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THE GOSPEL, SEXUALITY, and the FUTURE of MARRIAGE

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EDITORIAL

Unchanging Responsibility in an Ever-Changing World

TIMOTHY PAUL JONES

In a very real sense, everything has now changed,” R. Albert Mohler pointed out in the aftermath of a ruling from the Supreme Court of the United States of America legalizing same-sex marriage.

The highest court of the land has redefined marriage. Those who cannot accept this redefinition of marriage as a matter of morality and ultimate truth, must acknowledge that the laws of this nation concerning marriage will indeed be defined against our will.... In one sense, everything has changed. And yet, nothing has changed. The cultural and legal landscape has changed.... But our Christian responsibility has not changed. We are charged to uphold marriage as the union of

a man and a woman and to speak the truth in love. We are also commanded to uphold the truth about marriage in our own lives, in our own marriages, in our own families, and in our own churches.¹

The purpose of this issue of *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* is to equip you to pursue this unchanging responsibility in an ever-changing world.

In addition to a broad range of other articles, we are privileged in this issue to feature presentations, articles, and interviews from *The Gospel, Homosexuality, and the Future of Marriage*, a conference sponsored by the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in October 2014. It is our hope and prayer that these resources will spur you not to despair at the changes in our culture but to proceed with confident hope in a powerful gospel and in an unchanging Christ.

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ENDNOTES

¹ R. Albert Mohler, “Everything Has Changed and Nothing Has Changed” (June 27, 2015): <http://www.albertmohler.com>



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Glorify God with Your Singleness¹

DENNY BURK

SINGLENESS IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Only in Matthew’s gospel do we find Jesus’ clearest and most extensive comments on singleness. It comes at the tail end of Jesus’ teaching about divorce, in which the Lord offers a fairly restrictive view on divorce and remarriage.² Jesus’ remarks provoke a stunned response from His disciples, who say: “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry” (Matt. 19:10). In the minds of the disciples, if one must commit to the trials of marriage with such finality and permanence, then it would be easier simply to remain unmarried. The disciples probably did not mean to suggest that lifelong singleness was a serious option. In Jesus’ day, it was unheard of that a man would choose to remain unmarried his entire life. A good Israelite saw it as his duty to have a family and children — to be fruitful and multiply.³ Thus, the disciples’ proposal was likely offered more as an instinctive response than as an actual possibility.⁴

It must have been stunning, therefore, when Jesus greeted their remark with affirmation rather than dismissal: “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given” (Matt. 19:11). There are some who think that the phrase “this statement” refers back to Jesus’ prior teaching on divorce (vv. 3-9).⁵ In context, it is more likely that “this statement” points to what the disciples had just spoken in the immediately preceding verse (v. 10).⁶ Jesus means, therefore, to comment on the propriety of remaining unmarried. Jesus says that such a life is not something that just anyone can pursue. Singleness is only for those to whom it has been given. So Jesus does not view unmarried men with the disdain that his contemporaries probably would have had.⁷ Instead, he views singleness as a gift from God.⁸

Jesus treats singleness as a calling — a vocation given to certain persons by the sovereign grant of God. Yet Jesus acknowledges that singleness does not come to each person in the same way, for the same duration of time, or even for the same reasons. To illustrate the point, Jesus expounds upon the condition of a certain class of persons known as eunuchs. In the most literal sense, a eunuch is someone who is physically incapable of procreation and thus who cannot marry. But Jesus says that not all eunuchs come to this condition in the same way. First, “there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb” (v. 12a). This refers to people who are born with the physical inability to procreate. It may have included persons with disorders of sex development as we discussed in chapter 6. Second, “there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men” (v. 12b). This is most likely a reference to the fact that in the ancient world, royal officials were sometimes castrated in order to ensure that they would pose no threat sexually to the king’s harem.⁹ Third, “there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (v. 12c). This final group should not be understood as those who have literally castrated themselves. It should be understood figuratively along the lines of some of the modern translations, “those who choose to live like eunuchs” (NIV), “they have renounced marriage” (NAB), or “some

choose not to marry” (NLT).¹⁰ The first two groups are those who are incapable of marriage. This final group comprises those who have voluntarily chosen celibacy and a life of singleness. The key difference that Jesus identifies among the three groups is that the final group had chosen their singleness while the first two groups had not. Nevertheless, for all three groups, singleness comes to them by the sovereign grant of God.

For this reason, what Jesus says about singleness has important implications for all unmarried persons. Singles must recognize their unmarried state as a providential gift from God. For those who have been given the ability to set aside the desire for normal marital relations, their lives are now to be leveraged for greater effectiveness for the kingdom of God. Single persons have opportunities that married persons do not have. Singleness frees people from the responsibilities of marriage and allows them more time and emotional capital to invest in others for the sake of the kingdom. Such service should be the aim and motivation of any Christian who chooses a life of celibacy. For those who have *not* chosen their singleness but who would otherwise like to be married, they need to recognize that God has called them to this season for a purpose. There is nothing wrong with their remaining open to and even actively pursuing marriage. In the meantime — for as long as God providentially allows the season of singleness to continue — trust in God’s provision, chastity until marriage, and single-minded devotion to the kingdom should be the daily commitment of the Christian single.¹¹

SINGLENESS IN THE TEACHING OF PAUL

A Word for the Unmarried

In 1 Corinthians 7:7, Paul compares his own life as a single man to the experience of those who are married, and he says that — all things considered — he wishes that everyone could be like him. He writes, “Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that” (1 Cor. 7:7). Paul found the single life to be

preferable to married life. He doesn't go into all his reasons for this preference in this single verse, but later in the chapter he elaborates at least two benefits to the single lifestyle.

The first benefit to being unmarried is the ability to avoid trouble. In verse 7:28, Paul warns, "But if you should marry... such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you." Paul affirms what every married person already knows by experience. Marriage is hard. It is not easy. When two sinners are put in close proximity to one another for an extended period of time, they will eventually have conflict. There will be unanticipated trials that exacerbate conflicts, and married persons must learn to run the gauntlet in order to hold their marriage together. It is sometimes difficult for singles to see this before marriage, and expectations for marital bliss can tend to be a little higher than reality would warrant. One preacher put it this way: "Guys, marriage is not going to be a 24-hour a day sexual bonanza. Girls, marriage is not going to be one long meaningful conversation." Marriage offers great joys to those who choose to enter it, but it also offers great and abiding difficulties. Christian marriage requires two people willing to die to themselves daily. It is eminently difficult, and that is why Paul says, "I am trying to spare you."

The second benefit to being unmarried is the opportunity for undistracted devotion to the Lord. Paul says that unmarried persons are able to focus special attention on "the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord" (v. 32). But those who are married are "concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife" (v. 33). Consequently, "his interests are divided" (v. 34). Paul does not aim to put a legalistic obligation of celibacy upon anyone, but he does wish to commend the single life as that which enables "undistracted devotion to the Lord" (v. 35).

Married persons have responsibilities — responsibilities that they cannot shirk. A husband has the responsibility to lead, to provide for, and to protect his wife. He cannot walk away from this responsibility for any reason. Likewise, a wife has the responsibility of being a helper to her husband (Gen. 2:18). She has a special responsibility to care for the household and to follow her husband's leadership (Titus

2:5). She cannot shirk this responsibility for any reason. Singleness affords the opportunity for people to be “undistracted” by these duties. It frees them to leverage their lives more completely for the sake of service to God’s kingdom. This is the way Paul viewed the matter, and that is why he commends the single life to anyone who is able to accept it.

Paul has another crucial word about singleness in the second half of verse 7. He says it is not for everyone: “Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that” (1 Cor. 7:7). This means that even though Paul prefers singlehood, not everyone is called to be single. Each person has their own gift from God. Paul’s counsel here seems to be an elaboration of Jesus’ teaching recorded in Matthew 19:10-11. Paul seems to have known that Jesus taught celibacy was a gift from God. But notice that it is not just singleness that Paul describes as a gift. Every Christian has their own gift from God, “one in this manner, and another in that” (1 Cor. 7:7b). The married state is every bit as much a gift as the single state. Both of them issue from the sovereign grant of God to His people. Either status is a gift in Paul’s view. A person can serve God faithfully, live fully, and mature with purpose in either situation.

A Word for the Once Married

The key to understanding 1 Corinthians 7:8-9 begins with understanding who it is that Paul is addressing. He says, “to the unmarried and to widows.” The word *widows* is clear enough. A widow clearly refers to a woman who had once been married but whose husband had passed away. But who are these “unmarried” persons that Paul refers to? Some people think he’s referring to unmarried persons generally—anyone who is single. But this seems to be an unlikely interpretation. His general counsel to singles appears elsewhere in the chapter (vv. 7, 25ff), and these two verses seem to be about a different group of people. Also, the word translated as “unmarried” appears four times in the New Testament, and all four instances are in this chapter. In verse 11 and in verse 34, “unmarried” clearly refers

to those who were formerly married. Because the Greek word for “widower” was very rare and because the term “unmarried” is paired with “widow” here, the “unmarried” in verse 8 most likely refers to widowers. Verses 8-9, therefore, are addressed to widows and widowers. So the question that Paul is addressing is what should people do whose spouses have passed away? Should they remarry or should they stay unmarried?

At this point, hardly anyone would be surprised to learn that Paul prefers widows and widowers to stay unmarried. He writes, “It is good for them if they remain even as I.” In saying “even as I,” Paul seems to put himself in the very same category as the unmarried and the widow. I agree with those interpreters who suggest that Paul is giving us a hint that he too was once married but that his own wife had passed away.¹² Paul was a Pharisee, and marriage was the norm for Pharisees.¹³ It is very difficult to imagine, therefore, that a zealous Pharisee such as Paul would have been single (Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:5; cf. Acts 22:3). So it is most likely the case that Paul was married, and that now he is addressing people in the same condition that he is in — single and no longer married. For Paul, the gift of celibacy consisted in “a genuine gift of freedom from sexual need.”¹⁴

Paul acknowledges that not every widow or widower will be called to stay unmarried. He says that those who “do not have self-control” should pursue marriage, for “it is better to marry than to burn” (v. 9). There are at least two different interpretations of what this verse means. Some people think it means that it is better to marry than to burn with *lust*. While other people think it means that it is better to marry than to burn in *judgment* for not controlling one’s sexual desires. Since Paul says the issue is “self-control,” it seems that the first interpretation — “to burn with lust” — is the most likely one. Paul says that if you do not have “self-control” — meaning that you have an intense desire to enter into conjugal relations again with a spouse — then by all means you are free to pursue a situation in which you can fulfill that desire in a righteous way. In other words, you are free to pursue marriage. This is similar to the counsel Paul gave to older widows in 1 Timothy 5 who were called “widows indeed.”

These older widows had committed themselves to stay unmarried, and their names were added to a list of women with special status in the congregation (1 Tim. 5:9-10). But Paul says to the younger widows that “when they feel sensual desires..., they want to get married” (1 Tim. 5:11). So Paul says, “Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give no occasion for reproach” (1 Tim. 5:14). Paul wants these younger widows to get married because of their abiding desire for conjugal life. Paul encourages such people to pursue marriage both in 1 Timothy 5 and in 1 Corinthians 7.

As a professor at a Christian college, I hear from time to time from students who struggle with the question of whether they should pursue marriage or a life of celibacy for the sake of the kingdom. I tell them that Paul’s counsel in this text has implications not just for widows and widowers but also for singles in general. If one has a strong and abiding desire for conjugal life, that person should pursue marriage. There are other factors that determine whether or not a single will marry. Sometimes the door is closed even though a person might desire marriage. In any case, such persons who desire marriage are not in the wrong for pursuing it. In fact, Paul is saying that they probably should pursue it because it is better to marry than to burn.

Singleness and the Call to Chastity

Single Christians are not the only ones who must struggle to maintain sexual purity. Married persons are just as capable of sinning sexually as anyone else is. Nevertheless, there are some special challenges facing singles that are peculiar to our own historical moment and that make sexual purity especially difficult for unmarrieds. Over the last generation, massive revisions to traditional sexual mores have changed the way that young people move into adulthood. Sociologists Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker identify five elements that mark a young person’s transition from adolescence to adulthood:

1. *Becoming economically independent*
2. *Moving out of parents’ home*

- 3. Completing one's education/commencing work*
- 4. Marriage*
- 5. Children*

Young people are moving through these markers at a much slower pace than they did two generations ago, and for some of them adulthood no longer includes all five of these elements. In 1960, 65 percent of men and 77 percent of women had reached all five of these markers by the time they were 30. In the current day, only 31 percent of men and 46 percent of women reach these markers by age 30.¹⁵

Premarital Sex

Those figures have important implications for Christians and the issue of premarital sex. A sizable percentage of young people today are delaying adulthood. In particular, they are delaying marriage and delaying childbearing, but they are not delaying sex. As a result, demographers have observed a new life-stage among modern people called “prolonged adolescence” or “pre-adulthood”¹⁶ in which young people spend the better portion of their 20s delaying marriage while not delaying sexual activity. They move from partner to partner for nearly a decade before deciding to settle down, get married, and have children. Columnist David Brooks describes it this way:

Now young people face a social frontier of their own. They hit puberty around 13 and many don't get married until they're past 30. That's two decades of coupling, uncoupling, hooking up, relationships, and shopping around. This period isn't a transition anymore. It's a sprawling life stage, and nobody knows the rules.¹⁷

To the extent that Christian singles are caught up in these trends, there are pressing challenges that they face. From a physiological perspective, they are delaying marriage through the period of their life in which they are most fertile and most ready to enjoy the gift

of sex. This situation presents a conflict between burgeoning physical desires and the Christian ethic of sexual abstinence outside of marriage. Those who delay marriage through the decade of their 20s face temptations to find sexual release (premarital sexual activity, pornography, masturbation, etc.). Some singles answer the call to purity in the face of such challenges, but many others do not. And so they begin a renegotiation of what is permissible sexually. The temptation is always there to suppress or revise biblical norms in order to accommodate the powerful twin influences of culture and fleshly desire.

Perhaps it is time for Christians to re-evaluate just how much ground they have given to a cultural preference for delayed marriage. Early marriage is no silver bullet against the temptation to premarital sex, but not to consider it would be irresponsible in the face of the very real spiritual dangers of prolonged adolescence. Mark Regnerus argues that many evangelicals have made much ado about sex but have become slow and lackadaisical about marriage. Americans are marrying later — if at all — and having fewer children than previous generations. In 1970, the median age for first marriages was 21 for women and 23 for men. By 2009, that number had risen to 26 for women and 28 for men. Evangelicals marry a little earlier than the larger populace, but not by much.¹⁸ Regnerus writes,

Evangelicals tend to marry slightly earlier than other Americans, but not by much. Many of them plan to marry in their mid-20s. Yet waiting for sex until then feels far too long to most of them. And I am suggesting that when people wait until their mid-to-late 20s to marry, it *is* unreasonable to expect them to refrain from sex. It's battling our Creator's reproductive designs. The data don't lie. Our sexual behavior patterns... give us away. Very few wait long for sex. Meanwhile, women's fertility is more or less fixed, yet Americans are increasingly ignoring it during their 20s, only to beg and pray to reclaim it in their 30s and 40s.¹⁹

I disagree that it is “unreasonable” to expect Christians to abstain from premarital sex. No Christian is exempt from the obligation to sexual purity. But Regnerus does have a point. Delaying marriage has consequences that many Christians must reckon with, and early marriage may be one of the ways we can encourage chastity in singles.

Sexual holiness means abstaining from all sexual activity outside of marriage. The biblical term for sex with someone else’s spouse is “adultery.” The catchall term for any extramarital sexual activity is “fornication” or “sexual immorality.”²⁰ Although the term fornication has fallen into disuse, I agree with Russell Moore that it may be time to resurrect it. It is an antiquated term, but there is no other one like it that describes both unlawful sexual activity and the divine censure that goes along with it. Moore writes:

But could it be that the loss of the words “fornicate” and “fornication” is about something more than just updating our vocabulary to connect with the society around us? Could it be that we’ve lost something crucial about the grammar of the Christian faith? Moreover, could it be that, by using the language of “premarital sex,” we’ve implicitly ceded the moral imagination to the sexual revolutionaries? ... Part of what it means to recover a Christian vision of sexuality is to recover a lexicon worthy of the gravity of human sexuality.²¹

But beyond recovery of the word, we also need recovery of the substance. A Christian sexual ethic means avoiding fornication, no matter how long one remains single. Jesus said that fornication was first and foremost a matter of the heart (Mark 7:21). The new birth is therefore required to root out this particular sin (John 3:3, 5). But rooting it out must also issue forth in deeds, and in this case *abstaining* from certain deeds. As the apostle Paul warned the Corinthians, “Flee fornication!” (1 Cor. 6:18).

The biblical testimony is clear. Premarital sexual activity is not an option for the disciple of Jesus. But what about other kinds of

sexual activity that stop short of sexual intercourse? What about those who might maintain “technical virginity” through a variety of other activities as an alternative to actual intercourse?²² The old question that young singles seem to ask is, “How far is too far?” Other books on Christian sexual ethics consider a gamut of activities that unmarried couples might consider engaging in, and such books discuss the morality of each — e.g., oral sex, petting, etc.²³ I wonder if this level of detail is necessary.

I would suggest that all such activities should be evaluated by how they conform to what the Bible teaches about lust and about the purposes for sex. Jesus teaches that sexual immorality is a matter of the heart (Mark 7:21) and that lust is as sinful as committing the deed contemplated (Matt. 5:28). Perhaps certain activities are not explicitly forbidden by Scripture, but certainly lusting after someone who is not one’s spouse is. We must insist, therefore, that any activity designed to arouse sexual climax with someone who is not their spouse is sinful. In addition, the scriptures teach that our accountability is to flee from sexual temptation (2 Tim. 2:22). Paul says to make no provision for the flesh with regard to its lusts (Rom. 13:14). That means that not only must Christians abstain from all forms of sexual activity. They must also flee from the situations in which they know they might be tempted to transgress. The question should not be, *How far can we go?* The question should be, *How far can we stay away?*

Finally, Christians are not merely interested in what is or what is not lawful. Christians must aim to achieve the purpose for which God created sex — the glory of God. That means that every expression of physical intimacy must be oriented toward marriage and whether such expressions achieve the unitive purposes of the marital act. Again, the question is not, *What is lawful?* but *How can I glorify God?*

Solo Sex

Dennis Hollinger relates the following statistic in his book on sexual ethics: “90 percent of adolescent boys masturbate; the

other 10 percent are liars.”²⁴ Hollinger delivers this factoid tongue-in-cheek, but his point is well-taken. This kind of activity is in fact ubiquitous among the male population, and not just among adolescents. Surveys indicate that over 60 percent of males ages 18-59 have masturbated in the last 90 days. Male solo sex rates are highest — at 95 percent — among men ages 25-39 who are single and dating.²⁵ Surveys also indicate that a sizeable percentage of women participate in solo sexual activity. Over half of women ages 18-49 report having masturbated in the last 90 days. The highest rates — at 94 percent — are among women ages 25-29 who are single and dating.²⁶ Unmarried persons are not the only ones facing this temptation. The same surveys show that married persons are struggling with it too. This issue is too common to be ignored and can hardly be avoided in articulating a faithful Christian sexual ethic.

Christians have disagreed with one another in their moral assessment of solo sex. Opinions fall into three basic categories:

- 1. Total acceptance*
- 2. Total rejection*
- 3. Modified acceptance with qualifications*²⁷

Lewis Smedes comes close to the “total acceptance” position when he says, “It is not morally wrong,” and when he counsels Christian parents to help their child “see and accept masturbation as part of his growth as a human being.”²⁸ Daniel Heimbach advances the “total rejection” view, arguing that solitary sex “opposes every positive moral characteristic revealed to be essential in God’s design for sex.”²⁹ Dennis Hollinger aligns himself with the “qualified acceptance” view, arguing that “if one is able to use it to release built-up sexual tension without the lust, it is less morally problematic.”³⁰

As some are reluctant to offer a definitive answer to the question, others are quick to point out that the Bible does not forbid masturbation *per se*.³¹ Sometimes interpreters will point to Onan’s evil deed to condemn masturbation (Gen. 28:6-10). The story of

Onan, however, has nothing to do with solo sex but with Onan's failure to fulfill his levirate duty to his brother's widow (cf. Deut. 25:5). Even without the Onan story, the Bible does in fact offer us ample help in addressing the issue. And even though the Bible never mentions masturbation *per se*, it has a great deal to say about lust and God's purpose for sex.

It is Jesus himself who warns that "anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). As noted above, Jesus insists that sexual immorality and adultery proceed from out of the heart (Mark 7:21). For Jesus, sexual sin has every bit as much to do with the mind as it does with the body. Lustful thoughts toward a person who is not one's spouse are sinful, and this cannot be ignored with respect to the ethics of solo sex. We are doubtful (*contra Hollinger*) that solo sex can be separated from lustful thoughts. In fact, solo sex seems to be an inducement toward such thoughts, and may for some people be a segue to pornography. We are called to have clean hands *and* a pure heart (Psalm 24:4). Is it really possible to have a pure heart while masturbating? Jesus requires his disciples to take radical measures to avoid the sin of lust — even to the point of cutting off hands and gouging out eyes (Matt. 5:29-30). Also, the solitary nature of the act runs crosswise with the purposes for sex outlined so far in this book.

Obviously, the act is not directed toward procreation, nor to the consummation of marriage, nor to an expression of love for another person. Fulfilling the purposes of sex requires the participation of more than one person. They require directing one's love and affection toward one's spouse. It is clear, then, that solo sex falls short of the divine purposes for sex. Thus it falls short of the glory of God.³²

Pornography

The ubiquity of online pornography has caused Christian counselor Heath Lambert to declare, "Pornography is the defining sexual sin of our day."³³ For anyone paying attention to the issue, it would be very

difficult to argue with this judgment. Because of easy access through the Internet, a large percentage of males and females have become users and sometimes addicts of sexually explicit material. The statistics are staggering. Pornography is the most searched for topic on the Internet with 68 million pornographic hits per day.³⁴ According to one set of statistics, 40 million American adults regularly visit Internet pornography sites. 20 percent of men admit to accessing pornography at work, and 53 percent of men identified with the “Promise Keepers” movement say they have viewed pornography in the last week. 72 percent of visitors to pornographic websites are men, and 28 percent are women. 9.4 million American women have accessed pornography in the last month, and 13 percent of women report accessing it at work. The average age that children first see Internet pornography is 11 years old. 90 percent of 8-16 year olds report having viewed online pornography. 80 percent of 15-17 year olds say they have had multiple hard-core exposures to online pornography.³⁵ This onslaught of private perversion has led Lambert to conclude:

In Christian circles adultery and homosexuality often capture more headlines, but I am persuaded that in terms of sheer numbers they cannot hold a candle to the devastation of pornography. Last year I counseled six people struggling with homosexuality and around 18 caught in adultery and fornication. I don't know exactly how many I helped who were locked in pornography, but the number is in the dozens. As bad as that number sounds those people are not the ones I am concerned about... The people who concern me are the ones that did not seek out me or anyone else. These people pose the deeper problem. They are the ones who are hiding in the dark while destroying their marriages, ministries, and Christian witness under the radar.³⁶

Our ethical evaluation of pornography is fairly straightforward.³⁷ The production and use of pornography constitutes a grave violation

of sexual holiness. Its use by anyone (married or single) contradicts everything that the Bible teaches about God's purposes for sex. There are at least five reasons for this judgment.³⁸

First, pornography degrades women as well as every other participant in the production of pornographic material. Our ethical evaluation of pornography is not merely about how the material affects the user. It must start with the observation that the pictures on the pages or the Internet screen are real people performing sexually immoral acts. These people — who are made in the image of almighty God — are made into sexual objects for other people's enjoyment. This enjoyment consists in illicit sexual desires stoked by someone else's shame before God. It is unloving and hateful to become complicit in another person's debasement, much less to derive sexual pleasure from it. Yet that is exactly what happens every time someone accesses pornographic material. For Christians, love for our neighbor should provoke a different response (Mark 12:31). As Russell Moore rightly asks, "Where is the compassion for the cruelly named 'porn stars' — many of whom spend their hours [off] the screen in a heroin-induced, self-loathing depression?"³⁹ Christians have an obligation to oppose pornography out of love for those who are most directly debased by it.

