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It's All Relative? A Homosexual Revision of "Biblical Family Values"

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Timed for release on the one-year anniversary of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, the [National Gay and Lesbian Task Force](#) released a manifesto for revising our understanding of "biblical family values." [Articles of Faith: Biblical Values for American Families](#), written by Rev. Jay Emerson Johnson, is intended as a response to arguments put forth by those defending marriage against revision. Specifically, the document addresses the [Nashville Declaration on Same-Sex Marriage](#), released by the [Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission](#) of the [Southern Baptist Convention](#). [Personal disclosure: I am a signatory to that statement.]

[Johnson](#), identified as "a member of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Religious Leadership Roundtable," is also an Episcopal priest in Berkeley, California. His main objective is to convince readers that the Bible offers no normative picture of marriage or the family. In the way, he makes some rather striking claims. Take these, for example: "First, it's important to recognize that the most common marriage pattern in the Bible is polygamy: not a union of one man and one woman, but a union of one man and as many women as he could afford to keep (see Solomon, and his 700 wives and 300 concubines). In the Christian scriptures, the two primary figures, Jesus and the Apostle Paul, are both unmarried and childless. Based on the model of Jesus and his disciples, the early church developed a radical model of family that broke with ancient kinship patterns in favor of a religious—and nonbiological—church family."

Well, polygamy is not "the most common marriage pattern in the Bible." Genesis 2 reveals a monogamous heterosexual couple as the biblical ideal. The same ideal is consistently maintained in the New Testament. Just take the writings of the Apostle Paul, for example. Paul may have been single, but he was no advocate of family revisionism or moral relativism, to say the least. Even where polygamy is involved in the Old Testament, it goes without saying that there were no same-sex partners within the circle.

In order to get to any idea of same-sex relationships, Johnson travels the well-worn path of insinuating that Ruth and Naomi were drawn together by something he describes as "same-sex devotion." He argues that "when biblical figures act virtuously, they often do so outside the bounds of 'traditional family.'" Really? Is the relationship between a woman and her daughter-in-law "outside the bounds" of the traditional family structure? Of course not. Johnson went on to suggest that "David and Jonathan's relationship is presented with a tenderness lacking in most biblical marriages."

Look closely at his concluding statement: "Societal definitions of marriage and family will inevitably change over the course of history. It's clear that what is important in the Bible is not a family structure based on biology or even heterosexuality, but the quality of love exhibited in the relationships. And if same-sex couples exhibit such spiritual values, they deserve the legal protection and civil recognition of marriage. If we have any intention of preserving marriage or protecting families, we must base our support on values that are unchangeable: values such as faith, hope, and love. But the greatest among these—whether the couple is same-sex or heterosexual—is love."

A generation of Christians largely untaught and unprepared for this kind of argument represents a vulnerable audience for such a message. If Christians can be convinced that the Bible lacks any normative concept of marriage and family structure, we will face a moral and theological disaster.

FOR FURTHER READING: Rev. Jay Emerson Johnson is identified as co-chair of the Gay Men's issues in Religion Group of the [American Academy of Religion](#). For a look at what they have been up to, check out my column of October 14, 2004, "[The American Academy of Religion's New Theme—Sodomasochism.](#)"

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