Polls are showing that young adults in America are increasingly favoring same-sex marriage, and more likely to favor legalizing same-sex marriage compared to older generations of Americans.

There are important reasons to temper a conclusion that large-scale legalization of same-sex marriage is inevitable because of the beliefs of these emerging adults.

Sometimes demographics are destiny; sometimes they are not.

Consider the following:

1) Younger generations generally tend to be more permissive than their parents.

Young adults are generally more accepting of moving moral boundaries than their parents. This has historically been a hallmark of being young. But young adults tend to become more conservative, generally, as they move into their marriage and parenting years.

And while it’s different issues in every generation, the same trends are seen. The idealized convictions of youth tend to shift with age. How did Reagan win two terms as President in the 1980s just as the 1960s young adults were growing and establishing their lives? The grown-up hippies probably didn’t vote him into office, but their politics changed enough to not keep him out. The ideals of youth in one decade does not necessarily determine the political outcomes of later decades.

2) Generations can tend to be more liberal in the theoretical.

This point is similar to the first. Abortion and divorce have had a heavy toll on this emerging generation of young adults. They have vast experience with it in varying ways - like no other generation - and it has marked them deeply.

For many of their parents, abortion and divorce were held as positive, hopeful changes to personal choice and social mores. But this generation lived through the experimentation in widespread abortion and divorce and their personal experiences have not matched their parents’ hopefulness.

Generations can tend to be more liberal in the theoretical.

Boomers didn’t have any real, previous experience with cohabitation and sexual experimentation. They just sounded like a good idea coming from the mouths of cultural revolutionaries.

The same is likely to be true with same-sex marriage and this generation today. They have no experience whatsoever with the idea, but it sounds good from their vantage point.

But their children will be different because they WILL have experience with same-sex marriage, personally and through their peers, even if it doesn’t grow beyond the few states that have legalized it. And I suspect that – just like with abortion, divorce, cohabitation and freer sex – their experience with it will be worse in various ways than even the most alarmist among us have imagined.
3) **Young adult support for same-sex marriage is thin and not well developed.**

The Public Religion Research Institute – an organization doing some of the major polling on this question - released an interesting survey recently. Their numbers show growing support for same-sex marriage among emerging adults, but what was very interesting is the survey looked at the nature and depth of the conviction of young adults on both abortion and same-sex marriage. Their experience is seen in their response to abortion and their shallow idealism in their response to same-sex marriage.

On abortion, the young adults used strong, convicted top-of-mind words to describe their position on abortion: “Death”, “disgusting”, “sad”, “babies”, “irresponsible”, “Killing an innocent life”, “choice” and “personal”.

The same young adults used very different kinds of words for their feelings on same-sex marriage. Literally comments like: “awesome”, “equal”, “go for it” “How you feel”, “it’s cool” “love”, “no one’s business” “politics” “gross” “not my thing” “weird”.1

Young people might favor same-sex marriage, but it would not be correct to say they have a well thought-out, worked-through conviction on the topic.

So many see it as an issue of “equality” supported in their reaction to the same-sex marriage advocate’s rhetoric and blanket accusation of “hate”, “intolerance” and “bigotry” toward anyone who disapproves of redefining marriage in favor of genderless marriage.

4) **Same-sex marriage supporters have softer convictions and fail to vote.**

The Public Religion Research Institute reports that “a solid majority (54%) of those who oppose same-sex marriage say it is a critical issue, while only 14% of those who strongly favor same-sex marriage say it is a critical issue.”

The Alliance Defense Fund reports that in all the state votes on same-sex marriage over the last decade, 63% of all active voters have voted to affirm natural marriage. The record that counts – the one at the ballot box – show that those who report supporting same-sex marriage are not as likely to show up to vote their convictions.

5) **Young evangelicals are not becoming more politically liberal.**

Baylor sociologists Rodney Stark and Byron Johnson recently wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* that,

> “Major media hailed another Barna report that young evangelicals are increasingly embracing liberal politics. ….National surveys offer no support for this claim…young evangelicals actually remain as conservative as their parents.”

**Conclusion**

We should very much try to connect with emerging young adults on the issue of same-sex marriage and parenting.

But that will be done by faithfully, humbly and thoughtfully making our case on why same-sex marriage and parenting are not smart ideas for all of us. This is based on the reality of how God created humanity universally as male and female and why these two parts of humanity need each other and how the family is the primary institution that bridges this mysterious divide. We cannot give up on this message. This faithfulness is what bore fruit in slowly turning around attitudes on the life issue of abortion.

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