Second, pornography creates lust, and lust is a sin. The Bible says that to be given over to lust is the very judgment of God (Rom. 1:24). Paul says that those who walk in the lusts of the flesh are "children of wrath" and are "indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Eph. 2:3). Paul also forbids believers from living in "lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thess. 4:5). Lust characterizes the world in its rebellion against God: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" (1 John 2:16). Pornography incites sinners to lust and to direct one's sexual attention away from the marital bond. It is therefore a grave sin and completely out of step with God's purposes for sex.

Third, pornography introduces perversions into people's intimate lives. Mark Regnerus reports a growing expectation among emerging adult male users of pornography that they should experience with their partner what they view in online pornography. These men are increasingly requesting their female partners to mimic the behaviors that appear in pornography.⁴⁰ These expectations are sometimes carried over into marriage and cause great difficulty between spouses.⁴¹ It perverts the mind and prevents husbands from loving and serving their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25).

Fourth, pornography can be addictive. Hollinger writes, "The more one is exposed, the more one needs pornographic stimulation the next time to get the same high as before."⁴² William M. Struthers is a biopsychologist who has studied the neurochemical processes that influence addictive behavior. In his book *Wired for Intimacy* he argues convincingly that pornography hijacks the proper functioning of men's brains and has a long-lasting effect on their thoughts and lives.⁴³ This kind of addictive behavior is a direct violation of Christ's Lordship. As Paul wrote to the men sinning sexually in Corinth, "I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Cor. 6:12). This means that Paul was determined not to be controlled by anything or anyone but Christ alone. Pornography is dangerous because those who have been "mastered" by it can no longer be disciples of Christ (Matt. 6:24).

Fifth, pornography makes marital intimacy more difficult to enjoy. Indeed, some pornography users find themselves preferring virtual sex over sex with a real person. As a result, some men report decreased sexual appetite as the presence of a real person is not as stimulating to them as the perversions they view on the Internet.⁴⁴ Pornography destroys the joys of marital sex, and that is just one more reason that it stands contrary to God's purposes for the gift of sex (Prov. 5:18).

CONCLUSION

Jesus and Paul both commend by example and by teaching the nobility of the single life. To those who have the gift of celibacy, it allows them to leverage their lives more fully than they otherwise would be able for the sake of the kingdom. Singles who have an

abiding desire for the joys of conjugal life should pursue marriage. Even though the culture increasingly favors delaying marriage well into the late 20s, Christians who wish to marry should probably consider early marriage as a means to chastity and adulthood. Nevertheless, for as long as God allows a person to remain single, that person must remain sexually pure. That means abstaining from all sexual activity outside of marriage, including solo sex and the use of pornography. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from fornication” (1 Thess. 4:3).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ “Glorify God with Your Singleness” originally appears in Denny Burk, *What is the Meaning of Sex?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013). Used with permission.
- ² See the section in chapter 4 on divorce.
- ³ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 779.
- ⁴ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 722.
- ⁵ So Quentin Quesnell, “Made Themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 19:12),” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (Jl 1968): 335-358.
- ⁶ So France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 722-23; Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary 22 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 294; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 776-777.
- ⁷ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 777ff.
- ⁸ So Loader, *Sexuality in the New Testament: Understanding the Key Texts*, 108.
- ⁹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 724-25; R. J. A. Sheriffs, “Eunuch,” in New Bible Dictionary, ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 347.
- ¹⁰ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 725.
- ¹¹ John Piper quotes at length from Margaret Clarkson’s book *So You’re Single!* She writes: “Through no fault or choice of my own, I am unable to express my sexuality in the beauty and intimacy of Christian marriage, as God intended when he created me a sexual being in his own image. To seek to do this outside of marriage is, by the clear teaching of Scripture, to sin against God and against my own nature. As a committed Christian, then, I have no alternative but to live a life of voluntary celibacy. I must be chaste not only in body, but in mind and spirit as well. Since I am now in my 60’s I think that my experience of what this means is valid. I want to go on record as having proved that for those who are committed to do God’s will, his commands are his enablings.... Why must I live my life alone? I do not know. But Jesus Christ is Lord of my life. I believe in the sovereignty of God, and I accept my singleness from his hand. He could have ordered my life otherwise, but he has not chosen to do so. As his child, I must trust his love and wisdom.” See John Piper, “For Single Men and Women (and the Rest of Us),” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), xxv-xxvi.
- ¹² So Hays, *First Corinthians*, 119; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 288, n. 7.
- ¹³ Harvey McArthur, “Celibacy in Judaism at the Time of Christian Beginnings,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25, no. 2 (1987): 163-81.
- ¹⁴ So Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 287.
- ¹⁵ Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think About Marrying* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.
- ¹⁶ Eberstadt, *Adam and Eve After the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution*, 17.



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“They Share Their Food But Not Their Wives”: Sexual Holiness as Christian Apologetic in the Second-Century

COLEMAN M. FORD

Christian apologists of the second century continue to garner much-needed academic attention. Numerous new translations with commentaries on second-century apologetic literature have appeared in recent years.¹ Helen Rhee, looking more broadly at Christian literature of the second and third centuries, notes the Christian claim of a superior Christian sexual ethic. While her analysis bears much fruit, she sees a strong emphasis on asceticism and renunciation as normative for early Christian sexual ethics.² Additionally,

Rhee's tendency towards non-Pauline authorship of the pastorals and later epistles, coupled with a conflation of early Christian literature and Gnostic texts, impede any strong assertions regarding early Christian sexual ethics.³ This raises a series of interesting questions. To what extent does Christian sexual morality of the second century reflect biblical themes of sexual purity? Where, if ever, do the Christian apologists diverge from biblical motifs? How and to what extent was sexual holiness within the Christian community portrayed as an apologetic towards the veracity of the Christian faith and way of life?

In general, much work remains in examining sexual ethics in second-century Christian perspective. Second-century apologists, I contend, offer a consistent biblical defense relating to sexual holiness as an apologetic for the veracity of the Christian faith. Additionally, this apologetic relates to other biblical motifs calling Christians to exhibit a faithful presence in society. First I will briefly establish some New Testament foundations, then I will trace this biblical pattern through key works of the second century, concluding with some reflections for moving forward.

NEW TESTAMENT FOUNDATIONS

Based on the New Testament literary evidence, Christians drew hard lines of distinction between themselves and non-Christian religious practice. Using the imagery of night and day to describe conflicting moral positions, the Apostle Paul implores his readers to “cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” and to “walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy” (Rom 12:12-13). He charges Christians: “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 12:14). Elsewhere he describes the sentiment of those who maintain that “All things are lawful for me” and that “food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food” (1 Cor 6:12-13). Describing prevailing cultural mentalities, Paul implores readers to flee from such notions which lead to immorality.

Similarly, the Apostle Peter describes the “sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry” of the Gentiles, that is, non-Christians (1 Pet 3:3). They are surprised when Christians “do not join them in the same flood of debauchery” (1 Pet 4:4). This call for holiness included a charge to live among the world as “sojourners and exiles” yet honoring everyone so that they may “see your good deeds and glorify God” (1 Pet 2:11-12). Paul models the faithful presence Christians should practice in order that they might “win those outside the law.... [and] win the weak” and “save some” (1 Cor 9:22). A distinction in sexual ethic did not preclude consistent presence in the culture. The moral vision of the New Testament encapsulates a call to holiness while inhabiting the nations.⁴

Luke Timothy Johnson notes the trajectory of Paul’s writings as that of a “deep disdain for anything specifically Gentile in character.”⁵ Paul and other New Testament writers demonstrate a clear distinction between the moral practice of the Christian community and the world outside the community. It might go too far to say that this represents an “us versus them” mentality, but certainly an “us and them” frame of mind pervades. Christian apologists of the second century continued this mode of argumentation and an “ambivalence toward pagan religious practices.”⁶ Some, like the writer to Diognetus and Athenagoras, write with a milder tone. Others such as Tertullian engage his readers more forcefully. In either manner, a noticeable connection exists between second-century apologetic arguments and the positioning of New Testament moral assertions. Particularly, apologists emphasize the distinctive sexual morality within the Christian community.

From here, three specific yet connected themes emerge in post-apostolic apologetic literature. First, apologists focus on the sexual morality of the Greco-Roman gods. Many apologists present a moral history of the gods in contrast to the moral history as presented in Scripture. From here, apologists highlight the sexual morality of the culture. This is not unrelated to the sexual

morality of the gods in the minds of many apologists, yet the comparison between the pagan moral sphere with the Christian one is distinct. Finally, apologists give prominence to sexual morality within texts, that is Christian texts in comparison to pagan literary examples. All three themes are connected yet provide pronounced points of moral perspective in the works of the apologists. A distinct Christian sexual morality included monogamous marriage, a call to celibacy for some, and general sexual purity. Many apologists engage cultural practices such as pederasty and homosexual practice in Roman culture. The apologists, by nature of their genre, more explicitly engage the culture, yet their writing demonstrates a distinct connection to New Testament sexual conventions.

APOLOGY OF ARISTIDES

The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher (c. mid – 2nd century) was a defense potentially written to the Emperor Hadrian. The work of Aristides demonstrates the nature of pluralism in antiquity. Aristides divides humans into four distinct groups, each with their own gods.⁷ He states, “This is plain to you, O king, that there are four races of men in this world; Barbarians and Greeks, Jews and Christians” (*Apol* 2).⁸ A short history of the gods and their people follows. In order to understand the nature and origin of the Christian faith, Aristides prescribes the reading of Scripture. “This is taught from that gospel which a little while ago was spoken among them as being preached; wherein if you also will read, you will comprehend the power that is upon it” (*Apol* 2). The audience, supposedly the emperor Hadrian, is charged to read the Christian texts for himself.

The author turns his attention to the so-called wisdom of the Greeks, “[having] introduced many gods that are made” (*Apol* 8). The gods, who are both male and female, were found to be “adulterers and murderers” and “angry and passionate.” The logical consequence in the author’s mind is human action which mirrors the moral example of their gods. He contends: “For if those who are called their gods have done all those things that are written above,

how much more shall men do them who believe in those who have done these things!” (*Apol* 8). Following gods who commit impious deeds leads to a people who commit impious deeds. Aristides makes this argument clear in a passage worth quoting at length:

Because of these stories, O king, much evil has befallen the race of men who are at this present day, since they imitate their gods, and commit adultery, and are defiled with their mothers and sisters, and in sleeping with males: and some of them have dared to kill even their fathers. For if he, who is said to be the head and king of their gods, has done these things, how much more shall his worshippers imitate him! And great is the madness which the Greeks have introduced into their history concerning him: for it is not possible that a god should commit adultery or fornication, or should approach to sleep with males, or that he should be a parricide; otherwise he is much worse than a destructive demon. (*Apol* 9)

Morality from divine imitation is a consistent line of argumentation, both in the negative sense in regards to pagan practice and positive sense in regards to Christian practice.

Aristides, in continuity with other second century apologists, offers this as a protreptic to his readers. Aristides matches divine imitation from both Greeks and Egyptians with adultery and “sleeping with males, along with the rest of their doings” (*Apol* 13). The Christians, by contrast, imitate the “God, the Maker of heaven and earth ... [having] received those commandments which they have engraved on their minds.” (*Apol* 15). Aristides describes the Christian lifestyle in this way, “[On] this account they do not commit adultery nor fornication.... and their wives, O king, are pure as virgins, and their daughters modest: and their men abstain from all unlawful wedlock and from all impurity, in the hope of the recompense that is to come in another world.” (*Apol* 15). It is not the Christians “who practice foul things in

sleeping with males” but rather are “honest and pious” with the truth “set before their eyes” (*Apol* 17).

William Rutherford, in questioning the notion of Christians as new race, posits that Aristides’s notion of Christians is that of “superior citizens.” They are more than a people — “[they] are a way of life inherited from the supreme cultural progenitor, their Messiah Jesus.”⁹ This idea of citizenship is consistent throughout the apologetic literature of the second century, and derives from Pauline and Petrine foundations. This “superior” citizenship demonstrates an entirely different way of being in the world, which includes the sexual actions of its citizens. Divine imitation in this regard is key, as it is for subsequent apologists. Christian moral identity, according to Aristides, is distinct among the races of men, demonstrating an apologetic to consider the “superior” nature of Christian presence in society based on a consistent sexual ethic.

THE EPISTLE TO DIOGNETUS

The author of this mid-to-late second century text is ultimately unknown, though many have conjectured as to its originator.¹⁰ Robert Grant considers the work an oral address delivered to the addressee named Diognetus.¹¹ Though seemingly written as a letter, “the consistent impression,” Charles Hill maintains, “[is] of an oral address in which a Christian teacher explains Christianity in the presence of one who has requested it, a man of some social stature named Diognetus.”¹²

Using the motif of citizenship, the author contrasts two ways of life, that is, Christian and gentile, or Roman. The author of the epistle claims that Christians do not “practice an eccentric way of life” (*Diogn* 5.2).¹³ For this author, the Christian life is heavenly in the sense that it’s not a “human doctrine” which might be “discovered by the thought and reflection of ingenious people” (*Diogn* 5.3). Their character and behavior is reflective of the citizenship which some may consider “remarkable” and “unusual” (*Diogn* 5.4). The writer of the epistle declares, “They share their food but not their wives” (*Diogn* 5.7). Benjamin Dunning notes

how the text of chapter five “develops this framework in which Christian practice is contrasted to that of a stereotyped Roman social order” wherein “Christians fulfill expected norms of hospitality... but never at the expense of sexual purity.”¹⁴ George Weigel notes the distinct motif of “resident aliens” in the text of Diognetus. He contends, “Sometimes the Christian in the world will be more comfortably ‘resident’; at other times, the wickedness of the principalities and powers will require us to be more defiantly ‘alien,’ even ‘sectarian’.... At all times, though, Christians live ‘in the world’ in a somewhat unsettled condition.”¹⁵

Though not defiantly sectarian, the writer to Diognetus presents an alternate realm of existence. Perhaps romanticized to a certain extent, the author advocates for an ethos transcending reality. This moral domain includes not just obeying the laws of the land, but transcending laws in their private lives (*Diogn* 5.10). There exists a transcendent love for others, even those who persecute and condemn (*Diogn* 5.11). Additionally, they choose poverty in order to make others rich, blessing others when cursed, doing good though one may be punished. Christians in society are like a soul in the body, necessary in order to exist and have life though ultimately not of this world. (*Diogn* 6.1-3).

The author of Diognetus calls his reader to a life of imitation of God. Imitation of God comes when one imitates his primal act which is to love. Therefore imitation of what is ultimately Good leads to good acts. Greediness and impious ambition are contrary to God’s nature (*Diogn* 10.5). Such things are “alien to his greatness” (*Diogn* 10.5). To the contrary, the author contends, “But one who takes up a neighbor’s burden, one who wishes to benefit someone who is worse off in something in which one is oneself better off, one who provides to those in need things that one has received from God, and thus become a god to those who receive them — this one is an imitator of God” (*Diogn* 10.6). Imitation and cultivation of virtue in this regard leads to a full life as “the tree you cultivate, and whose fruit you pick, then you will always be harvesting the things that God desires, things that

the serpent cannot touch and deceit cannot infect” (*Diogn* 12.8).

Michael Heintz notes the nature of μίμησις in Diogenetus. Though imitation of God’s *philanthropia* is not a unique concept, “it’s use here seems to be ... [as] God’s plan is revealed and achieved through his logos.”¹⁶ This idea of μίμησις, as Heintz relates, “is certainly a different emphasis from Hellenistic and Philonic moral teaching, which seems (in some cases implicitly) to relate ethical μίμησις to an underlying cosmological μίμησις; the kinship between human logos and the divine or natural logos is the foundation for ethical reflection and moral living.”¹⁷

Diogenetus shows a consistent strand of biblical reasoning in regards to sexual holiness. Though not a diatribe against the sexual conventions of Roman society, the author provides a contrast, similar to the apostolic writings, between citizens of earth and citizens of heaven. Michael Bird notes, “The author attempts to rise up and meet the challenge of the cultural despisers of the Christian religion in the Greco-Roman world and he employs Pauline motifs to that end.”¹⁸ The author posits a community wherein imitating God leads to imitating his goodness.

JUSTIN MARTYR’S FIRST APOLOGY

Justin Martyr is rightly called the first “to offer ... a written defence of the claims of Jesus to the Gentiles.”¹⁹ Justin (c. 100 – 165) provides a “veritable mine of information about mid-second-century Christian and even Jewish and Roman theology, attitudes, and practices.”²⁰ His first apology is an address to the emperor Antonius Pius and seeks to answer the traditional charges brought against Christianity — that is — atheism, immorality, and disloyalty to the Empire. Justin’s defense of Christianity demonstrates more a proof for its validity and veracity as an ancient religion and one worthy of tolerance, yet his use of Scripture and appeals to reason demonstrate a desire to convey the reasonableness of Christian moral practice. He states, “Of old we rejoiced in promiscuity (*πορωείαις*), but now we embrace only temperance (*σωφροσύνην*)” (1 *Apol* 14.2).²¹ Justin’s additional exhortation focuses on Scriptural precepts, mainly

from the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, Justin's entire moral vision for Christians is based on the Sermon, which he quotes at length.

Jörg Ulrich notes, "These ethical choices are based directly on the preaching of Christ the teacher, with the Sermon on the Mount and the Gospel of Matthew in general playing a dominant role. It is characteristic of Justin to see acknowledgment of Christ's instructions for living and the associated life transformations as *the* essential criteria for being Christian (emphasis original)."²² Chapter fifteen of the *First Apology* provides a string of Matthean texts relating the standards of sexual holiness in Christian marriage and Christian celibacy in contrast to Roman practice. Some have lived their entire lives as "disciples of Christ and [have remained] pure (ἀφθονοι)" (*1 Apol* 15.6). It is unclear at this point whether Justin is referring to their purity as celibates, or their purity relating to uncorrupt Christian marriage, but the point remains the same. Justin's goal in this regard is to "point them out in every race of people" that is, as a testimony of Christian morality and faithfulness to the teachings of Christ (*1 Apol* 15.6).

While Justin does contrast the moral standards of life in Roman perspective with those of the Christian community, his is a much more philosophical and theological defense in order to highlight the differences in belief. This ultimately leads to practice, but his apology has a consistently different flavor. With this in mind, it is important to note that Justin's goal, as it is with other apologists, is to show that Christians should not be judged on the basis of their name alone, but rather on the merits of their life and practice. He asserts, "For neither commendation nor punishment could reasonably be based on a name unless actions can show something to be virtuous or wicked" (*1 Apol* 4.3). Justin's goal was to demonstrate the unique, and desirable, way of life demonstrated by the Christian community. Though his defense is theologically rich, his goal is simple.

ATHENAGORAS OF ATHENS

Athenagoras (c. 180) is considered one the most philosophically

profound apologists, adapting Middle Platonist philosophical works to his *Embassy for the Christians*. In contrast to the gods and lifestyle of the Romans Athenagoras states, “But we are so far from practising promiscuous intercourse, that it is not lawful among us to indulge even a lustful look” (*Embassy* 23).²³ In response to the Greco-Roman gods, Athenagoras posits that Greco-Roman morality simply mirrors that of its gods. In the same way, Christians mirror the morality of their progenitor, Jesus Christ. Crucial to understanding Athenagoras’s argument for Christian morality is confession of the Greco-Roman poets regarding the gods — they are nothing more than the creation of the human mind. Implicit in this argument is that Greco-Roman morality matches that of its origin, the human mind. Only the human mind can conceive of such a morality masked in the façade of deity. The gods are “slaves to desire” (*Embassy* 21). “For though the poets, in their fictions, represent the gods as no better than men, our mode of thinking is not the same as theirs, concerning either God the Father or the Son.” (*Embassy* 10).

In an additional response, Athenagoras compares the sexuality of the Roman gods to the sexual practices of the Christian community. The examples of “wickedness” and “impieties” in Zeus and Orpheus demonstrate that such a charge against the Christians is misplaced. He declares, “But so far are we removed from promiscuity that it is not allowed us even to look with passion upon another.” (*Embassy* 32). Quoting Matt 5:28, Athenagoras provides the dictum from Scripture which helps guide Christian sexual morality.

Athenagoras relates Christian distaste of “the lesser goods of this life” based on their “hope of eternal life.” (*Embassy* 33). While extolling the merits of virginity, Athenagoras views Christian marriage as primarily for “begetting children.” There is no middle ground for one chooses “to remain as he was brought into the world;” that as celibate, or hold to one marriage with a single spouse. Jesus’s command in Matt 5:31-32 sets the moral standard against divorce which “[destroys] the unity of flesh that was meant

for the propagation of the race.” (*Embassy* 33). Athenagoras sees in Scripture the boundary marker for Christian practice. Quoting the New Testament, Athenagoras shows that Christian communities imitate the words of the text and therefore live lives that demonstrate “a parade and school of deeds” (*Embassy* 33).

In Chapter 34 of the *Embassy*, Athenagoras engages the vices of Roman sexuality head on. Sara Parvis quips, “[It] is at this point that Athenagoras becomes as rude about Greco-Roman society as he ever does, in talking about their sexual mores.”²⁴ Prostitution includes the young, even boys, “men with men working that which is base.” (*Embassy* 34). For Athenagoras, such a debasement is a “dishonoring [of] God’s created beauty” (*Embassy* 34). Athenagoras avers, “These men reproach is with those deeds which they have upon their own consciences and which they say their gods do, and brag of them as noble and godlike. Adulterers and pederasts, they revile us who live in self-denial or single marriage.” (*Embassy* 34). It is not the Christians who should be ridiculed for their supposed deviant behavior, but the adulterers and pederasts who should be reviled.

Perhaps commentating on the charge of cannibalism, Athenagoras asserts, “This is the real feasting upon flesh” (*Embassy* 34). Whereas Christians are charged with cannibalism, it is those who “swallow whole what comes their way” in sexual pleasure and excess who should receive the indictment, according to Athenagoras (*Embassy* 34). He asserts, “Those who are stronger drive into the weaker,” likely describing the act of pederasty when dominant men would penetrate young boys (*Embassy*, 34). Laws intended to allow “wholesome morality to prevail” are broken and unable to counteract deviant sexual lusts modeled after the acts of the gods. Christians, on the other hand, though accused of “those deeds which [pagans] have upon their own consciences.... [do not] refrain from blessing when cursed.... [and] must be good and long-suffering.” (*Embassy* 34).

TERTULLIAN'S APOLOGY

Tertullian (c. 160 – 225) spent the majority of his literary career

in Carthage, North Africa. Geoffrey Dunn notes, “His writings are extensive enough for him to have made a contribution on just about every aspect of early Christian life and thought.”²⁵ A forceful Latin theological voice, Tertullian provided numerous treatises in defenses for Christian faith. His *Apology* was likely composed at the end of the second-century, not too long after his conversion to the Christian faith. It represents his typically assertive manner, while exhibiting similar second-century apologetic motifs.

Tertullian asserts, “Everything is in common among us — except our wives” (*Apol* 39.12). Tertullian echoes the same sentiment as the writer to Diognetus. Based on the similarity of phrasing, possibilities open regarding the shared nature of the declaration. This was seemingly a conscious Christian moral identity and perhaps a common statement among the community in defense of the faith. Tertullian describes how Christians refuse to participate in this form of partnership where some not only “usurp the marriage rights of their friends, but they even hand over their own rights to their friends with the greatest equanimity” (*Apol* 39.12).²⁶ Tertullian relates this practice to the influence of Socrates and Cato “who shared with their friends the wives whom they had married,” alluding to the possibility that the wives “were not exactly unwilling.” (*Apol* 39.13). Tertullian chides this sort of action as an ironic display of “Attic wisdom and Roman dignity” where the “philosopher [is] a pander, and the censor too.”

Tertullian describes the common activities of the community in contrast to other gatherings and societies. Andrew D. Clarke notes that many voluntary associations within Roman society “under the patronage of a chosen deity... gathered for the mutual benefit of their members.” Likely Tertullian draws a comparison with these types of groups. Christians, when they gave money, were doing so not to buy their way to religion, but to distribute to those in need. When they sat down at meals, Christians were temperate, eating and drinking only to satisfy themselves before worshipping the Lord. Their departure is peaceful “not to unite in bands for murder, or to run around in gangs, or for stealthy

attacks of lewdness.” (*Apol* 39.19). Christians, in contrast, depart from their gathering with “modesty and chastity as people who have partaken not only of a report but of a rule of life.” (*Apol* 39.19). This rule of life, this alternate way of being in the world, distinguishes Christians from other groups who might appear to do similar things. The gathering is distinct and dignified. Tertullian highlights the virtuous nature of the Christian gathering. Such a gathering should not be relegated to the status of “secret society” but as “a senate” (*Apol* 39.21).

