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# Is Feminism Good for the Church?

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Laura Turner writes on the “Her•meneutics” blog at *Christianity Today* that feminism is the Christian f-word. Turner argues that evangelicals have wrongly dismissed feminism as “anathema” to the body of Christ. She contends that feminism has not been a curse but a blessing both to the world in general and to the church in particular. She writes,

The church needs feminism because at its core, feminism affirms to us what our faith teaches us about male and female in God’s Kingdom and what Jesus himself preached throughout the New Testament.

Feminism is simply the belief that women are equally as human as men—equal in the eyes of God, equal in image-bearing, equal in ability...

Jesus’ care for the oppressed, the marginalized, cannot be ignored in the New Testament. As men continue to hold the reins of power in the church—2,000 years after the weak were made strong and the low made high in Jesus—we should welcome efforts to uplift and incorporate people who have been sidelined in Christianity, including women,

including people of color, including LGBT folks.<sup>1</sup>

I think there are a number of problems with the claims made in Turner’s essay, not the least of which is the claim that feminism has mainly been a force for good. The chief problem with this claim is its failure to account for the length and breadth of modern feminist ideology, which is anything but benign in its relation to the Christian faith. If feminism were defined solely by the likes of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Turner’s claim would not be nearly as controversial. But second and third wave feminism is a far cry from Stanton, and the radical claims of these feminists are not featured at all in Turner’s article.

Does the church “need” the feminism of Judith Butler who treats gender differences as socially constructed and who says that sexual differences between male and female are a farce?<sup>2</sup> Third wave feminists such as Butler are very much aligned with mainstream queer theorists on these matters. The normalization of homosexuality and transgenderism has ideological roots in the gender

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theory of third wave feminists such as Butler. The last thing one could conclude is that this kind of feminism “affirms to us what our faith teaches us about male and female.” This brand of feminism—which is perhaps the dominant type today—is a direct challenge to what the Bible teaches about male and female (Gen 1:26–27; Matt 19:4–5).

Feminism has also had a poisonous effect on Christian theology. Does the church really “need” the feminism of Virginia Mollenkott, whose Christology contends for the “Androgyny of Jesus”?<sup>3</sup> Can we really claim that the world “needs” the feminism of Mary Daly? She argues that we must cast aside any notion of God as Father and that Christians need to get over their “fixation upon Jesus” as a uniquely masculine image for God.<sup>4</sup> These kinds of contributions from feminist theologians have been anything but “needful.”

For these reasons, it is fundamentally in error to say that “the church needs feminism” or that “feminism affirms to us what our faith teaches us about male and female in God’s Kingdom.” Feminism has proven to be one of the great ideological competitors to Christianity in our time. It has been nothing short of a sustained assault upon Biblical authority and Christian orthodoxy. In these ways feminism has been a true enemy of Christianity.

We must also question Turner’s contention that LGBT should be “incorporated” into the body of Christ. What does she mean by this? I agree that LGBT people are welcome and invited into Christ’s church, but they must be welcomed to the table on the same terms as everyone else—through repentance and faith (Mark 1:15). But this is the point that is at best unclear and at worst misleading in Turner’s article. Can we “incorporate” into the body of Christ those who disagree with what the Bible teaches about homosexuality and who continue to engage in homosexual behavior? As I said, Turner is at best unclear on this point.

Further complicating the matter is the fact that she puts LGBT persons in parallel with “women” and “people of color,” which seems to suggest that LGBT is simply another facet of diversity that we need to embrace within the church (à la Gal 3:28). Does she really mean to say that LGBT

is as morally neutral as being a woman or being a person of color? Does she mean to suggest that homosexual behavior is compatible with being a disciple of Jesus? The 2,000 year old consensus of the Christian church has been that homosexual behavior is a sin and incompatible with being a disciple of Christ. Is Turner within or outside of that consensus?

Second and third wave feminism have attempted to redefine Christianity and in some cases to destroy it altogether. And that is why I think Turner’s article fails to convince. It does not deal seriously with the main features of feminist theory or with the key revisions of feminist theology. Nor does it account for modern feminism’s ideological alliance with radical gender theorists. In light of that, it’s just not credible to contend that “the church needs feminism.” It most assuredly does not.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Laura Turner, “The Christian F-Word: Letting Go of Our Outdated Fear of Feminism,” *Her\*meneutics*, September 25, 2013, accessed December 26, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2013/september/christian-f-word.html>.

<sup>2</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>3</sup>Virginia Mollenkott, “The Androgyny of Jesus,” *Daughters of Sarah* 2, no. 2 (March 1976), <http://www.virginiamollenkott.com/androgynyJesus.html>.

<sup>4</sup>Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 70 – 71.

# The Wedding Vows 20 Years Later

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My wife and I recently celebrated 20 years of marriage. I could have written the obligatory blog post or Facebook update to show how amazing she is and how undeserving I am and how glad I am we get to go on this journey together and how I hope we get 20 more years on this journey. I believe those things and could easily say them and mean them. But I didn't.

I could talk about how much joy I still have when I see her or hear her voice. But we have both come to realize that after 10 years those things were easy to say, but after 20 there is a whole lot of other things in our lives that will not allow me to write something trite because 20 years of marriage is not easy. It has been very hard. The fun of the first 10 years disappeared a bit in the light of other developments. We often say to each other, remember when we used to make up corny songs or give each other silly nicknames? Of course we remember, but we do not do that nearly as much now. We still do some of that, but they have mostly disappeared in the light of other developments.

In the second 10 years of marriage God has made sure we understand things about ourselves we did not wish to learn. He has brought us into certain kinds of suffering that we may never be free of in our "earthly tents." He has shown us how fragile life is with our marriage, our kids, and our continual struggle with selfishness and heart idols.

So on this our 20th anniversary, we want to share some thoughts about marriage, mostly for my younger married and not yet married readers. We often think about you with a bit of envy that we

cannot go back to the time when marriage was easy and a daily adventure. It really was easy in comparison with what has come to us. And we know our experience will not be common to all, or the timing of what we have learned, but we hope others find it helpful as we have found it helpful to meditate on our marriage and share these things with you.

What I offer below is not some well crafted, annotated essay. It is my anniversary morning thoughts, unplanned beyond the time it took to write it. We talked as I wrote, and this post accurately relays how we feel. This is what 20 years of marriage vows have meant to us. Though we could obviously say much more, we hope to convey that we are not complaining. We cannot talk about the vows without mentioning the hard part of the vows. It is not pretty or easy, but it is good.

### **To Have And To Hold From This Day Forward**

Having and holding each other felt pretty doggone good 20 years ago. I remember as a young unmarried man thinking of how amazing it would be to be married one day and holding a woman who loves me at any moment of any day that I would like to hold her. And now 20 years later we hold each other less often than we did, but still a lot. Some days, right in the middle of the day, we will go lay in the bed for a bit and hold each other and talk about whatever. It still is a joy, though we find ourselves thinking of something that needs to get done and move on.

