

THE JOURNAL FOR BIBLICAL
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MANHOOD & WOMANHOOD

ARTICLES INCLUDE:

“The Frank and Manly Mr. Ryle”:
The Value of a Masculine Ministry
John Piper

A Review of Mark Driscoll, *The Truth about Sex*
Heath Lambert

Women, Stop Submitting to Men
Russell D. Moore

A Review of James Dobson, *Bringing Up Girls*
Todd Miles

**THE JOURNAL FOR
BIBLICAL MANHOOD
AND WOMANHOOD**

is a biannual publication of the
Council on Biblical
Manhood and Womanhood
ISSN: 1544-5143

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Layout and Design

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Contributors

R. Albert Mohler Jr.

Russell D. Moore

Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Editorial Correspondence

journaleditor@cbmw.org

Subscription Correspondence

journal@cbmw.org

Contact CBMW for institutional rates.

2825 Lexington Road • Box 926

Louisville, Kentucky 40280

502.897.4065 (voice)

502.897.4061 (fax)

office@cbmw.org (e-mail)

www.cbmw.org (web)

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CBMW is a member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.

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Editorial: Junia Is a Woman, and I Am a Complementarian

Denny Burk

*Editor, Journal for Biblical Manhood & Womanhood
Associate Professor of Biblical Studies
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky*

Scot McKnight is one of my favorite egalitarians. We are quite different in our theological perspectives, but he is an all around engaging personality. He is a fantastic New Testament scholar and a prolific writer. His interests are wide-ranging, and he is gifted both at producing serious scholarship and at reaching more popular audiences with his work. In my view, he's a triple threat: serious scholar, popular blogger, and charismatic speaker. He has a gift for communicating serious ideas to wide audiences.

His new little e-book *Junia Is Not Alone* (Patheos Press, 2011) is no exception. In this little pamphlet, McKnight argues at the popular level in favor of an egalitarian reading of Scripture (though he prefers to call his view "mutuality"). Taking Junia as his point of departure (Rom 16:7), he argues that women have been routinely overlooked in the life and ministry of the Christian church. Thus, *Junia is not alone* in being slighted by a patriarchal vision of gender roles in the church and the home.

Though he makes mention of a litany of female Bible characters, McKnight gives most of his attention to explaining how and why Junia's legacy has been suppressed. On this point, his argument is not new. He makes the case that—notwithstanding those who have manipulated the Greek accents to transform her into a man ("Junias")—the name *Iounias* should be understood as feminine ("Junia"). Thus, Junia is a woman who Paul names as an apostle, and as such she was a "Christ-experiencing, Christ-representing, church-establishing, probably miracle-working, missionizing woman who preached the gospel and taught the church."

McKnight says that he bases his view of Junia's gender almost entirely on Eldon Epp's book *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*, and McKnight agrees with Epp's conclusions that:

- (1) Junia was a woman.
- (2) There is no evidence that any man had the name "Junias."
- (3) Junia is not, as some have argued, a

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contracted name of Junianus.

(4) “Among the apostles” means Junia herself was an apostle and not simply that the apostles thought she was a good egg.

According to McKnight, a female apostle would have been totally uncontroversial in the egalitarian communities with whom Paul corresponded. It is only subsequent generations of patriarchy that have silenced her and have given her a “sex change” by transforming her name into a masculine one.

At the heart of McKnight’s argument, however, is a critical weakness. Merely demonstrating that Junia was a woman (as all the early commentators do) does little by itself to advance an egalitarian point of view. The bottom line issue is not whether Junia was a woman. Complementarians like myself agree with the fact that Junia was a woman. The bottom line issue is Junia’s relationship to the apostles.

Though McKnight dismisses this as a possibility, there are serious and weighty arguments in favor of the translation that Junia was not one of the apostles but that she was “well known to the apostles” (ESV, NET). In 2001, for example, Daniel Wallace and Mike Burer defended the translation “well known to the apostles,” and the results of their research were published in *New Testament Studies*.¹ McKnight relies on Epp’s response to the Wallace/Burer proposal, but Burer has recently responded to Epp’s book and has shown the continuing strength of his and Wallace’s original thesis that Junia was “well known to the apostles.”² Wallace and Burer’s argument cannot be easily brushed aside.

But even if one disagrees with Wallace and Burer, that still doesn’t settle the issue in favor of recognizing Junia as an apostle. McKnight gives very little space to the possibility that the Greek term *apostolos* may be used in a non-technical sense in Rom 16:7. The word *apostolos* is not used in the New Testament uniformly to denote the office of authority that was held by the twelve. In Phil 2:25, for instance, Epaphroditus was an *apostolos* sent by the Philippians to minister to Paul’s need. No

interpreter believes Epaphroditus to be an apostle. Rather, it is clear that Epaphroditus was an *apostolos* in the sense of a “messenger” or an “envoy” who does not have any extraordinary status (cf. John 13:16; 2 Cor 8:23). Given Paul’s well-known prohibition of women in authority (1 Tim 2:12), it is most likely that Junia was simply an “apostle” in this sense of “messenger” or “envoy.”

One doesn’t have to agree with these interpretations to understand that they are well within the mainstream of possibilities recognized by commentators. In any case, the existence of these interpretations invalidates one of McKnight’s central critiques—that scholars have suppressed the truth about Junia. He writes, “Let me be clear once more: The editors of Greek New Testaments killed Junia. They killed her by silencing her into non-existence. They murdered that innocent woman by erasing her from the footnotes.”

This charge is not exactly fair. The fact of the matter is that many readers simply have a different interpretation of the text than McKnight does, and it will not hold water to allege that these readers are all motivated by a patriarchal desire to silence Junia. This is really good rhetoric but a very poor argument in my view.

McKnight’s central thesis is only as strong as his exegesis of Rom 16:7, and on this point I do not think he has provided sufficient exegetical warrant for his view in light of the countless interpreters who differ with his argument.³ There is not a single argument in this book that is new or that moves the gender debate forward. It simply assumes long-held egalitarian interpretations of the Bible, and then argues accordingly. I am doubtful that this method will be very persuasive to serious students of the Bible.

McKnight’s book may give the impression that there is a big cover-up when it comes to the identity of Junia and of women leaders in the Bible more generally. But nothing could be further from the truth. There’s no complementarian cover-up—just a difference over interpretation, a difference with profound implications for the life of the church.

ENDNOTES

¹Daniel Wallace and Mike Burer, “Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-examination of Rom 16.7,” *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001): 76–91.

²Michael Burer, “Reassessing Junia: A Review of Eldon Epp’s *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 13, no. 1 (2008): 56–59.

³See, e.g., Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans* (The Anchor Bible; New Haven: Yale, 1993), 739; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 796.

Odds & Ends

Sarah Flashing Comments on a Year of Living Biblically

Rachel Held Evans is an egalitarian and has set aside the last year to obey every command in Scripture pertaining to women. Her aim is to show what “biblical womanhood” really looks like when it is practiced consistently. She has been blogging about her year at her website (rachelheldevans.com), and Thomas Nelson has agreed to publish her narrative for a book set to be released in 2012.

When I first heard about this, I was skeptical about the usefulness of such a project. Sarah J. Flashing is also skeptical, and she has written a hard-hitting piece about it at the *First Things* blog. She writes,

I have to admit, I was very intrigued by the idea of an evangelical feminist woman living out a year of biblical womanhood even as just a thought experiment. But what Rachel Held Evans has done is not that. This could have been an opportunity to discover and experience some aspects of complementarianism not otherwise understood. Her experiment, however, was little more than a piecemeal approach.... Not only did she not live it consistently, she added practices that don't belong (camping out in her front yard, for example). She was not faithful to biblical womanhood as taught by its adherents.

Evans' Year of Biblical Womanhood has actually been a year of an erroneous hermeneutic resulting in misrepresentation to the church and the public at large of what biblical womanhood actually looks like. She expanded on the literal approach of scripture practiced by complementarians by flattening scripture such that systematic theology is of no consequence.

Flashing is right. You can read the rest of the essay (“What Biblical Womanhood is NOT”) here: <http://firstthings.com/blogs/evangel/2011/10/what-biblical-womanhood-is-not>.

– Denny Burk

Men, Temptation, and the Gospel

A few months ago Harvey Mansfield, Harvard professor of government and 2011 Bradley Prize winner, wrote a provocative piece on the distinctive characteristics and faults of men for *The Weekly Standard*.

Several years ago, Mansfield penned the highly controversial book *Manliness* (Yale, 2006). Enjoying the freedom only tenure can bring, Mansfield has questioned gender absolutes in the academy and suggested that men and women are different. These are fighting words in many circles today. I have benefited from his insights and applaud his courage, even if I have some essential disagreements with him.

In his *Weekly Standard* piece, Mansfield notes that “men are more adventurous and aggressive than women. This is true for good as well as ill.” Mansfield's insights are based in his observations, not in Scripture. They resonate, however, with certain tenets of the Christian worldview. From start to finish in the Bible, men are appointed as leaders of God's church and their homes. As they go, so go their families, churches, and societies. When men excel in righteousness, others flourish (see, in a general sense, Israel under David's reign, 1 and 2 Samuel). When men fall into gross sin, others suffer (see the book of Judges). The sins and strengths of men have an outsized impact on others.

Mansfield is right. Men are aggressive. Men are adventurous. Men find monogamy more challenging than women. When men act on their base instincts, channeling their aggression into fornication and marital affairs, they set women up for heartbreak and pain. As Kay Hymowitz has shown

in her recent book *Manning Up* (Basic, 2011), in the new sexual economy, men are loosed from traditional cultural bonds, which only increases the risks for women, children, and society.

All of which leads Christian men—men captured by the gospel of Jesus Christ—to realize that this is an age of tremendous opportunity. Godly men have a remarkable chance in this day to show how the Holy Spirit transforms a man. When God gets hold of a man, he doesn't merely tinker with him, making him cuss less and smile more. When God saves a man, he looses him to destroy sin and bless his family, church, and society. Christian men are not normal men who sleep less on Sunday and wear Dockers with no creases. Christian men are transformed men, other-worldly men, residents of a new kingdom, servants of a great King, as Randy Stinson and Dan Dumas make clear in their insightful and challenging book *A Guide to Biblical Manhood* (Southern Seminary, 2011).

Not every unsaved man will stray, and indeed, the media can make it seem as if every man is out to destroy the traditional family. These ideas are plainly not true. Many men, Christian or not, will not ruin their families. The point stands nonetheless: Godly men have a fantastic opportunity in a society rightly jaded by the failures of so-called "great men"—actors, athletes, politicians, celebrities—to demonstrate the transformative power of the gospel in a man's life.

We face all the same temptations as lost men. Our flesh pulls at us to compromise our marriages, to take our sacrificial wives lightly, to ignore our children in order to play golf or be more successful or have more fun, to flirt when traveling, to speak ill of marriage, to generally not live sacrificially in the image of Jesus Christ and spend ourselves for the betterment of those God has entrusted us. Our flesh encourages us to allow small temptations to grow into strong desires, then to usher those desires into daring actions, then to allow those actions to blossom into patterns of sin that will, when discovered, blow our families and churches apart.

But the gospel, praise God, is stronger. The power of God is inside us, enabling men to exchange the role of pleasure-driven narcissist for

that of self-sacrificing pillar of strength. The power of God is at work in his local church, where sinful men find fellowship in the company of brothers who bear the same weaknesses but through the power of the Spirit stand as oaks of righteousness. Instead of comparing black book conquests and planning the next hedonistic plunge, these men link arms to kill sin, love their families, and propel the church's witness. Whether in a massive church or a tiny one, this band of brothers provides an awesome witness to a fallen world of the mysterious power of the gospel. Men who genuinely find pleasure in their families, in service of the church, and in their vocations show the world that it is not a secular lifestyle for which we were made, but the far more pleasurable way of life sketched out for us in Scripture.

This very day, every man—whether a global leader or an unknown tradesman—has an opportunity to show the world that the gospel does not kill pleasure or aggressiveness. Rather, as Jonathan Edwards has shown, it frees Christians to experience true pleasure and to act in manly ways for a far greater cause than ourselves. We grieve the trajectory of modern men, and we feel special pain for the wives and children who are, through no fault of their own, deeply damaged by the sins of men. In a broken world, we pray to God to show the world a better way, a greater joy, and a magnificent Savior, who delights in taking sinful men and turning them into agents of his glory.

[This column originally appeared at The GospelCoalition.org]

— Owen Strachan

Why Abortion Is the Sacrament of Feminism

In a 2001 article, Frederica Mathewes-Green explains why abortion remains the sacrament of feminism. The fact that she was once an ardent feminist herself makes her perspective quite compelling. She argues that feminists sought to be equal to men with respect to having a career and having a promiscuous sex-life. The main obstacle to those two goals was the possibility of a pregnancy. So abortion became the necessary condition for careerism and promiscuity. Women could

not have complete sexual and professional freedom without unfettered access to abortion on demand. She writes,

Thus these two bad ideas come together, pressing in like the jaws of a vise, and making a woman feel she has no escape but abortion. Feminism sought (1) increased access to public life, and (2) increased sexual freedom. But that participation in public life is significantly complicated by responsibility for children, and uncommitted sexual activity is the most effective means of producing unwanted pregnancies. This dilemma—simultaneous pursuit of behaviors that cause children and that are hampered by children—inevitably finds its resolution on an abortion table.

Feminists defend abortion with desperate passion because the whole shaky structure of their lives depends upon it.... While pro-choice advocates present abortion as an act of autonomy, pregnant women experience it rather as a response to abandonment. Pregnancy is the icon of human connectedness, binding a woman to her child and the father of the child. Abortion shatters those connections and leaves her desolate ("What Women Need: Three Bad Ideas for Women and What to Do about Them," *Touchstone* [July/Aug 2001]).

This article is fantastic and well-worth your time to read. Feminist ideals have become so much a fixture of American life that many people hardly realize the extent to which their own worldview has been shaped by it. I challenge you to test yourselves as you read this article to see how deeply you may have drunk from the well of feminism. Read the rest online at <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=14-06-020-f>.

– Denny Burk

Women, Stop Submitting to Men

Russell D. Moore

*Dean of the School of Theology
Senior Vice President for Academic Administration
Professor of Christian Theology and Ethics
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky*

Those of us who hold to so-called “traditional gender roles” are often assumed to believe that women should submit to men. This isn’t true.

Indeed, a primary problem in our culture and in our churches isn’t that women aren’t submissive enough to men, but instead that they are far too submissive.

First of all, it just isn’t so that women are called to submit while men are not. In Scripture, every creature is called to submit, often in different ways and at different times. Children are to submit to their parents, although this is certainly a different sort of submission than that envisioned for marriage. Church members are to submit to faithful pastors (Heb 13:17). All of us are to submit to the governing authorities (Rom 13:1–7; 1 Pet 2:13–17). Of course, we are all to submit, as creatures, to our God (Jas 4:7).

And, yes, wives are called to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22; 1 Pet 3:1–6). But that’s just the point. In the Bible, it is not that women, generally, are to submit to men, generally. Instead, “wives” are to submit “to your own husbands” (1 Pet 3:1).

Too often in our culture, women and girls are pressured to submit to men, as a category. This is the reason so many women, even feminist women, are consumed with what men, in general, think of them. This is the reason a woman’s value in our society, too often, is defined in terms of sexual attractiveness and availability. Is it any wonder that

so many of our girls and women are destroyed by a predatory patriarchy that demeans the dignity and glory of what it means to be a woman?

Submitting to men in general renders it impossible to submit to one’s “own husband.” Submission to one’s husband means faithfulness to him, and to him alone, which means saying “no” to other suitors.

Submission to a right authority always means a corresponding refusal to submit to a false authority. Eve’s submission to the Serpent’s word meant she refused to submit to God’s. On the other hand, Mary’s submission to God’s word about the child within her meant she refused to submit to Herod’s. God repeatedly charges his Bride, the people of Israel, with a refusal to submit to him because they have submitted to the advances of other lovers. The freedom of the gospel means, the apostle tells us, that we “do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1).

Despite the promise of female empowerment in the present age, the sexual revolution has given us the reverse. Is it really an advance for women that the average high-school male has seen images of women sexually exploited and humiliated on the Internet? Is it really empowerment to have more and more women economically at the mercy of men who freely abandon them and their children, often with little legal recourse?

Is this really a “pro-woman” culture when res-

restaurant chains enable men to pay to ogle women in tight T-shirts while they gobble down chicken wings? How likely is it that a woman with the attractiveness of Henry Kissinger will obtain power or celebrity status in American culture? What about the girl in your community pressured to perform oral sex on a boyfriend, what is this but a patriarchy brutal enough for a Bronze Age warlord?

In the church it is little better. Too many of our girls and young women are tyrannized by the expectation to look a certain way, to weigh a certain amount, in order to gain the attention of “guys.”

Additionally, too many predatory men have crept in among us, all too willing to exploit young women by pretending to be “spiritual leaders” (2 Tim 3:1–9; 2 Peter 2). Do not be deceived: a man who will use spiritual categories for carnal purposes is a man who cannot be trusted with fidelity, with provision, with protection, with the fatherhood of children. The same is true for a man who will not guard the moral sanctity of a woman not, or not yet, his wife.

We have empowered this pagan patriarchy. Fathers assume their responsibility to daughters in this regard starts and stops in walking a bride down an aisle at the end of the process. Pastors refuse to identify and call out spiritually impostors before it’s too late. And through it all we expect our girls and women to be submissive to men in general, rather than to one man in particular.

Women, sexual and emotional purity means a refusal to submit to “men,” in order to submit to your own husband, even one whose name and face you do not yet know. Your closeness with your husband, present or future, means a distance from every man who isn’t, or who possibly might not be, him.

Your beauty is found not in external (and fleeting) youth and “attractiveness” but in the “hidden person of the heart” which “in God’s sight is very precious” (1 Pet 3:3–4). And it will be beautiful in the sight of a man who is propelled by the Spirit of this God.

Sisters, you owe no submission to Hollywood or to Madison Avenue, or to those who listen to them. Your worth and dignity cannot be defined by them. Stop comparing yourselves to supermodels

and porn stars. Stop loathing your body, or your age. Stop feeling inferior to vaporous glamor. You are beautiful.

Sisters, there is no biblical category for “boyfriend” or “lover,” and you owe such designation no submission. In fact, to be submissive to your future husband you must stand back and evaluate, with rigid scrutiny, “Is this the one who is to come, or is there another?” That requires an emotional and physical distance until there is a lifelong covenant made, until you stand before one who is your “own husband.”

Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as unto the Lord. Yes and Amen. But, women, stop submitting to men.

“The Frank and Manly Mr. Ryle”: The Value of a Masculine Ministry¹

John Piper

*Pastor for Preaching and Vision
Bethlehem Baptist Church
Minneapolis, Minnesota*

In dealing with the life and ministry of John Charles Ryle, my hope is to clarify and commend what I mean by the value of a masculine ministry. But before we turn to “the frank and manly Mr. Ryle,”² let me make some clarifying comments from the Bible.

God has revealed himself to us in the Bible *pervasively* as King, not Queen, and as Father, not Mother. The second person of the Trinity is revealed as the eternal Son. The Father and the Son created man and woman in his image, and gave them together the name of the man, *Adam* (Gen 5:2). God appoints all the priests in Israel to be men. The Son of God comes into the world as a man, not a woman. He chooses twelve men to be his apostles. The apostles tell the churches that all the overseers—the pastor/elders who teach and have authority (1 Tim 2:12)—should be men; and that in the home, the head who bears special responsibility to lead, protect, and provide should be the husband (Eph 5:22–33).

Masculine Christianity

From all of this, I conclude that God has given Christianity a masculine feel. And, being a God of love, he has done it for the maximum flourishing of men *and* women. He did not create women to languish, or be frustrated, or in any way to suffer or fall short of full and lasting joy, in a masculine Christianity. She is a fellow heir of the grace of life (1 Pet 3:7), from which I infer that the fullest flourishing of women and men takes place in churches and families where Christianity has this God-ordained, masculine feel. For the sake of the glory of women,

and for the sake of the security and joy of children, God has made Christianity to have a masculine feel. He has ordained for the church a masculine ministry.