Tertullian, miffed by the charge that Christians are “worthless in business,” responds by noting the same manner of dress, the same basic manner of life “using the same provisions and the same necessities of life” (*Apol* 42.1). Tertullian describes a life in which Christians exhibit a common existence among the rest of society. Christians are sailors, serve in the army, partaking in common practices such as bathing, participation in the forum, and shopping the markets. Christians were not absent in society — they were interwoven into the fabric of the culture. Though they participate in the economy and daily life of culture, nevertheless, Christians are distinct in their choices to participate in the culture. Though Christians bathe, they “do not bathe in the early dawn on the Saturnalia.”

Additionally at other feasts honoring the gods, as well as Roman games, there was a decided absence from the Christian community. This absence did not equate isolation, simply a distinct way of being in the world which excluded explicit participation in activities directly related to the gods. Tertullian and other Christians felt more than free to purchase goods at the market of these games. Additionally, other symbols associated with the gods may not be purchased, such as wreaths worn on the head, but this did not exclude the purchase of plants and flowers by Christians from these vendors. Though some decry Christians for hurting the economy because they don’t frequent the temples, Tertullian argues that Christians do more because they buy goods regularly on the streets and pay their taxes without grumbling. Christians

neither defraud nor neglect payment to others. Though their distinct commitment to God keeps them from the temples and feasts, it does not dissuade them from their duty to support the empire.

Tertullian describes a vision in which the Christian moral standard is not only ideal, it maintains the society despite the society. Similar to Diognetus's idea of Christians in the culture as the soul is to the body, Tertullian maintains the necessity of Christian morality for the health of society. According to Tertullian, Christians should be unprofitable towards "pimps, panderers ... assassins, poisoners, and magicians ... fortune-tellers, soothsayers, and astrologers" (*Apol* 43.1). Above all this, any loss to businesses that may still exist because of Christian commitments, is made up or through prayers which provide divine protection. Regardless of what else may happen, Christians should be recognized for their efforts to help society through their prayers "to the true God" (*Apol* 43.1).

SOME RECENT REFLECTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Cecilia Ames notes the use of Roman literary texts in Christian rhetoric against Roman religion. In this way, according to Ames, Christian apologists, particularly African Christians, constructed "an image of Roman religion ... [and] use the same argumentative strategies as their Roman adversaries."²⁸ According to Ames, Tertullian's was a textual based argument rather than an experience-based one. Ames contends that such a construction represented "a paradigmatic way of building an image of the other and stigmatizing those who do not share the same beliefs."²⁹ What Ames seems to neglect is the full biographical and contextual picture of Christian apologists, especially Tertullian, her immediate subject. Christians such as Tertullian, raised in Roman culture and likely in a higher echelon of Roman society, would have first-hand experience of Roman religious practices. There is little doubt that he could have escaped Roman religious infusion among quotidian activities. His pagan upbringing, including his life prior to conversion, would have been filled with the basic rituals of *religio Romana*. Further inquiry regarding the ubiquity

of Roman religious culture should continue to shed light upon early Christian apologetic texts.

Kyle Harper observes, “[The] Romans not only had sex with the lamps on — they had sex by the flickering light of lamps that had images of them having sex by lamplight on them!”³⁰ Harper’s description of the sexual environment in Roman late antiquity is a helpful addition towards understanding early Christian apologetic motives. Harper posits the notion of individual freedom as a Christian innovation in promoting sexual holiness. In Greco-Roman perspective, “our desires, our limits, our moral awareness” are part of a mandated status, restricted from mobility and powerless to change. Contrary to this Greco-Roman ideology of status, Christian notions of sexual morality assumed an understanding of the will, positing man as agents with the ability to resist aberrant sexual behavior and therefore honor God with their bodies. As Harper relates, this was a philosophical battle between the idea of polis and cosmos.³¹

Additional work is necessary to relate this notion of mandated status versus free will notions in early Christian apologetic literature. Certainly it is present, yet to what extent in these authors is it true and how is it articulated requires further inquiry. Harper provides a helpful study in the nature of pederasty and pervasive sexual mores within late antiquity. Though not ubiquitous among all classes, such acts were encouraged by a slave economy present among the more aristocratic members of society. Harper asserts, “Slave ownership was not just the preserve of such super-rich aristocrats, though; the sheer extent of slave owning meant that the mechanics of Roman sexuality were shaped by the presence of unfree bodies across the social spectrum.”³²

Wayne Meeks observes,

Most people living in one of the cities of the Roman empire, then, were constantly aware of rank on rank of others above them in the social pyramid, and the distance from top to bottom was very great. There was, moreover, little or no

expectation that the ranks would change. No organizations existed that were dedicated to social change, and we hear of only rare and local rebellions by oppressed groups. There were no revolutionary movements in antiquity.

With this in mind, the Christian movement was seen as revolutionary, and apologists described it as so, especially in the terms of a distinctive sexual morality. In light of Kyle Harper and others recent work, there is much more reflection and work to be done in the area regarding the intersection between Greco-Roman and early Christian sexual ethics. The apologists of the second century provide much insight to this intersection, and certainly others can be included for consideration.

Recent scholars have pointed to the paradigm of *eudaemonia* among early Christian texts. The concept of painting a converse *eudaemonia* with a positive one is nothing new in ethical literature.³⁴ The second-century apologists offer a Christian *eudaemonia*, a moral vision, in which imitation of a good God leads to good deeds which ultimately leads to good society. This is not a paradisiacal vision for the world, but rather, a contrastive way of being in the world which leads to human moral prosperity. The apologists some more harsh than others, invite their hearers to consider the reasonable nature of Christian sexual morality, coaxing people away from enslavement to alternate stories of being in the world, and into imitation of the one true God who is good and desires good things for those whom he has created.

CONCLUSION

Christian apologists in the second-century implored readers to consider Christian sexual morality as a litmus test for religious veracity. In other words, sexual holiness was a clear marker toward Christian moral, social and religious identity. Such holiness was reflective of Pauline and Petrine themes, and demonstrated a biblical concern for a faithful presence in society. Though distinct in ethic, the Christian community was not separate from

society, and as many apologists intimated, Christians were the spiritual glue which kept civilization from breaking apart. While highlighting these themes, this paper has also sought to provide potential entry points towards further exploration. In closing, the theme of sexual ethics in second-century apologetic literature is best summarized in the words of Aristides, “And verily, this is a new people, and there is something divine in the midst of them” (*Apol* 16).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ For example see Clayton N. Jefford, *The Epistle to Diognetus (with the Fragment of Quadratus)*: *Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013); Justin Martyr, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*, ed. Denis Minns and P. M Parvis (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Geoffrey D Dunn, *Tertullian's Adversus Iudeos: A Rhetorical Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008).
- ² Helen Rhee, *Early Christian Literature: Christ and Culture in the Second and Third Centuries* (London, UK: Routledge, 2005), 106-58.
- ³ This is important to note as Rhee, for all her helpful analysis, tends to group gnostic Christian moral lifestyles with those of traditional Christian voices. This leads to the conclusion of numerous Christian sexual moral alternatives, according to Rhee. She states, “While asserting the superiority of Christian sexual morality as a defense against pagan accusations, the Apologies, Apocryphal Acts, and Martyr Acts attested to the bifurcating development of the Dominical and Pauline tradition in close interaction with the Stoic-Cynic asceticism in the subsequent century” (Rhee, *Early Christian Literature*, 156). While one can talk about various tendencies in early Christian sexual ethics, I argue in this paper for a standard defense of Christian faith based on a sexual ethic rooted strongly in the biblical tradition, while not neglecting the possibility of philosophical influence. For a helpful summary of Stoicism and stoic influences on Christianity see Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 2003), 354-69.
- ⁴ For a comprehensive exploration of this motif within New Testament literature, and a helpful introduction to New Testament ethics, see Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1996).
- ⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 4.
- ⁶ Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 7.
- ⁷ For a recent assessment of γένος in Aristides, see William C. Rutherford, “Citizenship among Jews and Christians: Civic Discourse in the Apology of Aristides” in *Studia Patristica*, Vol. 65 (Leuven, BEL: Peeters, 2013), 3-26.
- ⁸ Citations from Aristides, “The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher.” Translated by D.M. Kay. In *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Philip Schaff, Series 1, vol. 9, 263-280. 1886. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.
- ⁹ Rutherford, “Citizenship among Jews and Christians,” 25.
- ¹⁰ The most likely candidates for authorship are Quadratus or perhaps Polycarp, though any evidence is ultimately circumstantial. See P. Andreessen, “The Authorship of the *Epistula ad Diognetum*,” *Vigiliae christiana* 1, no. 2 (1947): 129-36.
- ¹¹ Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox, 1988), 178.
- ¹² Charles E. Hill, *From the Lost Teaching of Polycarp: Identifying Irenaeus' Apostolic Presbyter and the Author of Ad Diognetum*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen, DE: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 106.

- ¹³ Citations from “The Epistle of Diognetus” in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, trans. Michael W. Holmes, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).
- ¹⁴ Benjamin H. Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners: Self as Other in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 70.
- ¹⁵ George Weigel, “The Church’s Political Hopes for the World” in *The Two Cities of God: The Church’s Responsibility for the Earthly City*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 1997), 61.
- ¹⁶ Michael Heintz, “Mimētēs Theou in the Epistle to Diognetus,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 115.
- ¹⁷ Heintz, “Mimētēs Theou,” 115–116.
- ¹⁸ Michael F. Bird, “The Reception of Paul in the Epistle to Diognetus” in *Paul and the Second Century*, eds. Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson (London, ENG: T&T Clark, 2011), 87.
- ¹⁹ Edwards, “Apologetics,” 552.
- ²⁰ Sara Parvis and Paul Foster, eds. *Justin Martyr and His Worlds* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 1.
- ²¹ Citations from *Justin Martyr; Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*, ed. Denis Minns and P. M. Parvis (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- ²² Jörg Ulrich, “Justin Martyr” in *In Defence of Christianity: Early Christian Apologists*, eds. Jakob Engberg, Anders-Christian Jacobson, and Jörg Ulrich. Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity, eds. David Braake, Anders-Christian Jacobson, Jörg Ulrich (Frankfurt, DE: Peter Lang, 2014), 58.
- ²³ Citations from *Athenagoras, Embassy for the Christians, The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. Joseph Hugh Crehan, Ancient Christian Writers, Vol. 23 (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1955).
- ²⁴ Sara Parvis, “Justin Martyr and the Apologetic Tradition” in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds*, eds. Sara Parvis and Paul Foster (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 125.
- ²⁵ Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian. The Early Church Fathers* (London, UK: Rutledge, 2004), 11.
- ²⁶ Citations from Tertullian and Marcus Minucius Felix, *Tertullian: Apologetical Works, and Minucius Felix: Octavius* (New York, NY: Fathers of the Church, 1950).
- ²⁷ Andrew D. Clarke, *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 2000), 67–68.
- ²⁸ Cecilia Ames, “Roman Religion in the Vision of Tertullian” in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 459.
- ²⁹ Ames, “Roman Religion in the Vision of Tertullian,” 459.
- ³⁰ Kyl Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 11.
- ³¹ Harper, From Shame to Sin, 18.
- ³² Harper, From Shame to Sin, 27.
- ³³ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1986), 34.
- ³⁴ Heintz, “Mimētēs Theou,” 114; cf. J. Cook, “The Protreptic Power of Early Christian Language: From John to Augustine,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 48 (1994): 105–34.



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Marriage in Crisis: The Conflict Between Sexual Freedom and Religious Liberty

RYAN T. ANDERSON

The following is an adaptation of a presentation from the 2014 Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission's National Conference on The Gospel, Homosexuality, and the Future of Marriage.

Sexual liberty and religious liberty need not be in tension. Indeed, most Americans don't want them to be in tension. It's true there are bad stories out there where people have been victimized by intolerance. Some of this has been at the hands of market leaders. Consider Brendan Eich, who six years ago made a donation to Proposition 8, and six years later, when it was discovered, was forced to resign as CEO of Mozilla Firefox.¹ Never mind that Prop 8, defining

marriage in California as the union of a man and woman, passed with more than 7 million votes. That view was now considered unacceptable. Or consider the case of Phil Robertson of Duck Dynasty.² The reaction to these cases from ordinary Americans was that they had gone too far. Ordinary Americans — both those in favor of gay marriage and those who oppose gay marriage — could agree that these cases were disconcerting. And so, not surprisingly, A&E (the network that airs Duck Dynasty) and Cracker Barrel (the restaurant chain that had removed Phil Robertson's products from its store) reversed their decisions within 48 hours. Robertson was no longer suspended from Duck Dynasty, and you could buy his wares at the Country Store at Cracker Barrel. The simple explanation is that the executives who run A&E and Cracker Barrel were out of step with their customers. They were out of step with ordinary Americans who enjoy country-fried steak and watching a show about duck hunters.

As these controversies were unfolding, no one suggested that Mozilla had to employ Eich or that A&E had to employ Robertson. No one wanted a law to force Mozilla and A&E to do this. No one suggested the government should coerce them into employing Robertson and Eich. They had the right to do what they did even if many Americans didn't think it was the right thing to do. I opened by saying that sexual liberty and religious liberty need not be in tension and that most Americans, whether they're for gay marriage or opposed to gay marriage, don't want them to be in tension. But there are some activists who do want them to be in tension. There are some activists who are working to pass laws that would allow the government to coerce individuals to violate their beliefs about marriage.

Much worse than the stories about Brendan Eich or Phil Robertson are the stories that involve government coercion, government fines, and other punitive action.³ The examples are well known at this point. Consider Christian-run adoption agencies in Massachusetts and Illinois and Washington, D.C., that have been forced out of the adoption space because they wanted to

find homes with married moms and dads for the children they were responsible for.⁴ These agencies weren't trying to prevent gays and lesbians from adopting from other agencies, from the state agency, or from other nonprofit agencies. They just wanted to run their adoption agency according to their belief that children deserve a mom and a dad — and the state said no. The state said it wouldn't grant them a license to run an adoption agency unless they placed children on an equal basis with same-sex married couples as they did with married mothers and fathers.

This does nothing to help orphans.⁵ It does nothing to increase the likelihood that parents adopt kids or that kids find homes. All it does is score a point for political correctness. It makes children victims in an adult culture war. And most Americans don't like this. While there are some activists pushing for this, by and large, whether you're for or against gay marriage, this sort of thing is disconcerting. Other examples involve photographers, bakers, and florists, and even farmers in New York State.⁶ These are citizens who have no problem serving gays and lesbians but do object to celebrating same-sex weddings. Barronelle Stutzman is one example. She had been providing flowers for a gay couple for years. But when they asked her to do the floral arrangements for their same-sex wedding, she had to decline. She couldn't help celebrate that event because it violated her beliefs about what marriage is. The same is true of the photographer at the same-sex wedding or the baker and the same-sex wedding cake.

These challenges will come in unimaginable varieties and complexities, and it's impossible to know beforehand how to respond in every single situation. Should we bake the cake, or should we not? Should we make the floral arrangements? What should our campus policies be? I don't know what I would do because I don't have those experiences. But I can understand why Elaine Huguenin thought the way she thought.⁷ And at the end of the day it's not my conscience that is on the line. It's not my relationship with God. It's her conscience, and it's her relationship with God. And so I don't want my government coercing her or penalizing her or putting a fine on her unless it has to. And it's the same with most Americans.

The way we've worked this out in American law is to have a balancing test.⁸ Religious liberty isn't an absolute right. Religious liberty doesn't always trump. Religious liberty is balanced with concerns for a compelling state interest that's being pursued in the least-restrictive means possible.

But it isn't clear that forcing every photographer and every baker and every florist to help celebrate same-sex weddings is advancing a compelling state interest in the least-restrictive way possible. It's not as if in New Mexico, where Elaine Huguenin resides, conservative evangelicals have a monopoly on the photography business. There are other photographers in New Mexico who support same-sex marriage and who are interested in making money and who are more than happy to do the wedding photography for same-sex wedding ceremonies. So it's not clear why we need to have the government penalize Elaine. And increasingly, most Americans agree on that. We can have a system of live and let live. And even if government recognizes same-sex relationships as marriages, the government should not coerce third parties into celebrating that marriage.⁹ Government should respect the rights of all citizens. And a form of government that's respectful of free association and free contracts and free speech and the free exercise of religion should protect citizens' rights to live according to their belief that marriage is the union of a man and woman. Protecting religious liberty and the rights of conscience doesn't infringe on anyone's sexual freedoms.

No one has the right to have the government force a particular minister to marry them, or a certain photographer to capture the first kiss, or a baker to bake the wedding cake.¹⁰ Declining to perform these services doesn't violate anyone's sexual freedoms. Some citizens may conclude that they cannot in good conscience participate in a same-sex ceremony, from priests and pastors to bakers and florists. The government should not force them to choose between their religious beliefs and their livelihood. Barronelle Stutzman was not looking to be a culture warrior.¹¹ She was not provoking a culture war. She was just trying to lead her

life in a faithful way as she understood it. She wanted to find a way to live and let live. She wasn't going to prevent her customers from having their ceremony. She wasn't going to prevent other florists from selling them flowers. She only asked to not be coerced to violate her conscience.

I don't want to suggest these examples somehow constitute a war on Christianity or that somehow Christians are being persecuted in the United States. We're not. There really is persecution going on in the world, and we shouldn't trivialize it. In many parts of the world you can be killed simply for believing that Jesus is Lord. I don't want to suggest that anything that's taking place in the United States even comes close to that. But what happens in the United States still matters. And as citizens of a self-governing republic, we should be engaged in trying to pass good public policy, to pass laws that serve the common good. We should be engaged in the political process to have our laws respect religious liberty rights for all Americans — not just for our co-religionists, not just for those people who hold the religious beliefs that we hold or who engage in religious activities that we approve of.

Religious liberty is for all people to worship and to lead their public lives in accordance with their religious beliefs — except for when doing so would violate a compelling government interest that the government is trying to advance in the least-restrictive way possible.¹² Protecting religious liberty will entail a battle fought in a court of law but also a discussion that will take place in a court of public opinion. Many of our neighbors will not understand why religious liberty matters in the marriage context because they can't understand why we believe what we believe about marriage.¹³ And the reason they can't understand it is because we haven't done a good job embodying it or explaining it or witnessing to it. So if many of our neighbors think our views about marriage are just a result of animus or bigotry, it's because too many of us are remaining silent on this issue, so only extreme voices are heard.

This is one of the reasons why Sherif Girgis, my co-author of *What is Marriage?*, does the work he does.¹⁴ He's a very young

person, he's in his 20s. He graduated from Princeton with the highest honors and then went to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. Now he's back at Princeton doing his doctorate in philosophy while doing his law degree at Yale. Why would someone like Sherif put all of those credentials at risk? If he just kept his mouth shut, he'd have tenure at a fancy school and a nice life. But he knows that in writing the book that we wrote and in giving the lectures on college campuses that he gives, he will be attacked. Why does he do this? It's not because of hate. No one I know involved in the marriage discussion is motivated by hate. Sherif does it because he wants to do what he can to help make the case for what he believes about marriage and to help other people, those who agree with him and who disagree with him, see the argument, point out flaws in the argument, point out the virtues of the argument and have a conversation about this.

Each and every one of us has to help witness to marriage in our own vocations. Sherif is a philosopher and legal scholar, so he does that given his particular calling in life. There are other callings in life — that of pastor and priest, of artist and musician, of spouse and neighbor and parent. We all have to find ways of making the case for marriage given our unique callings. We also need to love our neighbors. It's not enough to say, "I love you," and then lead our lives in ways that rightfully raise eyebrows. And we haven't done a good enough job of loving our gay neighbors. We have to do better. We have to work to protect the rights of Americans and the various associations they form to be free to speak and to act in the public square in accordance with their belief that marriage is the union of a man and woman — whether they be for-profit or nonprofit, whether they be universities and colleges or charities and adoption agencies and businesses.

Protecting religious liberty and the rights of conscience is the embodiment of principled pluralism. It's this principled pluralism that allows for a variety of beliefs with no government-imposed orthodoxy. It allows for a more diverse and civil public sphere. Indeed tolerance is going to be essential to promoting

co-existence in the midst of disagreement. If we're going to disagree over the nature and purpose of marriage, then protecting the religious liberty rights to dissent, to speak that dissent and to act on that dissent is central. And those religious liberty rights will be respected, both in law and in culture, if it's clear that we're coming at this from a perspective of love.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ <http://dailysignal.com/2014/04/03/eich-tolerance>
- ² <http://dailysignal.com/2013/12/20/penalizing-hold-biblical-views-marriage>
- ³ <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/04/protecting-religious-liberty-in-the-state-marriage-debate>
- ⁴ <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/01/adoption-foster-care-and-conscience-protection>
- ⁵ [http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/04/protecting-religious-liberty-in-the-state-marriage-debate;](http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/04/protecting-religious-liberty-in-the-state-marriage-debate)
- ⁶ <http://dailysignal.com/2014/08/19/government-farmers-host-sex-wedding-pay-13000-fine>
- ⁷ <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/04/protecting-religious-liberty-in-the-state-marriage-debate>
- ⁸ <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2014/07/13432>
- ⁹ <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/04/protecting-religious-liberty-in-the-state-marriage-debate>
- ¹⁰ <http://dailysignal.com/2014/10/18/government-ordained-ministers-celebrate-sex-wedding-go-jail/>
- ¹¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDETkcCw63c>
- ¹² <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2014/07/13432>
- ¹³ <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/04/protecting-religious-liberty-in-the-state-marriage-debate>; <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/marriage-what-it-is-why-it-matters-and-the-consequences-of-redefining-it>
- ¹⁴ <http://whatismarriagebook.com>



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JDFM FORUM

Is God Anti-Gay?

SAM ALLBERRY

The following is an adaptation of a presentation from the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission's National Conference 2014 in Nashville, Tennessee.

Let me thank you for coming along to our session this afternoon. I want to thank you not just for coming along to this session, but I want to thank you for caring about this issue, as we've been made very aware of the course of this conference, this is not an issue about politics, or abstract things; what we're dealing with is people. Maybe some of us are dealing with issues in our own life, or for people that are very close to us.

I am from the United Kingdom, and I am a bit of a contradiction. I'm an Englishman who is an American-phile. I live in the United Kingdom, but I love coming over to the States. I'm also a contradiction because I'm a conservative Reformed evangelical and yet I have experienced same-sex attraction for pretty much my entire adult life. Being a rather slow person, it took me a long time to be able to figure out what was going

on, and it took me longer to admit it to other people.

I remember one particular day in school, I must have been fifteen or sixteen, and a very good friend of mine was bragging about getting with a girl over the previous weekend (this was somebody who I was a close friend with). Most everybody was high-fiving and back slapping him, but I remember feeling devastated. It just suddenly cut me very deeply that this guy, whom I loved so much as a friend, had been intimate with somebody else. I guess that was the first little sign to me that there was something going on, and it took me awhile before I figured out what that something was.

My battle with same-sex attraction has been something that I've loved sharing over the past couple years, and I enjoy sharing because I want to say that the word God has for people in my situation is a good word. I see God's Word on this issue as an expression of his kindness, and therefore I hope I can convince us that we can have confidence in that word. We mustn't feel as if we're giving somebody a bad deal when we teach what the Bible teaches on sex and marriage. Although it's good, it doesn't mean it's an easy word. Very often it is a frustrating word that God has for us.

As I've had a lot of opportunities to speak to a number of churches and organizations, I've had a number of questions asked of me over the years. I thought it would be most helpful for me to answer the four most common questions that come to me on a regular basis. These are four that I think are the biggest ground-level questions that frequently are raised:

- 1. Did Jesus even mention homosexuality?*
- 2. Can't we just agree to differ over this issue as evangelicals?*
- 3. Isn't a same-sex partnership permissible if it is faithful?*
- 4. Isn't the traditional Christian tradition on sex and marriage deeply harmful to people?*

I'm conscious that we can't do justice to these questions in one session. However, I hope I can at least sketch out some useful approaches as we try to think about them.

DOES JESUS EVEN MENTION HOMOSEXUALITY?