In a bigger sense, we 20 years later have still only each other to have, and each other to hold.

There is no one else, and we love that. And we are still each other's best friend. What we started in only having and holding each other has continued. And we look forward to more days, weeks, months, and years of only holding one another.

In the last 10 years, we did not just get the pleasure of having and holding each other. We had to, often because there was little else in this life given to us by God to cling to. We still had each other. We held each other when under attack from gossips, when Molly had both of her brain surgeries, when horrible things happened to our children, when the things of this world and the messengers of Satan afflicted us. In those moments we fell into the arms of God and each other.

It is not good for man to be alone, and at times in ministry and in various ways, it has been very lonely. I remember many days and nights, from early on to two days ago, where something in me needed to hold someone and she was there. By God's magnificent grace he has provided me with a beautiful, godly, loving wife . . . to have and to hold. An inseparable union, we move forward together.

### **For Better, For Worse**

We have had remarkable "better" times. I know a lot of married people who seem to love each other very much. Good for them. But I cannot think of anyone who has more fun being married than Molly and me. It's a trip. And "better" times are grand, when the bills are paid and the basement is not flooding and the kids are getting good grades and there are not any cavities. When times are good we sing together and enjoy each other's company. We forgive each other quickly and enjoy each other's idiosyncrasies. We make time to hang out and talk, to get alone, to spend time around others. But anyone can endure the better times.

Especially during the last 10 of our 20 years the "worse" times have been pretty bad—some very bad. Some things we have been through are still too painful to describe in a reflection like this, so I won't. Many who know me already know some significant "worse" times through my blogging during and after Molly's brain surgeries. We have not had it as bad as many others, and we have had it worse

than many others. But comparison is not the point and is not how we think of our marriage. This is our road. It is our marriage.

We have had to preach the gospel to each other a lot. In worse times the gospel can get lost. God has given us each other to put someone there day by day to speak of the cross and peace and grace and love and forgiveness when one of us is distracted by the worst of our own sinfulness or the bad things that happen to us. Our stresses tend to bleed into each other's lives because we are one, but we endure together. Sometimes the one not suffering gets angry or bitter. Meanwhile, the one who is suffering is suffering well and reminds the other of how Jesus suffered for us, and the gospel breaks us of our bitterness.

I had no idea what "worse" would look like in marriage. We were both naïve. We thought we took the high and happy road by being fully committed to covenantal love for one another, and that would lead to a ton of better and little worse. Experientially, it has not. Though we have never even discussed divorce, it does not take the breaking apart of a marriage for a married couple to be broken. Still God, through giving us one another, makes those "worse" times, as bad as they are, really a "better" time because He is there with us and because we are there with each other.

### **For Richer, For Poorer**

We have never appeared on the "richer" side of things. My income has always been less than able to provide all the things we generally believe we need as middle class Americans. After all this time our kids have not gotten braces and do not have money for college. The last 5–6 cars have been free or almost free, by necessity. Our last three homes have been parsonages or missionary housing, free of charge, and we have never owned a home or townhouse. Nearly everyone our age is driving something newer and better. Everyone's house is bigger. Everyone's retirement account is fuller. Probably not completely fair, but the feeling is there and mostly accurate.

But 20 years of marriage has taught us that a bigger house does not make for a happy home. A

nicer car often means a bigger car payment which we do not have. We are not living for retirement, because we realize real rest is coming on “That Day.” Sure, we would like a new BMW or Suburban to drive. Really we would. But being married and having four amazing kids and keeping things simple is a kind of riches to us.

When times have been very tight, we still retell the stories of God providing vans and houses and groceries. Our kids are not hearing stories of financial achievement, but of faith and of a God who provides far beyond what we deserve. Our marriage has endured times where we have gone without because we go with God and with each other. We go with the church who has loved us and given so much for the gospel’s sake.

We hope our finances improve and we are able to provide our kids things that they want. We are working and praying toward that end, but if we cannot, we know One who can provide in riches and in poverty. He has proven himself over and over. And my wife and I remind each other of that as often as we can.

### **In Sickness And Health**

In connection to money, we should add here that the plan from early on, like many couples, was to keep Molly home from work during the formative years of our kids until she could work (if she chose to) once they entered school. It was very difficult, but we did it. She was earning almost \$30 an hour as a dental hygienist early in our marriage. But we sacrificed for the kids. She worked at home with our kids and I held one or more jobs while full time in school. Then came her diagnosis with Chiari I Malformation, resulting in two brain surgeries. These operations pretty much eliminated her chance at that career or much of any other career.

She took a job working at a local elementary school with a special needs kid during school hours last year. It messed her up, and she had to stop. Still many local friends think she stopped for no particular reason. Truth is, it was devastating to her health. Because she’s pretty and always looks happy around others, most do not realize the sickness runs deep and has ongoing effect. Few understand

what daily life is like when “health” seems to be a condition that will never describe her adequately again until That Day.

Molly is “sick,” never fully well, always living below the level of those first 20 years of her life and first 10 years of our marriage. Right now, for example, she wakes up every day wondering if she will have that particular headache that puts her down for a full day of vomiting and out of commission for anything else. And it is all a result of something no doctor is able to change.

Both of us have suffered varying levels of depression and anxiety the last 10 years. The last 10 years both Molly and I have lost our ability to sleep well. Sometimes we cannot fall asleep. Sometimes we cannot stay asleep. Rarely do either of us feel fully rested.

The first 10 years of our marriage I was in various stages of health, working hard both mentally and physically. After a few fun years of mountain biking and being in amazing shape, I found I had a few disc problems in my upper back. Often one day of exercise messes me up for weeks. Lifting weights has become nearly impossible. The only trip my family took to Disney World, I could not ride any coasters with the kids because of extreme pain when both awake and asleep.

We have had times of health, and times of “sickness.” What we have learned along the way is that we get to endure together and help each other in the sick times. I have told Molly many times that as odd as it seems I have found the times of her greatest fear and deepest sickness, namely right before and during her brain surgeries, to be times of great growth for me. She is helpless and needy, and I get to serve her. I learned to take care of her household duties as well as do my own work as a pastor. I learned to have someone lean hard on me in times of incredible need, and I enjoyed being there for her. I learned to lean hard on God because I was forced to live beyond my means—which is what I should have been doing all along.

Sick times have only begun. Our 20 years of marriage have us both about the age of 40, which is still young. We do not feel that young. Times get so bad that Molly will look at me and say, “I sure wish

Jesus would hurry up and come back.” She means it. And yet being married in sickness and health means we hold each others’ hand while waking up another day and working hard for each other, for our kids, and for the sake of the world hearing the gospel. What a joy to have all this pain and endure it together as husband and wife for all this time.

