the oldest right? Do you feel that? Or not yet? It probably kicks in more in the teenage years.

(from the room) You didn't mention this, but since your counsel kind of took the parenting direction first and then it went into the practical advice as a parent, what I was thinking is that any decision that we make as parents has to be based on the premise and the prerequisite that we are doing what Scripture clearly commands us to do regarding our children, and that's raising them essentially to be citizens of the kingdom. We can't save them, but we want to prepare them so that they're fed as much as we can instill in them that which is pleasing to God and so, I was just thinking of that and how the outworkings of that, they produce in a child character and things that they know to be true based on God's Word. And I also thought of how God deals with us living in this fallen world that He tells us is in the power of the evil one. And Christ specifically said not to take them out, but to keep them from the evil one. So I guess trying our best to follow that pattern. We're not sovereign. We're not all powerful, but there's that aspect you brought up as far as knowing that our kids are going to be exposed to that, and us

as parents knowing that, but just pleading with the Lord to give us means to protect our children, yet to know that if God saved us and kept us here, and didn't just take us, then we ought to know that - how He uses that argumentation that you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children. I think of Him being the perfect Father leaves His children in a fallen world. Like I said, we're not God, but I just thought that that might be useful as parents.

Tim: One of the things that we want to keep in mind - let me just say this: You know, whoever's writing this probably doesn't know Frances Chan personally or Paul Washer personally. So you want to be careful, because these are her perspectives of these guys, but the reality is Frances Chan may be protecting his children a lot more than she knows. And Paul may actually be exposing his children to things more than she knows. And I would say this, that what we want to do is we want to be wise like Corrie Ten Boom's father, to know when our children are ready for certain things. And that isn't just like an age of accountability that's going to be the same in all of our children. Not only is there this curve, you know, that we tend to be more strict with the oldest one, but we need to be conscious of the realities that the different gender, the different personality and makeup of our children, different maturity level, whether they're saved or whether they're lost... We need to be careful.

And then as we introduce more things, what you want to do as a parent, is you want to walk with your child through it. You want to make sure that the parents are walking with them. So, if you introduce them, say, to sports, which we thought was good for Joshua, because what did it do? It took Joshua who didn't have brothers and didn't have friends in the neighborhood that we wanted him running around with, and so we put him into that environment, but we could walk with him. If there was demonstrations of pride or there was any kind of conflict, we could talk. We could talk. If there was any lackluster effort on his part... You know, sports brings things out. And so we're able to deal with it. What you don't want to have happen is where you so protect and shelter your children, then all of a sudden, one day comes and they go out that door, and they're gone. And now they're hit full in the face with stuff you protected them from and you're not at their side anymore. And they're just swept away with it. I mean, better to break out a bottle of wine, put it on the table, have them taste wine. Better to watch certain movies and show them a standard, that this is unacceptable. God doesn't approve of this.

We would watch movies sometimes and it's like afterwards - you know, the movies I hate most are the religious ones. It's like they distort God. They distort Christ. They distort the biblical accounts. You can say to the children, well, this isn't good. Help your children be discerning. Help them to recognize the world is going to come at you full blast and you're going to have to fight through things. The kids are going to kick back sometimes. And they want more liberty or they want to do this. And there's things you're going to have to know when to fight the battles and fight for their souls and plead with God for wisdom to know what to do. We were constantly trying to weigh out, okay, this specific child - okay, we have some options. We can home school. We could homeschool with Abeka. We could homeschool with a plethora of different kinds of homeschool curriculums. We could take them to FEAST. It could be a combination. We could take them to Town East. We never seriously considered public school, but look, there might be

some cases where a certain charter school; there may be some school districts where it's not a bad thing. (Incomplete thought) We're in the zip code for Houston. It's like the worst. I think it scores 2 out of 10. But, you know, if you lived in Alamo Heights, you might want to send your kids there.

But you have to weigh it all out. If you're going to send them to public school, what are they going to get? Are they going to get the gay/lesbian agenda and transgender stuff? Are they going to get evolution? Are they going to get anti-God kind of philosophies thrown at them? Are they ready for that? I always thought, you know, if Joshua had been saved at the right age, I had thoughts about the possibility of sending some of the kids, perhaps their senior year, to a public school if they were converted, primarily for the sake of evangelism. It didn't happen. But I would consider that. I wouldn't rule it out. (Incomplete thought) You just want to make sure that you have a child that won't buckle to peer pressure. But you have to weigh that out. Every parent is going to have to weigh that out with their children.

Any other thoughts on that?

(from the room) This reminded me of what I've studied about Anthony Norris Groves. He was a missionary in Iraq in Baghdad. He had young children there. It says this, "In Baghdad, young kids faced bullets, shells, flood, plague, famine, and cholera, followed by the loss of their mom, and Henry had a close brush with death. One of the sons almost died. Like it or not, he was hustled into adult life in later years. Henry could not ever remember being a boy. When Norris was visiting India, the boys wrote letters and Norris said, 'My poor dear boys,' in writing about the siege and their prospects in Baghdad, expressed themselves more like old soldiers than children. They have been so accustomed to trials and dangers. And the author says, "In the end, the home schooling that Henry and Frank received amid so many distractions, equipped them remarkably well for adult life. After Norris' death, Henry and Frank continued to work in India." The younger two sons who were sent to a private school and didn't get time with their parents, the author says as he looked back on the lives of the brothers, we might wonder how it was that Henry and Frank - the ones in Baghdad - who suffered all the physical horrors of Baghdad, grew up so sane, balanced, and might almost say conventional. While the younger brothers, who had a commonplace private school upbringing should turn out so strangely. "The reason may lie in the fact that Henry and Frank faced the horrors of Baghdad with their father and mother, secure in their parents' love and affection, while Edward, feeling uncared for and abandoned, suffered the horrors on his own." So kind of like what you said. Am I walking through these things with my kids - whether public school, private school, home school? Am I there side-by-side having a deep relationship with them and communicating with them?

Tim: And the thing is, companionship is such a big factor. Whether that companionship is friends in the neighborhood, friends in the family, friends at the church, friends they make through the Internet, or even those they associate with in TV and movies. Companionship is a massive influence. And you know the thing about those two younger boys, nobody was ever there to say anything about their companionship. In fact, who was it? Some of the guys that

turned out to be great missionaries and pastors, you hear about their younger years and they got put in boarding schools and stuff away from the family, and they said they were just hell holes. But the nice thing is when you're walking close to your children, you can govern the companionship in their life. And the thing is if somebody begins to show friendship towards your child - and I think this is especially a satanic tactic when you're Christians - for the devil to introduce bad companionship possibilities to your children. But to be able to talk to your children and to explain to them why those relationships are not good and are not healthy... But anyway. Let's move on to the next one.