Obviously the implication behind the question is, “If Jesus didn’t, why are we even talking about it?” On Twitter recently I saw someone had tweeted, “This is what Jesus said about homosexuality,” and then there was a blank space. How do we respond to that?

I want to say two quick things. First, Jesus doesn’t *not* mention homosexuality. Secondly, in what Jesus does mention, he does address it. There are two quick verses for us to look at here. First, Matthew 15:19, Jesus is in a discussion with some of the Pharisees of his day and he says to them, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander, these are what defile a person.” Jesus is talking about the different kinds of things that defile us, that make us unclean, before God. He includes in that list what we’ve translated “sexual immorality.” It is the translation of the Greek word, *pornei*. If that sounds familiar that’s the word we get pornography from. In the time of Jesus, *porneia* was a kind of catch-all term for any behavior outside of marriage. That would include adultery, pre-marital sex, prostitution, and it would include homosexual sex. Jesus says, these kinds of sexual behavior defile us. They are not the only things that defile us, but they are some of the things that defile us. It is important for us to see that because it shows that while Jesus doesn’t name homosexuality, in teaching like this, he does include it. With all sexual activity outside of marriage, Jesus prohibits it. Jesus doesn’t mention homosexuality, but he does include it.

Let me just give you an illustration of this. Just imagine that I was so grateful that you’ve come to the session this afternoon that I decided to say to you, “As a thank you for coming, I want to give each of you \$50 on your way out.” Just imagine that offer was hanging in the air. You would be eligible for that money, but have I named you? I’ve not named you, but it is very clear from what I said that I included you. Jesus has not named homosexuality in this verse, but it is very clear from his teaching that it is included.

The second passage for us to turn to is Matthew 19:3-6. Again Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and they try to test him by asking,

"Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" I gather that there were rabbis teaching just that, that for any triviality you could divorce your wife. They want to catch Jesus and see where he lands on this issue. Jesus responds in a typically insightful way, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" Jesus is doing a number of things. First, he's poking a bit of fun at them. These were the Pharisees who were so proud of their knowledge of the Scriptures, and Jesus begins his answer by saying, "Haven't you read" and quotes Genesis 1. "Did you get as far as Genesis 1 in your Bible reading?" It's a great way to put a Pharisee down.

Now Jesus says a couple of things; in verse 4 he says, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" Jesus is quoting from two different verses, one in Genesis 1 and one in Genesis 2 and he puts them together. In this verse, what Jesus is saying is that our being created as men and women is connected to the fact that we have this thing called marriage. Because there is such a thing as gender, we have this phenomenon of marriage. Jesus tethers marriage to this sexual difference between men and women. Marriage is predicated on gender.

Now friends, that is hugely significant because there are all sorts of ways that a couple could be different and kind of fit well together. One might be left brain, the other right brain. One might be an extrovert, the other an introvert. But there is no deeper complementarity in the Bible than that between a man and a woman. It is this kind of union and actually only this kind of union that the Bible describes as one flesh. Jesus shows us that marriage is predicated on gender. He shows us something else just a few verses later.

As he expands on what it means for the two to become one, the disciples get cold feet and in verse 10 they say, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." You can imagine

the disciples freaking out saying, “goodness, if this is what it’s like I may give the marriage thing a bit of a miss. It sounds too committed.” But look at what Jesus says to them, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others — and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” In other words, the very moment the disciples start questioning whether to marry, Jesus starts talking about eunuchs — the celibate. As the disciples are saying, maybe it’s better not to marry, Jesus doesn’t say, “Cohabitate for awhile. Try it before you buy it.” No, he immediately talks about celibacy. The only godly alternative to heterosexual marriage is singleness.

Friends, as I understand it, the teaching of Jesus tells me that any kind of same-sex activity is not an option as a follower of Jesus.

Now I need to set that immediately in a wider context. All of us are out of sync with God in every area of life, including our sexual desires. All of us in this room together are attracted to things we shouldn’t be. Friends in that sense, none of us are straight. All of us are skewed in our sexual desires. Same-sex attraction is one expression of that, but it is not the only expression of that.

Two conclusions: Jesus is not neutral when it comes to this issue. Second, the Bible’s teaching on marriage alone is enough to settle whether same-sex is permissible. In other words, we believe what we believe about homosexuality because we believe what we believe about marriage.

CAN’T WE JUST AGREE TO DIFFER AS EVANGELICALS?

As evangelicals we make a distinction between core, primary issues and secondary issues where there’s room for a kind of differing with one another. Issues where we’re free to differ would be, for example, spiritual gifts, what we understand about the millennium, how often a church should take communion, questions about the appropriate age at which somebody should be baptized, and so on. We don’t treat those issues as central issues, we treat them as secondary. Why then

can't we treat homosexuality as another secondary issue? There are people who claim to be evangelicals with differing views. Surely, as an evangelical constituency, we have to allow that and facilitate that.

I want to share four reasons why I think the issue of homosexuality has to be a core issue for us as evangelicals.

The Authority of Scripture

The Bible mentions homosexual activity in six passages and in every case it does so negatively.

It strikes me that what you have to do to the Bible to make it supportive of gay relationships is profoundly un-evangelical. We have to ignore the context, we have to define the key words not by how the biblical author uses them but by how secular authors in a different time and place use those words. It's interesting that a number of non-Christian writers are far clearer on what the Bible says about homosexuality than some authors who are evangelicals.

The Meaning of Marriage

One of the purposes of marriage in the Bible is that this union between a man and a woman shows this mystery between Christ and the church. Human marriage is the icon of the relationship Jesus has with his people. If we now construe marriage as being between a man and a man or a woman and a woman, that picture is disfigured and we're left instead with Christ and Christ, or the church and the church. In other words, when you begin to change the biblical definition of marriage, you end up changing something that should be reflecting the gospel.

The Fate of Unrepentant Homosexual People

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 6:9, 11, Paul writes, "Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were." Paul touches there on the

issue of homosexuality. It is not the only thing on Paul's list. We need to be serious about greed, about reviling, about swindling, but we do need to be serious about homosexual practice as well.

Paul assumes that we might be deceived. He says, "Don't be deceived." There will be those who attempt to show that this is not the case. Paul shows why it matters so much — eternity is at stake! If we approve of something that God himself forbids, we are sending people to Hell. This is a different order issue for some of the other issues that we may agree to differ over. Eternal destiny is not at stake when it comes to understanding your view of the millennium; it is at stake, Paul says, with this issue of homosexuality. It could not be more serious.

The Disapproval of Jesus

Revelation 2:20, "I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols." It seems to be that at this time, there is some false teaching taking place in the Church in Thyatira. Jesus refers to the teacher as Jezebel. I take it that's not her actual name, but it is kind of using that Old Testament echo of Jezebel. The feature of this teaching is that it leads God's people into sexual sin. Notice how he responds to this situation though. He's not just against the person doing the teaching. He doesn't say, "I've got this against Jezebel." He says, "I have this against you! That you tolerate that woman, Jezebel."

Not all tolerance is godly! There are certain things which we should be intolerant, and Jesus says that the presence of teaching in our churches that leads to sexual sin is not something that we should tolerate. Not tolerating those things is no excuse for rudeness or brashness or arrogance or cockiness. The fact remains that we must act when such teaching is present in our midst. Not taking a side on this issue is taking a side. It is tolerating. This passage shows us that if you do that, you risk having Jesus against you. Please remind yourself who Jesus is in Revelation 1 and ask yourself, "Do you want that Jesus to be against you?" We do very well to remember that if we

are on the right side of that Jesus, we will not be on the wrong side of history, because he is the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

I am convinced that this must be a core issue for us and so, again, two quick conclusions. The first is that we can't avoid this issue. If you are a pastor, you mustn't avoid teaching on this issue. You must avoid only teaching on this issue and putting it in a category of its own, but you mustn't duck the issue. If the folks in your church are not being taught by you, they will only be taught by the secular world around them.

I've heard people in significant churches and ministries say that they don't want to talk about this issue because they might lose their platform for the gospel. If that is you, please don't seek a platform for the sake of the gospel unless you are willing to lose that platform for the sake of the gospel.

The second conclusion I feel we have to draw is that it will be right, if also deeply sad, for evangelical denominations and organizations to make this an issue over which members might have to be disaffiliated. In the United Kingdom, the Evangelical Alliance recently decided to disaffiliate a particular church and ministry, one which had become profoundly unbiblical on this issue. I gather that the Southern Baptist Convention has had to make a similar decision in recent months as well. Those decisions I take it will be very hard; often, the individuals involved are people we know and love as friends. It should be heart-breaking. Such decisions often attract a fair amount of opposition.

Can I also say that such decisions are a huge encouragement to Christians in your churches who battle same-sex attraction? Those decisions say to us that our daily battle for godliness is worth fighting. When denominations and organizations tolerate the kind of false teaching we've been looking at, that says to people in my situation, "You don't really need to be fighting that sin. It doesn't really matter." Very sadly, it is sometimes going to be hard for us to draw a line on this issue.

I am convinced that it is not an issue we can just agree to differ over.

SURELY A GAY RELATIONSHIP IS PERMISSIBLE IF IT IS FAITHFUL

Most people say, “Surely what matters to most people is not the gender of the people in the relationship, but whether they are faithful and committed.” If a same-sex couple loves each other and are faithful to whatever promises they’ve made, surely that should be the bottom line.

In the Bible, it is not the case that faithfulness is the key to whether a relationship is morally appropriate or not. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul rebukes the church in Corinth because it is accepting in its midst an illicit relationship. A man is having a relationship with his father’s wife, probably his step-mother, a relationship forbidden in Leviticus 18. Paul is dismayed. Even the pagans, he says, would not have allowed such a thing. Yet, it’s going on in plain sight against God’s people. You have this relationship going on in the church in Corinth and Paul’s response is instructive for what he doesn’t say as much as what he does say. Paul doesn’t say in response to the situation, “Can you just tell me, is the couple faithful and then I will let you know whether or not this is a godly relationship?” He doesn’t ask the level of commitment between the man and his father’s wife. He doesn’t ask if they really love each other first before he responds. That is not the issue. Whether or not they’re committed and faithful is beside the point.

Paul does not distinguish between faithful, illicit relationships and unfaithful, illicit relationships. In this particular situation, Paul calls for the church to express grief over what it has been allowing.

It is possible to demonstrate some virtues while doing something that is wrong. Because it is possible, it does not justify the wrong thing that we might be doing. Imagine a gang of bank robbers; a particular member of that gang may display impeccable loyalty to his fellow gang members during the course of robbery. He may look out for them and protect them. He may make sure that everybody gets a fair part of the loot, but none of this in anyway lessens the immorality of the act itself. Just because he is a loyal thief does not make his thievery right.

There are many same-sex partnerships that exhibit enormous commitment and faithfulness. That doesn't mean that such relationships are thereby justified. Activity that is faithful and committed is no more permissible just because it is faithful and committed.

ISN'T THE TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN POSITION ON SEX AND MARRIAGE HARMFUL?

I'm finding that this is the most frequently raised question that I get asked. It is certainly the most emotional.

Dan Savage wrote these words,

The dehumanizing bigotries that fall from lips of 'faithful Christians,' and the lies that spew forth from the pulpit of the churches 'faithful Christians' drag their kids to on Sundays, give your straight children a license to verbally abuse, humiliate and condemn the gay children they encounter at school. And many of your straight children — having listened to mom and dad talk about how gay marriage is a threat to the family and how gay sex makes their magic sky friend Jesus cry himself to sleep — feel justified in physically attacking the gay and lesbian children they encounter in their schools. You don't have to explicitly 'encourage [your] children to mock, hurt, or intimidate' gay kids. Your encouragement — along with your hatred and fear — is implicit. It's here, it's clear, and we can see the fruits of it.¹

It is put provocatively, but it expresses how many people feel today. Our line on this issue inflicts great harm on people's mental health, it is claimed. It engenders deep, self-loathing. It forces people who are not suited to it into a celibate lifestyle.

What do we say to these claims as Godly people?

Before I move on, I must say that there is never an excuse for abusive language or behavior. There are people who have undoubtedly ridiculed and victimized those of same-sex attraction and thought that by doing so they were furthering the Christian cause. Such

abuse is every bit as non-Christian as the behavior they claim they have the right to denounce.

The question still remains though. Is our position, even if graciously and carefully articulated, responsible for harming the mental health of people around us?

The Gospel Involves Enormous Cost and Enormous Blessing for Everyone.

The gospel is costly for everyone. The gospel makes us see ourselves in a new and painful light, because the teaching of Jesus shows us that we're not just a little mis-morphed here and there, the teaching of Jesus is that we're fundamentally sinful at heart and that is a painful thing to learn.

Jesus calls us to give up everything for him. He says in Mark 8 that if anybody comes after him, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. In other words, Jesus calls us to give up our very self to him, our sense of who we think we are. My point in raising that is not to say that therefore it doesn't matter if people feel deep self-loathing — it does matter. My point is that the gospel should be costly for every person who turns to Christ.

When I've done talks on this, I've lost count of the people who have come to me and said, "Yes but the gospel is harder for you because it goes against who you really are." The first thing I say is, "My same-sex attraction is not who I am. It's part of what I feel, but it's not who I am." Secondly, "Are you trying to tell me that the gospel is just slotted neatly into your life without any kind of reappraisal, or cost, or frustration at all? If that's the case, it is not this gospel that you have received."

There is no one for whom the gospel is not costly. There is no one for whom that same gospel is not utterly worth it.

Let me take you to Mark 10:28-30, one of my favorite verses. "Peter began to say to him, 'See, we have left everything and followed you.' Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a

hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”

Peter said, “We’ve left everything for you.” We don’t know his tone, whether he’s asking pridefully or out of despair, but either way Jesus’ answer is the same. He recognizes that people are going to have to leave things behind to follow him. That is what it means to deny ourselves and take up our cross. To turn to Jesus we have to turn away from many things, many things that are precious to us. Following Jesus involves leaving things behind and giving things up, but the promise here is that however much we have to leave behind, we are never left out of pocket. We never receive a bad deal.

Jesus isn’t just saying, “Yes you have to give a lot up, but grit your teeth and hang in there because eventually there will be heaven.” He says, “There will be nobody who won’t receive one hundredfold in this time and then in the age to come, eternal life.” Jesus is saying that following him is worth it, even in this lifetime and even with hardship. Whatever we leave behind Jesus replaces in far greater measure. What we give up for Jesus does not compare to what he gives us back. If the costs are great, the rewards are greater.

Interestingly, the main cost Jesus anticipates is relational. The main blessing he anticipates is relational. We may well have to leave some relationships behind in order to follow Jesus, but we will receive homes and family as part of his people. Jesus gives us family. It’s wonderful. It’s not just me and Jesus hanging out together from now on, instead he puts us in families. He promises us, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, even as he anticipates persecutions.

That gives us, as God’s people, a responsibility. We are to be family to those who leave behind much to follow Jesus.

The moment you think following Jesus is a poor deal for somebody, you are calling Jesus a liar. The gospel is costly. It should be costly for each one of us because each one of us has built our whole lives and identities on a faulty foundation. We have to come to terms with that and give ourselves to Christ to be named by him, identified by him. As we do so, we are put in a family by him.

We Evangelicals are Not the Ones Who Say Sex is Everything

We're not the ones who say a life without sex is no life at all. The idea and assumption behind the challenge that celibacy in itself is harmful means that sex has become an idol. If life without sex is not conceivable for you, it is really clear what is really God in your life.

A friend of mine, Andrew Wilson, spoke recently and was asked, "Why does God care about who I sleep with? Part of his answer was to turn the question around with, "Why do *you* care so much who you sleep with? Why is that where you draw the line and object to following God? Why is that your one non-negotiable?" It strikes me that it is our culture that is making sex into an idol and therefore is saying to people, 'When your sex life doesn't work out, your life hasn't worked out.' It is not the evangelical church, but the society around us that is putting the stakes up that high.

My question is which perspective is most likely to make someone feel like their life is not worth living. The perspective that says, "Sex is everything and if it's not fulfilling then there's no point. Life without sex is not life at all." Or the Christian perspective that is saying, "Sex is a wonderful gift from God, it is but a gift of God. It is no substitute for the Giver."

We are not the ones who say that a lack of sexual fulfillment is a lack of human fulfillment.

I don't deny that the church has been a cause of ungodly and unwarranted pain and abuse for people over the years. We should not be slow to confess that and repent of it, but I want to challenge the culture around us to say that it has blood on its hands as well in making sex the center.

Celibacy and singleness is seen as a good thing in the Bible

Jesus himself was single. As I was saying earlier, marriage and sexual activity are not intrinsic to being a fulfilled human being. Not only was Jesus single, but his apostle Paul too was single and he describes singleness as a gift.

Marriage is a gift, and singleness is a gift. Singleness is not just the absence of marriage. It is a gift and a good thing in and of itself.

Both marriage and singleness give us ways to fulfill our humanity, to point to the gospel, and to serve the Kingdom.

It makes as much sense as for somebody to say, “I’m married but I don’t think I have the gift of marriage,” as it does for somebody to say, “I’m single, but I don’t think I have the gift of singleness.”

That’s not to say that singleness isn’t difficult. I think living now in this particular point in our cultural history makes singleness much more difficult than it may have been in other times. Our culture now is designed around couples and sexual intimacy. We have almost entirely identified intimacy with sex. One result of that is that we have far less skill in forming deep, lifelong friendships than we used to have, so much so that when we look at some figures from history and see a deep friendship we assume it must have been sexual. There is an extent to which the church has not countered this trend but merely Christianized it.

We need to work harder at providing places of community. The New Testament describes the church as family. It describes fellow Christians as brothers and sisters. That is not an honorary thing. That is real. Timothy is told by Paul to treat older men as fathers and older women as mothers. Younger men as brothers and younger women as sisters. He doesn’t say to Timothy, “Treat older men as your great uncle who you might see once every Thanksgiving.” Treat the older men in your church as fathers. We’re not supposed to treat them as distant cousins. We ought to be truly family to one another.

In 1 Timothy 3, Paul writes, “Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” Paul describes the church in two ways in this verse. He says that it is the pillar and the foundation of truth.

You may be tempted to think of it the wrong way around. Surely the truth is the foundation of the church; if you take the truth away the church will fall down. But Paul is saying there is a sense that the church is the pillar and buttress of truth because it is the church

that is the outlet for God's truth in this world. It is the church that holds up the truth for the world to see.

Paul also describes the church as the household of God — the family of God. If God is your Father, then your fellow believers are your brothers and your sisters. They are your family. I believe those two things go together. It is when we most properly reflect the fact that we are the household of God when we treat ourselves as if we are truly family that we will find people take far more notice of the truth that we seek to uphold and present to the world around us.

It may well be the strength of the relationships within our church family that are the greatest evidence for the truth of what we believe about sex and marriage. So, the challenge for us is, "Are our churches places where there is community? Where there should be nobody who is having Thanksgiving dinner on their own if they don't want to?" Are we being family to one another? Are we opening our own biological families, our own households, to our spiritual brothers and sisters?

If we do, again, I think we will have far more impact with the truth that we uphold in the world around us.

My experience and that of so many Christians I know who have experienced same-sex attraction is that the word that God has for us is a good word, a word we can rejoice in. A word we need not be ashamed of. We're never better off without the word of God and we're never worse off with it. That is because God is so unfathomably good.

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://slog.thestranger.com/slog/archives/2010/10/01/sl-letter-of-the-day-sorry-nothing-fun>
There is explicit language in the cited blog post.

Millennials and Marriage: Evaluating the Younger Generation's Views on Sexuality and Marriage

ANDREW WALKER with ERIC TEETSEL,
JOHN STONESTREET, LINDSAY SWARTZ,
and TREVIN WAX

The following is an adaptation of a panel discussion from the 2014 Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission's National Conference on The Gospel, Homosexuality, and the Future of Marriage.

Andrew Walker (aw): The topic for this panel is "Millenials and Marriage: Evaluating The Younger Generation's Views on Sexuality and Marriage." We need to ask the question, "Why are we discussing this issue to begin with?" It's because Millennials find themselves in a culture that's obsessed with sex. As Millennials age in maturity they'll take on or correct the sexual attitudes of their previous generations. So today we're asking, "What's the culture saying about sex and marriage to Millennials?" and "How is this shaping their perspective as they mature into adulthood." Eric, my first question is for you and I'm going to ask it with a little anecdotal story.

A couple years ago I was in my hometown in Central Illinois. I was at a wedding which had a lot of individuals between the ages of twenty to thirty-three present. I noticed when I was looking out at all the people in attendance that I was the only one there who was married with kids and driving a mini-van. With that in mind, a few weeks back, new statistics indicated that marriage rates are

at their all time lowest in America. Out of wedlock child-bearing remains catastrophically high at over 40 percent nationally. People are marrying later than they ever have in American history. Co-habitation is the norm for Millennials it seems. One question to all those complex questions: What attitudes do Millennials have towards marriage today, given those realities?

Eric Teetsel (ET): Great question. If I can, I'd like to counter your anecdote with one of my own. My wife and I recently moved from Washington, D.C. to Kansas City, Kansas. The first week we were back, we went to church together at a really neat Southern Baptist Church, Redeemer Fellowship in Kansas City. I was shocked because there were a thousand people there in the same age range that you just described and they all had kids. I had never seen a group of young people my age and around my age who had kids, who were married. I think there's still hope. There are still pockets of people our age who do have some basic understanding of the life narrative that we're supposed to follow and they actually follow it. They just live in the real world and not Washington, D.C. I would say that even for those in the Church who do understand some of what marriage is, it's a rather basic and primarily biblical understanding. They know that marriage is for man and a woman and they know that homosexuality is a sin, but they don't have a much more robust theology of marriage and family than that. Certainly for those outside of the church, they have no understanding of what marriage is and why it matters. It's just sort of an incipient sense that it has something to do with romance and love and being together for some period of time. That's problematic. That feeds all of the types of marriage and family break down that we see, from infidelity and adultery to divorce. Young people in the church, in my estimation know what marriage is supposed to be for them but the connection from that ethic to public policy. I don't think the church has done a good job of convincing people our age why they're biblical ethics should apply as it regards to public policy. When you live in a world where you desperately want to be fully

Christian and fully modern and you don't have that fundamental, robust theology undergirding your life, it can be easy to privatize and compartmentalize these ethics. It helps you save face. It doesn't cost you close relationships with friends and family and since you don't' have that theology, you don't really understand that you've lost anything as a result.

John Stonestreet (JS): I think Eric mentioned something that's very important; he said they have this vague idea that it has something to do with romantic love. I think one of the things that we've dealt with on a cultural level is the triumph of romantic love above all other types of love. That's the only type of love there is in our culture. I feel this acutely because I'm the dad of three little girls and the Disney princess movement is the most successful marketing campaign in the history of the planet. Everything in my house has one of those princesses on it. This was also the reason I appreciated the movie *Frozen* even though the song "Let It Go" has been stuck in my head for eighteen months. If you think about it, the only sort of love that we see culturally in stories, in movies is romantic love. That's all that is celebrated. The robust understanding of friendship or agape and certainly the sort of love that it takes to properly understand marriage is just non-existent. It's hard for somebody in this culture without any other source of resources to even imagine what other love would be like, other than romantic love. We translate that into the church and this is one of the things that I would be concerned about. We have had a lot of conferences and seminars in our churches about how to have a happy marriage and how to have a godly marriage and how to have a great sex life. But really coming back and defining "what is love?" and "what is the purpose of marriage?" This isn't a conversation that many Millenials have even heard, so they kind of lack those categories.

AW: Lindsay, my next question is for you. What trends do you notice about men today that is affecting their maturity, their preparedness for marriage? What do you notice about men these days

that's problematic.

Lindsay Swartz (LS): I love that God created us male and female, I'm very grateful for his design in marriage. With some of my experience, I don't know whether to be frustrated with the fathers or with the sons — who are the ones who I am encountering. I feel like a lot of guys haven't been trained up. There's commitment issues, nobody wants to pull the trigger, there's busyness, so a lot of guys work hard but they don't want to make the time to take a weekend and visit somebody that their friend wants to set them up with.

There's also this romanticized vision of love, but I think sometimes the Millennial generation does all it can to not have to commit to something because something better might come along and they don't want to settle. I think we've bought into a lot of what Hollywood shows us, including myself. Young men need to be trained up! If they're not trained up, then the world is going to train them up according to its standard.