And, of course, this is liable to serious misunderstanding and serious abuse, because there are views of masculinity that would make such a vision repulsive. So here is more precisely what I mean. And words are always inadequate when describing beauty. Beauty always thrives best when she is perceived by God-given instincts rather than by rational definitions. But we must try. What I mean by “masculine Christianity,” or “masculine ministry,” or “Christianity with a masculine feel,” is this:

Theology and church and mission are marked by overarching godly male leadership in the spirit of Christ, with an ethos of tender-hearted strength, and contrite courage, and risk-taking decisiveness, and readiness to sacrifice for the sake of leading, protecting, and providing for the community—all of which is possible only through the death and resurrection of Jesus. It’s the feel of a great, majestic God, who by his redeeming work in Jesus Christ, inclines *men* to take humble, Christ-exalting initiative, and inclines *women* to come alongside the men with joyful support, intelligent helpfulness, and fruitful partnership in the work.

There are, I believe, dozens of sweet and precious benefits that come to a church and family that has this kind of masculine feel. Some of those will

emerge as we consider “‘The Frank and Manly Mr. Ryle’: The Value of a Masculine Ministry.”

His Early Life

John Charles Ryle was born May 10, 1816, near Macclesfield, in the County of Cheshire, England. His parents were nominal members of the Church of England with no interest in vital religion and would never embrace Ryle’s evangelical faith—which he came to when he was 21 years old.

At the age of eight, he was sent to a boarding school for three years, of which he said when he was 58, “I’m quite certain that I learned more moral evil in a private school than I ever did in my whole life afterwards.”³ But he did leave “tolerably well grounded in Latin and Greek.”⁴

A month later, at the age of eleven, he was sent to Eton, the elite preparatory school founded in 1440, and stayed there almost seven years, until he eighteen. “Religion,” he says, “was at a very low ebb, and most boys knew far more about the heathen gods and goddesses than about Jesus Christ.... On Sundays there was nothing whatever to do us any good; the preaching of the fellows was beneath contempt.”⁵

Cricket Captain

The last year was his happiest, and the reason seems to be that he was the captain of the Cricket XI—a game he loved and followed all his life. In his last year at Eton, he became very prominent and powerful among the students: “I was ambitious and fond of influence, attained power and was conscious of it.”⁶

He looked back on his Cricket experience with amazing appreciation for what it taught him about leadership:

I believe it gave me a power of commanding, managing, organizing, and directing, seeing through men’s capacities, and using every man in the post to which he is best suited, bearing and forbearing, keeping men around me in good temper, which I have found of infinite use.⁷

He was on his way to becoming a strong and forceful personality.

Three Years at Oxford

In October of 1834, he entered Christ Church, Oxford, where he stayed exactly three years till he was 21. He won the Craven University Scholarship, and at the end of his third year, he took a “brilliant first-class in classics.”⁸ But in spite of his achievements he said,

I thoroughly disliked Oxford on many accounts.... Nothing disgusted me so much as the miserable idolatry of money and also of aristocratic connection. I never saw such an amount of toadying flattery, and fawning upon wealth and title as I saw among the undergraduates at Oxford.⁹

And later, from his perspective as a believer, he wrote, “At Oxford things were very little better [than Eton]. No one cared for our souls anymore than if we had been a pack of heathen.”¹⁰

So up till the age of 21, Ryle says, “I had no true religion at all.... I certainly never said my prayers, or read a word of my Bible, from the time I was 7 to the time I was 21.... My father’s house was respectable and well conducted but there really was not a bit of [true] religion in it.”¹¹

His Conversion

But things were about to change dramatically.

About the end of 1837 [just after Oxford], my character underwent a thorough and entire change, in consequence of a complete alteration in my view of religion.... This change was ... extremely great and has had ... a sweeping influence over the whole of my life ever since.¹²

At least three things conspired to bring this about. First, a severe illness confined him to bed. “That was the time,” he wrote, “when I distinctly remember I began to read my Bible and began to pray.”¹³

Then a new gospel ministry opened in his hometown of Macclesfield. Till that time, he says,

“there was no ministry of the gospel at the church we attended. Macclesfield ... had only two churches, and in neither of them was the gospel preached.”¹⁴ But then a new church was opened and the gospel was preached, and Ryle was contrarian enough to be attracted to it when everyone was criticizing it.

There was a kind of stir among dry bones, and great outcry against the attendants of this new church. This also worked for my good. My natural independence, combativeness, and love of minorities, and hearty dislike for swimming with the stream, combined to make me think that these new evangelical preachers who were so sneered at and disliked were probably right.¹⁵

The third influence was some good evangelical books that came into his hands. He mentions Wilberforce’s *Practical View of Christianity*, Angel James’s *Christian Professor*, Scott’s *Reply to Bishop Tomline*, Newton’s *Cardiaphonia*, Milner’s *Church History*, and Bickersteth’s *Christian Student*.¹⁶

So God used Ryle’s sickness, the gospel preacher, and the evangelical books, and by the beginning of 1838, he says, “I was fairly launched as a Christian, and started on the road which I think I have never entirely left, from that time to this.”¹⁷

He tells us what the truths were that the Holy Spirit pressed on his soul in those days:

Nothing ... appeared to me so clear and distinct, as my own sinfulness, Christ’s preciousness, the value of the Bible, the absolute necessity of coming out of the world, the need of being born again, the enormous folly of the whole doctrine of baptismal regeneration. All these things, I repeat, seemed to flash upon me like a sunbeam in the winter of 1837 and have stuck in my mind from that time down to this.

People may account for such a change as they like, my own belief is that no rational explanation of it can be given but that of the Bible; it was what the Bible calls “conversion” or “regeneration.”

Before that time I was dead in sins and on the high road to hell, and from that time I have become alive and had a hope of heaven. And nothing to my mind can account for it, but the free sovereign grace of God. And it was the greatest change and event in my life, and has been an influence over the whole of my subsequent history.¹⁸

The Bankruptcy He Never Forgot

For the next three and a half years, he mainly worked in the bank that his father owned. Then disaster struck in June 1841, when he was 25 years old. His father lost everything in bankruptcy. Ryle describes this event as so traumatic that “if I had not been a Christian at that time, I do not know if I should not have committed suicide.”¹⁹

“Every single acre and penny my father possessed had to be given up to meet the demand of the creditors.... We got up one summer’s morning with all the world before us as usual, and went to bed that same night completely and entirely ruined.”²⁰ His own testimony about the effect of this disaster on his life is remarkable.

God alone knows how the iron entered into my soul.... I am quite certain it inflicted a wound on my body and mind of which I feel the effects most heavily at this day [he is writing this 32 years later in 1873] and shall feel it if I live to be a hundred. To suppose that people do not feel things because they do not scream and yell and fill the air with their cries, is simple nonsense.... *I do not think there has been a single day in my life for 32 years, that I have not remembered the ... humiliation.*

Nevertheless, Ryle believed in the sovereignty of God and knew that this event was decisive in making him what he was.

I have not the least doubt it was all for the best. If ... I had never been ruined, my life of course would have been a very different one. I should have probably gone into Parliament ... I should never have

been a clergyman, never have preached, written a tract or a book. Perhaps I might have made shipwreck in spiritual things. So I do not mean to say at all, that I wish it to have been different to what it was.²¹

But now what would he do? He had no idea. “The plans of my life were broken up at the age of 25.... I was going to leave my father’s house without the least idea what was going to happen, where I was going to live, or what I was going to do.”²²

Reluctantly Entering the Ministry

The Rector of the parish of Fawley, Rev. Gibson, knew of Ryle’s conversion and leadership gifts, and asked him to be the curate of Exbury. It was a strange way to enter the ministry in which he would become the foremost evangelical spokesman of the Church of England in his day.

I never had any particular desire to become a clergyman, and those who fancied that my self will and natural tastes were gratified by it were totally and entirely mistaken. I became a clergyman because I felt shut up to do it, and saw no other course of life open me.²³

His parents did not like the idea, but could suggest nothing better, and so he accepted the offer “with a very heavy heart,”²⁴ and was ordained by the Bishop of Winchester in December, 1841.

The people liked him. “I think they would have done anything for me,” he says, although “on the whole ... I think I was regarded as an enthusiastic, fanatical mad dog of whom most people were afraid.”²⁵

He prepared two written sermons each Sunday, spoke extemporaneously on Wednesday and Thursday, visited 60 families each week, and during an outbreak of scarlet fever, he says, “I saved many lives ... by supplying them with large quantities of beef tea, made from concentrated essence, and insisted on their swallowing it, as long as their throats kept open.”²⁶

The church was soon filled on Sunday. But he resigned in two years (November, 1843) for health

reasons. “The district thoroughly disagreed with me.... Constant headache, indigestion, and disturbances of the heart then began and have been the plagues, and have disturbed me ever since that time.”²⁷

Seventeen Years in Helmingham

After a five-month curacy at Winchester, he accepted a call to be the Rector at Helmingham, about 85 miles northeast of London, where he began on Easter, 1844. He was now 28 and still unmarried. Not until now had his income been sufficient to support a wife—which was one of the reasons he accepted this call after only five months at Winchester.²⁸ But this time he stayed 17 years.

In October, 1844, his first year there, he married Matilda Plumbpre. She was 22, and he was 28. A child, Georgina, was born May 1846, and Matilda died June 1847. Ryle was married again in February, 1849, to Jessie Walker, but their ten years together “were years of singular trials.”²⁹ Jessie was never well.

On five occasions, she had to be confined in London for two months each, and one side effect was that Ryle preached in at least sixty different churches in London and became very popular for his power in the pulpit, to which he responded, “I always felt that popularity, as it was called, was a very worthless thing and a very bad thing for man’s soul.”³⁰

Jessie bore four children over the ten years of their marriage, Isabelle, Reginald, Herbert, and Arthur. But then in May, 1860, after a long battle with Bright’s disease, she died. The last five years, Jessie was unable to do much at all, and when she died the entire load of the five children, with the oldest only thirteen, fell to their father, especially the three little boys.

As to holidays, rest, and relaxation in the year, I never had any at all; while the whole business of entertaining and amusing the three little boys in evening devolved entirely upon me. In fact the whole state of things was a heavy strain upon me, both in body and mind, and I often wonder how I lived through it.³¹

His middle son, Herbert, recalls the early days of childhood with their father:

He was everything to us—taught us games, natural history, astronomy, and insisted on our never being idle, and carefully fostered our love of books. To us boys he was extraordinarily indulgent. And he was tolerant to a degree little known or recognized. The High Church writers sought to destroy his position by detraction. Much as he differed from me in many points, he never suffered the shadow of a difference to come between us in the intimacy of our affection. And since the time I went to school at the age of nine and a half, I never received from him a harsh word.³²

While Ryle was an attentive father or not, none of his sons remained true to his evangelical faith. Reginald became a doctor with no professed Christian faith. Arthur became an artist with no religious inclinations. And Herbert was ordained in the Church of England and eventually became Bishop of Winchester, and Dean of Westminster. Though he became liberal in his theology, there remained a bond of affection between him and his father.

Herbert outlived his brothers and wrote, “The last of the five, I remain, having had two such loving brothers as few men ever had—never a quarrel, always affection and confidence.”³³ When his father died he wrote to a friend, “And I, to whom it was an intense stimulus to think of pleasing my father as a boy and a young man, feel how greatly he has filled the picture of my life.”³⁴

Nineteen Years in Stradbroke

The year after Jessie died, Ryle accepted a call to be the Vicar of Stradbroke about 20 miles north of Helmingham. He had served 17 years in the tiny village of Helmingham and would now serve Stradbroke for another 19 years. The year he began at Stradbroke, he was married a third time, October 24, 1861, to Henrietta Legh-Clowes. He was 45, she was 36, and they were married for 28 years, until she died in 1889, eleven years before his own death in 1900.

During the 36 years in rural parishes of Helmingham and Stradbroke, Ryle was becoming a national figure of prominence in the Church of England. He was constantly writing and traveling to speak. “He was Evangelicalism’s best-known and most respected writer and spokesman through the 1870s.”³⁵

During the ... years he spent in his two Suffolk parishes, he was a prolific writer, producing evangelistic tracts, devotional commentaries, historical and biographical accounts, works on doctrinal and controversial subjects, papers on Christianity and prophecy, all unashamedly written from the standpoint of a convinced Evangelical and Protestant Churchman.³⁶

Virtually all of the books and tracts that Ryle published had been first given as sermons or lectures.³⁷ The main books were all published during his time at Stradbroke: *Knots Untied* (1874), his most popular work during his lifetime; *Old Paths* (1877); *Holiness* (1877, enlarged 1879), the book he is most famous for today; *Practical Religion* (1878) which he said should be read in conjunction with *Holiness*.

One of the great ironies of Ryle’s life is that he took a brilliant first class in classics at Oxford, was a constant reader of old and new theology, collected a five-thousand-volume library, and yet, in tiny rural parishes, became “the Prince of tract writers.”³⁸ “Tracts” in those days were little booklets which in Ryle’s case had been sermons and which sold for pennies. The fact that Ryle put such a premium on publishing practical tracts on Christian living and church life shows how zealous he was for personal holiness and church reform. In writing and preaching, he was first a pastor, and “as he read,” J. I. Packer points out, “alongside the question ‘Is it true?’ the question ‘What effect will this have on ordinary people?’ was always in his mind.”³⁹

Not only was he a pastor in all he wrote, but he was a firmly rooted Anglican churchman with a strong allegiance to the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-Nine Articles. He had a huge heart

and huge respect for Dissenters and those on the outside, like Charles Spurgeon,⁴⁰ but he was unbudging in his passion that the Church of England, rightly administered was the best church on earth.⁴¹ “The standpoint I have tried to occupy, from first to last, is that of an Evangelical Churchman.”⁴² His passion was for the reformation and renewal of his own denomination, in accord with the great biblical principles of the Reformation.

Liverpool

At the age of 64, after 36 years in rural parishes, when most people are ready to retire, he was called to be the first Bishop of Liverpool.⁴³ So he moved from parishes of 300 and 1300 to a city of over 700,000 with all the urban problems he had never met face to face. He served in this post for 20 years, till two months before his death on June 9, 1900, at the age of 84.

Here he poured himself out for the spiritual good of the city and took serious initiatives to relieve some of the worst social ills. “During his time 42 new churches were built in the diocese. The number of clergy increased by 146, and confirmations almost doubled.”⁴⁴ The book with the most detail about his gospel efforts in Liverpool is Ian D. Farley, *J. C. Ryle: First Bishop of Liverpool* (Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2000).

On his gravestone, there are two verses of Scripture to capture the two aspects of the Christian life that he heralded, the fight, and the gift. First, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7). And then, “By grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph 2:8).

Eight Traits of a Masculine Ministry

Of all the helpful things that could be said about the life and ministry of J. C. Ryle, the theme I will focus on is “The Value of a Masculine Ministry”—which I tried to define at the beginning. What I hope to do is illustrate the nature of this “masculine ministry,” or “Christianity with a masculine feel,” with eight traits of such a ministry from the life and ministry of J. C. Ryle.

(1) A masculine ministry believes that it is more fitting that men take the lash of criticism that must come in a public ministry, than to unnecessarily expose women to this assault.

Therefore, a masculine ministry puts men at the head of the troop with the flag in hand and the trumpets in their mouths, so that they, and not the women, take the first bullets.

J. C. Ryle was a very controversial figure in British evangelicalism. He saw liberalism and ritualism and worldliness eating away at the heart of the Church of England, and he took such clear stands against these things that criticism against him was sometimes brutal.

In 1885, the *Liverpool Review* (November 21, 1885) published this assessment:

Dr. Ryle is simply about the most disastrous episcopal failure ever inflicted upon a long-suffering diocese.... He is nothing better than a political fossil, who has been very unwisely unearthed from his rural obscurity for no better purpose apparently than to make the episcopacy ridiculous.⁴⁵

Two years later, another paper, *Figaro* (May 14, 1887), said, “His name will stink in history.... It is to be regretted that he was ever appointed to fill a position in which he has done more mischief than the Liberation Society and all the atheists put together.”⁴⁶

The point here is not that a woman couldn’t endure such assaults. No doubt a godly woman could. The point is not that women can’t endure criticism, but that godly men prefer to take it for them, rather than thrust them into it.

Courage in the midst of combat, especially harsh and painful combat, whether with arms or with words, is not something a woman *can’t* exercise, nor even something she *shouldn’t* exercise under certain circumstances. The reason we call such courage “manly” is not that a woman can’t show it, but that we feel a sense of fitness and joy when a man steps up to risk his life, or his career, with courage; but we (should) feel awkward if a woman is thrust into that role on behalf of men.

She may be able to do it, and we may admire her for doing it, if necessary. But we wish the men were numerous enough and strong enough and courageous enough that the women could rejoice in the men, rather than take their place.

(2) A masculine ministry seizes on full-orbed, biblical doctrine with a view to teaching it to the church and pressing it with courage into the lives of the people.

Behind the increasing liberalism, ritualism, and worldliness that he saw in the church, Ryle saw a failure of doctrinal nerve—an unmanly failure. Dislike of dogma, he wrote,

is an epidemic which is just now doing great harm, and especially among young people.... It produces what I must venture to call ... a “jelly-fish” Christianity ... a Christianity without bone, or muscle, or power.... Alas! It is a type of much of the religion of this day, of which the leading principle is, “no dogma, no distinct tenets, no positive doctrine.”

We have hundreds of “jellyfish” clergyman, who seem not to have a single bone in their body of divinity. They have no definite opinions ... they are so afraid of “extreme views” that they have no views of all.

We have thousands of “jellyfish” sermons preached every year, sermons without an edge, or a point, or corner, smooth as billiard balls, awakening no sinner, and edifying no saint.

And worst of all, we have myriads of “jellyfish” worshipers—respectable Church-gone people, who have no distinct and definite views about any point in theology. They cannot discern things that differ, any more than colorblind people can distinguish colors.... They are “tossed to and fro, like children, by every wind of doctrine”; ... ever ready for new things, because they have no firm grasp on the old.⁴⁷

This aversion to doctrine was the root cause of the church’s maladies, and the remedy was a manly

affirmation of what he called “sharply cut doctrines”⁴⁸ recovered from the Reformation and the Puritans and the giants of the eighteenth century in England.

Mark what I say. If you want to do good in these times, you must throw aside indecision, and take up a distinct, sharply-cut, doctrinal religion.

The victories of Christianity, wherever they have been won, have been won by distinct doctrinal theology; by telling men roundly of Christ’s vicarious death and sacrifice; by showing them Christ’s substitution on the cross, and His precious blood; by teaching them justification by faith, and bidding them believe on a crucified Saviour; by preaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Spirit; by lifting up the brazen serpent; by telling men to look and live—to believe, repent, and be converted.

Show us at this day any English village, or parish, or city, or town, or district, which has been evangelized without “dogma.” ... Christianity without distinct doctrine is a powerless thing.... No dogma, no fruits!⁴⁹

The point of calling this failure of doctrinal nerve an *unmanly* failure is not that women can’t grasp and hold fast to the great doctrines of the faith. They can and should. The point is that when the foundations of the church are crumbling, the men should not stand still and wait for women to seize the tools and brick and mortar. And women should expect their men to be at the forefront of rebuilding the ruins.

The point of saying that the remedy for doctrinal indifference is a *manly* affirmation of “sharply cut doctrines” is not that women cannot or should not make such affirmations. The point is that long, hard, focused, mental labor should not be shirked by men. Men should feel a special responsibility for the life and safety and joy of the community that depends on putting these “sharply cut doctrines” in place. This issue is not what women are *able* to do, but what men *ought* to do. J. C. Ryle waited for no one. He took the brick and mortar and trowel and

spent his whole life rebuilding the sharp edges of gloriously clear truth to make a place where men and women could flourish in the gospel.

(3) A masculine ministry brings out the more rugged aspects of the Christian life and presses them on the conscience of the church with a demeanor that accords with their proportion in Scripture.