### **To Love And To Cherish**

What love meant to us 20 years ago was ridiculous. It meant a lot of awesome physical things (at least for me) and a general vibe of fun and adventure and playfulness and a general attitude of “What’s next? Let’s go do it!” For Molly it meant security and companionship. It meant sharing life with a best friend and lover.

Now, 20 years later, love is so much better though at first it does not feel like it is. Love early on was all over the place. It was public displays of affection and big toothy grins in photographs. It was weekend trips and events and discovery of wonderful life stuff. We got to explore the world we inhabited and the pleasures of marriage together, and it was exciting. It has not stayed quite that way.

With the births of our children in particular, the quick, heated, excited kind of love began to shrink. Actually, it did not shrink so much as it transformed. Now our sharply directed love for one another became spread out. Anyone who tells you that you can experientially love your spouse the same before having kids and as you are raising your raise kids is not telling you the truth. It becomes work. Justin Buzzard has had to write a book about how to *Date Your Wife* because too often we stop.<sup>1</sup> The first years of marriage were a constant date. Since having children, dating has had to become intentional. And those deep conversations into the night have become conversations into the evening after the kids are in bed and the last household chores have been done and “OH MY look at the time, I have to get up early in the morning for a MOPS group.”

We thank God for those years of racy love and the millions of kisses and endless hours of playful teasing. That is a part of our love for and cherishing of each other. We thank God for the years

of settling in to a deep and abiding love through huge mistakes, hurtful arguments, angry comments, putting off forgiving each other, apathetic stretches, and lulls between moments of kissing each other like we really mean it and do not have something better to do.

Love has lost some of its glorious youthful bite, but it has grown into learning I need to listen to her like her voice is living water poured into me. Love has become seeing gifts I am still learning to discover. Cherishing her has grown into a daily job of staring at her once again, like I did before, thanking God for the years on her face because it is those years of knowing each other deeply that gave her mildly aging face character and tells a thousand stories of her love for me, beyond what I have ever deserved. I have learned that loving and cherishing my wife almost never has to do with what sounds good to me, but learning what sounds good to her and letting her have that to her heart’s content and being the one to enjoy supplying it for her. And yet I am so far from doing that like I should. How much I love her, and how much I have yet to really love her.

### **Until Death Do Us Part**

To end this briefly, we have not gotten there yet. We have known for a long time it can end any day. We have never realized that more than right now. We have been given a 20 year gift and hope to enjoy it longer. But after 20 years, we have absolute certainty that we have been given to each other less to have fun and more to work for each other toward that common joy of life eternal. We are not headed toward a more perfect eternal marriage with each other, but with the Bridegroom who will show us what this momentary marriage was always pointing us to. It took us 20 years for this idea to actually sink in, but in many ways we have only scratched the surface of understanding what forever will look like. But considering the massive pain we have endured and the indescribable joy we have found in 20 years together, eternity is going to be a stunner.

I love you, Molly. Keep walking with me in these broken bodies and with these selfish strug-

gles with sin; hold my hand, and let's stay on this narrow path to something far better than what has so far been so amazingly good.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Justin Buzzard, *Date Your Wife* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

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# Husbands, Love Your Wives By Being the “Bad Guy”

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The title of this article has its genesis in Ephesians 5:25: “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” This command to husbands is, of course, part of a broader passage depicting the arrangement of the husband-wife relationship and other household relationships (Eph 5:22–6:10). The fact that the husband-wife relationship is predicated in this context upon the pattern of the Christ-church relationship is one key indicator that Paul’s instruction for husbands and wives is transcultural, as opposed to being restricted to first century marriages in and around Ephesus.

Having said that, twenty-first century husbands may still wonder *how* they ought love their wives as Christ loved the church. What does that mean in practice? That is an excellent question to ask, and the good news is we need not look any further than Ephesians 5 for an answer.

According to Paul’s argument in this passage, the pattern that Jesus laid down was one of “giving himself up” for his bride, the church, in pursuit of her sanctification (vv. 25–27). Then he states to husbands, “In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body” (vv. 28–30).

The directive is clear. After the pattern of Christ, husbands are to *love, nourish, and cherish* their wives as they do their own bodies. It does not get much more practical than that! So, let us consider a fairly common scenario in which Christian

husbands might love and lead our wives in accordance with this instruction. Though the possible applications are vast, the particular exhortation I have in mind at the moment focuses on those husbands who are also (or perhaps soon to be) fathers.<sup>1</sup>

From the vantage point of my own marriage, I have noticed (and have heard similar assessments from others) that one of the most routinely stressful seams in the day is the transition that occurs when I come home from work. This hour often generates a host of conflicting expectations about “what comes next” when dad comes home. Younger children are often bursting with energy and ready to play. Dad is frequently seeking a couch on which to collapse. Mom is looking for adult conversation and relief from having to be “on” all day with the kids, and so on.

Under such circumstances, the husband may find it very tempting to dismiss the concerns of everyone else—and especially his wife—in favor of “checking out” of life for some or most of the evening. In some cases, husbands may even come home feeling entitled to that kind of reprieve. “After all,” they reason, “I’ve worked hard all day to put food on the table and clothes on our backs. I deserve it, right?”

Sinking down into the couch, we may continue down our path of least resistance with the kids as well, either by immediately consenting to any and all of their requests, or by waving them back in the direction of mom to address their behavioral issues and other concerns. In either case, we effectively disengage from the family and potentially undermine much of the work of mom’s hands with the

kids throughout the rest of the day. And while we indulge in the comforts to which we feel so entitled, we may remain (or at least try to remain) ignorant that the wife of our youth is almost certainly more fatigued than we are. We can all too easily disregard the taxing nature of her daily labors, and perhaps even fail to wonder if she also might enjoy a reprieve. Sound familiar? Before you say “no” too quickly, ask your wife what she thinks.

In applying Ephesians 5:28–30 to our “end of the day” routine, might we not better love, nourish, and cherish our wives if we adopted a different approach? Instead of walking in the door preoccupied with our own fatigue, what if we came home prayerfully considering the needs of our wives as more important than our own (*à la* Christ, Phil 2:1–11), and sought to bear the “end of the day” burden in their place?<sup>2</sup> Indeed, as it pertains to lifting the parental burden, what if we determined that as soon as we enter the home, we would bear that frontline responsibility to discipline our children? While mom certainly has the authority to train and discipline the children (Eph 6:1–3), fathers would do well to take the lead when they are home.