AW: Trevin, before we came on stage you made a great point about how the church sees singles. You said that it is not right that the church just sees singles as a niche, as this kind of transitory constituency within the church. You had some good thoughts back stage, talk to us about what the church's posture should be towards singles in the church?

Trevin Wax (TW): I think the default position in the evangelical circles has been to put a lot of attention on the family — for good reason. What concerns me though is that we now live in a culture, where more people are single than not single, especially in a lot of urban environments and especially when you look at younger generations. The church has been slow to really wrestle with that reality, because that's not what we have prepared for. I always like to think that we are called to ministered in the culture that God has put us in, not the culture that we wish we were in.

If the culture that we live in is one where single is the norm, not the exception, then what does it look like for us to really reach singles to bring them into a congregation and have them fully integrated into a congregation. If you look around our congregations now, we see singles of all generations, it's not ministry to singles, but ministry alongside and with singles in the kinds of things that we do. There needs to be a better integration of singles into all aspects of the church, to where they're not treated as the exception, because that's just not the culture we live in.

AW: It seems that we've established that one of the biggest mistaken assumptions about marriage today is what I would call the "happily ever after model," that marriage is just about commitment, companionship, and sexual intimacy. Trevin, you have been instrumental in The Gospel Project which has been influential in many churches. What steps should the church take to correct these false views of marriage? What does the church need to be doing about restoring this robust understanding of marriage, that sees marriage as foundational to society, not just an entryway into adulthood?

TW: I don't think there's a one-size fit all approach for churches. I think when it comes to helping our churches think through these issues and to seeing marriage in a fundamentally correct way. My concern in our churches is that people in our churches are not going to be necessarily pro-gay marriage, I think a lot of the people in our churches have already bought into the romanticized vision of marriage — it is just the affirmation from the government of two people in love. That reduced understanding of marriage is already prevalent in Evangelical churches, whether or not they hold the line when it comes to gay marriage. At the end of the day, the Bible opens with a wedding and closes with a wedding. The Gospel Project is about seeing the Bible from beginning to end, and being fully immersed in this biblical narrative. We need the immersion in the grand narrative of scripture

so that we are going back to the biblical text over and over again, until we are fully formed, so that we can see with biblical eyes in the culture that we live in.

AW: Eric I want to follow up with you on this. How would you describe the church's response to the collapse of marriage in culture? What should the church be doing to correct it?

ET: The Manhattan Declaration calls us to restore among our people a picture of the beauty and holiness and mystery of faithful marital love. I think that's a beautiful vision. I think that is what we are to do. I would add, if I was going to go back and rewrite it, responsibility. As I was listening to Trevin talk I was thinking about my own life, never once can I recall a church teaching about marriage as a responsibility that we have. Certainly, we need to have a robust theology of singleness, the Bible is very clear about the very special and important and meaningful work of singles in the church. There's a difference between a call to singleness and being single because guys are lame and they haven't asked you out yet. There's another anecdote from a church in D.C. where a bunch of young, brilliant people and none of these young men are married. This bishop from Rwanda came over to preach and he looked around the Church. Before he was leaving he called out the congregation, he said there are a bunch of men here who are single and a bunch of beautiful women who are single. He told them they needed to get married to each other. I'm pretty sure that over the next six months that there were ten marriages out of that church. It was only because a pastor called them out and called them to the respond to the responsibility of marriage. You're never going to be ready for marriage, you'll never enough money, or experience, just get married and make it work. There's this wonderful quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer that he wrote to his niece and she's preparing to get married. At one point he says, "At one time it was your love that sustained your relationship, but after you get married it's your marriage that sustains your love."

LS: I just wanted to follow up on that and speak from my own

experience briefly. I grew up in a broken home, my parents divorced when I was five. A parent got remarried and then divorced again when I was 28. I love my parents, but it's just broken. All that to say, I didn't grow up in church, so I didn't have an understanding of marriage. I didn't have an understanding of gender roles or God's grand narrative. I would just say to churches: teach it, model it, and invite singles and married couples into that, and pray for this. I sat under teaching in my grad school for about two years before the Lord really started opening my eyes to the beauty of what God was doing in his design of man and woman. Then, I was kindly invited into one family's life and I just got to see things that blew my mind because I had never fathomed that marriage could like that. I had no construct for that and I didn't even know to go searching for that. Invite singles in because they so badly want to be a part of a family and they want to know the way to walk and they just need somebody to show them.

JS: What these guys are talking about is the paradigm shift that at some level we need to land on. We talked a little bit about this in our book because both of us were frustrated about this language — “let’s defend marriage” — over and over. Shawn, my co-author, teaches at a Christian school and I work with high school and college students. Ten years ago when I use that phrase, people knew. But now, there’s not a framework for marriage. It’s not available now. Where would these kids see the beauty of a life-long marriage lived out now? The collapse of marriage hasn’t been because there was some kind of great debate that happened with argument for marriage or against marriage. It happened in the imagination, not in any sort of argument, and we’ve lost that.

I’ll tell you, one thing practically, is when you stand up in front of your church and you tell them to get married, it is time to rebuild marriage. Stop talking about defending it and rebuild it. There’s not much left to defend on a cultural level and marriage is one of those great gifts. If you go back through church history there were four to five key moments where the church found themselves in a very

sexually broken culture and offered marriage as a good gift back to the world as it really is. When Christians occupy the world in such a way that gives good gifts, it really is meaningful.

All this is quite personal to me and this idea of modeling it; one way to model it is to put together generations. I tell my students all the time, “Go find old people! You need old people!” One of the things we do in churches is we divvy everybody up by generations. As a young married guy, I need an old guy in my life. One of the best things that happened early in our marriage is we met an older couple. They had both been married before, then almost got divorced, but became Christians and stayed married. The man mentored me and the woman mentored my wife. I love these people because they would be so real with us. They would call us to repentance in our marriage. I can’t even add up the influence they had in our life. Structurally in the church we need to do a lot more to bring the generations together.

AW: John, we’ve discussed the present state of Millennials views towards marriage for today, I want you if you would to trace an overview of how we’ve gotten to where we are today. What cultural currents occurred in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, that gave rise to this sort of anemic view of marriage?

JS: This is a really dangerous activity because you could always trace it back further and further. I think you can look at some specific traits of modernism in particular which led to this. One is the divorce of scientific knowledge as fact, and moral knowledge as opinion; that was a big shift. It took things that had to do with morality out of the realm of truth and put it into the realm of personal opinion. At the same time there was a huge push in what we call the sexual revolution. The sexual revolution came at us with ideas, with champions, with artifacts, and with institutions. Let me walk through that.

First of all the idea of sexuality tied a lot to the idea that essentially we had the same sexual responsibilities and capacities as animals (that has a whole intellectual history). You have the champions:

Alfred Kinsey, Michael Foucault who both wrote a lot about sexuality. What came through him was people like Hugh Hefner. Hugh Hefner, who read Kinsey, popularized a certain sort of sexuality. Then what did he do? He gave us an artifact — pornography. So one of the things that pornography did, and internet pornography does now, is that we are seeing a radical privatization of sexuality. Now sexuality should be personal, but it's not purely private. What happens sexually actually matters. What porn does is it allows everybody to be sexual without any responsibility. Now we've taken that and put Plan B vending machines in colleges, where somebody who had a risky sexual experience the night before or was victimized, and is ashamed. She can go swipe her credit card and nobody needs to know. Now there is access issues, women's health issues and all that, but I would say that it is a really bad idea, that nobody has to know anything we've done sexually, that we've kind of created this isolation and we're not accountable to anybody. Then institutions, the power of educations, the power of film, this is how culture shifts and changes. This has been pretty dramatic. It's pretty interesting, when I was growing up in the 80's the number one show on television was The Cosby Show. Family was the solution back then. One decade later when I was in college in the 90's the number one show was Friends and the most important show was Seinfeld. In both of those shows family is not the solution, it is the problem. That's a pretty dramatic shift. Recently the number one show that scandalized parents was Beverly Hills 90210 because all the parents did was talk about sex, they never did it, they just talked about it. Fast forward to Glee, they don't just talk about it, they do it and everything's fair game, and it's not in Los Angeles — it's in Central Ohio. These are indicators of some pretty dramatic cultural shifts in our understanding of sexual morality.

ET: John, I want to thank you for bringing up the question of pornography. In thinking about that as we were talking about singleness and dating, I don't think we can underestimate the impact

that the availability of pornography on men my age and younger and the reason for which they are not dating actual women. I know, personally, because of my friends and others, that when you can have an extremely realistic sexual experience with no effort and no cost, whenever you want, it sort of sears that impulse that men have that would cause them to step out of their comfort zone, to take a shower, get a haircut, get a job, and become a desirable mate so that they can win over an actual woman that would want to have sex with them. You don't have to do any of those things because of pornography. There have been studies done on teenagers in Japan, I believe....

JS: Yes... in Japan 25 percent of men from eighteen to twenty eight on a survey say, "I have no interest in sex." You're thinking, "Who are these guys?!" But, I think you're right, the virtual experience requires nothing and it's important what you said, Eric, what we know is the average first of pornography for internet users is nine! Here we have this delayed marriage, delayed responsibility, but early exposure to things. By the time they're 18, they've done it all.

ET: There are also stories about young men with erectile dysfunction because they cannot be sexually stimulated by a real woman. They've been so seared by hardcore pornographic images; it's scary the impact it has neurologically, emotionally, and on the way we live our lives.

AW: Trevin, given the romanticized understanding of relationships and marriage, show we be surprised that same-sex marriage is upon us?

TW: No, not at all. I think we as a culture have already redefined marriage to a large extent. It would've been inconceivable for my great grandparents to countenance the idea of same-sex marriage, because it would've been like saying square-circle. They wouldn't have had the thought-process because marriage was something that

was more public than private. Elements of romantic longing and love of course, the vows were very public. It was oriented towards procreation, family, stability, the common good. Now there are issues in the traditional society's understanding of marriage as well: sometimes it was seen as doing your duty, it was drudgery. So there were issues even in more traditional societies today that don't live up to the biblical standard. We're not saying that the Bible presents you either with a dutiful marriage vs. a delightful romantic love. The Bible brings both of them together in ways that actually reinforce one another and make the marriage better.

Today it is actually inconceivable that you would be against same-sex marriage. In many ways it's because they've moved away from the traditional view of marriage contributing to the common good to the view private, romantic relationship between two consenting adults and what the government's affirmation.

Of course looking at it from this perspective where the definition of marriage has already changed, and we've seen that change through the divorce culture, it makes total sense to me why when I talk to people they'll think this is just absolutely discriminatory. They see it this way because they've already adopted this other definition of marriage that downplays what it was before the divorce culture came in.

I think we cannot have a panel here and talk about marriage and Millennials and not talk about divorce because it is what has left the most brokenness in the past forty years. One of the reasons Millennials are delaying marriage is not simply because everybody is involved in pornography or they don't know how to date, but rather it is because you do have some well-intentioned Millennials who have been through the trauma (and they'll use that word) of divorce when they were kids and they don't want to make that mistake. The irony though is they ramp up the romantic new definition of marriage in trying to avoid that. So they cohabit, give marriage a trial run until they're absolutely sure that when their romantic feelings are going to be good enough to sustain them over the long haul. In trying to fight back against the divorce culture,

they're actually clinging even fiercer to that redefinition as they're trying to not repeat the mistakes of their parents.

AW: A few weeks ago I was having a conversation with a sixteen year old kid. I asked him, "So, tell me where your generation is on the LGBT issue and the same-sex marriage issue." This is a kid whose grown up in the SBC, made a profession of faith, and he said, "you know, I think homosexuality is sinful, but it doesn't really impact me or bother me, so why should I really care?" So behind this question is the harms of same-sex marriage in regards to how we communicate that to our youth when discussing marriage. What are the harms that we should be communicating to our youths that help them understand that it really does impact them?

JS: I think keeping that in that context, first and foremost, is really important. Same-sex marriage is not the root of any problems. It is the fruit of missing what the point of marriage actually is. G.K. Chesterton said, "There's a lot of ways to fall down, but there's only one way to stand up straight." When somebody says, "What is the harm that it will do?" The question is, "What sort of harm is done anytime that we actually take marriage and think it is something other than what it really is?"

When we say romantic feelings is all it takes to justify marriage that's the whole reasoning behind no-fault divorce. We're now thirty years beyond that, and it's interesting how many myths were thrown out during that time. The myth that kids will be happier, they will be happier with happy parents and not married parents. They want you to be happy, go ahead and get divorced and it will work out in the long run. We just said that as if it was true without any evidence. Well now we have the evidence and parents who stuck it out, even if they weren't "happy" were better on average for the children.

One of the things that's hard for Millennials to grasp, because they haven't seen it, is that inherent, natural observable connection between marriage, babies, and sex. These three things before

we had basically full-on access to contraception they were always understood to be held together. Even in cultures that tolerated, celebrated, promoted homosexual activities as an option to personal happiness, they didn't call it marriage because marriage actually had a function and design. We're at the point now where there is no distinction between the two relationships, but obviously there was because the marriages were geared towards procreation and the homoerotic relationships were not.

AW: And that's not a statement of discrimination, that's a statement of observation.

JS: It is a statement of observation. Eric talked about the ability to live sexually virtually and we talked about the privatization of morality and what that effectively does is it makes us modern day Gnostics. All of our morality and sexual energy exists in the realm of emotion and feeling and spiritual self, but it's disconnected from the physical.

I'm struck by what Rick Warren once said on a talk show, he said, "If you brought up a man and woman in front of us, it's obvious how the parts fit together and what might happen in that case. If two men and two women come up, even if you don't say it's wrong, it's obviously different. They don't serve the same functions." And this is how marriage has been understood throughout society. When I went to get a marriage license out in East Tennessee, the county clerk didn't ask me, "Now, John, do you really love her? Will you take this test from Cosmopolitan to prove that you're compatible?" The clerk asked me questions that had to do with children and family units. It's interesting that those were the questions concerning the government because it reveals the nature of this relationship. Now whenever you say something is not what it is, there's going to be consequence. We've seen that with no-fault divorce, we've seen that with cohabitation. We've seen that with Millennials when they say, "What difference does it make when I stand up before people and make vows?" Well, Glen Stanton who just spoke wrote the

book on this, The Ring Makes All The Difference. apparently it makes all the difference in the world from the social science data, so I think that's just something we have to take seriously. I guess I worry that in the name of the social revolution that we're going to say things like we said with no-fault divorce as if they're true with really no back from them.

ET: The destruction of our understanding of marriage and family has real consequences for our kids, for our economy, and our society as a whole. Study after study has said that kids do best in a home with their biological mom and dad. It's proven, everybody recognizes it, even wonderful alternatives like adoption, which is maybe the most Christian thing you can do, bringing somebody into your forever family just as God has adopted us into His. Kids in those environments don't do as well as those raised in the environment with their biological mom and dad. That's why public policy should seek to sure up the reality that just as it takes a man and a woman to create a kid, it takes a mother and a father to raise one. It's a scientific fact.

Economically, we spend billions and billions of dollar as a nation subsidizing broken families in a variety of ways. For libertarians out there who believe that this is a social culture war issue that has no effect on me, that's completely ironic to me. Nothing will fill the void left by the family, like the state. If we want to use romance as a basis for public policy, you're going to see all kinds of laws brought up that no libertarian should want. Finally, the future of society as a whole, when people delay marriage and stop having kids, you know there's this wonderful book called, *What To Expect When No One is Expecting* by Jonathan Lass, he lives in Old Town Alexandria, a suburb of D.C. He points out that there are four pet stores for every store for babies or toddlers. When societies lose our understanding of marriage and family and the need to have kids and to have enough kids to at least supplant you and your spouse. That hurts us in the long run and there isn't an industrialized nation on earth that has a fertility rate (FTR) above

the replacement level that we need and many are far below it. Places like Japan, the numbers about 1.6. If you continue on that trajectory which is a generous assumption, by 2100 their population will decline by over 50 percent. Well what happens when you lose half your population in a matter of seventy-five years, it is destructed. Societies can't survive. The minister of families for Germany has said they are going to have to turn the lights out on Germany if they can't figure out a way for their people to start producing more children to sustain social welfare programs, to be entrepreneurial, and have an economic base. This stuff matters *in a practical way*.

AW: We have time for one last question and Eric it's for you: with this same-sex marriage issue the phrase, "You're on the wrong side of history," is constantly brought up it's a difficult statement, it's a rhetorical battering ram. Eric, you do a job that is pretty thankless by secular standards, you're on the wrong side of history, why are you doing what you're doing?

ET: I talk a little bit about religious liberty and one of my favorite verses is from the book of Acts. The apostles are preaching and they're ordered to stop and they aren't punished at first because they recognize if they beat them, it's only going to garner more excitement, so they simply order them to stop preaching. The disciples disobey and keep preaching so the religious leaders come back and this time they say why aren't you listening to us and the disciples say, "Look, decide for yourselves whether it is right, for us we have to choose God." So the disciples are beaten. Afterwards it says, "Then they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name." In my own life I think I can say, I'm not called to win or be popular. I'm not called to have a lot of friends, I'm called to be obedient and for me that is all that matters.

LS: Just in closing, to the person who is living as a single who is here, not sure if you're going to get married (because I'm not sure

whether or not God has called you to singleness), it is not always easy or fun. Or at least it's not always that way for me. But I choose to embrace my singleness because my heart has been captivated by the gospel and because my fighter verse is Psalm 16:11, "You make known to me the path of life and in your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand there are pleasures forevermore." There is greater joy in the gospel than going the world's way. It's worth it to be single for the lord if he doesn't bring marriage. It's worth it to wait on the Lord as a single female. It's worth it to pursue a girl as a single male. It's worth it if you struggle with same-sex attraction but you want to honor the Lord. His Word is worth it and we're going to see that in the end. It's his Spirit that will supply the power and I've seen that in my own life.

Book Reviews

A Holy Vision for Family Life, vol. 1 of *Building a Godly Home*. By William Gouge, edited and modernized by Scott Brown and Joel R. Beeke. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013. 200 pp., \$18.00

On the subject of marriage, Solomon's ancient warning could certainly be applied—"Of making many books there is no end" (Ecclesiastes 12:12). With so many volumes on the subject lining the shelves of Christian bookstores, it is tempting to commit what C. S. Lewis called "chronological snobbery" by assuming that the latest word on the subject is unquestionably the greatest. Such assumptions ignore the treasures of wisdom lying dormant in the archives of church history. Biblical exegesis and practical theology have a certain timeless quality and many of our contemporary conversations could be strengthened by a healthy dose of perspective from the past.

For those looking for some historical input on married life, the *Building a Godly Home* series from Reformation Heritage Books will prove to be a helpful resource. The series introduces modern readers to William Gouge (1575 – 1653), whose family handbook, *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622), was one of the most influential Puritan works on the subject. Gouge (pronounced like *gooj*) pastored the Blackfriars congregation of London for over forty-five years and helped write the influential Westminster Confession of Faith (1646). In addition, he was a devout husband to his wife, Elizabeth (1586 – 1625), with whom he fathered thirteen children.

In updating Gouge's original work, editors Scott Brown and Joel R. Beeke have modernized the Puritan's language, trimmed less relevant sections, and divided the original 700-page work into three smaller volumes. The first volume, *A Holy Vision for Family*

Life, provides a general exegesis of Ephesians 5:21-6:4 divided into twelve chapters.

Gouge begins his treatment of domestic duties by focusing on the fear of the Lord as a foundation for serving one another. Following the text of Ephesians, he then moves into the wife's particular calling where several memorable quotations set forth his vision for the family. According to Gouge, the family is "a seminary of the church and nation" (19), "a beehive... out of which are sent many swarms of bees" (19), and "like a school where the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned" (20). With such high stakes, Gouge is careful to affirm that family life is a unique calling and should be taken as seriously as public vocations.

Turning to the wife's particular responsibilities, Gouge summarizes various aspects of submission and encourages wives to "manifest a willingness to yield to that order which God has established" (30). Such statements offended some women in his congregation at the time, yet Gouge remained faithful to what he considered to be the clear teaching of Scripture on the subject. Submission, he reasons can even be pleasant when husbands fulfill their proper responsibilities, which Gouge argues must be rooted in the love of Christ (51). Similarly, the author calls parents and children to heed the created order and render proper duties to one another. Children should honor their parents and express their respect through obedience (163). At the same time, parents ought to seek the good of their children by nurturing them and instructing them in the Lord (191).

True to the text of Ephesians 5, over two-thirds of the book (34-49, 51-89, 101-31, 140-55) does not deal explicitly with marriage itself. Instead, the relationship of Christ and His Church takes central stage. Gouge delineates various doctrines related to this image, including Christ's leadership of the Church, His purifying love for the Church, and the believer's union with Christ. His digression from the subject of marriage makes a profound point: the Gospel is the necessary foundation for building a godly home. Any work on marriage that bypasses this base misses the primary argument of Ephesians 5.

In this sense, *A Holy Vision for Family Life* is valuable both for its overview of the marriage relationship from a Puritan perspective as well as its extended discussion of several core Christian doctrines. Gouge helpfully grounds the responsibilities of married life in the example of Christ and His Church. Although he merely introduces many points that will be developed in the subsequent volumes of this series, his tone is pastoral and his words are saturated in biblical wisdom. The editors have bridged the gap between Gouge's seventeenth-century language and his modern readers with frequent section divisions, italicized key phrases, and several enumerated lists. A handful of footnotes enhance the accessibility of this work by defining antiquated phrases and providing background to various arguments.

While the editors have smoothed the language, a few reminders about Gouge's original context may be helpful for fully appreciating this work. For one, Baptist readers should not be alarmed by Gouge's reading of Ephesians 5:26 and subsequent defense of paedobaptism. This position was consistent with his overall theology even if many may find his exegesis unconvincing today. In addition, one must remember that the concerns of a seventeenth-century pastor will necessarily be different than the issues Christians face today. For example, readers may be surprised to see Gouge devoting so much attention to polygamy while never addressing homosexuality. However, Gouge's efforts to speak winsomely to the social issues of his day are instructive for modern Christians willing to think through parallel concerns. Finally, Gouge should be appreciated for his approach to the subject of marriage, which was somewhat modern at the time. Gouge was an early defender of the companionate view of marriage rooted in romantic affection between the spouses, even though his own marriage was arranged. His advocacy for love in marriage will become more apparent in volumes two and three of this series, which will be addressed in future reviews.

Overall, *A Holy Vision for Family Life* is a helpful introduction to the wise counsel of a Puritan pastor who skillfully brought the

Scriptures to bear on the important issues of marriage and family. Those who give Gouge a chance will be blessed and challenged in their own marriages by a man who was recognized in his own day as an expert on this subject.

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Beat God to the Punch: Because Jesus Demands Your Life. By Eric Mason. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2014. 128 pp., \$12.99

Eric Mason writes, “This title is meant to draw the reader into the complexities ... of a grace-filled life.”⁽¹⁾ Mason writes in an engaging manner and walks the reader through what it looks like to experience God’s immeasurable grace and how to see it manifested in everyday life.

Mason begins with the reality that upon Jesus’ return all will bow down before the King. “By implication, we have the option to bow by choice, or to bow by force. This reality extends to our whole life. Willfully bowing to Jesus now — rather than later — is the option we have in our everyday life.”⁽¹⁾ Unfortunately, many will bow by force and will face “the punch of [God’s] wrath, justice, and judgment.”⁽⁷⁾ By God’s grace, through faith, we can beat God to the punch and willingly bow down and submit to His Lordship. For Mason, this book is an invitation and is “all about the life available to those who embrace Jesus as Lord, those who willingly bow the knee.”⁽⁷⁾

For those who are still a little suspicious, Mason assures the reader that he is not in any way insinuating that we can, on our own ability, evade God’s punch of wrath; he writes that, “beating God to the punch is never accomplished through our own effort, enlightenment, strength, or power. Only by God’s grace is one able to bow.”⁽³⁾ He repeatedly emphasizes that though we are beating God to the punch, it is only because Jesus Christ absorbed that punch for us. He writes, “In order to beat God to the punch, you have to place your trust in Jesus Christ ... Jesus, on the cross, took God’s best shot.”⁽⁹⁷⁾

Mason walks through various aspects of God’s grace throughout the book. In the first chapter he discusses the embodiment of God’s grace in the man of Jesus Christ and connects it to our lives today. “We must recognize that grace still walks with us. It is a beacon for us to see grace through Jesus Christ ... All cross paths with grace, but not all respond to it.”⁽¹⁴⁾ Those that do respond

by faith become a part of Jesus’ “crew” (a hip-hop term that Mason likens to discipleship). We become all about Jesus; we like what he likes and do what he does, we’re now in his “crew.”