Ryle is most famous today for his work on holiness and sanctification. And the overwhelming impression you get in reading his book on holiness is how unsentimental and rugged most of it feels.⁵⁰ That is, it feels very much like the New Testament, especially the Four Gospels.

Over against the perfectionism and Keswick quietism of his day, he was unrelenting in stressing that sanctification, unlike justification, is a process of constant engagement of the will. And that engagement is war. He asks,

Is it wise to teach believers that they ought not to think so much of fighting and struggling against sin, but ought rather to ‘yield themselves to God’ and be passive in the hands of Christ? Is this according to the proportion of God’s Word? I doubt it.⁵¹

“True Christianity is a fight.”⁵² He cites, 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 2:3; Eph 6:11–13; Luke 13:24; John 6:27; Matt 10:34; Luke 22:36; 1 Cor 16:13; 1 Tim 1:18–19, and says, “Words such as these appear to me clear, plain, and unmistakable. They all teach one and the same great lesson ... that true Christianity is a struggle, a fight, and a warfare.”⁵³

“A true Christian,” he said, “is one who has not only peace of conscience, but war within.”⁵⁴ And this is true at every stage of maturity: “The old, the sick, the dying, are never known to repent of fighting Christ’s battles against sin.”⁵⁵ The tone he sets for the Christian life is “the soldier’s life.” “A holy violence, a conflict, a warfare, a fight, a soldier’s life, a wrestling, are spoken of as characteristic of the true Christian.”⁵⁶ “He that would understand the nature of true holiness must know that the Christian is ‘a man of war.’”⁵⁷

Of course, this is not the only picture of the

Christian life; but it is a true and prominent one. And Ryle sets it forth with clarity and with a tone that fits the soldier-like theme it is. But the point, again, is not that women cannot, or should not, fight sin with as much urgency as any man. Nor is the point that she is unable to see these things in Scripture, bring them out, and press them on the conscience. She is fully able to do that. The point is that the theme of Christian warfare and other rugged aspects of biblical theology and life should draw the men of the church to take them up in the spirit of a protective warrior in his family and “tribe,” rather than expecting the women to take on the spirit of a combatant for the sake of the church.

(4) A masculine ministry takes up heavy and painful realities in the Bible, and puts them forward to those who may not want to hear them.

One of the heaviest and most painful realities in the Bible is the reality of hell. It is a godly and loving and manly responsibility of the leaders of the church not to distort or minimize the weight and horror of hell. Ryle faced the same thing we do. In 1855, he preached the sermon that 24 years later was published in the expanded edition of *Holiness*. There he said,

I feel constrained to speak freely to my readers on the subject of hell.... I believe the time is come when it is a positive duty to speak plainly about the reality and eternity of hell. A flood of false doctrine has lately broken in upon us. Men are beginning to tell us “that God is too merciful to punish souls for ever—that there is a love of God lower even than hell—and that all mankind, however wicked and ungodly some of them may be, will sooner or later be saved.”... We are to embrace what is called a “kinder theology.”... Against such false teaching I desire, for one, to protest. Painful, sorrowful, distressing as the controversy may be, we must not blink at it, or refuse to look the subject in the face. I, for one, am resolved to maintain the old position, and to assert the reality and eternity of hell.⁵⁸

He pointed out that no one in Scripture “used so many words to express the awfulness of hell” as Jesus did.

Hell, hell fire, the damnation of hell, eternal damnation, the resurrection of damnation, everlasting fire, the place of torment, destruction, outer darkness, the worm that never dies, the fire that is not quenched, the place of weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, everlasting punishment—these, these are the words which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself employs.⁵⁹

He confessed that it sounds dreadful. But then said that the question is: “Is it Scriptural?” If it is, we must not shrink back. “Professing Christians ought to be often reminded that they may be lost and go to hell.”⁶⁰

Ryle’s manly courage that takes up a heavy and painful reality and presses it on people who may not want to hear it was not a callous courage.

God knows that I never speak of hell without pain and sorrow. I would gladly offer the salvation of the Gospel to the very chief of sinners. I would willingly say to the vilest and most profligate of mankind on his deathbed, “Repent, and believe on Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.”⁶¹

The point is not that women are unable to lift the weight or bear the pain of the reality of hell. The point is not that they are unable to press it into those who don’t want to hear. The point is that one of the marks of mature manhood is the inclination to spare her that load and its costs. We admire her for embracing the truth, we share her longings to nurture with tenderness, and, if we can, we carry for her the flaming coals of final condemnation.

(5) A masculine ministry heralds the truth of Scripture, with urgency and forcefulness and penetrating conviction, to the world and in the regular worship services of the church.

Not all preachers have the same personality

or the same tone. Some are louder, some are softer. Some speak faster, some slower. Some with long sentences, some with short. Some with many word pictures, some with fewer. Some with manifest emotion, some with less. Some with lots of gestures, some with few. These differences are inevitable.

But preaching, as opposed to teaching—*kerussein* (Greek) as opposed to *didaskein*—involves a kind of emotional engagement signified by the word “heralding.” There is in preaching a kind of urgency and a kind of forcefulness. A message is being delivered from the King of the universe—with his authority, in his name—and this message deals with matters of infinite importance, and the eternal destiny of the hearers hangs on how they respond to the message.

This is preaching. And no matter what a preacher’s personality or preferred tone, this preaching necessarily involves urgency and forcefulness and a penetrating conviction that aims to come with divine thrust into the minds and hearts of the listeners. And therefore, this is a manly task. Coming to a people with an authoritative word from God, aiming to subdue the hearts of men, and summon them into battle, and lead the charge at their head against the principalities and powers—this is where men belong.

J. C. Ryle’s preaching is a model for preaching in these ways. J. I. Packer refers to his “electric force of utterance.”⁶² Ryle knew that he had to crucify his florid,⁶³ literary style which marked his early preaching. The nature of preaching demanded something different. Something simpler, but more forceful and penetrating. What developed was really astonishing. Packer describes it, referring to his “brisk, spare, punchy style ... its cultivated forcefulness, its use of the simplest words, its fusillades of short, one-clause sentences ... its a rib-jabbing drumbeat rhetoric, its easy logical flow, its total lack of sentimentality, and its resolve to call a spade a spade.”⁶⁴

Ryle knew the preaching of his day was languishing. It was “dry, heavy, stiff, dull, cold, tame ... and destitute of warmth, vivacity, direct appeal, or fire.”⁶⁵ So he made every effort to break the mold, even as a dignified Bishop of Liverpool. He would

keep it simple, but he would untame his preaching. His simple, forceful, clarity was renown. One older lady came to the church hoping to hear the Bishop, but afterwards said to a friend, “I never heard a Bishop. I thought I’d hear something great.... He’s no Bishop. I could understand every word.”⁶⁶ Ryle took it as a great compliment.

Listen to what Packer means by the “electric force” of “fusillades” and “rib-jabbing, drumbeat rhetoric.” This is from a sermon on Lot’s lingering as he came out of Sodom and how so many Christians linger as they leave sin.

- Would you know what the times demand?—The shaking of nations—the uprooting of ancient things—the overturning of kingdoms—the stir and restlessness of men’s minds—what do they say? They all cry aloud—Christian! do not linger!
- Would you be found ready for Christ at His second appearing—your loins girded—your lamp burning—yourself bold, and prepared to meet Him? Then do not linger!
- Would you enjoy strong assurance of your own salvation, in the day of sickness, and on the bed of death?—Would you see with the eye of faith heaven opening and Jesus rising to receive you? Then do not linger!
- Would you leave great broad evidences behind you when you are gone?—Would you like us to lay you in the grave with comfortable hope, and talk of your state after death without a doubt? Then do not linger!
- Would you be useful to the world in your day and generation?—Would you draw men from sin to Christ, adorn your doctrine, and make your Master’s cause beautiful and attractive in their eyes? Then do not linger!
- Would you help your children and relatives towards heaven, and make them say, “We will go with you”?—and not make them infidels and despisers of all religion? Then do not linger!
- Would you have a great crown in the day of Christ’s appearing, and not be

the least and smallest star in glory, and not find yourself the last and lowest in the kingdom of God? Then do not linger!

- Oh, let not one of us linger! Time does not—death does not—judgment does not—the devil does not—the world does not. Neither let the children of God linger.⁶⁷

There is urgency, forcefulness, penetrating power. Preaching does not always rise to this level of urgency and force and authority, but regularly should. Again the point is not that a woman is not able to speak this way. The point is that godly men know intuitively, by the masculine nature implanted by God, that turning the hearts of men and women to God with that kind of authoritative speaking is the responsibility of men. And where men handle it with humility and grace, godly women are glad.

(6) A masculine ministry welcomes the challenges and costs of strong, courageous leadership without complaint or self-pity with a view to putting in place principles and structures and plans and people to carry a whole church into joyful fruitfulness.

Leadership in the church—tending and feeding and protecting and leading the sheep—is not only the work of preaching, but also a firm, clear, reasonable, wise guiding voice when it comes to hundreds of decisions that have to be made. This calls for great discernment and no little strength. There are a hundred ways that a church can drift into ineffectiveness; and wise leaders spot these early, resist them, and win the church joyfully into a better direction. And what is required again and again is a decisive strength that does not weaken in the face of resistance.

Packer describes Ryle’s leadership like this: “His brains, energy, vision, drive, independence, clear head, kind heart, fair-mind, salty speech, good sense, impatience with stupidity, firmness of principle, and freedom from inhibitions would have made him a leader in any field.”⁶⁸

Ryle was called by his successor to the bishopric of Liverpool, “that man of granite with the

heart of a child.”⁶⁹ He was described as “the most rugged and conservative of all Anglican Evangelical personalities.”⁷⁰ He said of his own leadership: “The story of my life has been such that I really cared nothing for anyone’s opinion, and I resolved not to consider one jot who was offended and who was not offended by anything I did.”⁷¹ These are the words of man surrounded by a rising tide of liberalism, ritualism, and worldliness in the Church of England. They are the voice of strength against overwhelming odds.

I am fully aware [he wrote in 1878] that Evangelical churchmanship is not popular and acceptable in this day. It is despised by many.... But none of these things move me. I am not ashamed of my opinions. After 40 years of Bible reading and praying, meditation, and theological study, I find myself clinging more tightly than ever to “Evangelical” religion, and more than ever satisfied with it.⁷²

“None of these things move me.” “More than ever I am satisfied with [the evangelical faith].” Immovable joy in truth is a precious trait in the leaders of the church. A masculine ministry looks on the forces to be resisted, and the magnitude of the truth to be enjoyed, and feels a glad responsibility to carry a whole people forward into joyful fruitfulness.

(7) A masculine ministry publicly and privately advocates for the vital and manifold ministries of women in the life and mission of the church.

The aim of godly leadership is a community of maximum joy and flourishing for everyone within—the women, the children, the men—and maximum impact on the world for the glory of Christ. It’s not about the privilege of power, but about the burden of responsibility to enhance the lives of others.

Ryle was outspoken in his zeal for women in the various ministries of the church. He drew attention to Romans 16, where 11 of the 28 names mentioned are women, and said,

The chapter I have mentioned appears to me to contain a special lesson for women. The important position that women occupy in the Church of Christ—the wide field of real, though unobtrusive, usefulness that lies before them ... I cannot go away with the common notion that great usefulness is for men only, and not for women.... It should never be forgotten that it is not preaching alone that moves and influences men.... Humanly speaking, the salvation of a household often depends upon the women ... [and] men’s character is exceedingly influenced by their homes.⁷³

There are countless needs in the community, and needs on the mission field, Ryle says, that cry out for the ministry of women.

There are hundreds of cases continually rising in which a woman is far more suitable visitor than a man. She need not put on a peculiar dress, or call herself by a Roman Catholic name. She has only to go about, in the spirit of her Savior, with kindness on her lips, gentleness in her ways, and the Bible in her hands, and the good that she may do is quite incalculable. Happy indeed is the parish where there are Christian women who “go about doing good.” Happy is that minister who has such helpers.⁷⁴

The aim of a masculine ministry is the fullest engagement of every member of the church in joyful, fruitful ministry. The aim of leadership is not to *be* the ministry, but to *free* the ministry, according to God’s Word, by the power of God’s Spirit, for the glory of God’s name.

(8) A masculine ministry models for the church the protection, nourishing, and cherishing of a wife and children as part of the high calling of leadership.

The year after he came to Liverpool as bishop, Ryle published a book of eight messages for children. It’s called *Boys and Girls Playing* based on Zech 8:5.⁷⁵ It reveals the rare mixture of concern

for children along with a very masculine feel. One of the messages is called “The Happy Little Girl” about a girl he met in public carriage who spoke of Jesus. He asks, “Dear children, are you as happy and as cheerful as she was?”⁷⁶ And another message is called “The Two Bears” about the two bears that killed forty-two children for mocking God’s prophet. And he says, “Dear children, remember these things to the end of your lives. The wages of sin is death.”⁷⁷ He was a masculine lover of children.

Before his ministry was complete, he had loved and buried three wives, Matilde, Jessie, and Henrietta. He had three sons and two daughters. All the testimonies we have of his children praise their father for his care for them. Whether he did this well, the evidence is too sketchy to know. But what we do know is that he tried. He gives us a hint of the burden he carried in his small biography of Henry Venn, who also was made a widower in the pastoral ministry with children to care for:

Those who have had this cross to carry, can testify that there is no position in this world so trying to body and soul as that of the minister who is left a widower, with a young family and a large congregation. There are anxieties in such cases which no one knows but he who has gone through them; anxieties which can crush the strongest spirit, and wear out the strongest constitution.⁷⁸

But no matter how difficult the homelife of a pastor, it is part of the calling, part of the masculine ministry.

Conclusion

From these eight glimpses into the value of a masculine ministry, I commend it to you. And I think “the frank and manly Mr. Ryle” would commend it also.

I commend it because it fits the way God is in the triune fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It fits the way he created man as male and female, calling the man to bear a unique responsibility of headship. It fits the way God has ordered the church with godly men as her elders. And it fits

the way our hearts sing—male and female—when men and women exult in each other’s enjoyment of God as our final and all-satisfying destiny.

ENDNOTES

¹This message was delivered at the Desiring God Conference for Pastors, “God, Manhood, and Ministry: Building Men for the Body of Christ,” January 31, 2012. Reprinted here with permission.

²Archbishop McGee called him in 1868, “the frank and manly Mr. Ryle.” Eric Russell, *J. C. Ryle: That Man of Granite with the Heart of a Child* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 9.

³Peter Toon, ed., *J. C. Ryle: A Self-Portrait, A Partial Autobiography* (Swengel, PA: Reiner, 1975), 14.

⁴*Ibid.*, 15.

⁵*Ibid.*, 19.

⁶*Ibid.*, 20.

⁷*Ibid.*, 21.

⁸*Ibid.*, 30.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 35.

¹²*Ibid.*, 35–36.

¹³*Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 42–43.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 54.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 51–53.

²¹*Ibid.*, 56.

²²*Ibid.*, 54.

²³*Ibid.*, 59.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 60.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 63.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 62.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 64.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 68–69. “I must honestly say that I went very unwillingly, and of all the steps I ever took in my life, to this day I feel doubts whether the move was right or not. I sometimes think that it was a want of faith to go, and I ought to have stayed.... But I have never ceased to wonder whether I was right or not. I only know that my chief desire was to set my father free from any charge on my account, and so I tried to hope all was right. But I think the doubt afflicted my spirits for two or three years.”

²⁹*Ibid.*, 79.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 80.

³¹*Ibid.*, 81.

³²J. I. Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness: The Witness of J. C. Ryle* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 69–70.

³³Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 85.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 250.

³⁵Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 51.

³⁶Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 103.

³⁷In an appendix to Ian D. Farley, *J. C. Ryle, First Bishop of Liverpool* (Waynesboro, Georgia, Paternoster, 2000), 240–43, there is a table which shows what sermons and their dates lay behind each of the chapters in *Knots Untied, Old Paths, Holiness, Practical Religion, and A New Birth*.

³⁸Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 70. To give some idea of the extent of the effectiveness of these tracts here is one story. “One little booklet called *True Liberty* was translated into Spanish. It came into the hands of a Dominican Friar who had been sent to stamp out the reform movement in the church in that part of Mexico. As he read the tract the scales fell from his eyes and he entered by faith into the true liberty of the sons of God. He began to build up the church he meant to destroy. The church grew in half a century from a tiny remnant of a few believers into a flourishing church of some fifty thousand members” (Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 72).

³⁹Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 71.

⁴⁰“When you read Mr. Spurgeon sermons, note how clearly and perspicuously he divides a sermon, and fills each division with beautiful and simple ideas. How easily you grasp his meaning! ... great truths, that hang to you like hooks of steel, and which you never forget! Spurgeon once called Ryle the best man in the Church of England; here Ryle in effect hails Spurgeon as the best preacher anywhere in the country” (Ibid., 62).

⁴¹“I am satisfied that well administered, the Church of England is more calculated to help souls to heaven than any church on earth.... I am deeply convinced of the excellency of my own Church—I would even say, if it were not a proud boast, its superiority over any other church upon earth” (Ibid., 45, 48). “He believed that the Episcopal government rightly administered is the best form of church government” (Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 28).

⁴²J. C. Ryle, *Practical Religion* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998, orig. 1878), vi.

⁴³There seemed to be some political intrigue behind this appointment. Some said that Benjamin Disraeli, the Prime Minister at the time, made this appointment of an outspoken conservative to spite William Gladstone who had just defeated him in an election and had come from an Anglo-Catholic family in Liverpool (*Self-Portrait*, 90).

⁴⁴Ibid., 101.

⁴⁵Farley, *J. C. Ryle*, 236.

⁴⁶Ibid., 224.

⁴⁷J. C. Ryle, *Principles for Churchmen* (London: William Hunt, 1884), 97–98. Quoted in J. I. Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 72–73.

⁴⁸J. C. Ryle, *The Christian Leaders of The Last Century, or England A Hundred Years Ago* (Moscow, ID: Charles Nolan, 2002), 392.

⁴⁹J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Moscow, ID: Charles Nolan, 2001), 355–56.

⁵⁰“Ryle was habitually factual and unsentimental in his account of things” (Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 71).

⁵¹Ryle, *Holiness*, xix.

⁵²Ibid., 63.

⁵³Ibid., 66.

⁵⁴Ibid., 26.

⁵⁵Ibid., 76.

⁵⁶Ibid., xxviii.

⁵⁷Ibid., 63.

⁵⁸Ibid., 208.

⁵⁹Ibid., 210.

⁶⁰Ibid., 211.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 11.

⁶³“I felt that I was doing the country people in my congregation [of Exbury] no good whatever. I was shooting over their heads; they could not understand my imitation of Melville’s style, which I thought much of, therefore I thought it my plain duty to crucify my style and bring it down to what it is now” (Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 60).

⁶⁴Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 19. Examples of his punchy, aphoristic style are almost everywhere. For example, from his book, *Thoughts for Young Men*: “The poorest saint that ever died in a ghetto is nobler in His sight than the richest sinner that ever died in a palace” (Kindle edition, location 414). “Never make an intimate friend of anyone who is not a friend of God” (location 485). “Bad company in this life, is the sure way to procure worse company in the life to come” (location 518). “The gospel keeps many a person from going to jail and from being hanged, if it does not keep him from hell” (location 632).

⁶⁵Farley, *J. C. Ryle*, 103.

⁶⁶Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 253.

⁶⁷Ryle, *Holiness*, 193.

⁶⁸Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 9.

⁶⁹Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 9.

⁷⁰Farley, *J. C. Ryle*, 123.

⁷¹Toon, *Self-Portrait*, 67.

⁷²Ryle, *Practical Religion*, vi–vii.

⁷³J. C. Ryle, *Shall We Know One Another, and Other Papers* (Moscow, ID: Charles Nolan, 2001), 29, 31, 32.

⁷⁴Ibid., 36. And Ryle made a case for the Zenana Mission who specialized in sending women missionaries to India, China, and Japan. His argument was that half the population of India were women who were almost entirely secluded from men, especially foreigners.

⁷⁵J. C. Ryle, *Boys and Girls Playing (and Other Addresses to Children)* (ed. Don Kistler; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996, orig. 1881).