In other words, what if we committed to leading and loving our wives by being the “bad guy” with the kids’ behavioral and disciplinary concerns when we are home, including when we get home at the end of the day and are tired?<sup>3</sup> Moreover, since we have no desire to restrict our interaction with our children only to those moments of correction (Eph 6:4), what if we made it our purpose not only to remove mom’s burden of being the “bad guy,” but walked in the door with a disposition to pursue warm and affectionate engagement with the children, not simply to bark orders at them. In this intentional approach mom would receive an enjoyable respite, and the children would come to await daddy’s homecoming with joy. To broaden the scope of the picture still more, what if we viewed taking that initiative not only as a responsibility but also as a ministry and privilege—a way to bless our wives, and also to be on the front lines tilling the soil of our children’s hearts and proactively training them as often as we are able?

As a purely practical mechanism, husbands

and wives might ease the conflicting expectations of this transitional hour by discussing in advance what the difficulties of this point in the day are. Then in response to each spouse’s expectations, a prayerful, loose-ended strategy could be employed for how they might make this “handoff” more effective.<sup>4</sup> In that case, the husband would be wise to clearly communicate his desire that his wife feel the freedom to voice her concerns without fear of nagging if the plans fail to work. After all, we should not be surprised to learn that “planning it out” in moments of strength is easier than “living it out” in moments of bodily fatigue. For in those moments of weariness, when we are battling the appetite for supreme self-regard, we are not merely resisting a tired body, we are also resisting the desires of the “flesh” (Gal 5:16–26). In those moments only the gospel has the power to meet that need.

Accordingly, in the kindness of God it seems that he has given husbands a daily opportunity to rely on the gospel as they resist a sense of entitlement to ease. By pouring themselves out daily for the well-being of their wives, husbands are pressed into the mold of Christ (Eph 5:25–30).<sup>5</sup> And as we love, nourish, and cherish in the strength that God supplies (1 Pet 4:11), we will find the capacity to bless both our wives and our children, all while exercising our own faith and bearing witness to the ultimate meaning of marriage, namely that Christ led and sacrificially loved his bride to the uttermost (Eph 5:31–32). Now that is a calling with *gravitas* that anchors us in grace, calls us to live daily with a view to the primary meaning of marriage, and reminds us that as we seek to love and lead our wives after the pattern of Christ there are no little moments.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>I realize that personal circumstances will vary from reader to reader. Some readers, for example, are no longer parents of children in the home, and others are not yet parents. My purpose here is not to account for all the possible circumstances that husbands face, but simply to present one fairly common scenario. Let the reader personalize and adapt the narrative example to their own unique situations. For another outstanding depiction of a husband loving his wife as his own body, see Wayne Grudem’s explanation of his vocational decision to relocate from Illinois to Arizona

out of regard for his wife's health ("Men and Women: Similarities and Differences, with Wayne Grudem," *Revive Our Hearts*, May 18, 2005, accessed December 17, 2013, <http://www.reviveourhearts.com/radio/revive-our-hearts/a-balanced-look-at-roles>).

<sup>2</sup>For a helpful resource in thinking more strategically about bearing some of the burdens of our wives, see Justin Buzard, *Date Your Wife* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>3</sup>Lest anyone misunderstand my intended meaning for "bad guy" here, allow me to emphasize that I, of course, am not condoning parental behaviors or attitudes that are harsh, mean-spirited, or unkind. I am simply referring to fathers stepping forward into the role that the children will (at least temporarily) view as the "bad guy," because we are holding them accountable and enforcing appropriate disciplinary consequences.

<sup>4</sup>As part of a strategy to love my wife as my own body, I have tried to learn to identify opportunities throughout the day where I can store up and recapture some reserves to spend on my family when I do get home. Here we might think of anything from adjusting dietary and exercise habits to increase energy, to trimming overcommitted schedules, to taking a short 10 minute walk around the office complex before making the drive home with the radio off so as to capture a few refreshing moments. I believe that expressions of "energy stewardship" such as these can all be helpful expressions of faithfulness. And yet, as the remainder of this article indicates, energy maintenance strategies are not sufficient in and of themselves—and that, too, is good news!

<sup>5</sup>For some husbands it is common practice to identify a landmark on the way home that they will use as a visible reminder to pray for a renewed appropriation of the transformative power of the gospel, as they transition out of the workplace and back into the home. See Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp's penetrating and gospel-centered analysis of this same sort of end of the day scenario in *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 157–58 and 167–69.

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# Why Homeschooled Girls are Feminism's Worst Nightmare

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My dual role as a professor of English and of honors at a Christian university has afforded me the great and greatly-cherished opportunity to teach and mentor scores of homeschooled girls. The thirty years I have spent in the halls of academia have forced me, often against my will, to be exposed to the theories, writings, and agendas of feminism. After many years of reflection, I have come to believe that the former poses the greatest single threat to and antidote for the latter.

Before I explain why, let me define what I mean by feminism. Though many today think that feminism means nothing more than “equal pay for equal work,” the feminism that is taught in our schools and universities has little to do with the rules of fair play in the workplace. Academic feminism rests on the fiercely-held belief that there are no essential differences between the sexes.

Whether or not such feminists accept the Bible as the Word of God, they deny that God made us male and female. He may have made us male and female biologically, but whatever the nature of our bodies, our souls are androgynous. It is society, not the Creator, that “invented” masculinity and femininity.

So strong is this belief, that feminists have replaced the word “sex” with “gender.” Whereas the first connotes an essential link between body and soul, the second points to something that is not inherent in our makeup but constructed by external forces. Masculinity and femininity do not define God-created (or even nature-created)

natures that we are born with but man-made, social-political-economic constructs.

Although it can be argued that this distinction between sex and gender has advanced (somewhat) the cause of equal pay for equal work, it has had a deleterious effect on the integrity, nobility, and beauty of God-given femininity. Sexism insists that men and women are different, but then treats femininity as a lesser and less important thing than masculinity. Feminism says that men and women are the same, but then systematically privileges masculine initiative, reason, logic, analysis, compartmentalization, and competition over feminine response, emotion, intuition, synthesis, holism, and nurture.

A century ago, G. K. Chesterton prophetically defined the feminist as someone “who dislikes the chief feminine characteristics.” Today, many feminists not only dislike femininity; they dismiss it as a bourgeois illusion. Increasingly since the 1960's, true femininity has been on the run. Traditional college girls who value their own femininity have either had to hide their God-given nature or apologize for their feminine values, perspectives, and choices.

Not so the Christian homeschooled girl.

I have become famous (or infamous) at my university for my ability to spot immediately a homeschooled girl, at least the kind of homeschooled girl who majors in the Humanities (English, Writing, History, Philosophy, Christianity, Art, Music) or who joins an Honors college devoted to a classical Christian curriculum. What is my method for

spotting such literary homeschooled girls? If when I speak to a freshman girl I feel that I am speaking (literally) to a character out of a Jane Austen novel, then I know that she was homeschooled. (To date, my success rate is about 85%).

