



Window on the World

Window on the World is our weekly opportunity to examine our culture from the vantage point of biblical Christianity. Here you will find the text from Dr. Ryken's "Window on the World" talks from Tenth Presbyterian Church's evening service. If you missed one or wanted to send a copy to a friend, you will be able to find them here.

Please note: there is no "Window on the World" on third Sundays, selected other Sundays, or in July and August.

Windows on the World before 2003 are available in an older format. [Click here](#). Many of these are now published in [My Father's World: Meditations on Christianity and Culture](#) (P&R Publishing, 2002) and in [He Speaks to Me Everywhere: Meditations on Christianity and Culture](#) (P&R Publishing, 2004) by Philip Graham Ryken.



The Latest Scandal in Washington

Dr. Philip Ryken



Series: Window on the World
Date: 10/08/2006

Full Text:

Up until late last week, Congressman Mark Foley served as the United States Representative from the 16th District of Florida. In what is now a painful irony, Representative Foley formerly served as co-chair of the House Caucus on Missing and Exploited Children. Now he has resigned in disgrace for perpetrating the very kind of exploitation he was once responsible to help prevent.

On September 28, ABC News reported that Foley had sent inappropriate email messages from his personal account to a former Congressional page. As you may know, the page program offers gifted high school juniors an opportunity to serve their Representatives by performing clerical duties at the United States Capitol in Washington. The next day another former page had come forward to say that he too had received sexually explicit messages from Congressman Foley, and by the end of the day, Foley had resigned his office. An investigation is now under way to determine the extent of Foley's misconduct, and also the extent to which other members of Congress may have known about his misdeeds.

As one would expect, especially in an election year, these revelations have provoked a firestorm of political outcry. However, they also give us an opportunity to take the moral pulse of our nation. What, exactly, do people think was wrong with what Foley did? And what does the Bible say about this kind of behavior?

At the center of public concern is the fact that pages are minors, and that as such, both they and their parents



have a right to expect protective care from their public leaders. The page program is carefully set up to promote the welfare of the young people who participate. A sexual advance from a member of Congress is an egregious betrayal of this trust. Although to date there have been no allegations of sexual contact, the explicit content of his messages raises legitimate fears of sexual predation.

The homosexual nature of Foley's affections may also have some role in the public response, in which many people are using the language of perversion and degeneracy. Then there is the issue of hypocrisy: Mark Foley belongs to a political party that is publicly identified as a champion of family values, and if there is one thing people will not tolerate, it is moral hypocrisy. These seem to be some of the reasons why Foley's emails have provoked such a vocal response.

It is good to know that neither the U.S. Congress nor the American people will tolerate the homosexual exploitation of children. Today we are too often told that there is no objective difference between right and wrong, particularly when it comes to sexual ethics. People have a right to do whatever they want to do sexually. Yet the American public still believes that some things at least are morally reprehensible. They also believe that public leaders should be held accountable in areas of private as well as public morality.

This is very much in keeping with biblical ethics. When the Bible says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exod. 20:14), it is doing something more than telling us not to cheat on our spouse. It is protecting sexual intimacy for marriage by ruling out any form of sexual impropriety. It is immoral to pursue a sexual relationship that is not first bound by the covenant of marriage (see Gen. 2:24; Mal. 2:14-15). It is immoral for men to have sexual intercourse with men, or for women to have sexual intercourse with women (see Rom. 1:26-27). And it is immoral for a person in power to make a sexual advance towards someone who is in a weaker and more vulnerable position (e.g. Deut. 22:25-27). The biblical category for this kind of abuse is "oppression" (e.g. Deut. 24:14).

Not everyone would agree with all of the statements I have just made. However, their quarrel is not with me; it is with what God has said in his Word. Nevertheless, whether they agree with everything the Bible says about human sexuality or not, most Americans still have the moral instinct to say that what Mark Foley did was wrong. Whether this instinct comes from our country's Christian tradition or whether it comes from the moral law that is written on the human conscience, it reflects the truth that comes from God.

There is one further dimension of the latest scandal in Washington that calls for Christian reflection: Mark Foley's statement that he was sexually molested by a clergyman when he was between the ages of 13 and 15. He is not using this as an excuse, his lawyer says, but to help people understand who he is as a gay man.

Foley's statement opens a window on dark secrets of sexual abuse. When someone is guilty of sexual exploitation, it is easy to treat him with shame and scorn, even to demonize him. Of course it is true that every one of us is fully responsible before God for our own sexual behavior, Mark Foley included. However, it is also true that most of the people who are guilty of sexual abuse were themselves sexually abused, usually as children. This is deeply sad—as sad as anything we know about our fallen world.

While the latest scandal in Washington deserves condemnation, it also calls for deep compassion, fervent prayer, and a healing work of grace that only the gospel can bring. Inside the man who is guilty of homosexual abuse is a young boy who was sinfully violated at the very time he was learning to be a man, especially in his sexuality. Where is the only safe place he can go to receive forgiveness for his own sins, and also compassion for the sins committed against him? He can go to Jesus, who was abused all the way to the cross before rising again with the healing power to make all things new.