⁷⁶Ibid., 110.

⁷⁷Ibid., 65.

⁷⁸J. C. Ryle, *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century* (London: 1869), 279–80.

Of “Dad Moms” and “Man Fails”: An Essay on Men and Awesomeness

Owen Strachan

*Assistant Professor of Christian Theology and Church History
Boyce College
Louisville, Kentucky*

In November 2011, I was watching a football game, minding my own business, when a Tide commercial popped up on the television. It is not a commonplace that I pay great attention to advertisements for laundry detergent. But there was something different about this one. It began by showing a man folding clothes in a cheerfully lit bedroom. He introduced himself with this odd statement: “Hi. I’m a Dad mom. That means while my wife works, I’m at home being *awesome*.”

This was interesting. I had not heard of a “Dad mom” before. This commercial suddenly had my full attention. It continued,

I know there’s a lot of mom moms that look at my unique mixture of masculinity and nurturing and find it quite alluring. And I know that there’s dads out there who are astonished at my ability to dress a four-year-old. And here’s the real kicker: I can take even the frilliest girl dress and fold it with complete accuracy. Boom. And, with Tide Boost, I can use the brute strength of dad to mix with the nurturing abilities of my laundry detergent. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to go do pull-ups and crunches in the other room.

The light lifting over, the spot ended. Our smiling protagonist left the frame, ostensibly to focus his “nurturing abilities” on his abs and biceps.

Light mockery aside, this Tide commercial had me thinking. One minute I’m watching sports; the next I’m witnessing the renovation of millennia of gender roles. Should I accept the viewpoint

of this advertisement? As a complementarian man, I have committed myself to a sometimes exhausting program of provision. I just completed my third degree; I don’t always get a great deal of sleep; I’ve worked part-time for several years in addition to my full-time work in order to put my family in a solid financial position. Should I shift my priorities? What if my sweet wife is actually supposed to be the breadwinner?

Should I too be at home with my two children, “being awesome?”

My ruminations on this topic led to a blog post that led to a point-counterpoint debate on the Her.meneutics blog of *Christianity Today*. I interacted with Laura Ortberg Turner, a Fuller Theological Seminary employee and evangelical egalitarian, on this topic. Scores of similar voices responded to my articulation of a complementarian domestic philosophy, some genuinely engaging me, others castigating me and swearing at me. Rachel Held Evans, a gifted young writer and Christian feminist who is publishing one of those pop-culture books in which the author “lives the Bible” for a year (she purports to follow all of the commands given to women), suggested rather straightforwardly via Twitter that “If [I was] going to use the Bible to put women in their place at least do us the courtesy of being consistent.” No small reaction, this. Clearly, I had struck a nerve.

I don’t know if laundry detergent has ever ignited such a theological firestorm.

Do Interchangeable Roles Lead to Happiness?

In light of this response, one driven mostly by feminine voices, we are left to ask the question: should the roles of men and women be interchangeable? Should dads feel freedom to be “dad dads” or “dad moms?” Should women take on the duty of provision if they like?

A feminist society and egalitarian culture answers “yes” to all of these questions. Women, goes the line, have been restrained from full flourishing by the traditional division of roles in which men take on the burden of providing and women take on the burden of homemaking and child-raising. Men have been allowed to dominate others; society has suffered as a result. Undoubtedly, there are many sins that have accrued to patriarchy; there are, of course, many sins that accrue to most any philosophy in this fallen world. The modern narrative, however, suggests that only when men and women feel freedom to fluidly inhabit either role will they experience fulfillment.

This kind of argument is now a part of our cultural water. It surprised me a few years back, then, when feminist Maureen Dowd proclaimed from her elite journalistic post that the new sexual economy had made women sadder.

According to the General Social Survey, which has tracked Americans’ mood since 1972, and five other major studies around the world, women are getting gloomier and men are getting happier. Before the ’70s, there was a gender gap in America in which women felt greater well-being. Now there’s a gender gap in which men feel better about their lives.

As Arianna Huffington points out in a blog post headlined “The Sad, Shocking Truth About How Women Are Feeling”: “It doesn’t matter what their marital status is, how much money they make, whether or not they have children, their ethnic background, or the country they live in. Women around the world are in a funk.”

Why is this? Because while men have experienced increased freedom to lay down the hard work of

breadwinning, women now become stressed out not only by their economic labor, but by the continuing duties of the home—cooking, cleaning, keeping track of the kids—which modern men, even in their enlightened state, resist.

Women trained by secular society and culture think, in other words, that they can do everything and have it all. In practice, many of them are finding the endless choices and tasks before them exhausting. The “dad mom” from the Tide commercial exhibits a chipper, can-do spirit. If, based on feminist ideals, we were to imagine his wife, she might be serene, poised, possessing obscene levels of calm as she executes perfect “work-life balance.” If we worked off of Dowd’s generalization, we might find her to be frazzled, haggard, gaining stress weight, and upset.

Equilibrium, thy name is unknown.

I don’t read *Good Housekeeping* or *Real Simple* or those kinds of magazines (though my friend the “dad mom” probably should given his day-to-day tasks). On occasion my wife will show me an article from one of these periodicals, perhaps a profile of a celebrity actress who is also a wife and mom. Invariably, these pieces sketch an enviable picture of a woman who has it all yet remains down to earth. There is discussion, however muted, of her glamorous friends, her favorite vacation getaways, and there are tasteful pictures of her Viking stove, Restoration Hardware couch, and Sub-Zero refrigerator (though she eschews materialism, naturally, in her interview).

There’s usually a question or two about “mommy guilt” or some such term. For example, in a February 2011 interview with Gwyneth Paltrow, modern every-woman, she offered the following on this difficult topic:

“I came back from Hong Kong and tried to make it about bringing back this rich experience for the kids as well,” Paltrow says, but she knows how tenuous that sounds. She tears up a little. “I do feel so guilty and, like, *What am I doing?* but I also want them to know work is really fun for me — ‘Hey, look what I get to do!’ As opposed to feeling like, *Oh, I’m a terrible mother.* Because that really just

doesn't get you anywhere. It doesn't get *them* anywhere."

Even in the softball stories with the airbrushed photos, one finds evidence of the downside of modern gender roles. As a complementarian, I don't read this with any glee or joy. On the contrary, I read it with sadness. It's clear that Paltrow's career choices weigh on her; though one could chalk her self-professed guilt up to unfair cultural expectations, it seems clear that she lives in a world that has only encouraged her celebrity ambitions—her father is a director, her mother a movie star—but that cannot stave off the natural guilt that comes from parental, and especially motherly, neglect. It's rather difficult to see how six-year-old Apple, Paltrow's daughter, will be able to be happy knowing "work is really fun" for her mother. It seems more likely that she would rather actually have fun with her mother in the traditional (personal) sense.

These anecdotes do not prove the rightness of complementarianism with finality. But as the years go by and the Judeo-Christian consensus crumbles, "dad moms" and "mom dads" proliferate. If this was inherently virtuous and good for everyday people, we would expect to hear glowing testimony from all corners, especially from our most trusted guides, celebrities like Paltrow. In reality, however, we hear the opposite. All human plans for the home lead not to flourishing, but sadness.

We think we are liberated, but in reality, find ourselves in bondage to our selfishness and sin, our children unhappy and unable to understand.

A Better Way: "Dad Dads" and "Mom Moms" Who Serve

I have no fancy conclusion to offer in response to the modern turn, no super-creative response to the domestic revolution accomplished by laundry-loving men and globetrotting actresses. For millennia, followers of God have practiced what used to be called patriarchy and is now called complementarianism.

Working from Gen 1:26-27, Christians have historically argued for the full equality of the sexes (though at times our theory has outpaced our prac-

tice). The fact that Adam was created first and given a leadership role from the start in naming the animals and taking dominion has weighed heavily in the gender roles of many believers; that Adam's work is cursed in Gen 3:15 has seemed to many to suggest that in God's economy, men bear the responsibilities of provision. This view is corroborated by a diverse array of texts that touch on the matter either directly or indirectly. It is the men of Israel who leave the home to provide food for their families (see Genesis 37, for example); the husband of the Proverbs 31 woman sits with the elders in the gates while she cares for her family and home in manifold ways; women in Titus 2:5 are instructed to be "workers at home," even as young widows are called by Paul to "marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander" (1 Tim 5:14).

These texts fit with the biblical-theological role Christ plays for his church in redeeming her; he is her head, her provision, and she depends upon him to live (see Ephesians 5). In a marriage, men fill this Christic role. We therefore have explicit textual reasons for calling men to be providers for their families, particularly when God gives the blessing of children, but we should not neglect the rich theme of Christ's provision for his bride. Men who wish to be like Christ, in other words, do well to image his sacrificial labor by their own.

Does this mean, though, that if a man folds laundry he is some sort of spineless creature, giving up his God-given duties for work he should not countenance? Not at all. There is nothing biblically to indicate that it's wrong for a man to pitch in where he can to help his wife. I do not think a husband is called to be a homemaker as a wife is, but neither do I experience personal internal conflict when I wash some dishes at night to help out my wife, who has been nurturing small children and executing countless household tasks all day while I've worked to provide. Complementarianism, with its connection between the husband's work and Christ's provision, sets the bar higher for men than the culture does. It's not easier to be a godly man; you can't claim the title "lord of the home" and then plop yourself into the easy chair to watch ESPN

and lose yourself in your iPhone, leaving discipline and training and teaching to your wife. Contrary to what we see most everywhere in our society today, men are not called by God to tune out from the family and merely make money. No, men are supposed to lead in all areas, including training of the children, discipline, and opportunities for sacrifice.

As I said, in my home this means that I help out where I can with the kids and even a few chores. No one would confuse me for the homemaker; I'm frankly not and never will be. Much of what I do does not fall under that rubric. Neither, though, do I avoid serving my wife. In calling men to be "dad dads," then, I'm not offering a summons from the Stone Age, but a call to show the world a new kind of manhood, a redeemed kind, a self-sacrificial, strong, bold, and loving kind.

Does Christianity Enslave Women?

The "dad mom" phenomenon has caught on in part because people mistakenly think that past conceptions of the sexes have hindered men and women. Christianity, goes the line, has oppressed women and chained them to the home. Some women, even women of an evangelical persuasion, use language that denigrates homemaking and child-raising in speaking of their calling. "I like kids and all, but I want to use my gifts," is one such line that I regularly encounter. In this way of thought, complementarianism—biblical gender roles—keeps women back. Some think that Christianity itself harms and suffocates women, and the culture, with its flexible roles, is therefore their liberator.

The historical record tells a different story. In *Roman Wives, Roman Windows*, New Testament scholar Bruce Winter sheds valuable light on the lives of women in ancient Rome. Men, in short, enjoyed superior cultural standing. For example, if "divorced and found guilty of adultery by a court, the wife lost half of her dowry, one third of any other property she owned, and was relegated to an island" (42). In such a society, the proclamation of the full equality of men and women in Christ from texts like Gal 3:28 was revolutionary and helped, over time, to improve the status of Greco-Roman women.

So it is in our day. Christianity offers not captivity, but freedom. It does indeed offer us models for manhood and womanhood, scripts for how we should live out our days to the glory of God in our sex, our gender. Men must not shun the work of provision for their wives and children; this role is given them of God. Women must not demean homemaking and child-raising; such is their inheritance from the Lord. Families may encounter unusual circumstances that require careful handling—job loss, catastrophic injury, and so on. But for most of us, the way we fill our roles as "dad dads" and "mom moms" is straightforwardly scriptural.

Conclusion

It is important to note that this pattern of life does not mean the absence of pain and hardship. All life in this broken, sinful world is effected by the fall. Husbands will have long days and experience physical problems from work; when given children by God, wives will face some stress and tiredness from caring for active little ones all day. In these and other ways, we reap the curse that we sowed in Adam. It is not God's design for the family that is to blame on this point, however; his plan predates the fall. It is our sin, and the result of living in a Satan-haunted world.

Our call, though, is not to re-envision the family to escape difficulty. Our call is to be faithful, to inhabit the part given us to play in God's cosmic drama. Men can image Christ the savior-king by folding laundry on occasion, by getting down on the floor to play with their kids, and by doing the dishes when they can. But they must commit themselves primarily to the work of provision, whether of spiritual leadership in the home or financial breadwinning to sustain it.

To paraphrase the Tide commercial in question, that and no other definition is what "being awesome" truly means for a husband and father.

From the NRSV to the New NIV: Why Gender-Neutral Language Represents an Enforced Agenda Rather than a Natural Evolution

Louis Markos

Professor in English

Scholar in Residence

Houston Baptist University

Houston, Texas

One of the many services rendered by Professor C. S. Lewis was to remind us of a fact that had been obscured by two centuries of Enlightenment propaganda—that the Medievals knew that the earth was round. Now, in saying this, Lewis did not mean to imply that grade school instructors who dutifully teach their students that everyone before Galileo and Columbus thought the earth was flat are promoting an anti-medieval agenda. Most are merely carrying on something that was instilled in them by their instructors. Just so, to say that the NRSV was put together in accordance with a feminist agenda intent on blurring the God-given distinctions between the sexes is not to say that all who use or advocate the NRSV are feminists in disguise.

Nevertheless, whatever the motives are of those who promote the NRSV (and other gender-neutral translations), the fact remains that the NRSV had an agenda, and that agenda included changing the English language so as to eventually eliminate the use of “he” as the gender-inclusive pronoun and of “man/mankind” to refer collectively to the human race (a traditional practice authorized by Gen 1:27 and 5:2, where God refers to “them,” Adam and Eve, as “Adam”). When the NRSV was first published, gender-neutral usage was not at all common; indeed, the NRSV did not reflect a change in language but was intended to foster and produce a change.

This intention is stated boldly and unapologetically in the Preface to the NRSV:

During the almost half a century since the publication of the RSV, many in the churches have become sensitive to the danger of linguistic sexism arising from the inherent bias of the English language towards the masculine gender, a bias that in the case of the Bible has often restricted or obscured the meaning of the original text. The mandates from the Division specified that, in references to men and women, masculine-oriented language should be eliminated as far as this can be done without altering passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture.

The phrase, “danger of linguistic sexism,” is a telling one; it makes clear that the changes made to the translation were not done primarily for the sake of clarity but to justify an agenda. Note as well that the “mandates from the Division specified” that traditional gender usage was to be proscribed in all but a very small number of cases. In many ways, the NRSV sets itself against the English language itself, with its “inherent bias ... towards the masculine gender.”

Perhaps emboldened by the assertions and mandates of the NRSV, the committee that com-

posed the Preface to the equally gender-neutral Contemporary English Version (CEV) offers the following justification for their own proscribing of “sexist” language:

In everyday speech, “gender generic” or “inclusive” language is used, because it sounds most natural to people today. This means that where the biblical languages require masculine nouns or pronouns when both men and women are intended, this intention must be reflected in translation, though the English *form* may be very different from that of the original. The Greek text of Matthew 16:24 is literally, “If anyone wants to follow me, *he* must deny *himself* and take up *his* cross and follow me.” The Contemporary English Version shifts to a form which is still accurate and at the same time more effective in English: “If any of *you* want to be my followers, *you* must forget about yourself. *You* must take up *your* cross and follow me.”

The assumption that underlies this paragraph is not only radically untrue; it is insincere, manipulative, and patronizing. The literal translation of Matt 16:24 quoted above is neither unnatural nor ineffective. Any teen (or even child) would recognize immediately the naturalness of the original verse and would understand that its invitation is made to all people, not just males.

The editors of the CEV, like those of the NRSV, would have us believe that their gender-neutral translation of the verse is more natural and effective and that it more truly reflects the way “real people” speak. But they are putting the cart before the horse. The true goal of the gender-neutral agenda is not to reflect existing patterns of speech, writing, and thought, but to so radically alter those patterns that people will, in time, really come to think of the literal translation as unnatural.

Even today, gender-neutral usage does not represent a natural evolution in the English language. It is a change that has been manufactured and enforced through academia, the media, and other outlets. In grade school and college, students

are *taught* (and usually forced) to use gender-neutral language. The practice does not come naturally, and if one merely listens carefully in public settings, he will notice how often people trip over their tongues to avoid using “he” or “man”—not because they think it is intrinsically wrong to do so, but because they don’t want to be called to account by modern “thought police” who have proscribed the traditional usage of “he” and “man.” In fact, if truth be told, in the media and in films, the words “man” and “mankind” have slowly been returning, offering some real hope that gender-neutral language is a fad that will eventually disappear—just as the 1980’s/90’s fad for academic women to retain their maiden names after marriage has all but disappeared.

The newest version of the NIV has justified its widespread use of gender-neutral language on the basis of a massive computer survey that gauged the use of gendered language in thousands of books and journals. Since they found in this study a heavy use of gender-neutral language, they assumed that this proved that language had “changed” and that they must therefore use gender-neutral language in their updating of the NIV. But their logic here is faulty. Over the last three decades, increasing pressure has been put upon journalists, teachers, professors, pastors, politicians, and media people to accommodate their writing and speaking to gender-neutral language usage. In many universities (including Christian ones) students are told that they must use gender-neutral language in their essays and papers or risk having their grade dropped. Just so, the loudly touted argument that Intelligent Design (ID) cannot be considered scientific because its results have not been published in peer-reviewed journals skillfully obscures the fact that peer-reviewed journals have tightly closed their evolutionary ranks and refused to publish ID essays, no matter the quality of their research.

In my own personal experience, I have encountered the widespread gender-neutral agenda on numerous occasions. To some (though not all) of the Christian presses with whom I’ve published, I have had to *insist* that my manuscript not be neutered—in one case that even meant making exten-

sive changes to the galley proofs after the editors went ahead and neutered my manuscript anyway. I have had a Christian journal refuse to publish an article of mine that they had already accepted when I refused, on philosophical, theological, linguistic, and aesthetic grounds, to neuter my essay. I even had an evangelical Christian organization first invite me to be a plenary speaker at a Christianity and education conference, and then promptly disinvite me when I circulated an essay by email in which I explained why I was opposed to gender-neutral Bible translations. The essay had nothing to do with my presentation topic, but the man who disinvited me told me that he did not want me speaking to his female faculty! I recount these incidents, not to gain sympathy, but to highlight that gender-neutral language does not represent a natural evolution but is the result of an enforced agenda. That is why the same people who use traditional usage in private settings will suddenly switch to gender-neutral usage when their colleagues are around. In a similar way, if you survey academic books, you will see heavy use of BCE/CE, despite the fact that the majority of people still use BC/AD. It should also be noted that the way young people (both male and female) use the word “guy” is identical to the traditional usage of “man”—that is to say, “guys” is used both to designate a mixed group of males and females and to distinguish the males (guys) from the females (girls).

Just as the supporters of politicians caught in scandals defend their candidate by saying that all politicians are guilty of something, so defenders of the gender-neutral agenda insist that all translations are backed up by an agenda. Though it is true that all translation projects are influenced by their historical moment, what the NRSV initiated—and what the CEV, NLT, TNIV, and several other versions have continued—mandates something far more sweeping than simple historical influence. The NRSV (and its heirs) have made the unilateral decision that traditional usage is no longer viable (or understandable) and that they must therefore eliminate all uses of the inclusive “he” and “man”—an elimination that calls for the altering of close to 1000 verses. For example, in Chapter 3 of *The*

TNIV and the Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy, Vern Polythress and Wayne Grudem offer a categorized list of 900 verses where the translators of the TNIV changed the clear meaning of the verse in order to accommodate gender-neutral usage.¹ And most of these inaccuracies persist in the new NIV. Indeed, according to a study commissioned by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “although the 2011 NIV corrected many of its most controversial renderings of gender language from the TNIV, the majority (75%) of the problems identified by Polythress and Grudem still remain.”²

And yet, despite all the changed verses, the fact remains that traditional usage continues to be viable. The truth of this statement is made abundantly clear by the fact that no textbooks in the English speaking world ever include notes to explain that when Shakespeare or Milton or Wordsworth or Dickens or Twain or Melville use generic “he” or “man” that they are referring to all people, both male and female. Such notes are unnecessary because everyone (and I mean everyone) knows that when Jesus says, “If anyone would follow me, he must take up his cross,” that the “he” refers to males and females both, and that when the scriptures say that “man does not live by bread alone” that the word “man” does not exclude women. Two generations of English professors (and, worse, teaching assistants) have sought to change the way their students think about gender issues, and yet, despite their efforts, inclusive “he” and “man” are still fully understandable.