On the surface, the link between the homeschooled girl and Elizabeth Bennet is part educational and part linguistic. Most homeschooled girls—henceforth, I will be focusing on the literary type—spend a great deal of their time reading great books, especially eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels. They therefore possess a much higher level of diction and understand the finer rules of etiquette. They value good conversation and are able to participate in it without succumbing to arrogance or false modesty.

But the link goes far deeper than that. The Jane Austen connection only rests partly on the homeschooler's ability to speak with eloquence and wit and to conduct herself with grace and charm. She resembles Elizabeth Bennet because she shares with all of Austen's heroines a firm and rooted sense of herself as a female member of the human race.

What I have found in my homeschooled students is what one used to find frequently in Catholic girls who attended parochial school. Such girls do not consider their femininity a limitation to be overcome or a weakness to be hidden, but something special and unique that must be nurtured and developed. The properly Catholic-educated girl of the past, like the homeschooled girl of today, is less likely than her peers to engage in pre-marital sex: not because she thinks sex is dirty or men are pigs, but because she views her own sexuality as a gift to be treasured by her and by her future husband.

Here are some of the other admirable qualities I have encountered in three-quarters of the five dozen Christian homeschooled girls I have had the privilege to teach over the last fifteen years and the five score whom I have met, briefly but memorably, through the speeches I have given for churches, universities, classical Christian academies, and worldview camps. Before listing them, however, let me make clear that I have encountered many of these qualities in girls who attended public or

private schools but whose parents worked hard to instill the below virtues in their daughters. Nevertheless, the consistency that I have observed among Christian homeschooled girls has been remarkable.

- They possess a razor-sharp wit with which they can cut pretentious people (especially males) down to size, but they rarely use this skill, and only when they are sorely provoked.

- They know what they believe and have a firm knowledge of the Bible, but they (unlike my biblically-literate male students) don't engage in forensic debates over minor theological points of controversy; they will, however, step in if the boys get too contentious or triumphalist.

- They have wonderfully synthetic and creative minds that make connections across disciplines and that open up new perspectives on old books; they don't do this in an abstract, pedantic, "scholarly" way, but in a warm and personal way.

- They respect their professors, but they speak to them on a level of equality; indeed, they will often gently set their male professors straight, not the way that a dean sets a faculty member straight, but the way a savvy wife sets her husband straight if he is starting to sound bombastic.

- Like the aristocratic ladies of the Old South, they are gifted in the arts; almost all of them can sing, and most play instruments and draw.

- They have not bought into the lies of our modern consumerist state; that is to say, they do not judge their value and worth on the basis of power, wealth, or job status.

- They proudly identify themselves as daughters, sisters, and granddaughters, and aspire to be identified as wives, mothers, and grandmothers—a self-identification that enhances, rather than diminishes, their sense of themselves.

- They desire to be helpmeets in the full biblical sense and to have their husbands trust in them and call them blessed; they desire as well to be mothers who will raise up godly children.

- Though not all of them plan to be stay-at-home moms, they all make it clear that if they have children, they will put them first.

The glorious and unashamed femininity that radiates from my homeschooled students is

a beautiful thing that at times brings me close to tears. These young women will give all they have to nurture the children God puts in their care and to make their home a humane and creative place where faith, hope, and love can thrive and bear fruit. And they desire to do this, not because they do not think they can contribute to the business world, but because they consider motherhood a high and noble calling.

To achieve such a calling, the modern woman must not only resist the voice of feminism but the voice of an excessively-male, ultra-materialistic society that only values things which can be calculated in monetary terms. I am convinced the housing crisis that kicked off the recession would not have happened if Americans had treated their houses as true homes rather than business investments. Much of the brokenness in our cities and schools could have been avoided had we valued the traditional family as the central building block of society and the ultimate source of personal and civic identity. But such things cannot happen as long as the true feminine voice is squelched.

I've been challenged by feminist students and colleagues, but never in a deep and lasting way. Their challenge is political or ideological, and, as such, is ultimately superficial. But those wise and witty homeschooling girls! They challenge me where it counts, by taking to task my masculine view of the world.

Feminists, whose view of the world is far more masculine than my own, do not like homeschooled girls, for such girls explode all the vicious and untrue stereotypes that feminists have been propagating for the last several decades. Feminism would have us believe that the stay-at-home mom is a timid doormat lacking in will and self-esteem, and that the conservative female student who champions femininity does so because she has been cowed into submission by male chauvinists. Homeschooled girls give the lie to these stereotypes.

They embrace their femininity as a positive and dynamic force that has the power to shape the world around them in a life-giving, soul-enhancing way. And they bravely defend their feminine

vision against all misogynists (whether sexists or feminists) who would demean it. Indeed, they have the wit and discernment to perceive that the feminist is finally a greater threat than the male chauvinist: for whereas the chauvinist demeans femininity, the feminist dismisses it altogether as a social construct that has no essential grounding in our God-created soul.

The homeschooled girls I have taught know who they are, both as female creatures made in the image of God and potential creators and nurturers of new human lives. And, because they know who they are, their self-esteem is both high and firmly rooted. If truth be told, it is more often the successful feminist than the homeschooled girl who struggles to hold on to a sense of herself that is daily eaten away by a faceless, androgynous, consumerist society.

As I indicated above, homeschooled girls usually refrain from engaging in direct debates meant to crush their opponent's views (they are too well-mannered for that), but they will speak up when they spy pretension and pomposity—even as Elizabeth Bennet gleefully punches holes in the pride of Mr. Darcy. They do not suffer fools gladly, especially when they are feminists who snidely degrade the very things they hold sacred. They will also, to my great delight, defend the value of a liberal-arts education over against a vocational school that privileges job training over the development of character.

Homeschooled girls are feminism's worst nightmare because they know that men and women are different, and they celebrate that difference. They don't hide their femininity under a bushel, but put it out in public for all to see. They respect and honor their male counterparts, but they will not allow their feminine voice and perspective to be marginalized.

I said earlier that they are like Jane Austen characters, but they are also like Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*. They have the brains and the skill to don the robes of the lawyer, but their motivation for doing so is not to win a debate or to air their bitterness in public or to settle old scores. It is, rather, to defend those they love. In an age that is in great need of the *true* feminine voice—not one

marred and twisted by the politics of identity and victimization—homeschooled girls are, to borrow a line from Portia, like “the gentle rain from heaven.”

The modern democracies of Europe and America have championed a view of the individual that is radically autonomous, that refuses to define itself by social, religious, or familial categories. Feminists have perpetuated and enflamed this intensely masculine view of the individual. Homeschooled girls, in their enthusiastic willingness to define themselves in terms of family and community, offer a way back to a more biblically-based and civilization-sustaining view of the individual.

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# Should a Woman Marry a Man Who Has a Problem with Pornography?

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This question is an urgent one given the importance of marriage, and the pervasive problem that pornography is in our culture. Many women have been concerned about this problem, and many more are sure to follow in their footsteps. I want to respond to this question in three ways: with a short answer, with a long answer, and by posing a more helpful consideration.