In chapter two, the author discusses how we experience grace. For him, an experience of grace comes from the knowledge of grace. He walks through five aspects of grace to help the reader better understand what grace is and is not. These five aspects are: (1) grace is rooted in who God is, (2) this grace is rooted in God’s loving-kindness, (3) grace as a Person, (4) grace symbolizes something that was withheld from us, and (5) grace is the mans by which we respond to God. Understanding grace helps us experience grace; we need both truth and grace. He writes, “grace and truth are the key ingredients for God to be glorified and therefore, unleashing the contagious nature of the gospel.”(38)

The next chapter addresses how we live in light of God’s grace. Mason writes, “Living a grace-filled life requires us to look into the name of Jesus and discover what we lack. When I look at the names of Jesus, I see a buffet of grace. All the food groups of the soul are in His name, so that our souls will never find themselves malnourished. This grace buffet is for us to see that nothing we have could have been obtained on our own.”(47) It is through an intimate, deep knowledge of who Jesus is that we can experience is ever-present grace in our lives. This is all done through Jesus sending us his Spirit. “The Spirit of God is the means for which we initially experienced the grace of God and continue to experience grace in our every day lives.”(57) Only by being filled with the Spirit can we be filled with the grace of God, because it is only through the working of the Spirit that grace works.

After moving through a sort-of historical survey of grace in chapter 4, in which the author looks at various theologians views of grace, Mason moves to the “completing work of grace”. “As we live in this day and age, we find ourselves longing for the eternal when the fullness of God’s grace will be dispense to us. Yet, between now and eternity we are to look forward to this grace and pursue living in light of it.”(82) We now live in a time of tension; God’s

Kingdom is here, but not in its fullness. It is the same for God's grace; we are experiencing it in a very real way, but not in its entirety. The author encourages readers that as we hope and long for the coming Kingdom, "Jesus desires that, until He returns, we extend grace's borders through the power of the gospel."

In the final chapter of his book, the author tells us just how we beat God to the punch. "Jesus Christ came to empower us to beat God to the punch. Beating God to the punch was God's idea; we are not fooling Him or anyone else. God's idea in eternity past was to provide Jesus as a substitution for our sin. There is a Judge and judgment coming... In order to beat God to the punch, you have to place your trust in Jesus Christ."(91, 97)

Overall this book is an in-depth look at God's grace. Mason admits "it will seem as if this book is more about grace than anything else."(3) More than that, it is a call to live in light of God's grace. The reality is that when Jesus returns, you will bow down. But why not beat God to the punch and bow down now, and by grace submit yourself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Whether you've been a Christian for decades or minutes, or even if you're not a Christian, this book will serve as an encouragement to you as you learn more and more about God's grace.

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Gospel-Centered Discipleship. By Jonathan K. Dodson. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012. 173 pp., \$12.99

Gospel-Centered Discipleship is not a book focused on measuring how a person is performing as a disciple, but rather about who we are as “imperfect people, clinging to a perfect Christ, being perfected by the Spirit.” (18). Dodson is a very engaging author who opens up about his own story as a follower of Christ and areas that he has fallen short. His personal hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ is easily read through the pages, making this book real to the reader.

The book is divided into eight chapters with three main topics: defining discipleship, the heart of a disciple, and applying the gospel. To begin his book Dodson defines a disciple. He believes that the reader must understand “disciple is an identity” (29). To be a disciple is to have three areas that attribute to one’s identity. Each disciple is a learner, part of the faith family and missional (31). Gospel centered means to be a disciple of Jesus who “learns the gospel, relates in the gospel, and communicates the gospel.” (38). Chapter two introduces the idea of image and that a disciple’s goal is to fight for image. The principle of image is presented as follows: man is created in the image of God and that image is distorted in the fall of man, God restores His image in His people through Jesus Christ.

Chapter three deals with the struggles to biblically apply the practice of accountability and confession. Chapter four deals with the motivations one has for disciple making. The motivation must be more than “religious performance” or “spiritual license”— which he deals with in the previous chapter — but the motivations found in Scripture. “What motivates Jesus’ followers is what makes his disciples.” (76). These motivations, from a biblical standpoint, must be: religious affections, repentance and faith, and promises and warnings. Dodson summarizes this understanding by writing, “To synthesize these three motivations, we can say that 1) religious affection (holy fear and Christ-centered

joy) motivates 2) belief in God's warnings and promises which, in turn, 3) motivate a life of repentance when we fail to be motivated by foundational joy in Christ." (86). Chapter five adds an area that many pragmatic understandings of disciple making can fail to address if not given careful thought or attention to a proper biblical understanding, that is the role of the Holy Spirit. The believer must be engaged in dependence on the Holy Spirit to allow us to be a part of making disciples and maturing them because "God has called us to surrender to His Spirit and to fight our flesh." (102).

Part three of *Gospel-Centered Discipleship* is where we find the application of the theology and confusion of disciple making presented thus far. Chapter six Dodson uses the language of conversion to continue his ongoing thesis that a disciple's identity is in being a learner who is part of a faith family and on mission. Each disciple must have his or her life converted to Christ, the church and to mission. Jesus as Lord is primary, Dodson writes, "It is important to note that Jesus is Lord, not church or mission. Be careful you don't get that mixed up. Both church and mission will fail you, and you will fail in your church and mission. The good news is that Jesus never fails." (116). Again Dodson clings to an unrelenting hope in Jesus as the center for His disciple making model. Chapter seven introduces the idea of Dodson's gospel fight clubs. "Fight clubs are small, simple groups of two to three men or women who meet regularly to help one another beat up the flesh and believe the gospel of grace." (121). They are meant to be simple, reproducible, missional and biblical groups that exist to know our sins, fight these sins, and trust our Savior. The idea of fighting is key to Dodson and is perhaps his greatest area of concern to pursue Gospel centered discipleship. Dodson suggests implementing "Gospel Fight Clubs" where believers can gather to fight sin. Finally, chapter eight deals with some very basic practicalities of starting fight clubs in the local church.

While Dodson offers a biblical and helpful understanding to being centered on Jesus Christ as disciples his application of

this could be developed a bit further. For instance, how does one find the right people to gather in a fight club? What is the direction of the fight club to pursue, or is it just simply a time to confess sin, and be encouraged in holiness? A great resource to take Dodson's ideas and make them more practical is Neil Cole's book, *Cultivating a Life for God: Multiplying Disciples through Life Transformation Groups*. In Cole's book we see an example of the practicality and simplicity that Dodson is seeking put in a more manageable system of disciple making. This book serves the church well, but would go to another level of gospel helpfulness if chapters seven and eight could be expanded. To see the theological basis for fighting sin a great resource is John Owen's, *The Mortification of Sin*.

Dodson offers an honest insight into what it can look like to make disciples. It is refreshing to read of his struggles, his continued hope in Christ, his desire to see himself grow as a disciple, and his passion to make disciples. This book is easily accessible to the regular follower of Christ who has not invested years in formal training. It's a recommended read especially for people who are asking the question, "How do I grow in my faith with others if there is only a few of us?" Dodson offers an easy to understand and apply perspective on disciple making that can be read and practiced today, while keeping the gospel at the center of the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ!

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How to Grow a Connected Family with Contagious Love and Faith. By James and Lynne Jackson. Enumclaw, WA: Wine-Press Publishing, 2011, 242 pp., \$17.99.

Discipline that Connects with Your Child's Heart: How to Seize the Moment for God's Purposes — Even in the Messes of Family Life! By Jim and Lynne Jackson. Chaska, MN: Connected Families, 2012, 245 pp., \$12.95.

These two works are being reviewed in tandem not simply because of identical authorship but because they complement each other with their principles of parental core belief and connection with their children.

How to Grow a Connected Family is ultimately about a journey of a parents' "knowing and sharing God's ... love in and through our family" (xvi). The book revolves around several premises. First, we act upon our deep-seated core beliefs which shape and are shaped by our relationship with God, how we were parented or not, and currents stresses and situations to name a few. Additionally, what drives effective parenting is first receiving God's love, Christ's forgiveness, and with that parents then dispense God's love in the best interest of their children. Lastly, "parents ultimately cannot change their children. They can only change the way they relate to them" (3). The authors present four principles as a framework to guide parenting: *foundation, connection, proaction, correction*. Accordingly, if parents focus on this order then there will be fewer issues needing correction.

Section 1 (Chapters 1-6) presents the *foundation* for the entire framework: parental core beliefs and their relationship with God. "The path to becoming a better parent — like most every road to personal growth and mastery begins with self-examination (33). Better parenting begins then "with not better techniques, but with a careful look at myself and why I respond the way I do as a parent" (33).

As the foundation is laid, parents can then make healthy *connections* with their children wherein their actions and words clearly convey an unconditional love for their child that is not misunderstood. In Section 2 (Chapters 7-11) parents are equipped in ways to connect with their children regularly, which develops a safe place and their children trust that their parents are looking out for their best interest.

As a parent's foundation is addressed continually, and they regularly approach their children with healthy connection, *proaction* follows. In Section 3 (Chapters 12-20), the authors teach parents how to "T.E.A.C.H." their children character and responsibility for own actions, consequences, resolve conflicts, and care for themselves and others (Genesis 12:2-3). To TEACH is to intentionally provide or seek out opportunities to, "T" talk about life and its deep issues (1 Thess 2:7-8), "E" exemplify (Phil 4:9), "A" affirm (Phil 4:8), "C" create opportunities for success, significance, service (Lk 10:1-2), and "H" help or come alongside (Jn 14:16).

Intentionally placed last in the book, *correction* is discussed in Section 4 (Chapters 21-24). Grace-filled, biblical correction through various means enforces consequences, with the child's best interest in mind. If all other principles have been followed — parent's foundational issues with God are settled, connections with their children, and proaction intentionally fostered — then correction (if and when it is administered) is minimal and grace-filled with the child's best interest in mind.

The expressed goal of this second book, *Discipline that Connects*, is that our children desire to know and love Jesus and to walk in the grace of obedience to Him (7). The book's four principles can be summed up in this: Parents must prepare their own hearts before engaging with children so they can model God's grace and forgiveness. Parents can then connect or engage with their children communicating the key message that "You are loved, You are capable, and You are responsible" (12). While there are many parallels between the two books, this book focuses on the previous book's last section, correction, guided by the loved, capable, and responsible message.

Section 1 (Chapter 1-6) posits that parents need to intentionally wrestle with the thinking behind their behavior as parents before they can expect to engage with their children. This *prepared heart* or renewing of one's mind (Rom 12:2) is about deep transformation characterized by "Sabbath mentality" wherein parents are instructed to step back, breathe, pray, and get perspective (38), and even ask for "Do-overs." Author Jim Jackson recounts coming home from work and upon entering the house found a squabble to which he reacted without grace and love. So he asked his children for a "Do-over" and went back into the garage and restarted the entire return home. He reentered with "Hey kids, great to see you," calmly asked if he could assist with their dilemma to which they replied they had already resolved the situation and ended with a smile, "We got it covered, Dad.... Good Do-over" (20).

In Section 2 (Chapters 7-10), the authors emphasize that unconditional love, based on God's very essence being love, casts out all fear (1 Jn 4:18), a fear that the authors have found to be predominately at the root many troubled youths' misbehavior. It is essential for parents to express unconditional love especially when children are doing nothing in particular or when they are struggling or misbehaving.

In Section 3 (Chapters 11-12), parents are encouraged to be involved in a purpose-filled process — knowing their own purpose in God's scheme and parent out of that to help their kids know they are capable with their gifts, abilities, and purpose in God's scheme. In that vein, children's misbehavior is often a gift gone awry (102). For example, a disobedient child may in fact be one with an ability to be highly focused in finishing a project they started (a good trait) yet because of that focus, not hear or properly interpret a parent's instruction. Lastly, though not exhaustively, parents should facilitate wise choices, train children to self-correct, and help children brainstorm solutions so they can learn to discern for themselves.

Natural consequences are the most powerful type of consequence this book focuses on in Section 4 (Chapters 13-17). Galatians 6:7 communicates that we reap what we sow, good or

bad stuff “naturally” happens based on what we sow. However, parents often rush in and fix problems with or for their children all the while not realizing they, in a way, are blocking a powerful way children learn through natural consequences (129).

In Section 5 (Chapters 18-19) the authors address the question, how do we rebuild what falls apart? They instruct parents to prepare their “heart well, communicate love no matter what, recognize and affirm your child’s capability, and impose consequences that truly grow a child’s sense of responsibility.... This will guide parents in connecting with child’s heart in discipline” (151). The parent-God connection is crucial in the parent-child connection because parent model human relationships with God. That is, the “shortest distance between a child’s heart and God is a parent” (163).

One litmus test of so many books on biblical parenting is do they encourage practical transformation? Can the biblical principles shared be implemented? Both of these books do an excellent job in this.

How to Grow sensitively addresses many scenarios parents will encounter in their child’s misbehavior. Throughout the book they provide numerous practical real life examples of how the principles work, self-examination questions, relevant Bible passages and responses or activities engaging parent and child alike. Even section titles are expressed in question form arresting the reader’s attention and seeking their engagement.

There were two areas that might be considered further. Perhaps one parenting dynamic the authors could address when fleshing out the principles through scenario would be that of divorce or when one of the cohabitating parents is non-Christian. Additionally, a deeper philosophical issue to address is that right thinking (orthodoxy) does not necessarily or immediately yield right practice (orthopraxis). The authors rightly note that we do need foundational work on our deep-seated core beliefs, but we cannot directly change them. It takes hard work, putting ourselves intentionally in places and with people to shape those beliefs indirectly. Perhaps this could be flushed out more.

Discipline That Connects does an equally admirable job. Of the many practical discussions in the book, two of them I personally found applicable upon reading. Their observation of “gifts gone awry” was quite eye-opening and lead to great opportunity to bond with one of my children. Another valuable insight as well, that has subsequently influenced the way I see things, is their notion that many parents inadvertently truncate their child’s learning from natural consequences of their misbehavior by rushing to judgment or fixing things prematurely, when they could have let some things run their course so their children learn on their own. Lastly, the Appendixes provide invaluable practical scenarios of how these principles are used biblically for a parent to prepare their heart, tell and show the children they are loved, they are capable, and they are responsible.

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How to Ruin Your Life by 30: Nine Surprising Everyday Mistakes You Might Be Making Right Now. By Steve Farrar. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012, 144 pp., \$13.99.

Baseball pundits will be quick to say that you cannot win a World Series in April, but you can certainly lose one. Getting off to a bad start can have crippling effects, even in something as long as a 162-game season. In much shorter competitions, like a 100 meter sprint, a bad start is impossible to overcome. That is exactly the premise that Farrar has in his book, that a bad start is hard to overcome. Age 30 is significant for him, because “for the first twenty years of your life, your parents make the major decisions for you. From twenty on out, you will be making the decisions. The quality of your decisions will determine what your life will look like at thirty.” This is the mark of adulthood, you own your decisions and the consequences of them. And as a young person transitions into adulthood, passing through different stages leads to greater decisions and greater responsibility.

Farrar has nine common mistakes that he believes can shipwreck a life before age 30:

1. *Overlook the law of cause and effect.*
2. *Get off to a bad start.*
3. *Ignore God’s purpose for your life.*
4. *Refuse to take responsibility for your actions.*
5. *Neglect your gifts and strengths when choosing a vocation.*
6. *Disregard what the Bible says about sex and marriage.*
7. *Stop learning.*
8. *Isolate yourself.*
9. *Refuse daily wisdom.*

The great news is that each of these can be fixed before a life becomes a tragic waste, but they are essential in the early stages of adulthood because of their long-term ripple effects.

Perhaps the most pointed chapter is chapter six, which focuses on disregarding what the Bible says about sex and marriage. Marriage is hard work, but it is a lifetime commitment. As the divorce rate stays high, even among Christians, Farrar says “the reason Christian couples get divorced is that someone in the marriage didn’t burn the ships.... commitment has been redefined to mean they will stay in the relationships as long as it’s personally convenient.” To help young Christians make wise decisions for marriage, he offers four rules:

- 1. Married for life*
- 2. Hands to yourself (sexual purity before marriage)*
- 3. Don’t act cheap*
- 4. Christians only marry other Christians*

In keeping with his long-range perspective, he also wants to challenge the common question young adults ask. Instead of “Who am I going to marry?” he wants the first question to be “What kind of marriage do I want to have?” For Farrar, twenty years down the road needs to be the focal point, not the impulse for instant happiness.

In a culture that embraces YOLO (You Only Live Once) as its mantra, Farrar’s words come as a stark, but very wise and timely contrast. He ends the book by pleading with his young readers to go to the wellspring of Proverbs every day. Rather than live out YOLO and do what Drake says “forget what anybody says” and chase after the pursuit of pleasure, money, sex, and no consequences, Farrar sees one life with a 200 year ripple effect. He gives the example of Os Guinness’ great great-grandmother, who nearly committed suicide and left two young children to an orphan’s life. Instead she made the adult decision to press on, found forgiveness and restoration in Christ, and married well.

Youth pastors, put this book in the hands of your graduating seniors, and challenge them to make wise decisions as they move into adulthood. Their choices in the ten years after high school

will have ripple effects for decades. This book is worth taking the time to read, consider, and apply--because by God's grace we hope to see lives transformed by the gospel and the pursuit of wisdom.

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Youth Ministry from the Outside In: How Relationships and Stories Shape Identity. By Brandon K. McKoy. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013, 267 pp., \$20.00.

In *Youth Ministry from the Outside In*, Brandon McKoy explores the power of story and relationships in youth ministry through the theoretical lens of social constructionism, the idea “that we create our world through our relationships and through the language we use and the stories we share” (26). For McKoy, the real problem with youth ministry today is its obsession with individualism, particularly on the location of failures as *personal* problems. “When we view the uniqueness of youth as originating internally, what happens when they fail? ... Any inadequate performance or public failure throws youth and us into questioning our deficiencies” (36). McKoy believes that shifting the locus of ministry from individual formation to relational and narrative formation will help youth “gain what they need most: to know they are connected, to feel they belong, to see their life matters and to love in God’s relational reign” (40).

McKoy divides his text into three parts. In part one, McKoy argues that we in the West possess an individualist worldview and construct a social constructionist understanding of stories and relationships in practical theological perspective. McKoy chisels away at individualist thought, using stories of youth with whom he has interacted throughout his many years of ministry to demonstrate how individualistic thought can create destructive narratives of inadequacy and failure. For McKoy, the best identity formation practices with youth come when youth play particular roles in relationships, particularly through the youth/youth pastor relationship. McKoy includes a chapter arguing, from the basis of social constructionism, that our life stories are not “reality” per se, but are “*our reality*,” and that life stories can be “rewritten.” In part two, McKoy explores “the importance of our coordination of our life story, how our relationships from

infancy from adolescence shape our identity” (16). He briefly touches on the importance of instilling within children the ability to shape and share their life stories as adolescents.

In one chapter, McKoy examines the literature of developmental theory, challenges assumptions regarding the role adolescence plays in the developmental journey, and expresses the importance of knowing and understanding the emerging stories of youth. Moving on from the importance of narrative in adolescence, part three examines issues related to biblical hermeneutics, particularly the way we read Scripture as a set of propositions as opposed to a grander narrative. McKoy helpfully posits pedagogical methods for presenting the biblical narrative effectively to youth. McKoy explores the life of Christ as the guiding narrative that brings narrative structure to youths’ lives, bringing them into the relational reign of God in Christ.

McKoy truly understands the power of story and relationships in forming youth identity, and constructs a helpful youth ministry paradigm that brings the two together and models a “more holistic and integrative approach to youth, Scripture, and church” (15). It is no secret that modern approaches to youth ministry focus on the spiritual formation of individual youth with little attention to the stories and relationships that shape their identities. McKoy helps youth ministry practitioners move beyond the limitations that society has placed on our theories of ministry, and spurs us to obtain a more holistic and fruitful narrative-driven paradigm. Moreover, his promotion of the Scripture as narrative moves beyond traditional readings and better relates to the lives and struggles of youth.

Throughout the text, McKoy includes brief sections entitled “The Critic’s Voice,” which seeks to answer the potential objections of readers. While there is much to commend in this text, a few concerns do exist. McKoy’s use of social constructionism as a guiding paradigm for youth ministry may alarm those unfamiliar with the theory. It is important to understand that while McKoy views social constructionism not as a belief system or

worldview, but as a tool that “requires nothing from anyone” (19), his overreliance on social constructionism tends to muddle the theoretical waters rather than clarify them. His insistence that individually-based youth ministry approaches are more damaging than helpful appears to be an overreaction; while there is much truth to the idea that youth identity is molded in the context of personal relationships, McKoy’s diatribe against individualism is not necessarily helpful. Perhaps most alarming is McKoy’s view of Scripture, which he deems *becomes* authoritative when a community deems it so, and even questions the idea of biblical inerrancy (163-165). Moreover, McKoy’s writing is densely theoretical, which may excite the thoughtful youth ministry practitioner, but may disappoint the seasoned youth worker eager for a new, practical, and sustainable ministry approach.

Apart from these critiques, McKoy offers a fresh paradigm that moves beyond the limitations of individualism and empowers youth to envision themselves as actors in a grand narrative that God is writing with their lives through his story and through caring relationships. There is much within the work that will benefit the youth minister, but there is much to beware. A book such as this with a fresh vision but possessing some shaky biblical and theoretical foundations deserves an open-minded but critical read. The youth pastor who delights in understanding the foundational underpinnings of ministry practice will thoroughly enjoy this work.

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The Pastor's Kid: Finding Your Own Faith and Identity. By Barnabas Piper. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2014, 160 pp., \$12.99.

R e-entering pastoral ministry after a seven-year seminary hiatus with the recent addition of two boys makes me nervous. More than anything I fear the possibility that my children's regular exposure to the disappointments, trials, and vulnerabilities of pastoral ministry will have a hardening effect on their hearts and will serve to drive them away from Christ and his people rather than into close communion with both. I have heard the stories of pastor's kids who have turned from the faith of their parents, often citing the unique difficulties of their dad's work and their experience in the church as the primary reasons they don't want to follow Christ. And now I'm a pastor. Who is sufficient for these things?

Barnabas Piper is a pastor's kid. Actually, Barnabas Piper is one of the most well-known pastor's kids, because his dad (John Piper) is one of the most popular pastors in America today. With a father whose immediate and derivative ministry has been, for several years, significant in terms of sheer breadth, the fishbowl has been particularly large for Barnabas Piper; he understands with special acuity the troubles that often harass pastor's kids.

Piper comes to writing this book with a threefold aim. First, he is writing for the sake of pastor's kids (PKs) to give them a voice. Second, he is writing to pastors to remind them of the unique struggles and pressures that face their children. Third, he is writing to the church to remind them of their special responsibility to care for their pastor's children. I would assess that Piper accomplishes his threefold aim throughout the book, with an emphasis on the second and third aims. The subtitle to the book ("Making Your Faith Your Own") is slightly misleading for Piper does not address PKs predominantly with regard to how they might personalize their faith. Rather, the message for PKs to "make their faith their own" comes implicitly as Piper addresses

pastors and the church; it is not the main thrust of the book.

After an introduction and a preliminary chapter, Piper discusses “The “Fishbowl” (chapter 2). Here he addresses the many assumptions with which Christians often approach PKs. It is typically supposed by church members that the PK has a solid relationship with God and with his family (38-39), loves the church (39-40), is confident in his religious beliefs (40-41), and desires to be a leader (42). None of these may be true, yet the relationships between church members and PKs are often based on these kinds of faulty assumptions. In time, these assumptions lead to unrealistic expectations for PKs and a growing sense that they are “well-known but unknown.”