Let me say it once more: gender-neutral translations of the Bible do not reflect a natural change in the English language. Many of them seek to promote and help bring about a change that those on the translation board think should be universally accepted. And what that means, plain and simple, is that the Bible is being used to promote an agenda rooted in feminist propaganda and originally meant to obscure (if not eliminate) all essential, God-given distinctions between the sexes. Again, that is not to claim that all proponents of gender-neutral translations believe in that agenda—but the agenda is there nonetheless.

One major part of that agenda that the feminists have been successful in enforcing upon society is the replacement of the word “sex” with the word “gender” in most academic journals and in all those interminable forms that our bureaucratic society calls on us to fill out. The word “sex” is rejected because it suggests an essential link between the bodies and souls of men and women; the jargon word “gender” does not bring with it the same connotation. In fact, the word “gender” used this way suggests that masculinity and femininity are not essential traits but social constructs.

For quite a long time, my fellow evangelicals have boldly resisted the gender-neutral agenda, a resistance that blocked several early attempts to neuter the NIV and that culminated in a stunning victory when the TNIV itself was pulled. And yet, sadly, despite this victory, the NIV has put out an updated version (confusingly bearing the same name: NIV!) that has mostly capitulated to the agenda. If we will allow the Bible to be so altered as to promote a change in language that is not natural but grew directly out of an anti-biblical agenda, then what will we swallow next? Shall we republish Shakespeare and Milton and Dickens in gender-neutral editions? English hymns and prayer books have already been neutered, so why not English literature as well? Let us continue to fight for our language and for those wonderful, essential differences between men and women that God hard wired into us from the beginning.

ENDNOTES

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How Do We Speak About Homosexuality?

Denny Burk

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies

Boyce College

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Louisville, Kentucky

Introduction

In September of 2010, a 15-year old boy named Billy Lucas was a high school student in Greensburg, Indiana. You might not have known it from looking at him, but Billy was as unhappy a student as you would ever meet. There was something about Billy that made him the target of relentless bullying. Billy was homosexual, and everybody knew it. Day in and day out, he went to school, and his classmates targeted him for cruel treatment. They would do unimaginably cruel things to him. On one occasion, one of Billy's classmates pulled his chair out from under him just to see him fall to the ground in humiliation. And as he was sitting there shamed in front of his classmates, the person who pulled his chair out told him that he should just hang himself.

For Billy, this was the straw that broke the camel's back. He decided he wasn't going to take it anymore and determined to fight back. So in September 2010, he came back to school ready to resist. Like clockwork, his classmates started in on him, and he blew a fuse. He took his stand and just let loose with a string of obscenities that would make a sailor blush. If the bullies were subtle, he wasn't. He got caught and was suspended before the day was out.

He was bullied, he resisted, and he got kicked out.

Billy lived on a farm with his mother. That night when he got home, Billy placed a curious call to 911. He told the dispatcher that he was "causing

problems" for his mother and that the authorities should come to their home. The dispatchers called back to see if the call was legitimate. His mom told them she didn't know why he had called, and she told them there was no problem and not to come. About 8:00 pm, Billy went out to his barn to put the horses away for the night. A little after 8:00 pm, Billy's mom went out to the barn, and she found that he had hanged himself from the rafters.¹

Some major news outlets picked up the story of Billy Lucas's suicide, and the news spread around the world. A sex-advice columnist named Dan Savage heard about Billy's suicide and decided to do something about it. Savage is a homosexual himself, and he launched a YouTube channel called the "It Gets Better" project. The point of it is very simple. It's a place where gay adults upload videos of themselves telling their stories about how life "gets better" after high school. Their messages are aimed at kids like Billy Lucas who are losing hope. Their message is simple: *Things may be hard now, but just hang in there. After high school, you'll find a gay community and others who will affirm your sexuality. You can be married and adopt children and have a full life. It may be awful now, but it gets better. You don't have to commit suicide. You just need to hang in there.*

What interested me about the "It's Gets Better" project is what Savage said motivated him to start the site. It turns out, that Savage's response is a mixture of compassion towards gay high school students and anger towards Christians. He writes,

Another gay teenager in another small town has killed himself—hope you're pleased with yourselves, Tony Perkins and all the other "Christians" out there who oppose anti-bullying programs (and give actual Christians a bad name)....

Nine out of 10 gay teenagers experience bullying and harassment at school, and gay teens are four times likelier to attempt suicide. Many LGBT kids who do kill themselves live in rural areas, exurbs, and suburban areas, places with no gay organizations or services for queer kids...

I wish I could have talked to this kid for five minutes. I wish I could have told Billy that it gets better. I wish I could have told him that, however bad things were, however isolated and alone he was, it gets better.

But gay adults aren't allowed to talk to these kids. Schools and churches don't bring us in to talk to teenagers who are being bullied. Many of these kids have homophobic parents who believe that they can prevent their gay children from growing up to be gay—or from ever coming out—by depriving them of information, resources, and positive role models.”²

So Dan Savage starts his YouTube channel. In the first video, Savage and his “husband” tell YouTube viewers how and why they have found a happy life as gay, married men who have now adopted their first child—a little boy. They offer themselves as living proof that “it gets better.” You don't have to kill yourself.

I want to talk to you today about how we as Christians can minister most effectively to homosexual sinners in a culture in which there are many voices like Dan Savage's. If you are listening to the Dan Savages of the world, you will find that what they say is far different from what the Bible says.

If you live on planet earth, you are going to encounter people who are struggling with homosexual sin. Perhaps there are some in this room right now who are struggling with this issue. If you are a Christian, it will fall to you to speak truth and

love into some very difficult situations. The question that you are going to have to answer between now and then is this: *How are you going to speak?*

Obviously, you need to speak biblically, but how do you do that when there are so many people saying that the Bible is not sufficient for the task? People are telling you that there are only two options for how you should speak: the intolerance option and the tolerance option.

(1) *The Intolerance Option* is the idea that if you oppose homosexuality in any way, then you are intolerant of homosexuals as persons. You hate both homosexuality *and* homosexuals. You don't think they deserve basic respect as persons, and you think that they don't even deserve civil rights. If your religion tells you that homosexuality is wrong, then you and your religion are bigoted because you promote hate against homosexuals. This is the intolerance option.

(2) *The Tolerance Option* is the idea that the only way to show love and compassion to homosexuals is to recognize that homosexuality is morally acceptable. You must not only affirm that homosexual persons have civil rights but also that the lifestyle itself is a wonderful option for those who are so inclined. You have to affirm the persons *and* the lifestyle if you want to be truly tolerant.

The Tolerance Option and the Intolerance Option are regularly set before you as the only possible choices you have in relating to homosexuals. Since none of us wants to be bigoted or hateful, there is a tremendous pressure on you in our culture to choose the tolerance option. After all, who wants to be a bigot?

But my question for you today is this: Are these really the only two options? If you had known Billy Lucas and if you had the opportunity to speak to him before he died, is it true that your only options were either to hate him or to affirm him?

This is a false choice. There is another option. It's the biblical option, and it also happens to be the one that is the most loving. Biblically defined, love will determine both *what* we speak and *how* we speak when we minister to homosexuals.

My concern is really not with how to fight the larger culture war that's going on over gay mar-

riage. I think Christians have a role to play in that discussion, but that is not my aim. My aim is for us to consider how we as Christians are to address the gospel to those who struggle with homosexual desires.

Ephesians 4:14–15 says, “We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.”

So we are called to *speak the truth in love*. There is much that we could say about what it looks like to speak the truth in love. But I want to focus on three things that have to be on any list of how we ought to speak to the Billy Lucas’s of the world: (1) Speak the Truth, (2) Speak the Gospel, and (3) Speak Humility.

Speak the Truth (Romans 1:26–27)

Speaking the truth means simply speaking what the Bible says about homosexuality. One of the first things that you will encounter when you try to speak those truths is that people generally resist the truth. This shouldn’t be surprising. People are sinners. Sinners sin. And that includes the sin of resisting the truth. In fact, the apostle Paul says in Rom 1:18 that sinners as a rule “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” The truth convicts us of sin, and apart from God’s grace we all resist that conviction. Jesus says it this way: “And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:19–20).

Sinners don’t like the light, so when they are confronted with the truth they suppress it. Sinners suppress biblical truth by saying one of two things: (1) the Bible doesn’t mean what you think it means, or (2) the Bible is not trustworthy.

This is precisely what is happening in our day on the issue of homosexuality. Many of you have probably heard the name of former pastor Brian McLaren—a guy who was named by *Time* magazine in 2005 as one of the twenty-five lead-

ing evangelicals in the world. In 2006, he called on evangelicals to stop speaking as if they know the truth on this issue.

Frankly, many of us don’t know what we should think about homosexuality. We’ve heard all sides but no position has yet won our confidence so that we can say ‘it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us.’ ... If we think that there may actually be a legitimate context for some homosexual relationships, we know that the biblical arguments are nuanced and multilayered, and the pastoral ramifications are staggeringly complex. We aren’t sure if or where lines are to be drawn, nor do we know how to enforce with fairness whatever lines are drawn.

Perhaps we need a five-year moratorium on making pronouncements. In the meantime, we’ll practice prayerful Christian dialogue, listening respectfully, disagreeing agreeably. When decisions need to be made, they’ll be admittedly provisional. We’ll keep our ears attuned to scholars in biblical studies, theology, ethics, psychology, genetics, sociology, and related fields. Then in five years, if we have clarity, we’ll speak; if not, we’ll set another five years for ongoing reflection.³

Nevertheless, with still a year remaining on his moratorium, Brian McLaren made a moral pronouncement on the moral status of homosexuality. In his 2010 book *A New Kind of Christianity*, McLaren seeks to redefine the Christian faith for a new day, and in one chapter in particular he argues that evangelicals need to abandon their ancient ethic on homosexuality.

McLaren pillories our beliefs as “fundasexuality,” which he defines as a “reactive, combative brand of religious *fundamentalism* that preoccupies itself with *sexuality*.... It is a kind of *heterophobia*: the fear of people who are different.”⁴ Traditional evangelicals, he argues, need an enemy against which they can unite in common cause: “Groups can exist without a god, but no group can exist without a devil. Some individual or group needs to be identified as the enemy.... Gay, lesbian, bisexual,

and transgendered people are an ideal choice for this kind of scapegoating.”⁵

For McLaren, evangelicals who treat homosexuality as a sin are really just looking for an enemy—a scapegoat. In other words, our faith is less about theology than it is about psychology. Evangelicals need someone to loathe, and homosexuals are the unfortunate target.

In spite of what McLaren says, the Bible is not unclear on the topic of homosexuality. The most important text in the New Testament on this topic is Rom 1:26-27. Two truths stand out about homosexuality in this text: (1) it’s a sin, and (2) it’s a judgment.

Homosexuality as Sin (1:26b-27)

For their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error (Rom 1:26a).

According to this text, both women and men who abandon the “natural function” of sexuality to engage in same-sex acts are committing sin. There are some who will tell you that “natural” refers to one’s sexual orientation—that this verse only condemns people who participate in same-sex activity that have a heterosexual orientation. In other words, it’s not a sin for those who do so “naturally”—those who act in accordance with their own homosexual orientation.

But that’s not what Paul is talking about, is it? For Paul, “natural” is not defined by one’s personal orientation (whatever that may be) but by God’s intention in creation. For Paul, what is “natural” is defined by what we see in the garden of Eden before the fall. One man and one woman in a covenanted heterosexual union. Any other kind of union is “unnatural” and sinful in Paul’s way of thinking.

Paul couldn’t be any clearer here. Homosexuality goes against God’s design and is a sin.

Homosexuality as Judgment (1:26a)

“For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions (Rom 1:26a).” The sin of idolatry is mentioned in verse 25. Paul says because humans were idolaters, God judged them by giving them over to “degrading passions.” We don’t desire the sexual ideal given in the garden of Eden. All of us are inclined (to one extent or another) toward perversions. We have degrading passions. In verse 26, the specific “degrading passion” is homosexual desire.

This text teaches that God’s judgment often consists in giving us what we want. When God gives you over, you are in a scary place.

About two years ago, I went to visit my dermatologist for my regular check-up. He looked me over, and he found a spot on my back that troubled him. He cut a little piece out and did a biopsy. What he found in the biopsy troubled him even more. So he called me back and said that he needed to see me again. This was naturally disconcerting. It turns out that he found some cells on my back that were somewhere in between benign and cancerous. At the very least, they looked like they were on their way to being cancerous, so he wanted to remove more skin from my back. So I went back in for a procedure and they cut a rather large piece of skin out of my back and got all of it out.

I was certainly bothered by the call back from the doctor telling me that I needed to come back in. I was bothered by the fact that I had something that looked to him to be pre-cancerous. But would he have been doing me any favors by withholding that information so as not to trouble me? Of course not. He’s saving my life by upsetting me.

So it is when we deal with sinners in general and homosexual sinners in particular. When we minister to homosexuals, we do them no favors by running away from the truth of Scripture. We have to tell them clearly—even when it’s unpopular—that homosexual acts are sinful and homosexual passions are a judgment.

If we withhold that truth from them out of fear of offending them, then we don’t love them. We cut them off from salvation. The only way for them to be saved is to receive Christ. The only way

to receive Christ is by *repentance* and *faith*. They can't repent if we enable them to continue to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. We must shine the light. They will either come to it, or flee from it. We can't control their response. We must speak the truth if we love them.

Speak the Gospel (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Homosexual sinners need the gospel just as much as you do. Christ intends to save homosexual sinners from their sin and to include them in his body, the church. No text brings this truth out more vividly than 1 Cor 6:9-11. I want you to see three things in this text.

The Unrighteous Are Excluded from God's Kingdom (6:9a)

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" (1 Cor 6:9a). Not everyone gets in. Those who die in their sin will perish for eternity. They do not experience God's redemptive reign through Christ. Because they are unrighteous, they are *excluded*.

Homosexuals Are Among the Unrighteous Who Are Excluded (6:9b-10)

"Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9b-10). Homosexuals are named among those who are unrighteous and excluded. The terms translated "effeminate" and "homosexual" refer to the active and passive partners in a homosexual encounter. And these two are included in a long list of other kinds of sinners: fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, the covetous people, drunkards, revilers, swindlers. It's a bad crew, and homosexuals are named right there with them.

The Gospel Makes Them Righteous and Included (6:11)

"And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and

in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). God is in the business of saving sinners, and homosexuals are included.

Recently, the Christian publisher Zondervan released a book by a young man named Wesley Hill, and the book is titled *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. In the book, Wesley Hill describes his own lifelong struggle with homosexuality. For as long as he can remember, he has experienced a powerful and abiding attraction to persons of the same sex. There was no experience that triggered it. It's just been there from his earliest memories.

Wesley Hill also describes himself as a Christian. He became a follower of Jesus as a child, and he has never turned back from that commitment. He also agrees with what the Bible teaches about homosexuality—that it is a sin. So against the powerful attractions that he feels every day, he agrees with the Bible against his feelings that homosexuality is wrong. And so his life is one of radical denial. He is remaining celibate in faithfulness to Christ.

Yet here's why he does what he does:

In the end, what keeps me on the path I've chosen is not so much individual proof texts from Scripture or the sheer weight of the church's traditional teaching against homosexual practice. Instead, it is, I think, those texts and traditions and teachings as I see them from within the true story of what God has done in Jesus Christ—and the whole perspective on life and the world that flows from that story, as expressed definitively in Scripture. Like a piece from a jigsaw puzzle finally locked into its rightful place, the Bible and the church's no to homosexual behavior make sense to me—it has the ring of truth ... when I look at it as one piece within the larger Christian narrative. I abstain from homosexual behavior because of the power of that scriptural story.⁶

For him, 1 Cor 6:9 is a part of that story. He is *washed* and he is *waiting* for the day when his disordered desires will be taken away.

Don't be surprised when someone comes to you at your church who says they were saved out of a homosexual lifestyle. Jesus loves these dear people and saves them. Don't be surprised if you find yourself in a church with brothers and sisters who still struggle with these disordered homosexual desires. Love them, pray for them, be compassionate towards them, and do everything you can to help them in their fight against this sin. But don't be surprised or stand aloof.

For those you know outside the church who are homosexuals, make it your aim to win them to Christ. Love them like you would any other sinner. Speak the gospel to them so that they might be saved. And never do anything that would hinder the progress of the gospel in their lives. No bullying. No making fun. No gay jokes or name-calling. Only love, compassion, prayer, and good will.

Speak Humility (1 Timothy 1:8-17)

By this I mean speak with humility. Notice that Paul labels homosexuals as sinners:

... realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and *homosexuals* and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted (1 Tim 1:9-11).

He includes homosexuals in a long list of sinners who are *lawless, rebellious, ungodly, unholy, and profane*. They are listed among a bad lot: those who kill their fathers or mothers, murderers, kidnappers, liars, and perjurers. Is there any question about the moral status of homosexuality?

In any case, Paul still thinks himself to be the worst sinner of the lot:

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for

this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life (1 Tim 1:15-16).

When I say "speak humility," I mean that you need to speak the way Paul speaks. Paul calls homosexuality sin. But when he does, he still thinks of himself as the biggest sinner on the planet. It doesn't really matter who is the biggest sinner in reality. In your own heart, you ought always to feel like you're the biggest one, the worst of the lot. We don't speak to homosexuals as if we are without sin. We speak as sinners. So we speak with compassion.

Conclusion

We are often presented with a false choice concerning the church's ministry to homosexuals. We are told we can either walk the path of homophobia and hatred, or that we can surrender our ancient beliefs to affirm homosexual practice. But this is an unnecessary dilemma. There is another way. We can love and minister to homosexuals while still holding fast to biblical norms for human sexuality. If McLaren's "pastoral response" is as unworkable as I have argued here, then it is incumbent upon Bible-believing Christians to construct a framework for ministry to people struggling with homosexual sin. I hope that we have made a beginning of that here so that when you meet the Billy Lucas's of the world—and there are so very many—you can minister the gospel of Jesus Christ freely to them.

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The Ironies of Real Marriage

A Review of Mark Driscoll, *Real Marriage: The Truth about Sex, Friendship, and Life Together*.
Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012.

Heath Lambert

Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology
Boyce College
Louisville, Kentucky

The first time I heard Mark Driscoll speak I cried. About a year ago I was attending a conference where he was speaking in Florida. He spent a few minutes reflecting on his ministry in Seattle. This city was the least-churched in the United States, and he desired to provide a gospel witness to the people living there. God used Driscoll mightily, and Seattle is no longer America's least-churched city. Though I have been aware of the broad following he has with many young Christians and have heard about some of the controversies he has stirred, I have not followed his ministry very closely at all. As I listened to him speak that day I was moved by his faithfulness in proclaiming Christ. I knew that Mark Driscoll and I were on the same team.

It was in that spirit that I came to *Real Marriage: The Truth about Sex, Friendship, and Life Together*. Because I am a professor who teaches many classes on marriage, a pastor who does ministry with many married couples, and a husband who is married, I have a great stake in books on marriage. I am always interested when a book on marriage is released. I am always excited when such a book is written by an influential Christian leader and his wife with the potential to influence massive numbers of people.

I really wanted *Real Marriage* to be a helpful book and was concerned when I began hearing that many of the reviews on the book were nega-

tive. I was even more concerned when I found, after reading the book myself as well as a number of the reviews, that many of these negative reviews were far too favorable of the book. In fact, I was sad when upon completing the book it was clear that this book is a dangerous and troubling one that will cause confusion and difficulty in many marriages.

It is not as though there is nothing of any value in the book. The problem is that the good elements of the book are so frequently obscured and/or contradicted by very many bad elements of the book. The mingling of these helpful things with a lot of bad things are what I refer to as the ironies of *Real Marriage*. The book is a contradiction. In fact, I think there are at least ten ironies with regard to the Driscolls' book.