First, the short answer. There is a clear and concise response for a woman wondering whether she should marry a man after discovering he struggles with pornography: no. She should not do it. Marriage is too important and too exclusive to enter into it with a man who is cultivating desires for women beyond the one to whom he is married. The same is true for those approaching marriage. You need to be in a relationship with a man who is cultivating exclusive desires for you. That's the short answer.

Next, the long answer. The long answer still responds with, "No. You should not marry a man who has an active problem with pornography." I want, however, to elaborate on "no" by explaining why it is wrong to marry such a man. This is what Proverbs 6:32–33 says:

He who commits adultery lacks sense;  
he who does it destroys himself.  
He will get wounds and dishonor,  
and his disgrace will not be wiped away.

This passage in Proverbs 6 does not mention the word pornography. Neither does any other verse in the Bible. When you let Jesus explain, however, that adultery is about desiring a woman to whom you are not married (Matt 5:27–28) then you see that modern men who ogle air-brushed women are serial adulterers. When you grasp that fact you understand that this passage in Proverbs is an incredible condemnation of the man you want to marry who has a problem with porn. He is a man who lacks sense. He destroys himself. He will get wounds and dishonor. His disgrace will not be wiped away. How could you consider marrying into a situation like this?

I have talked with many women who try to make an argument for pursuing marriage with their boyfriend who has an ongoing porn struggle. They often point out that there are tons of good things about him, and that his porn problem is only one slice of his life. I have no doubt that is true. Very few of us are defined entirely by our vices and exclusively devoid of virtue. Beyond this fact, many of these women express great confidence in the power of Christ to change men and set them free from this problem. That is certainly true, as well. As true as those realities are, you will say "I do" to the man who shows up on your wedding day, not the man you hope he will become afterwards. I'm sure your boyfriend has many wonderful things about him! I know Jesus can change him! The greater part of wisdom, however, is to wait and allow Jesus to do some of that work before you marry.

Some women get nervous because they are convinced that *this man* is the man they need to marry and *right now* is the time to do it. You need to allow the wisdom of Proverbs to cut through that confusion. If you marry the man that Proverbs warns against then you are signing up to share in the promised destruction, dishonor, and disgrace that is coming to him. I could write a book full of stories of women who married immoral men and would love to trade all of their current struggles for decades of singleness. I promise you that the ache of singleness does not compare to the anguish of being married to an adulterer. This doesn't mean that you must marry a man who is perfect, or that you cannot marry a man who has struggled with porn *in his past*. It does mean that you should only marry a man who is currently winning the battle, and has a track record of change.

Finally, I would like to pose what may be a more helpful consideration. It is important for a woman to avoid marriage to a man who has a problem with pornography. But making that decision requires that she is aware there is a problem. The reality is that it would be much better for a woman to marry a man who looks at porn and is being honest about it, than a man who is looking at porn and lying about it. That means the truly urgent matter for women concerns how they discover whether the man they are considering for marriage is struggling with pornography.

There are all kinds of ways that a young woman can get a handle on her boyfriend's commitment to purity. If I had time I would love to explain several indicators of sexual holiness including the degree to which he is pursuing purity in his relationship with you. Other indicators include his Christian maturity and spiritual leadership, especially the kinds of relationships he cultivates with others in his church. When it comes to the specific issue of his involvement with pornography, however, you will need to talk with him about it.

How you bring this up is very important. I encourage women that they should avoid an attitude of suspicion about the men in their life. Pornography is a problem of epidemic proportions that many men fight against. That doesn't mean, however,

that it is necessarily a problem for the man you are considering for marriage. Love demands that we believe the best of others until we have a reason to believe otherwise (1 Cor 13:7). Believing the best of your boyfriend means that you will not accuse him, but instead move towards him with loving care, concerned for how he is protecting himself from the availability of porn. As a young woman considering marriage to a man who is a believer it is completely appropriate that you would ask caring questions about what he is doing to defend himself against such a considerable threat.

You should ask your boyfriend or fiancé who is in his life that is helping him with issues of lust and pornography. You should ask him what technology he uses to monitor and block pornography on his phone, computer, and tablet devices. If he does not have a person who is doing this, and if he is not protecting his equipment then you should request that he begin to do it. If you know that your man is taking measures to protect himself against pornography then that should be very affirming for you. You do not have to be his accountability partner or examine his Internet history to be able to trust others who are doing this. A man who refuses to do these things has told you all you need to know about his commitment to purity.

In the pornographic culture in which we live, fewer and fewer women will find it possible to find a young man who has not had at least some exposure to pornography. In such a world women who are looking for a man who has never viewed pornography or who does not consider it a temptation will be disappointed. This reality does not mean, however, that godly women should settle for a man with an ongoing porn struggle. Instead what she should look for is a guy who is honest about a struggle, is seeking to get ahead of the problem with various kinds of accountability, has a track record of victory, and is passionate about growing in purity by getting very close to the Christ who alone can forgive and cleanse former sins.

# Five Forms of Egalitarianism: With a Critique of David Instone-Brewer's View of the Household Codes

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I encountered a new type of egalitarianism the other day. At least, it was new to me. In the course of discussing different approaches to gender roles over the last ten years or so, my experience has been that the same four varieties of evangelical (or, in one case, quasi-evangelical) egalitarianism always crop up—exegetical, experiential, trajectory hermeneutic, and “kingdom now” egalitarianism—and I thought that I had the whole landscape mapped out. But then I came across an article by David Instone-Brewer in *Christianity* magazine which, though resembling two of these somewhat, was so different in its overall approach that it required a whole new category.<sup>1</sup> I haven't settled on a name for it yet, but for the purposes of this article we can call it “uninspired” egalitarianism.

First, though, here's a sketch of the original four. *Exegetical egalitarianism* consists of the view that we should do whatever the New Testament says, but that when the exegesis is done properly, there is no restriction on women being elders in the New Testament. Thus, the famous prohibition of 1 Timothy 2:12 is about teaching false doctrine in a way that usurps or undermines men, and need not imply eldership was off-limits; the requirement for elders to be “one women men” simply means that men were the only people in that world who would be polygamous; and the wide range of women in key roles in his churches indicates that Paul had

no problem with women teaching or leading men. This is the position of Tom Wright, Mike Bird, Ben Witherington, and many others; and although I disagree with it in a number of ways, I regard it as the most defensible of the four.<sup>2</sup>

At the opposite end of the spectrum is *experiential egalitarianism*, which represents those for whom, no matter what Paul or anyone else might say, their experience indicates that women can be elders, and that's that. This might be personal (“I've felt God tell me to do this, and you've got no right to say that's wrong”), or observational (“so-and-so is a woman, and she's an elder, and God is blessing her, so how can that be wrong?”), or even societal (“the world has changed, and if we keep doing this, they'll think we're idiots”). This brand of egalitarianism was pointedly illustrated to me recently when a French woman, with whom I was discussing 1 Timothy 2, pointed at the text and said simply, “Je ne serais jamais d'accord avec ça.”