The progression continues as these false expectations often lead to double standards. For example, Piper recalls a time when he was strongly rebuked by a church member for doing the same thing for which two other non-PKs were not corrected. The underlying belief is that the *pastor’s* kid should be different: more holy, less inclined to youthful immaturity, and generally uninterested in the things of the world. Such double standards are often a catalyst for hypocrisy — a temptation to which PKs are particularly susceptible. “This kind of multiple standard causes PKs to focus on the wrong things. We begin to worry about pleasing people. Or we begin to resent them. It runs the risk of casting God in the same light as the crotchety old woman who’s always griping about our baggy pants, shaggy hair, and thumping bass” (51). What, then, do PKs need? While agreeing that obedience to God is important, Piper implores: “We need an extra measure of grace to overcome the lack of grace we find in so many other areas of life” (51).

Yet, not only do PKs need other church members to extend grace, they also need their parents to exhibit grace by refusing to be those who “present themselves as the flawless heroes they can never be (for us or the church) instead of the flawed, idiosyncratic, weird, sinful people they really are” (78). Pastor’s homes must be places where both parents are leading by example in confessing their sins, admitting mistakes, and demonstrating a

readiness to ask for and extend authentic forgiveness. Accordingly, the pastor must never indicate to his children — explicitly or implicitly — that his job security is tied to his children's behavior (86). A gracious parent cares about his child more than his role as pastor (97-102).

Despite the many warnings and admonitions, Piper seeks to balance what appears to be a generally negative appraisal of PK life with positive reflections on the benefits of growing up as a PK. PKs enjoy the privilege of regular exposure to Scripture and theology, and they have the opportunity to observe parents who are devoted to serving the church. These kinds of privileges can help PKs prepare for future ministry.

Piper's exposure of the temptations lurking within the pastor's heart is a most welcome invasion. I found myself thoroughly rebuked, admonished, exhorted, and warned as I read this book. I am grateful for Piper's willingness to draw from the hardships he endured as a PK to encourage other PKs, warn pastors, and instruct the church.

Yet, I fear that this book could serve to enflame a spirit of emotional entitlement among PKs if it is not read with the same grace from PKs that Piper requires of the church and her pastors. Piper often states that the pressures and struggles of a PK are unique. I do not doubt this claim. And Piper is also careful to warn PKs that playing the "victim card" is unacceptable (129-130). But the ratio between church-directed admonition and instruction aimed at PKs definitely slants in one primary direction: toward the church and pastor.

While I agree that many church members and pastors need to wake up to the way we think about and relate to PKs, I wonder if such a strong emphasis on the failures of the church and pastor-dads, coupled with the constant reminder that PKs endure a unique class of difficulty will prove healthy for PKs. Time will tell. Nevertheless, despite this weakness, I commend this book, especially to pastors and church members. We need to hear a pointed word from a PK who knows what it's like to persevere

through the trials of pastoral life and come through the experience still loving Jesus. And that is something for which the church and her pastors can hope for all their children.

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EQUIPPING THE GENERATIONS

How I Know Marriage Will Stand¹

ERIN DAVIS

“Marriage under fire”

*“Government to hear testimony
on the re-definition of marriage”*

*“Biblical definition
of marriage questioned”*

I didn't rip these headlines from today's blog roll. Not yesterday's either. Yes, I know they are an accurate description of the state of the marriage debate our country is currently facing, but we're not the first society to wrestle over the subject of marriage.

These headlines describe what was happening in sixteenth century England during the English Reformation. In case it's been awhile since you sat in a world history class, here is a crash course. Pay attention to the parallels between what was happening then and what is happening now.

- ♦ *King Henry VIII wanted his marriage to Catherine of Aragon annulled.*

- ♦ Catherine had not yet given Henry a male heir, and he had a sudden and passionate interest in a new lady, Anne Boleyn.
- ♦ This ignited a frenzy of public debate about marriage, government's involvement in marriage, and the limit (if any) of the Bible's authority in our private lives.
- ♦ It became a political affair centered around a theological dispute.
- ♦ Because of the invention of the printing press, more words were written and circulated than ever before. If you had an opinion, you had the option to share it beyond your immediate circle.

Ultimately, Henry split from the authority of the Pope and the Catholic Church and created the Church of England to get his annulment. Why am I taking us so far down this ancient path?

THE BATTLE FOR BIBLICAL MARRIAGE IS NOT NEW

Let's take a slightly shorter trip into the history books and hop back a few decades. In the 1970s and 1980s cultural forces converged to create skyrocketing divorce rates. The "no fault divorce" was introduced, and the effect worked like tidal wave in American homes. Almost half of couples who got married in the 70s and 80s divorced. That number stuck in the American psyche and caused much hand wringing, especially in the church.

I was a preschooler in the 80s, too young to be aware of any debate in the public sphere. As the 1990s hit, I still didn't care much about public opinion and was not yet a Christian, but I knew that my parents were divorced, and it was devastating. I started paying very close attention to how people talked about marriage. I picked up on a tone that seemed to say, "Marriage is a doomed institution and married people are more likely to win the lottery than to stay happy." Needless to say I headed into my own marriage with great fear and low expectations for success.

Now sociologists are telling us there is good news. The divorce

surge is over. But for those of us in the church, there is still a great deal of hand wringing and head shaking.

The definition of marriage is still being debated. Is marriage strictly between a man and a woman? Can it be between two men? Two women? One man and multiple women? Is marriage forever or just for now? Is divorce healthy or devastating? Should individuals have the freedom to choose what marriage looks like or do we need to agree on a consensus?

Just like in Henry VIII's time, the government is involved in the discussion. The church leaders are involved. The public is involved and fractured. Yet, as Christians, we know that, though people have been trying to re-define God's plan for marriage for centuries, God's plan still stands.

A HOUSE THAT MUST BE BUILT

Several months ago, I read through the book of Ezra. It's a short Old Testament book that outlines the rebuilding of God's temple by a ragamuffin crew of exiled Jews. God's people begin to rebuild his place of worship. They stake their claim. Draw their lines in the sand and declare, "We will do what God calls us to."

"Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia" (Ezra 4:4-5).

The general public tried to block God's people. They wrote accusatory letters, convinced that the remnant was intolerant. There were decrees from kings to cease and desist. The cause looked hopeless more often than it looked hopeful. And yet Ezra 6:16 says, "And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy." Despite resistance from kings, the pushback of public opinion, and the unpopularity of their cause, God's people were not stopped.

As I finished the book of Ezra, one theme came into clear focus: The plans of God cannot be stopped.

When it comes to marriage, that's the good news, but of course there is bad news. Marriage may always be in the sights of the enemy who seeks to kill and destroy all that God has made (John 10:10). That's because it's a picture of God's unbreakable covenant with his people (Eph. 5:32). There have been and will continue to be causalities, marriages that break or miss God's mark, but all of history will end with the marriage between God and his people. Marriage will stand.

But what should we do in the meantime?

COMMITTED TO THE WORD, PRAYER AND GOD'S PEOPLE

Ezra takes the lead in rallying the people toward God's purposes in the book of Ezra. As Christians in an anything goes world, we'd be wise to take our cues from him.

"For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). Ezra studied God's Word and taught it faithfully. Even when that was unpopular.

He also prayed like crazy. In fact, at the dedication service for the temple that cost so much blood, sweat, and tears to build, Ezra is deeply broken on the issue of marriage. He realizes that God's people have intermarried with the pagan people around him and his reaction is anything but passive. He tears his clothes and yanks the hair from his head and beard (Ezra 9:3). He fasted and then he fell on his knees and prayed this prayer: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted to the heavens."

Verse after verse, Ezra goes on about the sin of his people, but this is not a "get em' God" prayer. There was no "us" versus "them." Ezra lumps himself with his people and asks for mercy in spite of the prevalence of marriages that don't stick to God's plan. What happened next?

"While Ezra prayed and made confessing, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of

men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly.”

The people repented.

They committed to marriages that honored God.

The tide turned.

Marriage will stand, but there is a battle to be fought. God’s plans will not ultimately be thwarted. Kings cannot stop the plans of God. Neither can angry mobs. Cultural trends do not change his mind or dilute his message. That knowledge is enough to stop the hand wringing. And yet, there are many who would come against God’s plan for marriage? What should we do about them? Let’s pray like Ezra and watch for the tide to turn.

ENDNOTES

¹ This article originally appeared at The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (www.erlc.org). Used by permission.



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Don't Just Teach Your Kids About the Lord¹

MATT MCCUALEY

Olds are, your kids aren't going to remember everything you taught them. But it will be nearly impossible for them to forget the things you were passionate about. In fact, they will very likely grow up to be passionate about the same things. Perhaps this is why we are instructed to do more than just teach our children about the Lord. Psalm 145 tells us to commend, to praise His works to the next generation. John Piper describes this as the transmission of knowledge — the works of God — through praise or exhortation.

THE KIND OF KNOWING WORTH KNOWING

You see, there's so much more to discipling your children than just getting the right information about God into their heads. There is an eternal difference between knowing about God and knowing him personally. Our hope for our children is that they would know

God and have a relationship with him.

We see this idea illustrated in the lives of three men in the Old Testament: Hophni, Phinehas and Samuel. In 1 Samuel, we meet two young men who knew much of the Lord but, as Scripture explicitly tells us, did not *know* the Lord. Hophni and Phinehas were PKs: Priest's Kids. Their father, Eli, was a priest in the house of the Lord at Shiloh during the period of the judges. It's an understatement to say that these boys grew up in church. They were literally raised in the house of the Lord and, no doubt, had a correct working knowledge of him. But right information about God is not the same as having a right relationship with him. As 1 Samuel 2:12 states, "The sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the Lord."

The Hebrew word for "did not know" carries more meaning than just lack of understanding or knowledge. It suggests a lack of acknowledgement and, in a spiritual sense, suggests that Hophni and Phinehas did not believe in the Lord. This is quickly confirmed by the unspeakable acts the two sons commit later in the book of 1 Samuel. While they had an understanding of God in their minds, their hearts were far from him.

Compare these two men with Samuel, the son of Hannah. Barren and desperately wanting a child, Hannah was a common woman with an uncommon faith and fervor for the Lord. In the first chapter of 1 Samuel, Hannah prays to the Lord in the temple at Shiloh, desperately asking for a child. The Lord goes on to answer her prayers, giving Hannah a son whom she names Samuel, meaning "the Lord hears."

Just as she had promised the Lord, Hannah brought Samuel to the house of the Lord at Shiloh and presented him to Eli. (Yes, the same Eli whose two sons did not know the Lord.) From that day on, Samuel would grow up in the house of the Lord under the training and instruction of Eli, hearing and learning the same lessons that were taught to Hophni and Phinehas.

But Samuel's outcome would be much different than that of Eli's sons. Samuel would come to *know* the Lord and would be named

successor to Eli. Unlike Hophni and Phinehas, “The Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground” (1 Sam. 3:19).

WHAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE?

Why did three boys raised in such similar circumstances result in such different outcomes? How did Samuel come to know the Lord while Hophni and Phinehas did not? Salvation belongs to the Lord, and faith comes from him. God was the ultimate factor. But Scripture goes out of its way to highlight one variable: a praying mother.

Hannah prayed for her son. From before he was born to what I’m willing to bet was her final breath, Hannah prayed for Samuel. Some of those prayers were private, spoken only between her and the Lord. But others were very much public, and the Lord saw fit to preserve one of them for all to hear (1 Sam. 2). Hannah passed on more to her son than correct theology and right information about the Lord. She passionately and publicly praised the works of the Lord in ways he could witness.

Hannah provides a great example of what it looks like to go beyond teaching your kids about God but to also know him and have a relationship with him. This transmission process is one reason why it’s vital that you make corporate worship — the weekly gathering of the saints — a regular part of your family’s routine.

As an elementary aged boy, “big church” wasn’t my favorite way to spend an hour and a half of my weekend. But looking back on that experience, there’s no doubt that my parents were planting seeds of faith in my young heart that would come to produce fruit as an adult. Not only was I learning about God from them, but I was witnessing their experience of and relationship with him, as well. Attending corporate worship with my parents allowed me to peer through a window into their hearts and see their passions on display.

Parents, follow Hannah’s example. Don’t just teach your kids about the Lord, but show them what it looks like to know him. Praise his works in visible ways, both in the privacy of your home

and in the public, weekly gathering of the saints. Your words are needed, but your visible example communicates both the authenticity of your faith and the great worth of your God.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This article originally appeared on The Village Church blog (www.thevillagechurch.net/the-village-blog/). Used by permission.



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Hear, My Children, the Instruction of a Father: Diligently Teaching Children to Live According to the Word

MARK MCCARTY

God commands parents to teach their children the word of God diligently (Deut 6: 7). Throughout salvation history, whenever people are in a covenant relationship with God, the divine mandate to teach children is present.¹ This truth has been evident from the very beginning.

In Genesis 1:28, God commissions His image-bearers to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.” Implicit in these words is the need for Adam and Eve to teach their children, for filling the

earth and subduing it requires descendants, as evidenced by the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, which in turn takes place when the man is joined to his wife and they become one flesh (Gen 2:24). A natural implication of the first couple's unity is, as G. K. Beale notes, "reproducing offspring in God's image."² From the beginning, God's purpose has always been for his elect to teach their children diligently.

This divine mandate, first given in the garden of Eden, has now been given to the church. Parents within the household of God are now called to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4), so that they, like Timothy, might from childhood be acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make them wise for salvation (2 Tim 3:15). How are parents to go about accomplishing this task?

FROM THE PARENT'S HEART TO THE CHILD'S HEART

Deuteronomy 6:7-9 records Moses's familiar exhortation to Israel to diligently teach their children the words which he commanded. This teaching is to be so woven into the fabric of everyday life that it takes place "when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (v 7). This teaching was to frame the beginning of the child's day (when you rise), the close of the day (when you lie down), as well as taking place throughout the day (when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way). Moses calls parents to be so diligent in their teaching that the children not only hear it (talk of them, v. 7), but the children also see it (write them on the doorposts of your house, v. 9). This teaching was to be multisensory!

What cannot be neglected, however, is the connection between verse 7 and the two preceding verses. In order for the teaching of God's word to children to be effective and fruitful, Moses states that "these words, that I command you today, shall be on your heart" (Deut 6:6). And not only were Israel's parents to have God's word on their hearts, they were also to love the Lord their God with all their heart (Deut 6:5). In other words, the emphasis in this passage is not limited to the teaching (vv. 7-9), but likewise focuses upon

the teacher (vv. 5-6). The diligent teaching of children flows from parents who love God with all their heart and have God's word on their heart. Effective teaching of children is first and foremost a heart issue, because the effective teaching of children begins with a parent's heart that loves God and is filled with his word.

When parents diligently heed these commands, they create within their home, as Bruce Ware states, "an atmosphere where they lead their children in the discipline of obedience."³ When parents neglect these commands, they risk repeating the mistake described in Judges 2:10, where "there arose another generation ... who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel."

A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF DILIGENT TEACHING

The book of Proverbs offers a specific example of parents incorporating into their home the teaching of Deuteronomy 6:7-9. Passages which open with phrases such as "my son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching" (6:20, see also 1:8, 1:10, 1:15, 2:1, 3:1, 3:11, 3:21, 4:1, 4:10, 4:20, 5:1, 5:20, 6:1, 6:3, 7:1, 7:24, 19:27, 23:15, 23:19, 23:26, 24:13, 24:21) provide readers insight into a home where the diligent teaching of God's word is being practiced.

What is noteworthy in these examples is the specificity and practicality of the parent's teaching. Within these passages, Solomon addresses issues such as peer pressure (1:10-19), stewardship (3:9-10), love of neighbors (3:27-30), sexual purity (5:1-23), and work (6:6-11), to name a few. The timelessness of God's truth demands that parents today pay heed to the wisdom found in these examples by teaching children the ways in which God's word applies to every aspect of life.

By means of this diligent teaching, Solomon was seeking to train up his child in the way he should go so that in years to come he would not depart from it (Prov 22:6). An alternative approach to this diligent teaching of children is described in Proverbs 29:15, "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother." These two verses, seen

side by side, provide two vastly different approaches to parenting. On the one hand, parents can train up their children in the way they should go. On the other hand, parents can leave children to themselves and thus allow them to navigate life's decisions and choices on their own. The former approach points children in the way they should go. The latter approach leads to a life of shame. The type of parenting that trains up a child in the way he should go provides preparation for life's battles and temptations, while the type of parenting that leaves children to themselves results in a coming generation being ignorant of the Lord and his mighty works.

PREACH THE WORD

Although parents are called to embrace these duties and responsibilities, yet many Christian households have never crossed the Jordan and entered into the Promised Land of diligently teaching their children. As Bryan Nelson with Timothy Paul Jones observe, “Many contemporary Christian parents ... have never been equipped to function as active partners in the training of their children.”⁴ What is the church to do?

In Paul’s final letter, he exhorts Timothy to “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2) so that the people of God “may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:17). If parents are to be equipped for the good work of teaching their children, then the church’s primary strategy is to preach the word, for God’s word will never return empty, but will accomplish what God purposes (Is 55:11). Below are three ways the church can equip parents through the exposition of Scripture.

Obviously, the church’s pulpit ministry is the starting point. Due to the thorough emphasis which the Bible places on this subject, pastors cannot preach the whole counsel of God without congregations being consistently exposed to the Bible’s wisdom pertaining to the teaching of children.

Pastors can also take advantage of infant dedications as opportunities to help new parents embrace their God-given

responsibility of bringing up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Likewise, vacation Bible school can lead to an open door of opportunity for the church to impact parents. In this ministry context, instead of offering classes for children only, the church can also provide classes for parents and thus strengthen households by equipping parents to diligently teach their children.

CONCLUSION

In this generation, children once again need to hear their father's instruction and be encouraged to not forsake their mother's teaching (Prov 1:8). Allowing children to sort out for themselves the great questions of life is surely one of the most unloving decisions a parent could make. Like the children in Mark 10:13-16, how wonderful it would be for the children in our congregations to be brought to Jesus through the diligent teaching of God's word. "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Mk 10:14).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ See Genesis 18:17-19 as an example in the Covenant with Abraham. See Deuteronomy 6:7-9 as an example in the Mosaic Covenant. See Psalm 145:4 as an example in the Davidic Covenant. See Ephesians 6:4 as an example in the New Covenant.
- ² G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004), p. 84.
- ³ Bruce A. Ware, "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: The Trinity as Theological Foundation for Family Ministry," *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry*, Spr – Sum 2011, pp. 6-13.
- ⁴ Bryan Nelson with Timothy Paul Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), p. 15.

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Fifty Shades of Shame — The Evolution of Pornography¹

R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.

The release of the *Fifty Shades of Grey* movie, timed for Valentine's Day after this year, was a more important and lamentable event than many Christians may realize. What the movie represented was nothing less than the evolution of pornography in an age increasingly distant from a biblical vision of sexuality and human dignity.

One of the hallmarks of the Christian worldview is an affirmation of the unity of the transcendentals—the good, the beautiful, and the true. Christianity affirms—and demands—that the good, the beautiful, and the true are actually one, unified in their source. The source of what is good, beautiful, and true is none other than God himself, who alone is infinitely good, beautiful, and true. Our very knowledge of beauty, goodness, and truth are due to God's gifts of revelation and creation. He defines the good, the true, and the beautiful by his being, and they are unified in him.

This means that Christians believe the radical truth that nothing good can be ugly, that nothing untrue can be beautiful, and that everything beautiful and true is also good.

To attempt a separation of the good, the true, and the beautiful is, by Christian understanding, both impossible and self-defeating. Furthermore, the attempt to separate them is sinful — an act of defiance.

For this reason the Christian worldview insists that the face of a child with Down syndrome is infinitely more beautiful than an airbrushed model on the cover of a fashion magazine. The model may be pretty, but every human being is beautiful, simply by virtue of being made in the image of God. That grounding of human dignity points to the fact of our creation by a loving and merciful God, who made us in his image, and revealed this truth in our very existence and in our capacity to know him. He revealed this truth explicitly in Holy Scripture, and this means that every single human being, at every stage of development, possesses full human dignity.

The corruption of the gift of sex is, more than often realized, an assault upon that human dignity that is the Creator's gift. The attempt to declare beauty at the expense of goodness and truth is at the heart of the problem of pornography. Now, we live in a society fast losing even a sense of shame about its pornographic obsessions.

The explosive sales of the *Fifty Shades* book series alerted many Christians to the fact of female-oriented pornography. While far more attention had been devoted to the visual nature of most male-oriented pornography, the *Fifty Shades* phenomenon underlined the public mainstreaming of pornography that would find a primary audience among women — narrative pornography in book form.

While many had noted the attraction of so-called “romance novels” to many women, the arrival of the *Fifty Shades* series announced that the culture at large was ready to shift to what can only be described as explicitly pornographic. Furthermore, the plot line of the series, now quite well known in the larger society, is devoted to forms of sexuality that had historically been defined as perverse and abusive.

The lost sense of shame is not only documented in the unprecedented sales of the series in book form, but also by the mainstream celebration of the movie.

A culture that is determined to reduce all sexual morality to the issue of adult consent is now ready to eat popcorn while watching the corruption of the gift of sex and, in effect, granting approval to the vision of sexuality that is the film's very essence.

This next stage in the evolution of pornography combines, in an unprecedented way, male-oriented visual pornography with female-oriented narrative pornography. The movie is being marketed on Valentine's Day as an adventure for couples — something offered to both men and women.

That something is a lie. The late U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan spoke of our tendency to "define deviancy down." That is one of the marks of our age. The *Fifty Shades* movie will not be legally defined as obscenity or pornography. In our age, almost nothing is. But biblically speaking, there can be no question about the fact that the *Fifty Shades* phenomenon is explicitly pornographic — defined in the New Testament by the Greek word *porneia* — which refers directly to any illicit sexual impulse or act. Pornography, whatever its form, is intended to produce that wrongful sexual impulse.

Going to see *Fifty Shades of Grey*, or reading the book series, is an exercise in pornographic intent and effect. It is also an act of defiance against the goodness of the gift of sex as granted to humanity by God. Furthermore, the series is an assault upon the dignity of every human being.

The loss of shame in modern society is championed as a sign of cultural progress in many circles and as a step forward in mental health by many therapists. More than anything else, however, it points to the depth of the confusion that inevitably accompanies the corruption of God's gifts.

Christianity celebrates the unity of the good, the beautiful, and the true in God himself. In obedience, we must seek to unify the true and the beautiful and the good in our hearts and minds — and in our bodies.

Words from the *Book of Common Prayer*'s service of Holy Matrimony will serve us well here. Christians know that the good, the true, and the beautiful are always and evermore united. What God has joined together, let no one tear asunder.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This article originally appeared at AlbertMohler.com. Used by permission.



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Older Men, Younger Men Need You¹

PAUL MAXWELL

There is a sad and wide gulf between older men and younger men today. Generational discrimination and segregation are alive and, well, discouraging.

We have to pass the torch somehow, but so many of the bridges have been burnt. Younger guys *need* older guys. Older men, by God's design and grace, there are things we will get from you and no one else. Especially those of us without dads, or Christian dads, or engaged and intentional Christian dads. Yet the decades sadly so rarely seem to play well together.

As a younger man myself, I have tried to identify how exactly older guys can love, exhort, and invest in younger men around them — men like me. On behalf of other younger men, with humility and boldness, we plead with our older brothers for five things.

1. LOVE

Young men are often asking of older men, "Do you care about me? Do you *really* care?" We can watch YouTube videos

for advice, wisdom, and inspiration for life's complexities. With Christian blogs today, we can access answers to most every life question without even picking up the phone. We should still ask you, but we don't need older men mainly because they're smarter.

Young men need steady love, a love that shadows the love of the Father (1 John 2:13-14). We *need* that, and we are on a journey with monsters on the horizon — monsters deep in our own hearts and all around us. You, the older man, are not necessarily our dad, but you are a "father's friend" — a "neighbor who is near" (Prov 27:10), who teaches us about "reproach," "prudence," "suffering," "adultery," and "cursing" (Prov 27:11-14) — how to *do* (or avoid) all of it. The king says "do not forsake ... your father's friend." So, we're here. At least some of us are. Not forsaking. Maybe annoying, but not forsaking.

2. STORIES

Young men need to hear, "Everything's going to be okay." Most days we're pretty sure our lives are an utter failure, a disaster zone even.

We hear: "You're not a man." We need: "You *are* a man. Let's act like it." We hear: "You can't beat this." We need: "I know that voice. This is *how* you fight it." We hear: "She doesn't love you, so life is worthless." We need: "This is a season. God knows your needs. Talk to me about it."