The Driscolls say they want to speak candidly, but their presentation is impractical. The Driscolls say,

After years of learning, counseling, teaching, repenting, forgiving, and praying, we believe it's time for us to tell the story of what we've learned and what we are learning. The story is honest, helpful, practical, and biblical. We'll give date night tips, talk about how to set up a marriage, and discuss how to fix a broken marriage. We'll have pointed words for husbands and wives (18).

These words were encouraging to read. Too many couples are left to drift in their marriages existing in churches that have no candid wisdom for them either because they do not know what to say or because they are afraid to talk about difficult topics. The church today is in great need of leaders who will stand up and give bold advice to couples struggling in the dark with problems they think they could never share. I am thankful for the desire the Driscolls have to speak into this void. In fact, I imagine that it is this element of honest sharing that will impact most people positively. Many people will be encouraged to discover that they are not alone in their marriage struggles but are in the trenches with a popular Christian leader and his wife.

The problem with the book is not with the Driscolls' desire but with their delivery. *Real Marriage* is a hard read because it is so poorly organized, but, worse than that, it is impractical. This one is a critique with huge pastoral implications. If your material is disorganized and impractical, people will not be helped by it.

One example of this is Grace Driscoll's chapter on abuse. I read the chapter, and was repeatedly thankful that she was able to find grace to help in the aftermath of her own abuse. I was disappointed, however, because her communication was so disorganized that I fear too few will receive help from it. I read the chapter three times trying to isolate the various, isolated pieces of advice that were not clearly described or cohesively presented. Though it was clear she is better today, I was completely unclear about the specific process that she used. I have counseled many victims of sexual abuse, and my guess is that most women reading the book will be encouraged by Driscoll's candor and hopeful in their own struggle because she was able to find help. I also think most will be hard-pressed to take away from the chapter a specific plan to help in their own efforts at change.

Another example of impracticality was Mark Driscoll's chapter on pornography. Driscoll's chapter was fifteen pages, and only the last few concerned practical help for people struggling with this problem. The rest of the chapter was filled up with facts and figures on the pornography indus-

try, details of how the brain processes pornographic images, and an explanation of why pornography is damaging. I have counseled scores of people who struggle with this problem and have never met one who was powerfully and qualitatively changed by a description of the billions of dollars spent on porn, by an analysis of how neurons work in the brain, or even by descriptions of the deleterious effects of pornography. People struggling with pornography simply do not need these things. That means that the thing people most need is what Driscoll spent the least amount of time developing. I was sad at an opportunity, now missed, to provide so many people with practical help.

The Driscolls say their book will be biblical, but their treatment regularly falls short of this standard. In the quotation I referenced previously, the Driscolls state that their book will be biblical. They make clear in a couple of other places in the book that one of their chief goals is to be biblically faithful (see ix, 3). These are encouraging words to read. There are many books on marriage, but few that reflect God's perspective on marriage. I was delighted by the Driscolls' desire to have a book on marriage that was anchored in the text of Scripture. I was disappointed, however, when I found that much in the book was so deeply *unbiblical*. The unbiblical nature of the book showed up in a number of ways including the rare occasions the Bible was mentioned at all, the bad exegesis that was characteristic of the Driscolls' handling of texts on the few occasions they turned to actual passages,¹ and by the way that the Driscolls regularly highlight their own experience above the instructions of the Bible. It is this last problem that I will focus on here.

The Driscolls are really quite mystical. God talks to Mark and Grace Driscoll a lot. In repeated places throughout the book they each describe hearing the verbal voice of God from Heaven (8, 12, 13, 15, 25, 69, 78, 121). There is a time and a place to discuss the appropriateness of such experiences in an abstractly theological sense. That is not my concern here. My present focus is pastoral in nature. I am concerned that the Driscolls' repeated

references to hearing the voice of God will hurt marriages. Time and again they make clear that the truth that held their marriage together was Pastor Mark's experience of hearing God tell him to marry Grace (see especially p. 12). It is actually astonishing that in the entire account of their difficulties the Driscolls never point their readers to the many passages of Scripture that teach on the permanence of marriage.

This is an enormous pastoral problem because I have talked with dozens of couples where one spouse is just itching to find a reason to walk out. What kept those couples faithful and clinging to their partner were the clear truths in God's Word that he speaks to all of his people. I know so many people that would be discouraged after reading Pastor Mark's experience and would be emboldened to pursue divorce because they have not had a similar one. Regardless of what Pastor Mark believes happened to him, the call to be a faithful preacher of the Word of God points to the error of highlighting one's own experience over the clear instructions of the Bible.

The Driscolls adopt a complementarian vision of marriage but implement it in a confusing way. The Driscolls share an appreciation with all complementarians that the Bible teaches a vision of life in the home where men are called to loving headship and women are urged to respectful submission. Mark Driscoll is clear that a man is to "take responsibility for the well-being of his wife and children" (56). Grace Driscoll is clear that women should be submissive to their husbands and should repent of a sinful disrespect of authority (68). This is a bold and courageous stand. The Driscolls will be maligned for taking such a firm position. Pastor Mark and Grace will be unfairly critiqued for holding a position which will be called chauvinistic. Complementarians should be thankful for the Driscolls' conviction, and pray for them to be able to withstand the criticism they will get for it.

Having said that, the way the Driscolls develop their view of biblical complementarity is unhelpful. This was clear in a number of areas. First, Mark

Driscoll recounts how he invited his wife to be his "functional pastor" (34). Obviously husbands want to be open and live honestly with their wives, but such an invitation smacks of the kind of authority for a wife that cuts against the complementarian vision the Driscolls are trying to embrace. Second, the Driscolls say that a wife gets to decide if her husband is being loving, and a husband gets to decide if his wife is being respectful. They say,

But the verse that sets up the responsibilities of husbands and wives, Ephesians 5:21, commands them to be "submitting to one another." This means she gets to decide if you are loving and leading well as the head, and you get to decide if she is respecting and submitting well as the helper (64).

The primary problem with this assertion is that it is not what the passage means.² A secondary problem is that it is unwise advice for evaluating whether a spouse is meeting his or her obligations in the marriage. Obviously married couples need to be sure that their efforts at love and respect are communicating to their spouse. It is too simplistic, however, to point to one spouse's perception of this as the only way to evaluate it. What about abusive husbands? What about exasperating wives? The Driscolls' counsel will not help in these situations and many others. Husbands and wives need biblical guidance as they make evaluations concerning whether their spouse is treating them as they should. The Driscolls would have served their readers much more practically if they had given some guidance from Scripture about how to recognize loving and submissive behavior. They never do this, and the failure here will cause many couples to evaluate their spouse's behavior in subjective and selfish ways.

Mark Driscoll says men should deal humbly with their struggles but leaves readers wondering if he has repented of patterns of extreme sinfulness in his own life. Driscoll writes wisely to men, "As the family leader, model humility, honesty, repentance, service, study, and worship. Your

life preaches at least as loudly as your words, so teach and model humble godliness by the grace of God" (62). I am so thrilled that Driscoll says this in his book. Literally every man I know needs to be reminded of this. I need to be reminded of this. My concern is that in the book Driscoll does not heed his own counsel. He teaches humble godliness, but does not model it. Let me explain what I mean.

One thing is crystal clear about the Driscolls' marriage after reading their book, and it is that Mark Driscoll believed he was not getting enough sex in the early years. He offers repeated complaints about this. If there were other significant issues contributing to their marital discord it is hard to tell from the book. The degree to which Pastor Mark believed he was being cheated out of sex was clearly *the* issue in their marriage. Driscoll's self-assessment that he was sex-starved led him to bitterness against God and Grace, feeling trapped in the marriage, self-entitlement, thoughts of infidelity, frustration, discontentment, regret over their marriage, lust, loneliness, explosive anger, and depression (see 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 120, 162). Driscoll is not the only man to struggle with such sinful responses. The problem is that in the book he never takes responsibility for his role in their poor marriage.

Grace Driscoll confesses to being in an abusive relationship before she met her husband. She then spends pages of humble, honest, and tender reflection discussing how—in her brokenness—she neglected the sexual relationship with her husband. After God healed Grace of her brokenness, Pastor Mark asked her to have more frequent and free sex. She acquiesced, and that was that. Their marriage improved. Grace dealt with her frigidity, and the problem was solved. There is never any fault placed on Pastor Mark for his sin. There is never any regret expressed over his contribution to their difficulties. There is no consideration that his role of leading Grace into a premarital sexual relationship may have contributed to her distrust of him. There is no discussion that his constant anger and badgering for more sex may have raised real and legitimate questions about his love for her. This one was a tragically wasted opportunity for Pastor Mark to *show* repentance instead of merely commending it

to his readers.

To be clear I am not saying that Driscoll never repented for these obvious sins. What I am saying is that, if he did, readers do not know it because he never talks about it in the book.³ This is inexcusable given how clear his sinfulness was and given how much time Grace spent dealing with her own issues. The message from the book is "I wanted more sex than my wife would give because she was frigid. She needed to deal with that. When she did, I told her I wanted more sex, and I got it. Problem solved." I cringe when I think of how this message will play in so many broken marriages with husbands even more selfish than Pastor Mark.

The Driscolls emphasize the nature of marriage as friendship, but then highlight sex in an extreme way. The Driscolls spend an entire chapter emphasizing the importance of being best friends with your spouse. In many ways I found this to be the most helpful chapter in the book. As they note, the Driscolls fill a void in discussing the nature of marital friendship in a way that few other resources do (see 24). I was deeply encouraged after reading this chapter and went home emboldened to redouble my efforts in building a close friendship with my wife.

Another of the many ironies of *Real Marriage*, however, is that the book does not really pick up this theme again. Most of the rest of the book is dominated by the nature of the sexual relationship in marriage. Obviously sexually intimacy is of great importance in marriage and any good marriage book will deal with it. But sex so dominates the Driscolls' book that readers will find themselves wondering where the theme of friendship went after the initial mention. The Driscolls talk more about friendship *per se* than most books on marriage. That is true enough. But the rest of the book is framed by their sexual difficulties, and is filled with chapters about pornography, sexual abuse, and detailed descriptions of which sex acts are acceptable in marriage. Though they pay lip service to "friendship," sex is where the action is in the Driscolls' book. The problem with this is that even with a maximum amount of sexual activity

couples will still spend most of their time in marriage engaged in activities that happen outside the bedroom. The Driscolls spend a maximum amount of space discussing important sexual matters that are rather less dominant in marriage than other things couples do. The lasting impression that one receives from the Driscolls' book will not concern friendship but sex.

The Driscolls desire for people to avoid a pornographic culture, but much of their book grows out of that same pornographic culture and will guide many people into it. The Driscolls hate pornography. They understand how prevalent, powerful, and poisonous it is. They speak with clarity about the way that pornography degrades the individuals who view it, women, children, and the glory of God. Theirs is a powerful witness against one of the defining sins of our age.

The crystalline clarity with which they condemn pornography is why it is so distressing that much of the counsel they provide to couples is more grounded in our pornographic culture than in the pages of Scripture. Examples could be multiplied, but for the sake of space I will only mention two.⁴ The Driscolls say, "One of our culture's powerful lies—fueled by pornography, sinful lust, and marketing—is that having a standard of beauty is in any way holy or helpful. God does not give us a standard of beauty—God gives us spouses" (108). A few chapters later, however, they commend cosmetic surgery saying, "There are many reasons cosmetic surgery may be beneficial. It can make us more attractive to our spouse. And if our appearance is improved, we feel more comfortable being seen naked by our spouses, which can increase our freedom in lovemaking" (197). The contradiction inherent in these two comments took my breath away. How does the call to delight in the appearance of one's spouse commend expensive and permanent procedures that alter the appearance or enhance the features of the spouse who was supposed to be the standard of beauty before their surgical metamorphosis?

That is not all. In another place the Driscolls say, "Seeking to emulate what their husbands

view in porn compels women to push their bodies beyond God's creation design" (148). Then, only pages later, the Driscolls commend anal sex as a potentially helpful practice in marriage. The contradictory nature of such phrases is astounding. It is difficult to imagine a more degrading, dangerous, and pornographic practice than this one. Few other sexual acts could be identified that more clearly push a woman's body beyond God's creation design.

Another problem with the way the Driscolls treat pornography has to do with the reality that many people will be guided to pornography because of their book. Make no mistake: men and women will be introduced to pornography because of this book. For almost my entire ministry I have been talking to at least one person a week who struggles with pornography. I do not live in some sheltered ministry context away from people with perverse struggles. As true as that is, the Driscolls taught me a lot about pornography I wish I never knew. The Driscolls introduce their readers to the titles of pornographic books, magazines, and videos; they provide technical names for specific kinds of pornographic films; they list the names of celebrities who have starred in pornography; they even provide web addresses where readers can meet people for sex. As I look back on that sentence I am overwhelmed that a Christian minister could be so irresponsible. I can tell you for an absolute fact that there are young men and women all across the country who will read *Real Marriage*, have their interest piqued by some of the details the Driscolls provide, will turn to Google for a search on those things, and will not come up for air again for hours—perhaps months and years. If you or someone you love struggles with pornography the Driscolls' book will do *serious* damage.

The Driscolls say they want to deal with issues that real people are struggling with but lose sight of real people in many of the issues they address. The Driscolls say,

Because we are a pastor and his wife, we really do want this book to be used of God to help people. It's the kind of book we wished we could have read earlier in

our marriage, and wish we could have given to those we served in ministry. So we wrote what we hope is a book that is biblically faithful, emotionally hopeful, practically helpful, sociologically viable, and personally vulnerable (ix).

The Driscolls are not writing a theoretical book. That is a good thing. Marriage is anything but theoretical. Books by ministers who are willing to deal with practical matters that keep real people and real situations in view are always desirable.

Unfortunately, there are all kinds of real people who get lost in the shuffle in the Driscolls' book. Above, I discussed real people who struggle with pornography who will be led astray. Consider another example. Real people who are sexual abuse victims will feel wounded and troubled by this book. The Driscolls make clear that they have hundreds of victims of sexual abuse in their congregation (130). In spite of this the Driscolls commend oral sex, anal sex, and advise, "If your spouse is not getting enough sex, maybe you don't need marriage counseling and long deep conversations as much as you need to try regular sex" (163). I know and have counseled many victims of sexual abuse, and know with certainty that—standing alone, and without qualification—such counsel will send many women into despair at the sex practices they will have to endure.

This reality is accentuated in *Real Marriage* for two reasons. First, Mark Driscoll regularly responds to critics of his explicit language that he is doing ministry in the gritty environment of Seattle. He speaks the way he does because he is addressing a certain context. If true, one would imagine that the knowledge of the many sexual abuse victims in his congregation would commend some modicum of pastoral sensitivity in suggesting such practices to his audience. Second, the responsibility for the difficulties in the Driscolls' sexual relationship was placed on Pastor Mark's wife. The sad reality is that many real women who struggle in the aftermath of sexual assault will be confused, hurt, troubled, and plagued by much of the Driscolls' talk about, so-called, real marriage.

The Driscolls are writing a book on mar-

riage, but seem only lately to be figuring out their own marriage. It is hard to construct an explicit timeline from the details of their book, but it is obvious that the Driscolls have had a very unhappy marriage for the larger part of Pastor Mark's ministry. Grace Driscoll seems to indicate that things have only improved within the last few years (136). During the years of extreme difficulty the Driscolls led premarriage counseling with other couples teaching on the "freedom and joys of married sex," which Pastor Mark admits he was not enjoying (11). He also preached through Song of Songs highlighting, again, the joys of marital sex (14). Such work, Driscoll admits, only increased his bitterness (14). Driscoll also did marriage counseling trying to help people with their sexual difficulties in marriage (15). All of this went on for more than ten years of marriage and ministry with Driscoll being accountable to nobody (16, 34).

It is important to confess that no marriage is perfect, and even pastors have marriage problems. The depth of the problems in the Driscolls' marriage, however, is troubling. It is precisely this kind of marital dysfunction that God means to eliminate with commands for pastors to have a well-ordered home (1 Tim 3:4) and to keep a sharp eye on their life and doctrine (1 Tim 4:16).

The Driscolls write about marriage, but seem to misunderstand the fundamental nature of marriage. The Driscolls write many good things about marriage—some of which I have observed above. They commend complementarian marriage and friendship in marriage, and they argue for a covenant understanding of marriage (53–57). In spite of all this, the Driscolls miss the fundamental essence of marriage. The most profound passage in Scripture about marriage is, arguably, Ephesians 5 where the Apostle Paul states that marriage is essentially a picture of Christ and the Church. Marriage is a profound demonstration of the love Jesus has for his bride. Any Christian book on marriage that approaches faithfulness must address this reality. The Driscolls, amazingly, never even *mention* it. As all the buzz about the book demonstrates, people walk away from this book talking about its sexu-

ally explicit nature. They will not walk away with a clear vision of the gospel of Jesus as demonstrated in marriage. There is no greater loss than this one.

The Driscolls make a point in their book of saying they appreciate their critics only to dismiss them in other statements. The Driscolls say, “We want to thank our critics who help us continually serve Jesus better by the grace of God” (219). This is a humble and wonderful statement. None of us are perfect, and all of our work is marked by a need for improvement. The only question is whether we will embrace this reality or reject it in a spirit of arrogance. It is encouraging to hear such humility from the Driscolls.

That is why it is so unfortunate that Driscoll has rather publically dismissed his Christian brothers who raise legitimate questions about his work. In response to a question from CNN asking what he thought about the negative reviews of his book, Pastor Mark responded dismissively, “Sometimes reviewers will reveal more of their own struggles than actual problems with the book.”⁵ Is this the response of a Christian leader to the careful critique of his work? I have read a few of the other reviews of the Driscolls’ book. I know some of the men who wrote them, and they are examples of the godliest people I have ever met. It is irresponsible and unchristian to ignore substantial critique from wise men by directing aspersions onto their marriages.

I cannot tell you how discouraged I was when I read these words from Pastor Mark. All of us have miscalculated, overstepped, and otherwise made mistakes in work we have done. That is why it is so critical for every Christian to cultivate a heart of humility that receives and even encourages constructive criticism. Pastor Mark’s stubborn response in the CNN interview bodes poorly for his willingness to modify the more troubling portions of his book.

Conclusion

This is longer than a typical book review. There is a reason for that. I hope that after reading it you will not sense the need to read *Real Marriage*. I want to be clear: I have nothing against Mark Driscoll and his wife. Instead, I am thankful for

(what I have been told is) a clear witness to the gospel in Seattle. Having said that, I am deeply disturbed by this book on marriage. This book will hurt people. It is going to create confusion in marriages, trouble in the sexual relationships of married couples, turmoil in individuals struggling with all manner of difficulties, and questions about the nature of marriage from God’s perspective.

When I first received the advance review copy my wife and I agreed to read the book together. I was further along than she, and ultimately asked her to stop reading it. I could not imagine asking her to process all the bad material in the book when there are so many other things she might read that would be beneficial. I pray that you too will spare yourself, those you love, and those in your ministry the many troubles of *Real Marriage* by focusing on a Christian book on marriage that is more helpful.⁶

The first time I heard Mark Driscoll speak, I cried. To be very honest, I also cried when I read his book on marriage. Unfortunately, my tears in each case were for very different reasons. My initial tears were full of joy over a man who so clearly desires to spread the gospel of Jesus. More recently my tears are full of sadness over the message of a book that has strayed so far from the intentions of its authors and will bring pain to many real marriages.

ENDNOTES

¹See pages 175–77. As many others have noted, the Driscolls do not correctly interpret 1 Corinthians 6. They also typically push the language of Song of Songs past any normal hermeneutical bounds as even the scholars they cite seem to understand (see 170, 184).

²This is another example of the mishandling of texts in the book.

³As far as I could tell, the only time Pastor Mark confessed any sin was when he repented of not being a better provider for his family (see 11).

⁴For more examples, see 144, 146, 149, 174, 176, 190–91, 198.