Increasingly popular in the last ten years or so, *trajectory hermeneutic egalitarianism* is the idea that the New Testament doesn't give us God's definitive ethic, but it gives us an important stepping stone (or series of stepping stones) towards it. So yes, the apostles thought wives should submit to their husbands, but that doesn't mean *we* should; after all, they were children of their time, and God was trying to draw them forwards into new levels of

equality and inclusivity. I find this view to be both hermeneutically problematic, in putting “where the New Testament is headed” over “what the New Testament says.” Despite the attempts of William Webb and others to constrain the way it works in practice (as recent announcements on gay marriage have illustrated), it risks undermining huge swathes of apostolic teaching on other issues contemporary people find unpalatable.<sup>3</sup>

And then there is “*kingdom now*” egalitarianism. This view holds that we should all be egalitarians because the essence of the Christian life is to bring the future kingdom into the present and because in the new creation there will be no submission of wives to husbands or distinctions in gender roles in the church. Two Vineyard pastors put this to me recently, and my response was to suggest that, although I did not consider it a slippery slope leading to liberalism, it was certainly a slippery slope leading to *celibacy* (not to mention theonomy, the abolition of pastoral ministry, all denominations, and so on); I felt certain these two married, democratic, denomination-leading pastors would see where I was going with that. Anyway: those were the four I had encountered until a few weeks ago.

Then I read David Instone-Brewer, who is an expert in Rabbinics and New Testament Studies (as well as being the editor of the *Tyndale Bulletin* and an extremely gracious man), argue briefly in *Christianity* for what I am tentatively calling *uninspired egalitarianism*.<sup>4</sup> His suggestion, following a paper he delivered to the Evangelical Theological Society in 2005, is that we should not assume that the instructions to wives in the New Testament *Haus-tafeln* (Eph 5:22–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1; 1 Tim 2:9–3:7; 6:1–2; Titus 2:3–10; 1 Pet 2:13–3:7) are inspired by God (hence “uninspired”), since they clearly adapt the Aristotelian three rules of household submission. Rather, he argues, we should regard them like Paul’s quotations of Menander, Aratus and Epimenides (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor 15:33; Titus 1:12), namely, as citations of pagan thinkers rather than as divinely inspired instruction for God’s people: “we should not automatically attribute these to God and consider them to be part of his perfect law.” Consequently, he reasons, we should not follow them

today if we live in countries where gender equality is taken for granted—and in fact, it would be “an ironic paradox” if we were to do so. Interesting.

The argument, which forms the second half of an article ostensibly about Esther, runs as follows, with my comments in square brackets:

1. There was a battle between two rival family structures in the ancient world: the Jewish one, in which “many feisty and independent women are celebrated,” and the Gentile (Persian and Greek) one, in which “women were inferior to men.” [Fair enough, although as biblical critics never tire of telling us, there are a number of Old Testament passages that are not quite as proto-feminist as contemporary readers might like. Nonetheless, I agree with Instone-Brewer’s general point here, and regularly teach on the large differences between the pagan and Jewish views of women].

2. The book of Esther presents this struggle, with Esther trying to defeat the latter. [Yes. The narrative lauds her courage in approaching the king, and paints Xerxes as a boorish, drunken oaf at the time of his pronouncement in 1:22].

3. The Persian and Greek approach was victorious by the time of the New Testament, with Aristotle’s threefold submission (wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters) taken for granted in the Greco-Roman world. [Broadly speaking, yes].

4. Aristotle’s rules were gradually incorporated into both Jewish thinking and Christian thinking, and were only cited and kept in order to avoid seeming “uncouth and immoral in the eyes of their Gentile overlords.”<sup>5</sup> [This is hugely debatable; see below].

5. Consequently, these texts should not be seen as part of God’s word to us. After all, not everything in the Bible is spoken by God; some is spoken by fools (Psa 53:1), drunken kings (Est 1:22) and pagan poets (Titus 1:12). In the same way, Peter and Paul are merely citing Aristotle’s three rules of submission in

these passages, and therefore we should not necessarily attribute them to God.

The problem with his fourth point, on which Instone-Brewer's argument depends, is not the claim that Jewish and Christian writers built their *Haustafeln* around Aristotle's structure (which they clearly did), nor the claim that they were eager not to appear uncouth or immoral to the Gentiles around them (which they clearly were). The problem is the enormous jump—with all its implications for our hermeneutics, our ethics and our view of Scripture—to the idea that *all* these writers were doing was citing Aristotle (rather than, say, adapting his form and subverting his content), and that in doing so they reflected nothing of God's intention for male-female relationships. This is far from the case. In *Contra Apionem*, Josephus grounds his instructions repeatedly in the Torah, and includes some instructions which first century pagans might well have regarded as “uncouth and immoral,” including the death penalty for homosexuality and failing to honour parents:

But, then, what are our laws about marriage? That law owns no other mixture of sexes but that which nature hath appointed, of a man with his wife, and that this be used only for the procreation of children. But it abhors the mixture of a male with a male; and if any one do that, death is its punishment. It commands us also, when we marry, not to have regard to portion, nor to take a woman by violence, nor to persuade her deceitfully and knavishly . . . The law ordains also, that parents should be honoured immediately after God himself, and delivers that son who does not requite them for the benefits he hath received from them, but is deficient on any such occasion, to be stoned. It also says that the young men should pay due respect to every elder, since God is the eldest of all beings . . . He hath also provided for such as are taken captive, that they may not be injured, and especially that the women may not be abused.<sup>6</sup>

Worse is to come when the New Testament texts are considered. In fact, of the four *bêtes noires* for contemporary egalitarian interpreters (Eph 5:22–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1; 1 Tim 2:8–3:7; 1 Pet 2:13–3:7), only one mentions the concern about the perception of Gentiles at all (1 Pet 2:11–12). On the other hand, these texts repeatedly ground their instructions in the Scriptures, the created order, the nature of life “in the Lord,” and the relationship between Christ and the church:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, **as to the Lord**. For the husband is the head of the wife **even as Christ is the head of the church**, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now **as the church submits to Christ**, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, **as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her**, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, **just as Christ does the church**, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that **it refers to Christ and the church**. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Children, obey your parents **in the Lord**, for this is right. “Honour your father and mother” (**this is the first commandment with a promise**), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, **as you would Christ**,

not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but **as bondservants of Christ**, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will **as to the Lord and not to man**, knowing that whatever good anyone does, **this he will receive back from the Lord**, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that **he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven**, and that there is no partiality with him. (Eph 5:22–6:9)