God taught you lessons when you were young. You pray, "From my youth you have taught me," and, "Even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come" (Ps 71:17-18). Now, for every gray hair, we want one story of God's faithfulness, one lesson from years of learning God and his world. One "you'll be okay" for every silver lock.

Was there a time when you had that same life experience? Tell us about it. We need to hear, "God is faithful in that situation, because I've seen it — I have *felt* it. I don't know what it will look like for you, but he *is* with you, and he is faithful. And so am I." Tell relevant, helpful stories. You can't see the end of

any young man's story. But you can be a historical anchor for the hope that God is *actually* involved in this tragic world — in a young man's tragic life — because sometimes we're not so sure.

3. PRAYER

It's hard for most Christians to spend time alone with God. For you to take time with the Father — with *your* Father — to intercede for us, to pray for our good, and to ask for wisdom for us, means more than you know. With all the brokenness between generations today, it would be an unusual and undeserved blessing to take your prayers for granted.

Paul feared the Ephesians would "lose heart," so he prayed that God would, "grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit" (Eph 3:13, 16). We often lose heart while we make our own way. We need strength. We're praying our immature hearts out. Take those ten or fifteen years you have on us and do with them in prayer what we haven't learned to do yet as unskilled, inexperienced, and scared younger men.

4. SELF-SECURITY

Don't feel the need to compete with us. We're not your peers, so don't measure yourself against us. If we need your more mature, fatherly help, chances are we're not getting it from our dads. Most guys who have distant or absent fathers feel like they have been competing with other men their whole life — for stats, for affection, approval, and acceptance.

Be a friend in the war of life — a fellow soldier. We need support, friendship, and non-competitive camaraderie like that — we need a person to manifest to us, face to face, God's disinterest in comparative performance. It's *really* hard to "do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). But we might just learn how to do it for others through your example.

One of the most practical shapes this takes is in the form of *good listening*. In listening to a young man talk about himself, you will

hear embedded in his words a “plea for grace” (Psalm 86:6), and you will be more equipped to speak “a word fitly spoken,” which is “like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Prov 25:11).

We also might need help hearing you, because we can be impatient and stubborn and defensive (what do you do with an apple of gold anyway?). God models this humility and patience: “God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance” (Romans 2:4). God is kind because he doesn’t have anything to prove. That security produces amazing results in relationships, and in men in general.

5. VULNERABILITY

Be patient. We are slow. Don’t feel like you need to yell at us. We’ve been yelled at. Be firm if we need it. We need to be able to ask you anything—and get an honest, non-judgmental answer. This includes wisdom for Christian growth in general—in fighting sin. We need to feel, “We’re in this together,” not, “You’re such a failure.”

Most men *already* feel like failures. Be original, and be with us. Is 1 Cor 10:13 really true? “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.” Help us to learn to practice the tension of that verse: that it is “common”—not weird or stigmatized or something to keep in the dark—and to embrace the call to “endure it,” which is nearly impossible without community. We need a place—a man—that challenges us to grow, but also makes it safe for us to confess.

EVERY BOY WANTS TO BE A MAN

This was not written for the courtroom, fathers. These “needs” are not a condemnation of *you*. No, they are meant for your veneration. “I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who has been from the beginning” (1 John 2:13). Young men have failed older men in many ways—through incompetence and inconsistency, through shortcomings and shameful acts, through critiquing everyone else and coddling ourselves—our lives our fraught with failure. It’s true.

No matter what the young, stubborn punk in your life says, we want to mature; we want the skilled, heavy, healing hand of corrective (not punitive) discipline; we want to be told we’re wrong;

we want to grow. Every young man wants to be a man who can receive the love of Christ, and out of that, become a skilled lover of God, a helpful lover of friends, and a serving lover of a woman.

We want to be like you inasmuch as you are like Christ (1 Cor 11:1).

ENDNOTES

¹ This article originally appeared at DesiringGod.org. Used by permission.



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Why I Don't Want to Raise an Obedient Child¹

LYETTE REBACK

It's funny the things people will ask me when they discover I have fifteen children. Most times, the questions are a barrage of "How do you do it?" and "Don't you know what causes that?" Sometimes the questions are heartfelt — "How did you get to adopt four children?" or "Why have so many?"

But one of the most important questions that rarely gets asked is "What's the most important thing I can teach my children?"

Of course the most vital thing to teach any child is the redemptive power that faith in Jesus gives us. But past this, most parents just tend to focus on raising well-behaved kids.

As if being well-behaved is the end-all goal of Christianity. Be good. If I have "good" kids then I am a good parent. If my kids know all the rules and follow them then I have done my job. An added bonus may include a college education or an exemplary skill of

some sort, but truly it just boils down to their behavior, right?

Wrong.

I can see how we easily fall into this trap ... and yes, it's a trap. When the children are small we are basically relegated to making sure the child survives the day — no matter how many times they try and self-destruct between jumping off the couch, climbing out of their crib, and swallowing everything possible to block their windpipe. We begin to think to ourselves that if we could ever just get through a meal at a restaurant without being humiliated, make it through Publix without the three-year-old having a total meltdown, if we could just get them to *listen* to us and *do what we say*, we will have *done it*. Done our jobs. Get those little wee beasties tamed and they may even manage to make us as moms and dads look pretty good in the process.

I am in no way saying that obedience itself is not important. It is. In fact, your child's life may very well depend on them stopping when you ask them to thereby avoiding being run over in the street. We must teach our children to listen to us and obey, but this is something that is rarely accomplished completely at a very young age and I have my sneaking suspicions that's why the Lord gave us a solid sixteen-to-twenty years with our children under our wings.

But while my short term goal may be obedience, I do *not* want an obedient twenty-one year old. I want a young adult who knows the rules and when to break them. "No fighting in school," may be the rule, but I want a teenager who knows when to stick up for a friend and get a bump or bruise in the process. "Live peaceably with all men," say the scriptures, but I want my child to know it is alright to not be "peaceable" when someone is trash talking another classmate. Playing to win may be the unspoken rule, but when my child chooses all the school "losers" to be on her team for dodge ball and they get creamed, my child just won at the game of life.

You see, without watching ourselves, we can accidentally raise a child who is just obedient and not resourceful or full of initiative.

We could raise a child who knows the rules and not the guiding principles, so they never weigh out which is the greater need. And I have two really good examples of this.

Fourteen years ago, I was heavily pregnant with my fourth child. I had taken my three daughters, then six, four, and three years old to play on the beach while my friend and I talked. The girls were skimming along in the waves in barely a foot of water when the hair on the back of my neck stood up. Prompted by what I can only describe as a “Holy Warning,” I yelled “Get out now!” to the children in a voice that screamed terror. The girls sprinted out of the water and ran 30 feet up to the dune. They then turned around and asked, “Why, Mama?”

Thank God they ran before they asked. A tiger shark began rapidly approaching as they sprinted out of the water and I saw it heading straight for where the girls were playing. Surely a tragedy had been avoided because they listened quickly. Shaken, I gathered them up and left the beach that day thanking God for their safety and ever since that day, “shark” has been the buzzword around our house we use when someone doesn’t listen and obey quickly.

Fast forward about ten years. A four-year-old cousin is having a surf party at the beach. About twenty five children are playing in the waves, trying out surfboards and enjoying a fun day in the ocean. One of the dads who is a local surfing legend leans over to me and says, “Shark. Get the kids out.” In my “do-it-or-else-you’ll-be-sorry” voice I promptly tell every kid to get out of the water immediately. Out of the twenty five kids, five decide they would rather play than listen. I tell them there’s a shark in the water and those stinkers start arguing with me that since they don’t see it I must be wrong. And guess who’s still in the water between all these five-to-eight year old arguers? My sixteen-year-old daughter. Daly Kay had become quite a swimmer and reasoned that since she was a strong swimmer she would rather stay in the water and gather up these yahoos to get them out of the water than leave them in there defenseless. Even as she disobeyed the clear commands to leave the water, she was pulling them out to

safety. She broke the rules. She disobeyed. But she did the greater thing. She saved these kids from their own foolishness.

My kids aren't perfect and you can be guaranteed that I'm not either. There have been plenty of times that we've had to learn the hard way to obey. But at the end of the journey, I don't just want an obedient adult. I want a faith-filled bold individual that knows the rules and when to break them. I want my children to be so full of his Word, favor, and grace that they walk in confidence knowing their Heavenly Father loves them and their parents have their back. If we only focus on the short term goal of teaching our children obedience, rather than the long term goal of boldness through faith in Christ (and what his sacrifice bought us: favor, grace, and good standing with our heavenly Father), we will have missed our opportunity as parents to raise up a generation of world-changers.

ENDNOTES

¹ Originally posted on Believe with Me (www.believewithme.com), by Lyette Reback. Used by permission.



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Bible Reading in the Marriage of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon

RAY RHODES, JR.

On Sunday evening, March 18, 1855, Charles Spurgeon (1834 – 1892) looked to his Bible and declared in his sermon: “If these words were written by a man, we might reject them; but O let me think the solemn thought, that this book is God’s handwriting — that these words are God’s!”¹ For Spurgeon it was beyond the pale of sound reasoning for anyone to reject God’s words. He was not alone in those convictions; his wife Susannah (1832 – 1903) also believed in the divine authorship of Scripture. Reflecting on John 14:27, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid,”² Susannah asserted that those “tender words” were words of “Jesus Christ himself, my gracious Lord and Master, who thus speaks, and I shall do well to ponder every weighty sentence

as I listen to his loving voice.”³ For Susannah, the words of Scripture were “the loving voice” of Jesus Christ. Hearing Scripture as the very voice of God formed the foundation of Charles and Susannah’s marriage.

Charles Spurgeon’s views about the Bible and marriage were cultivated in him from childhood by his grandparents and parents. Susannah Thompson was also raised in a Christian home and regularly heard biblical preaching at London’s prominent Baptist congregation, New Park Street Chapel. While attending a special service at the nearby Poultry Chapel, Susannah was converted. She described her conversion as, “the dawning of the true light of my soul.”⁴ Following that experience, however, she fell into a season of spiritual decline.

Shortly after Charles began his London ministry in the spring of 1854, he learned of Susannah’s spiritual struggles, and he took a pastoral interest in her. He provided her with a copy of John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as an aid to her spiritual growth.⁵ He inscribed the book: “Miss Thompson, with desires for her progress in the blessed pilgrimage.”⁶ Charles and Susannah’s friendship deepened and on August 2, 1854, they were engaged. Susannah “knelt before God and praised and thanked Him ... for His great mercy in giving me the love of so good a man.”⁷

As Charles busied himself with ministry, he also facilitated Susannah’s spiritual growth. One example is evident in his enlistment of her to read from the writings of the Puritan Thomas Brooks and to note salient quotes. Susannah’s findings were compiled for Spurgeon’s book, *Smooth Stones Taken From Ancient Brooks*. Susannah wrote that behind the compilation of *Smooth Stones* is a “sweet love-story” that “hides between the pages.”⁸

Spurgeon also recognized the gift of Susannah to his own spiritual development as indicated by his requests for her prayers. He believed that her prayers would promote his “usefulness, and holiness, and happiness.”⁹ Charles and Susannah were married on January 8, 1856 in a wedding ceremony that reflected their deepest convictions, rich in Scripture readings and proclamation.

The New Park Street Chapel was inadequate to hold the crowds who flocked to hear Spurgeon preach. Therefore, until larger more permanent facilities were secured, church leaders leased the nearby Surrey Gardens Music Hall for worship services. At the first service, (October 19, 1856) with thousands crowding the hall, seven people were trampled to death as mischief-makers cried “fire, fire.” A deacon rushed to Spurgeon’s home to deliver the tragic news to Susannah. Later, describing the experience, Susannah wrote: “I wanted to be alone, that I might cry to God in this hour of darkness and death.”¹⁰ Charles was deeply shaken by the tragedy. However, his recovery was precipitated while reflecting on Scripture during a walk with Susannah. Turning to his wife he urged, “Oh, Wifey, I see it all now! Praise the Lord with me.”¹¹ Insightfully, Susannah framed a print of Matthew 5:11 and hung it on their bedroom wall for her husband’s daily reading and encouragement.¹² Susannah’s godliness helped Charles to weather the storm.

Charles Spurgeon’s philosophy of Bible reading provides the reasoning for how he and Susannah employed Scripture intake and prayer in their marriage. Spurgeon believed that the Bible should be read carefully, meditatively, and prayerfully. Though Spurgeon urged his congregation to read the Bible directly he also encouraged the use of study aids to assist in their understanding of Scripture. For Spurgeon, it was of utmost importance to see the relation between every passage and Christ. Spurgeon referred to this as finding the “spiritual meaning of the text.”¹³

On January 31, 1892, at 11:05 p.m., Charles Spurgeon died in his room at the Hotel Beau Rivage in Mentone, France.¹⁴ Susannah, his wife of thirty-six years, was by his bedside. She bowed her head and “thanked the Lord for the precious treasure so long lent to her, and sought, at the throne of grace, strength and guidance for the future.”¹⁵

For Charles and Susannah Spurgeon, Bible intake and prayer characterized the beginning of their marriage and supported them through a lifetime of challenges. Their marriage, grounded in Scripture, faithful in prayer, was, in every way, “a spiritual partnership.”¹⁶

ENDNOTES

- ¹ C.H. Spurgeon. "The Bible." In *The New Park Street Pulpit*, Pilgrim ed. reprint Vol. 1. (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1975), 111.
- ² Susannah quoted from The King James Version.
- ³ Susannah Spurgeon and Charles Ray. *Free Grace and Dying Love: Morning Devotions*. (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 64. Included in the Banner of Truth edition is *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon* by Charles Ray. When citing the second part of the book, it will be noted simply as, *Life*.
- ⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife, and His Private Secretary*, Reprint in 2 vols. (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1992), 2:6.
- ⁵ Bunyan lived from 1628 – 1688. He wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*; published in 1678. Spurgeon's initial reading of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was around age six and he continued to read Bunyan's masterpiece throughout his life, totaling some 100 times before he died.
- ⁶ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:6-7.
- ⁷ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:9.
- ⁸ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:19.
- ⁹ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:26.
- ¹⁰ Charles Ray, *Life*, 164-66.
- ¹¹ Charles Ray, *Life*, 167.
- ¹² Charles Ray, *Life*, 168-9.
- ¹³ This paragraph is deduced from Spurgeon's sermon, "How to Read the Bible" from *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Pilgrim ed. Vol. xxv. (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1980), 625-636.
- ¹⁴ Spurgeon often retreated to this hotel in Mentone seeking physical recovery and rest.
- ¹⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:371.
- ¹⁶ Ernest W. Bacon, Spurgeon: *Heir of the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), 45.



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One Man and One Woman: The Created Order and the Problem of Same-Sex Marriage

NICHOLAS J. WEYRENS

The debate and tension over homosexuality has reached new levels in our modern society. After decades of work by activists, the governmental approval of same-sex marriage looks to be in the near future, and many feel will soon become a constitutional right for the homosexual community. Unfortunately, the Church itself has lost some in the winds of cultural change, and appears will lose many more if same-sex marriage becomes a constitutional right. With so much cultural change occurring, it has forced us to ask the hard question: is same-sex marriage wrong?

Same-sex marriage is fallacious based on its inability to fulfill the three main purposes of marriage as revealed in the

created order. In looking at a small selection of verses from Genesis 1 and 2, we see that God designed marriage for one man and one woman to join together in a union for the purposes of procreation, complementarity, and reflection of the image of God. Though many on the other side of the debate may be dismissive of any argument constructed mostly from the Bible, Christians should uphold the priority of the biblical witness in this debate. We must also remember that simply because unbelievers discredit our use of the Bible as a foundation for our view, this does not invalidate the foundation of Scripture as a platform for argumentation. As one author puts it, “If Scripture is the norm that is not normed by any other norm, then we cannot set homosexuality aside as an issue of moral indifference.”

MARRIAGE FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROCREATION

From the beginning of Genesis, we see that God had an intended purpose for his creation. He wasn’t like a child playing with Play-Doh, molding the clay based on a creative whim; he was the omnipotent Creator who had very specific reasons and purposes for his Creation, especially for the human race. We see in Genesis 1:27-28, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it.’” It is evident that one major purpose of marriage is procreation. God made man and woman to join in marriage in order to carry out this goal. Kevin DeYoung rightly asserts, “[Only] two persons of the opposite sex can fulfill the procreative purposes of marriage.” Same-sex couples cannot fulfill this procreative purpose given by God.

Even though procreation is an important purpose of marriage it is not the only purpose. Sam Allberry writes, “Procreation is not the sole purpose of marriage (those unable to have children are no less married because of that), but it is clear that procreation is intended to be rooted in marriage.” Elevating procreation as the sole purpose actually harms marriages, making the validity of marriage based solely on the ability to have children. Stephen F.

Noll writes, “It was an error of earlier ‘natural law’ teaching to see procreation as the obvious *essence* of marriage, thus making the marital relationship and act instrumental to the end of procreation.” While it is important to remember that procreation is not the *sole* purpose of marriage, it is a core facet. There is no refuting the fact that—biologically speaking—men and women are hard-wired for procreation through heterosexual marriages. However, if evangelicals wield the “procreation argument” as their primary argument, they must practice it in their own marriages.

MARRIAGE FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMPLEMENTARITY

The second purpose of marriage established in the creative order is the complementarity of a man and a woman. Thomas Schmidt asserts, “[Male] and female are necessary counterparts.” In Genesis 2:18 reveals, “Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” When God created woman, he created another human who would complement the man in many ways. Schmidt writes, “The Genesis narrative affirms that male and female are different in correspondence to one another such that their union constitutes a completion.” This complementarity is not merely physical, but can only be achieved by humbling seeking union with one’s spouse (of the opposite gender).

In a discussion regarding the complementary nature of heterosexual marriage, one must address the reciprocal sexual desire that men have for women and that women have for men. Our sexual desire was created by God—more specifically—it was created to be enjoyed and expressed in a heterosexual relationship. In Genesis 2:23-24, the man saw his wife and desired her because she was different from the animals and different than he; there was a clear desire for a being that was a complement to him. This sexual desire between a man and a woman is what bonds them together and connects them intimately together to form one union. DeYoung calls this is a “*reunion*.” It is a reunion because the woman was made from man to be his complement. Sexuality and sexual union between a man and a woman is more than just fulfillment of sexual desire, it

is something that unites us with our spouse and with God. Kathy Rudy writes, “Undergirding complementarity is the idea that God intends men and women to unite sexually, and that such sexual unions bring the couple into a sense of wholeness and closeness to God.” Rudy goes on to say, “Complementarity also leads to direct criticism of homosexuality. If male and female together signifies relationship with God and salvation, homosexuality becomes a symbol of everything the Christian is not.”

MARRIAGE FOR THE PURPOSE OF REFLECTING THE IMAGE OF GOD

Finally, we can see from the created order that God designed man and woman to be joined together in marriage with the purpose of reflecting His image. Genesis 1:27-28a says, “And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them.” Man and woman were created to join together in marriage to mirror the Triune God. Erwin Lutzer writes, “Marriage brings a unity that is unlike anything else on this earth; indeed, it represents a unity found only in heaven — in *God Himself!*” The Trinitarian God of the Bible, who has revealed Himself as three persons in one being, is the God who created man and woman to bear offspring. This familial unit, created by God, is the only way to express the profundity of the Trinity in a creaturely way. A same-sex marriage does not have the capability to reflect the unity and diversity inherent in the Trinity. A same-sex marriage would simply model a reflection of a unitarian God — a God of unity in similarity. Only in a heterosexual marriage can the purpose of reflecting the image of the Trinitarian God be fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

Same-sex marriage violates the created order intended by God in the creation accounts of Genesis. For that reason, those wishing to affirm the veracity and consistency of Scripture, can only logically affirm marriage defined as between one man and one

woman. Various texts from Genesis 1 and 2 indicate that God created marriage as an institution of a man and a woman to fulfill the purposes of procreation, complementarity, and reflecting the image of the Triune God. First, we saw that from a biological standpoint God created marriage for the purpose of procreation. Same-sex marriages are incapable of producing children on their own, which leads us to reject this union between two people of the same sex. Secondly, complementarity should be considered as a primary facet of marriage. The creation account shows that God intended to create Eve as a “suitable helper” for Adam. This simple declaration of God reveals that the animals were not “suitable” and *another man* was not “suitable” for Adam. Both of these together reveal that there is some sort of fulfillment that belongs to the role of women, not just in the physical sense, but in all senses, and vice versa. The final purpose of marriage, as it was originally created, is to reflect the image of the Triune God. Same-sex marriage cannot reflect the unity in diversity of the Trinity, which means that it cannot properly fulfill its purpose of reflecting the image of God. This can only be done through the creation of the familial unit of a husband, a wife, and their offspring.

Though the winds of culture are drastically tossing about many in the Church, no matter what the courts rule, we must stand firm in our defense of traditional marriage between a man and a woman. This was God’s original design and purpose, and we should humbly reflect that design and purpose in the life of the Church.

Here We Stand: An Evangelical Declaration on Marriage

A declaration from a coalition of evangelical leaders assembled by the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, June 26, 2015

As evangelical Christians, we dissent from the court's ruling that redefines marriage. The state did not create the family, and should not try to recreate the family in its own image. We will not capitulate on marriage because biblical authority requires that we cannot. The outcome of the Supreme Court's ruling to redefine marriage represents what seems like the result of a half-century of witnessing marriage's decline through divorce, cohabitation, and a worldview of almost limitless sexual freedom. The Supreme Court's actions pose incalculable risks to an already volatile social fabric by alienating those whose beliefs about marriage are motivated by deep biblical convictions and concern for the common good.

The Bible clearly teaches the enduring truth that marriage consists of one man and one woman. From Genesis to Revelation, the authority of Scripture witnesses to the nature of biblical marriage as uniquely bound to the complementarity of man and woman. This truth is not negotiable. The Lord Jesus himself said that marriage is from the beginning (Matt. 19:4-6), so no human institution has the authority to redefine marriage any more than a human institution has the authority to redefine the gospel, which marriage mysteriously reflects (Eph. 5:32). The Supreme Court's ruling to redefine marriage demonstrates mistaken judgment by disregarding what history and countless civilizations have passed on to us, but it also represents an aftermath that evangelicals themselves, sadly, are not guiltless in contributing to. Too often,

professing evangelicals have failed to model the ideals we so dearly cherish and believe are central to gospel proclamation.

Evangelical churches must be faithful to the biblical witness on marriage regardless of the cultural shift. Evangelical churches in America now find themselves in a new moral landscape that calls us to minister in a context growing more hostile to a biblical sexual ethic. This is not new in the history of the church. From its earliest beginnings, whether on the margins of society or in a place of influence, the church is defined by the gospel. We insist that the gospel brings good news to all people, regardless of whether the culture considers the news good or not.

The gospel must inform our approach to public witness. As evangelicals animated by the good news that God offers reconciliation through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, we commit to:

- ♦ *Respect and pray for our governing authorities even as we work through the democratic process to rebuild a culture of marriage (Rom. 13:1-7);*
- ♦ *Teach the truth about biblical marriage in a way that brings healing to a sexually broken culture;*
- ♦ *Affirm the biblical mandate that all persons, including LGBT persons, are created in the image of God and deserve dignity and respect;*
- ♦ *Love our neighbors regardless of whatever disagreements arise as a result of conflicting beliefs about marriage;*
- ♦ *Live respectfully and civilly alongside those who may disagree with us for the sake of the common good;*
- ♦ *Cultivate a common culture of religious liberty that allows the freedom to live and believe differently to prosper.*

The redefinition of marriage should not entail the erosion of religious liberty. In the coming years, evangelical institutions could be pressed to sacrifice their sacred beliefs about marriage and sexuality in order to accommodate whatever demands the culture and law require. We do not have the option to meet those demands without violating our consciences and surrendering the gospel. We will not allow the government to coerce or infringe upon the rights of institutions to live by the sacred belief that only men and women can enter into marriage.

The gospel of Jesus Christ determines the shape and tone of our ministry. Christian theology considers its teachings about marriage both timeless and unchanging, and therefore we must stand firm in this belief. Outrage and panic are not the responses of those confident in the promises of a reigning Christ Jesus. While we believe the Supreme Court has erred in its ruling, we pledge to stand steadfastly, faithfully witnessing to the biblical teaching that marriage is the chief cornerstone of society, designed to unite men, women, and children. We promise to proclaim and live this truth at all costs, with convictions that are communicated with kindness and love.