⁵<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/01/06/pastors-detailed-book-on-sex-divides-reviewers-sparks-controversy>.

⁶There are many good books, but a few examples are Ken Sande with Tom Raabe, *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2002); Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say I Do: Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2007); Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2002); Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 1999); C.J. Mahaney, *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004); John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Perseverance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

The End of Sexual Identity ... or Sexual Morality?

A Review of Jenell Williams Paris, *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex is Too Important to Define Who We Are*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011.

Kenneth Magnuson
Professor of Christian Ethics
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky

In her book, Jenell Williams Paris calls for an end to sexual identity categories, which she considers to be the prevailing notion of personal identity in western culture, in which persons are defined by their sexual desires. The two most prominent categories are “heterosexual” and “homosexual.” Other, newer categories, which aim to sort out certain distinctions of sexual identity, include LGBTQ (lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer).

In the first several chapters of the book, Paris argues that there are too many problems with using such categories. First, she argues, they represent an unhelpful cultural construct. Paris, who is a Professor of Anthropology at Messiah College, appeals to anthropological and historical research to make her point. There are a variety of perspectives on same-sex relationships in other cultures, in which sexual behavior is not understood to entail a sexual orientation or identity. Further, even in western cultures, sexual identity categories are relatively recent. Thus, contrary to our assumptions, this way of viewing human beings is not given in creation, but it is “a social construct that provides a faulty pattern for understanding what it means to be human” (43). The problem is that a person’s sexual desire is used to define who that person is. As Paris puts it, all sexual identity categories suggest that “who you want sexually is who you are socially” (56).

Thus, Paris views the innovation as deeply problematic in part because it attributes too much significance to sex and sexual desire, where ultimate

pleasure, hopes, and personal identity are found. As such, it becomes idolatrous. In addition, sexual identity categories are troublesome, Paris argues, because they privilege heterosexuality over all others “on the basis of inner desires and feelings” and they are used to denigrate those who do not fit into the preferred category. This is done most often, but not exclusively, by heterosexuals. As such, “heterosexuality is a concept riddled with problems. I’d even call it an abomination” (43).

One other reason that Paris sees sexual identity categories as a problem is that many people do not fit neatly into any of the categories. Rather, they experience a range of desires, behaviors, and sense of identity, or a certain “sexual fluidity” over time that may be seen as different places on a scale between exclusive “heterosexuality” and “homosexuality.” To place a sexual identity label on people is to fail to recognize this reality, in her view.

Instead of being conformed to this western cultural paradigm of sexual identity categories, Paris calls Christians to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2). As part of that renewal, chapter 4 offers a vision of sexual holiness that focuses on love for God and neighbor rather than seeing holiness as “as synonym for morality” (83) and being concerned primarily with “behavioral compliance” (87). Christians ought to consider not simply particular acts and desires but the whole person, and be Christ-centered, united in devotion to Jesus and to one another in love. She

ends her chapter on sexual holiness by saying, “In the post-sexual identity church, there’s no moral high ground for heterosexuals and no closet for homosexuals. There’s just people, each of whom is lover and loved” (92).

She follows her chapter on sexual holiness with chapters on sexual desire, sex, and celibacy, arguing that each of these is (not) a big deal. That is, it is easy to make each of these things out to be too important, treating them as ultimate issues when they are not. Too much is made of sexual desire because desires are fickle and yet are not easily changed. Too much is made of sex, she argues, in that it cannot bear the expectations that have been placed on it for pleasure and fulfillment. Too much is made of celibacy in that it is seen as an impossible and undesirable choice in a culture that sees sex as a necessary part of human flourishing, and not enough is made of celibacy because even in the church there is an inadequate support structure and understanding to make celibacy plausible for many people.

How should this book be evaluated? It can be said that Paris presents some very important insights, arguments, and research that should be considered carefully. She is right to say that personal identity should not be reduced to sexual desires, and to resist a culture that in many ways understands sexuality to be the essence of what it means to be human. Further, it is important to raise concerns about how people may be alienated and mistreated because of their same-sex attraction. She also argues effectively that too much is made of sex and what it can deliver, promising “indescribable erotic ecstasy” (111) and personal fulfillment, expectations that simply cannot be met. This leads to disappointment, emptiness, and broken relationships in an ongoing search for that perfect partner. What is more, as Paris notes, it is often the case that “instead of correcting these false promises, Christianity lays a blessing over them” (111). Christian preachers, teachers, and authors do this by, frankly, talking incessantly about sex and placing too much emphasis on sexual and relational fulfillment for a successful marriage. Finally, her chapter on celibacy provides some very helpful insights as well, and it is

well worth reflecting on what the church can do to provide a better plausibility structure for those who are single, whether by choice or circumstances, in order to encourage them as they live out their calling within the body of Christ.

Unfortunately, as important as these insights are, there is far more about the book that I find to be problematic. I will focus on only a few of the more significant points.

First, there are some significant loose ends in relation to Paris’ argument that sexual identity is a contemporary western social construct. She offers some evidence that other cultures perceive same-sex acts differently, and that they do not use categories like sexual identity or orientation, but the significance of that observation is not clear. If the concept of sexual identity, to which the terms “homosexual” and “heterosexual” refer, is relatively new and western, the same cannot be said of the whole range of concepts to which they refer, including sexual acts and desire. To be sure, the concept of sexual identity has some problems, but to say that these terms represent a new social construction is misleading. Simply put, we are not the first culture to recognize that some people have same-sex desires, and that they are sometimes more or less fixed. Further, some of the range of meaning of the terms “homosexual” and “heterosexual” is understood sufficiently in other cultures that we could explain what we mean and much of it would make sense. In addition, in Rom 1:26–28, Paul does not address merely same-sex acts, but also same-sex desires, as evidence of human fallenness. It is not only presumptuous to think that Paul simply did not understand homosexual desires, in a way that is similar to what we mean by same-sex attraction or “orientation,” but it also misses his point that sin has corrupted human beings thoroughly, down to our very desires.

Second, when Paris rejects sexual identity categories as a label that privileges one category over all others, she leaves massive questions unanswered. Whether intentionally, or by omission, Paris does little to indicate whether there is a “privileged” creation pattern given by God for sexual desire and behavior. When she writes about sexuality, there

is no significant biblical or theological account of what it is and what it is for. Instead, she lists items that are related to, or are aspects of, our sexuality (behaviors, choices, relationships, hopes, memories, marriage, physical health, fantasy, desire). These items, she suggests, are like groceries in a bag (81), and you simply cannot judge the items in the bag by the label on the outside, for each item needs to be seen as a potential area for healing or growth. There is certainly some truth to that, but to focus on the items without reference to the larger purpose of sexuality in God's design, and to specific biblical teaching, easily obscures whether there is anything wrong with same-sex desire or even acts. It may even seem incidental that God created male and female for one another, and created a pattern of sexual desire that draws male and female into a one-flesh relationship. Given what Paris says about heterosexuality in general, it is difficult to see how she would "privilege" heterosexual marriage over other patterns either.

Third, then, Paris never adequately addresses how deeply God's purposes are distorted by sin, not merely in acts and attitudes, but in our very thoughts and desires. She has much to say about desires, that they do not tell us who a person is, that they are fickle, that they are often conflicted, and rarely just simply "good" or "bad." In support of her view, she cites Paul in Rom 7:18, "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." Her point is that desires may or may not change, and thus we should not place our identity in them. Instead, regardless of whether they change, we can be known as a child of God (98). That point is important and necessary, but it isn't sufficient. Paul is not simply arguing that desires are fickle or impossible to change. Instead, he recognizes in ungodly—and unwanted—desires just how pernicious is sin. He goes on to say, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" and concludes, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom 7:24). Yes, thank God, we can be known not by our sinful desires but by our relation to God. However, that does not diminish the sinfulness of our desires. Rather, it magnifies God's grace, by which our sinful desires may be transformed. That

message should not be blunted for the homosexual (or lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, or queer) any more than for the sexually promiscuous, the idolater, the adulterer, the thief, the drunk, the reviler, or the swindler (1 Cor 6:9-11).

Fourth, her understanding of repentance is inadequate. Commenting on Jesus' call to repentance in Mark 1:15, Paris writes, "the Greek *metanoia*, translated 'repent', pairs two words that mean 'after' and 'thinking or perceiving'" and concludes, "repentance is an 'afterthought,' a change of mind that is different from the earlier thought" (104). She acknowledges that it involves a change of behavior, but argues that its "deeper meaning is a transformation of the mind" and thus it fits with Paul's call to a renewed mind in Romans 12. What follows is a mixture of insight and a troubling lack of clarity about what repentance entails. Since same-sex desires are difficult to change, she concludes that if repentance requires "fixing, curing or eliminating problematic desires, it seems that only some people will be able to follow Jesus' teaching." Therefore, repentance must be focused on "a reorientation of perspective." In particular, it involves turning from "judgment to discernment and from cure to care" (105). Granted, Paris has some helpful things to say about discernment and caring, but the problems with her account are numerous. For one thing, she does not indicate what repentance might look like for those who engage in same-sex acts or experience same-sex attraction. Do they simply need to stop judging themselves and stop trying to cure their problem? Her suggestions are telling. She says in one case, "It's up to the person to make meaning of those feelings and to decide how desire ought to shape behavior." Further, if one's sexual desires are such that they are best described as same-sex orientation, "he then needs to consider which sexual identity label, if any, he wishes to adopt, and what it will mean for him. This approach encourages sober judgment as a person identifies sexual feelings, clarifies personal values, makes meaning of both and makes choices about how to live" (107). Here repentance simply looks like values clarification.

Where is the gospel in all of this? How is sin understood? It does seem that many who strug-

gle with same-sex desire find it difficult or even impossible to change, and that should be considered as we care for and encourage that person. But we cannot allow our difficulty with overcoming certain desires to determine whether they are sin, and whether we ought to seek to change, by God's grace. Consider that many people find it difficult or impossible to stop engaging in same-sex *acts* as well. Indeed, heterosexuals, too, find it difficult or impossible to overcome lust, promiscuity, greed, and other sinful desires and thoughts. We cannot base our understanding of repentance on what we seem to be capable of doing. It must be based upon what God calls sin, and what God calls us to do by His grace and through His Spirit. Some may be more successful than others. Some may struggle; some may stumble and fall. We ought to be understanding, encouraging, exhorting, and loving. But we need not, we dare not, capitulate to our fallen desires and behaviors.

Concerning the possibility of change, Paris notes a significant study by Christian psychologists Mark Yarhouse and Stanton Jones (101), which reveals that only 15 percent of those seeking change through therapy or other programs experienced a change to heterosexual desire (they call "conversion"), while 23 percent said their same-sex attraction was either reduced or gone ("chastity"). Another 29 percent claimed it is an ongoing process ("continuing"), and 27 percent experienced no significant change or had given up or embraced a gay identity. Paris concludes that "compared to other therapeutic outcomes, a 15 percent success rate is not poor (success could be as high as 38 percent if conversion and chastity are both considered successful outcomes)." We need to ask what we would consider "success" to be. There is another 29 percent, those referred to as "continuing," who, according to the study, "experienced reduced same-sex attraction" and "the person remains committed to changing more" (101). In terms of what it looks like to repent of sin and follow Jesus, their experience is a lot like that of many believers who are seeking to overcome various sins. If that group is included in the success rate, it climbs to 67 percent. Still, she is right to caution that, "it just isn't real-

istic to tell a same-sex-attracted person that they can surely resolve their struggles through therapy" (102).

I appreciate the concern Paris has for people who are often treated as outcasts, and are sometimes driven away from the church rather than drawn towards it. I agree with her contention that human identity ought not to be reduced to their sexual desire, and that too much is made of sex, turning it into an idol. She offers many other insights as well. She also articulates a growing perspective among Christians, especially those within the emergent movement and those with a postmodern bent, which warrants a response. This review has offered one response, and that only to a handful of concerns. Much more needs to be said, for much is at stake.

In the concluding paragraph of the book, Paris says, hopefully, "Driven by genuine love, people are making their way around, under, over and through the sexual identity impasse." As an example, "a Christian college allows its faculty to hold divergent viewpoints about homosexuality (at many Christian colleges, *faculty cannot theologically affirm same-sex intimacy*), and while some backbite and / or avoid each other, others seek out dialogue and friendship with those who hold different views" (144, my emphasis).

I have no doubt that there are many things that Christians need to learn to do better as we express love for God and neighbor. We need to be sensitive to the struggle lived out by Christians who experience same-sex desires that they have difficulty overcoming. We need to convey the good news of Jesus Christ more clearly and compellingly to all people, with grace and love and compassion as we call people to repent and believe. However, to suggest that a Christian college is driven by genuine love, when it allows its faculty to affirm same-sex intimacy, is simply a repudiation of biblical teaching. That is the kind of "love" espoused by Joseph Fletcher, not Paul or Jesus. It affirms something that Scripture clearly says is wrong. To do that is not merely to reject the framework of sexual identity. It is to reject the framework of sexual morality.

Cultivating Womanhood in a World of Competing Voices

A Review of James Dobson, *Bringing Up Girls: Practical Advice and Encouragement for Those Shaping the Next Generation of Women*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2010.

Todd L. Miles

Associate Professor of Theology, Western Seminary
Elder, Hinson Baptist Church
Portland, Oregon

James Dobson's *Bringing Up Boys*, published in 2001 by Tyndale House, proved to be so informative and helpful to parents in the raising of their sons, that many fathers and mothers of daughters wondered when the companion volume on raising girls would be published. Ten years later, Dobson finished *Bringing Up Girls*, and it will no doubt prove to be beneficial to all who read it.

Dobson, the founder and president emeritus of Focus on the Family, a licensed psychologist and marriage, family, and child counselor, as well as a husband and father to a son and daughter, brings a wealth of trusted experience to his writing. Christians have long looked to Dr. Dobson for counsel in the raising of children, and there has arguably not been a more influential voice in parenting and marriage issues over the last century.

Bringing Up Girls is borne out of a critical concern for the well-being of girls and young women in a culture that is simultaneously over-sexualized and confused over all issues related to gender and gender roles. There are so many competing voices for the hearts and minds of young women, so many mixed messages being sent to young men regarding the place of those same young women in society, and most tragically, so little godly sense exercised in parenting, that today, as perhaps never before, a clear voice of authoritative biblical wisdom is needed.

Dobson begins his book by explaining, in the first two chapters, why he possesses this sense of urgency in writing to parents of girls. Young women are in peril. The ambient culture wants to make girls

into sex objects, and it targets them when they are young and most vulnerable.

Girls are different than boys. Femininity is different than masculinity. That might seem obvious and attractive to some, but to many in our society, those differences are unwanted and are to be negated through strong social engineering. In chapters 3–6, Dobson explores the differences between girls and boys and argues persuasively that those differences are there by design. Bringing his clinical training and experience to bear, Dobson explains that girls are fundamentally different than boys, and those differences are essentially due to nature, not nurture. Girls have different biochemistry, physiology, and neurology. They are more emotional and nurturing. They mature differently and earlier than boys. They are programmed with different social needs and concerns. And though our culture desperately depends upon those differences, for the most part it does not respect or appreciate them. In fact, our culture is antagonistic toward them. Therefore, intentional parenting is needed to produce a safe environment where femininity and womanhood can be cultivated and trained.

Chapters 7–11 focus on the fundamental role that both mothers and fathers must play in raising girls. For example, mothers need to stay in touch emotionally with their girls. That relationship must be cultivated from birth, and it is to continue throughout adolescence. In fact, Dobson is convinced that all of a girl's childhood is a critical period in her relationship with her mother. Yet he

cautions that girls need their mothers to be mothers first, and best-friends later. Fathers are equally important, though their role is different. Through formal study, panel discussion, and anecdote, Dobson makes the case that girls need their fathers. They need an emotional and appropriate physical connection with their fathers, particularly during their awkward teen years. Young girls need the security of knowing that their father, the man in their life, loves them unconditionally, that they are protected and provided for by that same man. Their maturity and psychological and emotional health depends upon it. For those fathers who struggle in knowing how to do so, Dobson has suggestions for cultivating the relationship that range from the simple (e.g., intentional times of conversation) to the elaborate (e.g., a father-daughter purity ball).

Chapters 12–14 focus on cultural exegesis. Why is it that girls are the way that they are and yet our culture both feeds some legitimate desires (Dobson devotes all of chapter 12 to the “princess” movement) and destructively fights against others (chapter 14 describes the cultural currents that seek to pull girls toward sexual immorality)? Chapter 15 outlines the inevitable consequences of a sexual promiscuous lifestyle. The effects of the “hookup” culture are physical, relational, and emotional. But he happily reports in chapter 16 that a growing number of young women are resisting the tides of the culture and are practicing sexual abstinence until marriage. Dr. Dobson provides some practical advice in chapters 16 and 17 to parents who seek to protect their children and teach them to value and cherish their sexuality.

Chapters 18–21 cover an assortment of issues related to female physiology and biochemistry (18), female bullying and “relational aggression” (19), puberty (20), and protecting your children in our connected age from the dangers presented by invasive technology (21). In chapter 22, Dobson brings the book to a close by calling parents to raise their girls in the fear of the Lord, pointing them to Jesus Christ.

Bringing Up Girls is a strong book full of easy-to-understand explanations and practical advice. The strengths are numerous. Here are a representa-

tive few: *Bringing Up Girls*, though dealing with difficult issues is remarkably easy to read. Dobson illustrates his points throughout with panel discussion transcripts and anecdotes from his personal experiences in raising his daughter. Dr. Dobson writes in much the same style in which he speaks. Those who have listened to Dobson over the years will at times hear his voice speaking the words of advice, concern, and compassion as the pages are read. The book is clearly a labor of love and represents, in all earnestness, Dobson at his best.

Dobson’s clarion call to fathers to be intentionally involved in the lives of their daughters is compelling and convicting. As the father of a teenage daughter myself, I was confronted at numerous points and then challenged with the importance of my role in her life. He also raises the issue of the importance of mothers being at home with their children. Although he is not as confrontational as he could be, he outlines the issue well and asks mothers in two-career families to consider the wellbeing of their daughters as they make their vocational choices.

Dobson’s citations of sociological and physiological research is impressive. His explanations are clear. One is left with the inescapable conclusion that there is a difference between boys and girls, and it is that way by design. Readers are also left with an understanding of their daughter’s physiology, neurology, and emotional makeup that will go a long way toward explaining her needs. Though never excusing certain behaviors, such knowledge will enable parents to understand and more effectively deal with certain issues as physiological changes occur.

I highlight two areas of concern, one small, the other more significant:

At times, Dobson runs into the same confusion regarding femininity and gender roles that is manifest in the culture. It is apparent that he is trying to walk a fine line between the strength of women on the one side and their femininity on the other. At one point he defends the strength of his feminine grandmother by recalling that she co-pastored a church with his grandfather and that she was an excellent preacher. I’m not sure that appealing to

an occasion where a woman does what is forbidden by Scripture is testimony to legitimate strength. Admittedly, it is a difficult line to walk when you are trying to speak against a culture that wants to treat women as sexual objects while also affirming the differences between men and women that the feminist movement despises. Scripture alone is able to guide one along this line, celebrating the differences between men and women that are designed by our wise and loving Creator while upholding the precious dignity of women as image-bearers and the unique and special creations of God.

Which brings me to my largest concern: There is virtually no Bible and even less gospel in this book. Surely the gospel has incredible implications for how we parent our girls! And I am speaking of more than a general “raise your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord” instruction. If Jesus came to save sinners (including mothers, fathers, young women, and little girls) and that salvation is holistic in the manner and depth that Scripture reveals, then the gospel has to uniquely guide our aspirations, philosophies, techniques, and prayers for our daughters as females and our sons as males. It is not until the last chapter that Dobson turns to Scripture for divine revelation on the roles and responsibilities of parents. And when he does so, it reads more like an obligatory add-on, rather than an authoritative appeal to the Word of God to give definition, explanation, and instruction to femininity, adolescence, and parenting. Why not begin with a brief biblical study on femininity and masculinity? Why no reference or appeal to the verses or passages that speak specifically to women and womanhood? But there were plenty of references to science, psychological studies, opinion polls, and anecdotal evidence. Dr. Dobson’s appeals to behavioral science, psychology, and physiology are impressive. And it is clear to me that Dobson is convinced that men and women, girls and boys, are unique and different because God designed them to be so. With that presupposition in mind the data makes perfect sense and is helpful. Why not make that presupposition explicit by rightly grounding the theology, philosophy, goals, and manner of parenting girls in the Bible? But in the absence of that

presupposition, one will inevitably conclude that the source of authority and insight for parenting lies in the behavioral sciences. Really, apart from the last chapter and the unwritten presuppositions that ground the entire worldview of the volume, there is nothing distinctly Christian about the book. I think that Dobson recognizes the priority and sufficiency of Scripture, but it is not clear from the book structure that this is the case.

But Dr. Dobson has earned our trust and we know of his commitment to Christ. His voice is no longer heard by as many parents as it was during the seventies and eighties when he called parents to love their children enough to “dare to discipline.” One look around society and even the church suggests that most parents are not suffering from too much good advice and godly instruction. If anything, the stakes for our children are higher now, and the world that much more dangerous. For these reasons and more, *Bringing up Girls* is a book well worth reading.

Give Them Jesus: Parenting with the Gospel

A Review of Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson, *Give Them Grace: Dazzling Your Kids with the Love of Jesus*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2011.

Andrew David Naselli

*Research Manager for D. A. Carson; Administrator of Themelios
Moore, South Carolina*

Jennifer J. Naselli

*Homemaker
Moore, South Carolina*

We're parents of two young children with a third on the way. Andy is the second of seven children, and Jenni is the first of three. We're cautious about parenting books because they often end up being a craze that either accommodates our culture or pontificates about how a specific method is the one and only right way based largely on anecdotal evidence that it worked for them.

Give Them Grace?

To begin with, we weren't sure what this book's title means: *Give Them Grace*. Does that mean "Give them a break, and don't discipline your children so much" or "Lighten up: chuck the rules, and let the kids do what they want"? The subtitle clarifies that it means, "Give your kids grace by dazzling them with the love of Jesus." But what exactly does that look like?

Elyse Fitzpatrick and her daughter, Jessica Thompson, explain in the book that giving your children "grace" means to "explain again the beautiful story of Christ's perfect keeping of [the law] for them" (36). "Give this grace to your children: tell them who they really are, tell them what they need to do, and then tell them to taste and see that the Lord is good" (50). "Give grace to your children today by speaking of sin and mercy" (73). The book could be titled *Give Them the Gospel* or *Give Them Jesus*.

Tracing the Argument

The burden of the book is that Jesus is everything and that the good news about Jesus should permeate the whole parenting process. Many Christian parents desperately want to rear good kids—kids who almost always obey immediately, completely, respectfully, and joyfully. They want kids who don't embarrass them, who make them look good, who aren't losers. And if that's the goal, then the typical means to reach it often work. But that's the wrong goal, argue Fitzpatrick and Thompson, and those typical means are often counterproductive to the right goal.

Here's a one-sentence summary of each of the book's ten chapters:

- (1) From Sinai to Calvary: Parents should require initial, social, civic, and religious obedience from their children, and they should also give God's law to them but only to drive them to Christ and give them grace.
- (2) How to Raise Good Kids: "You cannot raise good kids, because you're not a good parent" (50); the only hope for your kids is Jesus' perfect obedience.
- (3) This Is the Work of God: Parents often assume that good parenting results in good children, but only God can produce good children because salvation is of the Lord.

(4) Jesus Loves All His Little Prodigals and Pharisees: Parents should teach their children that “Jesus Christ loves both rule breakers and rule keepers” (74), especially by specifically confessing their own propensity to live like one or the other.

(5) Grace That Trains: “Of the Lord” parenting involves applying the gospel to management, nurturing, training, correction, and rehearsing gospel promises.

(6) Wisdom Greater Than Solomon’s: Proverbs teaches that parents should appropriately and lovingly discipline their children with physical force, but it “must come in the context of the Wise Son who took blows meant for fools” (100–01).

(7) The One Good Story: When making decisions about controversial issues like media and modesty and hanging out with non-Christian friends, parents must connect those to the gospel story.

(8) Go and Tell Your Father: While “your child’s salvation does not depend on your faithfulness in prayer” (130), the role of prayer in parenting is very important.

(9) Weak Parents and Their Strong Savior: Parents are desperately weak, but their Savior is strong and gives all-sufficient grace.

(10) Resting in Grace: Parents can’t “manufacture their child’s ultimate success by sheer force of will” (160); they must rest in God’s grace.

Weaknesses

We commend the book as a whole, but we’ll highlight just two weaknesses before we highlight strengths in the following two sections.

The first is how the authors define law. The words “law” or “laws” occur 178 times in the book (we searched a PDF; we didn’t count them manually!), and it’s one of the book’s main themes. Unfortunately, the authors never justify how they define “law.” The issue of law in the whole continuity-discontinuity debate and especially in Pauline studies is massive, and the authors seem to assume a Lutheran view.¹ For example, they assert, “Everything that isn’t gospel is law” (36). Their

functional definition of law with reference to parenting is “every way we try to make our kids good” (36). These are not standard theological or biblical-theological definitions of law.

The second is how the authors understand the phrase “of the Lord” in Eph 6:4. They assume that “of the Lord” is an objective genitive (i.e., “nurturing, correcting, and training them *in the truth of or about Jesus Christ*,” p. 85), but some of the finest commentators argue instead for a subjective genitive² or genitive of quality.³

Yes, Grace, but . . .

Tullian Tchividjian’s foreword highlights the most controversial aspect of *Give Them Grace*:

The biggest lie about grace that Satan wants Christian parents to buy is the idea that grace is dangerous and therefore needs to be “kept in check.” By believing this, we not only prove we don’t understand grace, but we violate gospel advancement in the lives of our children. A “yes, grace, but . . .” disposition is the kind of fearful posture that keeps moralism swirling around in their hearts. And if there’s anything God hates, it’s moralism!...

[A]ll too often I have (wrongly) concluded that the only way to keep licentious hearts in line is to give more rules. The fact is, however, that the only time licentious people start to obey is when they get a taste of God’s radical, unconditional acceptance of sinners.

The irony of gospel-based sanctification is that those who end up obeying more are those who increasingly realize that their standing with God is *not* based on their obedience but on Christ’s. In other words, the children who actually end up performing better are those who understand that their relationship with God doesn’t depend on their performance for Jesus but on Jesus’s performance for them.

With the right mixture of fear and guilt, I can get my three children to obey in the short term. But my desire is not

that they obey for five minutes or even for five days. My desire is that they obey for fifty years! And that will take something bigger and brighter than fear and guilt....

Any obedience not grounded in or motivated by the gospel is unsustainable (11–12).

Give Them Grace is radical. It's so radical that it constantly leads the reader to conclude, "Yes, grace, but . . . isn't that dangerous? If we give grace like that, then our kids will *abuse* grace."

So does that make *Give Them Grace* a dangerous book? No. To the contrary, if a book on parenting *doesn't* lead the reader to that conclusion, then *that* book is dangerous. Not vice versa.

Let us explain.

Paul uses the phrase *mē genoito* as a stand alone reply thirteen times (Rom 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; 1 Cor 6:15, Gal 2:17; 3:21; cf. 6:14). Translations render it in various ways:

- May it never be! (NASB)
- By no means! (usually ESV, sometimes NIV)
- Certainly not! (sometimes ESV and NIV)
- Not at all! (sometimes NIV)
- Absolutely not! (HCSB, usually NET, sometimes NIV and NLT)
- Of course not! (usually NLT)
- Never! (sometimes ESV, NIV, NET, and NLT)
- God forbid. (KJV)

Here's how Paul uses that phrase: (1) he asserts a truth; (2) he raises a question about or objection to that truth by stating a logical implication; and then (3) he says *mē genoito*, which essentially implies, "Right premise but outrageous conclusion!"

For example, in Rom 9:6–13, Paul argues that God unconditionally elects individuals. That raises one of the most common objections that people have to that truth: "But that's not fair!" The objection is that it is not fair for God to select individuals for salvation without any preconditions. Paul responds to the objection with *mē genoito* (v. 14)

and proceeds to argue that God alone has the prerogative to show mercy and compassion to whom-ever he desires. Our point here isn't to argue for unconditional election. Our point is that if your view of God's election doesn't logically lead to the objection in v. 14—"Is God unjust?" (NIV)—then your view of election isn't Paul's view.

Similarly—and making the very point that *Give Them Grace* makes—Paul says earlier in the same letter, "you are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom 6:14). "But Paul," you might ask, "don't you realize the implications of that statement?" Yes, Paul knows. That's why he writes this in the very next verse: "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!" (Rom 6:15 NIV). So if your view of grace isn't so radical that it logically leads to the question "Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?", then your view of grace isn't Paul's view.

It's obvious, then, how this connects to views on parenting. Does a view on parenting present God's grace in such a way that it logically leads to the objection of Rom 6:15? If not, then it doesn't pass what we call "the God-forbid test." *Give Them Grace* passes the test. It logically leads precisely to that sort of objection. That's good.

A Mom's Perspective

Andy asked me (Jenni) to share my perspective on the book as a mom.

"I thought parenting was going to portray my strengths," reflects Dave Harvey, "never realizing that God had ordained it to reveal my weaknesses" (quoted on p. 143). For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be a mother. That was my only dream as a little girl, teenager, young adult, and young wife. When I was a child, I had twin dolls that I named, carried around, and fed on a set schedule *for years*. As a teenager, I spent almost all of my free time babysitting for several families and would often secretly pretend to be their mother. When I chose a major in college, I chose early childhood education so that someday I could homeschool my kids. After graduating, I taught preschool and kindergarten for four years. During those years, I carefully observed the parents of the

children in my care, noting things that I admired and filing them away to use someday. When we learned in 2007 that we were expecting Kara Marie, I was beside myself with excitement. I read every book I could get my hands on, asked lots of questions, over-analyzed all of my friends with children, and even had a typed-up feeding schedule on my computer before we left for the hospital. More than anything else in my life, I wanted to do this right.

But my heart was proud, arrogant, and idolatrous. I hadn't just spent those years dreaming about snuggling and loving a baby. I'd spent many hours criticizing parents around me, ignoring their advice if I deemed it unworthy, noting their faults and shortcomings, and making mental notes to do it better. I'd read book after book until I became extremely opinionated and overconfident. By the time I left for the hospital on that bright Sunday morning in June, my mindset was "This is the most important thing I will ever do in life, and I'm going to do it *right*."

But God graciously and kindly began to expose my heart to me, starting with that very first week in the hospital. God knew my self-reliant heart and my idolatrous view of "successful" mothering, and he wisely gave me an infant I could not control. Kara was eventually diagnosed with severe infant reflux and had to be medicated. She developed multiple food allergies and even a sleeping disorder. On top of all of that, she was an extremely intense and volatile baby who would turn blue from screaming for hours. Everything that I had planned to go so smoothly fell into shattered pieces around me that I could not control. I have vivid memories (pre-Kara) of arrogantly telling my mother, "Honestly, if a parent can't get their own child *to go to sleep*, then they can't have any other control over their lives!" God graciously took away all of the control that I thought I had.

At the same time, God was kindly teaching me more about the gospel. I began to see the gospel as central to all of life, not just as "step one" in the Christian life. I began to see my own desire for self-justification as idolatrous and robbing God of his glory. I began to understand that I needed God's grace, too, even though I wasn't an outwardly rebel-

lious child.

As I grew in this understanding, I also grew uncomfortable with my approach to discipline with my child. By this time, Kara was headed full steam into the terrible two's. I became dissatisfied with my routine exhortations and exclamations:

- You just need to obey God.
- When you sin, you're making God sad.
- Good girl!
- You're pleasing God when you obey like that!

I began to feel that I was instilling self-justification into her heart—the very sin I was finding so pervasive in my own. But I really wanted to help Kara understand from the beginning that God is her final authority and that disobedience is ultimately against him alone. I was stumped and frustrated by this seeming incongruity between what I was learning and what I wanted to be teaching my child.

Then I picked up *Give Them Grace*. As I read it I kept exclaiming to Andy, "It's like she is inside my head, answering all of my questions!" I was fascinated and intrigued, but I had to keep putting the book down and mulling over the concepts that were so diametrically opposed to how I was accustomed to thinking about my role as a parent. During each chapter, I would be brimming with excitement, but then I would wait for almost a week before beginning the next chapter as I absorbed and thought carefully about the new concepts.

Here are four themes that have been incredibly enlightening for me:

(1) We cannot ever hope to raise good children (chs. 2–3). Only God can make us good. I began to see that I idolized being perceived by others as a model mother with model, obedient children. I've been both convicted and encouraged by the thought that only God can change my children and make them *truly, inwardly* good.

(2) *Both* little Pharisees and little prodigals need God's grace (ch. 4). I had been so consumed with not raising a prodigal that I was quickly encouraging the development of a little Pharisee. I've been alarmed by how quick I am to moralize and have been working to more clearly explain our

sinful hearts, which motivate both bad and outwardly “good” behavior.

(3) Parenting involves specifically applying the gospel to everyday situations. Chapters 5–7 flesh out for me what this kind of parenting should look like. I began to see how the authors would talk naturally about the gospel with their children and how I could do the same thing. I’ve read some reviews that criticize their long, drawn-out gospel explanations. Some of their scripted responses are so long and complex that they may leave parents wondering, “There’s no way I’m clever enough to remember to make all these connections when dealing with my child, and I’m skeptical that it will actually work out that way in real life.”⁴ But for me, the examples are welcome opportunities to think through new ways to explain these glorious truths. I wouldn’t say all of those things to my three-year-old in one sitting, but listening in to those conversations gave me helpful “hooks” and ideas about how to explain and apply the gospel to real-life situations that I deal with daily.

(4) Parents need God’s grace, too. Chapters 8–10 were the most gracious parts of the book to me. Without those chapters, this book could easily become “the next thing I need to master: gospel-centered parenting.” These chapters clarify that I am totally incapable of mothering my small children without God’s grace, and they assure me that any good that we ever accomplish has always been and will always be because of God’s grace. The last chapter in the book, “Resting in Grace,” addresses my idolatrous heart. I cannot ever be the kind of mother that I have always wanted to be. I will never have the perfect children I idolize. But God is so great and so kind. He is at work in my heart and in the hearts of my children. By his grace, I’m learning to trust him to work in their little hearts. He knows what they need so much more than we do.

Conclusion

How does *Give Them Grace* compare to other recent parenting books? Despite the similar sounding titles, its argument differs completely from Tim Kimmel’s *Grace-Based Parenting*. The argument is basically the same but clearer and more practical

than Bill Farley’s *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, and it’s more foundational than Ted Tripp’s *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*.

A book on parenting is an excellent place to teach theology and demonstrate how important and practical it is. Fitzpatrick and Thompson keep the main thing the main thing by explaining the gospel to parents and insightfully showing how it applies to shepherding children.

ENDNOTES

¹Helpful works on the law include Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson Jr.* (ed. John S. Feinberg; Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 203–18, 373–76; Greg L. Bahnsen, et al., *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999); Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010).

²Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 798–99: “the training and admonition come from the Lord or are prescribed by the Lord through fathers.” Cf. Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 402.

³Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 447: “the training and instruction is in the sphere of the Lord or has him as its reference point. In other words, it is truly Christian instruction.” This view is much closer to Fitzpatrick and Thompson than the subjective genitive.

⁴Cf. Kevin DeYoung’s humorous post “Parenting 001,” May 10, 2011, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2011/05/10/parenting-001/>.

A Valuable Historical Study

A Review of Diana Lynn Severance *Feminine Threads: Women in the Tapestry of Christian History*.
Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2011.

Courtney Reissig

Pastor's wife; writer
Little Rock, Arkansas

A common point of disagreement in the debate between complementarians and egalitarians is that each side believes a study of church history would substantiate the claims of its own position. Complementarians appeal to the Bible and church history as evidence that men and women are equal in worth and value, but are given different, gender-specific roles in the church and in the home. Egalitarians build their case on the Bible and church history, affirming that leadership in the home and the church is based on God's gifting. Without a thorough study of church history, how is one to decide which side is right? What roles have women played in the church and home throughout Christian history?

Diana Lynn Severance seeks to answer this question and more in *Feminine Threads: Women in the Tapestry of Christian History*. Severance, who is a historian and the Director of the Dunham Bible Museum at Houston Baptist University, provides a comprehensive and insightful unpacking of the role women have played in church history. Due to the rise of feminism and the interest in women's studies in church history, Severance aims to present an accurate portrayal of Christian women by letting them speak for themselves (13). The book's twelve chapters are divided into five specific historical periods spanning two thousand years: early church history, the middle ages, reformation and revival, the Victorian era, and women's rights and the church today.

Beginning with the New Testament, Severance takes the reader on a narrative journey, consid-

ering women in the bible and church history. She begins by showing that, while the culture of Jesus' day was not affirming of women, Jesus himself set a precedent of including women in his teaching and considering them his friends (22). This standard further solidified the value and equality of women as image bearers, and set the stage for the early church's valuing of women in the face of a culture that did not (51). But it did not eradicate role distinctions for men and women, as some have argued. Severance shows that the New Testament affirms a God-given role for women in marriage in which a wife submits to the leadership of her own husband (34). This truth about God's design, Severance argues, was the normative pattern for the church from a very early age and continues to this day (89, 142, 179, 258). She recounts stories of women who studied God's word, taught the bible to women, loved and served their families, and gave their lives for God's name.

Though complementarian and egalitarian advocates have claimed certain historical figures to support their position, Severance lets the women of church history speak in their own words. In doing so, she shows that some women once claimed as feminist trailblazers were no such thing (132, 244). Some egalitarians claim that the earliest stages of the feminist movement were an attempt to follow the Bible. Severance shows that, even in the earliest stages, feminists were questioning the truth of God's word and rewriting the Bible (280–82).

Because the women are speaking for themselves it is often hard to distinguish between what is

right and what is wrong. Severance begins the book by stating that “throughout the centuries of history, as Christ has continued to build His Church, the visible Church has often included tares among the wheat, nominal Christians among the true, and false teaching alongside the truth of God. This mixture of wheat and tares is true of both women in the Church as well as attitudes towards women by the Church... The reader is encouraged to discerningly use the truths of Scripture to evaluate the lives of the numerous women in *Feminine Threads*” (16). This means that when she talks of the life of the ascetics in the early stages of the church (81 ff.) or provides Martin Luther’s view on women (136), discernment and a good grasp of history is necessary. The best of men (and women) are just that—men and women who are sinners by nature and redeemed by Christ. Without a clear understanding of human nature, coupled with a solid biblical foundation, church history (and even biblical history) can be sorely disappointing. Understanding God’s design, as laid out in the bible and this book, will allow the reader to take these sections in without throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Studying history often sheds light on the present. Studying the history of Christian women (and all of church history, for that matter) reveals that there is really nothing new under the sun (Eccl 1:9)—it has simply been repackaged to fit the culture of the day (128, 132, 198). There is a lot we can learn from the women who have gone before us, both to emulate and to avoid. But more than anything we learn that the word of God is living and active, and will stand the test of time. The same Christ who these women treasured is the Christ we treasure today. He has not changed. And we stand on the shoulders of women who have lived for him, died for him, and lived ordinary (and extra-ordinary) lives in order to make him known throughout the world. That is a history worth studying.

THE DANVERS STATEMENT

BASED ON OUR UNDERSTANDING OF BIBLICAL TEACHINGS, WE AFFIRM THE FOLLOWING:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18).

2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen. 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor. 11:7-9; 1 Tim. 2:12-14).

3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen. 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor. 11:7-9).

4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen. 3:1-7, 12, 16).

- In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.

- In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.

5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal. 3:28). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen. 2:18; Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:11-15).

6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.

- In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; Tit. 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

- In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 1 Tim. 2:11-15).

7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission—domestic, religious, or civil—ever

implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan. 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet. 3:1-2).

8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim. 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9). Rather, biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.

9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (1 Cor. 12:7-21).

10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.



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