Wives, submit to your husbands, **as is fitting in the Lord**. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, **for this pleases the Lord**. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, **fearing the Lord**. Whatever you do, work heartily, **as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ**. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that **you also have a Master in heaven**. (Col 3:18–4:1)

We could go on, but this should suffice to make the point. Paul's stated basis for instructing believers in this way is *not*, as Instone-Brewer claims, merely to avoid appearing uncouth and immoral to the pagan world around them. Rather, it is to teach believers how to live out a Christ-shaped life in whatever position they find themselves in, through instructions that are thoroughly grounded in the Scriptures, the way of Christ, creation and the gospel, even when they use a traditionally Aristotelian *Haustafel* structure. As has often been pointed out, the New Testament household codes have been so thoroughly reworked in light of the gospel that to

refer to them as “citations” of Aristotle, as if they were merely parroting what he said in order to catch a break from nearby pagans, is thoroughly unwarranted. Though the form is Aristotelian, the content is unequivocally Christian, with its theological roots stretching right back to Genesis 1–2. In the case of Ephesians, Instone-Brewer's suggestion is particularly implausible, since the household code follows a lengthy series of instructions *not* to live like the Gentiles (4:17–19; 5:5–8, 11–12), and as is well-known, works out the practical nature of a Spirit-filled life of rejoicing, thanksgiving and submission (5:18–21). (The parallel passage in Colossians suggests that these mutually submissive relationships flow from the word of Christ dwelling within the believer, but the point is the same).

So to use the language of “citing” Aristotle, and from there to suggest that these texts carry no more authority over the believer than Paul's quotations of Menander or Epimenides is to misrepresent entirely the nature of the texts themselves, let alone the nature of Scripture. It is also to give undue credence to a common false dichotomy: biblical passages are either informed by previous Greco-Roman or Jewish texts, or they are inspired by God. The household codes in Paul and Peter, like all the writings in the New Testament, are shaped by both, with historical, literary and rhetorical contexts in no way displacing or abolishing divine inspiration. And that means that the passionate, courageous, Esther-like femininity that ancient Jews (and David Instone-Brewer) rightly celebrate can, and should, coexist with a marriage shaped around the service, love and submission of Christ and his church.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>David Instone-Brewer, “Esther: The Best in Bed,” *Christianity* (August 2013), 58–59.

<sup>2</sup>Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters* (London: SPCK, 2002), 64–68; idem., “Women's Service in the Church: The Biblical Basis,” *N.T. Wright Page*, accessed 17 December 2013, [http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Women\\_Service\\_Church.htm](http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Women_Service_Church.htm); Michael Bird, *Bourgeois Babes, Bossy Wives and Bobby Haircuts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Volume I: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1–2 Timothy and 1–3 John* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).

<sup>3</sup>William Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the*

*Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

<sup>4</sup>Instone-Brewer, "Esther," 58–59.

<sup>5</sup>Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:2–3; Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2:24–30; Titus 2:5; Eph 5:22–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1; 1 Tim 2:8–3:7; 6:1–2; 1 Pet 2:18–3:7; see Instone-Brewer, "Esther," 59.

<sup>6</sup>Con. Ap., 2:25, 28, 30.

# One Beautiful, Scandalous Night: How God Brings Redemption Through A Foolish Plan, A Faithful Woman, and A Righteous Man (Ruth 3:1–18)

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*Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do." And she replied, "All that you say I will do."*

*So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your ser-*

*vant, for you are a redeemer." (Ruth 3:1–9)*

Sometimes things are not as they appear. For instance, the Trojan Horse came as an outstanding gift but contained inside a vengeful army. In politics the promising candidate turns out to be another self-interested bureaucrat. And the friend who seemed so trustworthy reveals his true colors when he overspends your credit card.

It is a sad fact of life, we often cannot trust the 'goodness' of those around us. But conversely, we cannot always trust the 'badness' of things either. Sometimes an apparent scandal is nothing more than a lack of understanding or a premature conclusion. And sometimes, God works in a mysterious way to bring light out of darkness, life out of death.

A perfect example of this is the story of the midnight encounter between Boaz and Ruth. In this chapter the author of Ruth inches closer to resolving Naomi's plight and Ruth's protection, but not without passing through one of the most scandalous nights in the Bible. Or at least, Ruth 3 looks like one of the most scandalous nights in Holy Scripture.

Under the guise of unrighteousness, God is at work to unite Boaz and Ruth and to bring from their holy union a blessing that touches Naomi and the nations. In his sovereign wisdom God permits the faith-filled but folly-laden plans of Naomi to draw out the righteous character of Ruth and Boaz, as these saints are called upon to exercise incredible self-restraint to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Naomi's Foolish Plan (3:1-5)**

Chapter 3 begins with Naomi concocting a plan to find Ruth a husband. Verse 1 reads, "Should I not seek rest for you." Based on a comparison with Ruth 1:9, "rest" is clearly another way saying that Naomi aims to do a little match-making for Ruth. And in Boaz, the close relative, Naomi believes she has found her man. In contrast to her lethargy in Moab, Naomi is now primed to assist her daughter-in-law.<sup>1</sup>

Halfway through the book, Naomi's faith is being restored. No longer is she embittered and apathetic. Instead, she is actively planning a way for Ruth to find a husband. Yet, her counsel is far from sanctified. As I will show from the text, faith generates Naomi's scheme but folly is not far from her.

Verses 2-4 give the details of Naomi's plan. First, Naomi's actions are impelled by the quality and proximity of the man Boaz. Whereas chapter 2 introduced this man's virtue, now Naomi's words are filled with emphasis. When she asks, "Is not Boaz our relative?" she is really asking, "Is he not *the One*?"<sup>2</sup>

Of course, Boaz is the one, but on what basis does Naomi know that? At this point, her confidence is based upon something that has yet to be manifested. Naomi's actions are understandable, but also hasty (cf. Prov. 19:2).

Convinced that Boaz is the One, Naomi acts in a way that resembles a little too closely the actions of Moab (cf. Num 25). Notice the specifics of her plan. In the middle of the barley harvest, Naomi knows Boaz will be at the threshing floor night and day (Ruth 3:2). The threshing floor was usually an elevated place outside of town where men like Boaz would spend the night to protect their crops from thieves. However, threshing floors were also known to be a place where prostitutes would frequent (Hos 9:1).<sup>3</sup>

### ***A Perilous Place***

For any ancient Near Eastern reader, the story's location would have raised more than a few eyebrows. Let us not forget that these were the days of the Judges (Ruth 1:1), when men did whatever was right in their own eyes (Jdg 21:25). Away from home, tired from labor, loose women might exchange sexual favors for grain. In fact, from a certain distance, the movements of Ruth and Boaz would have a striking resemblance to such a sensual trade. In the beginning of the chapter, Ruth prepares herself to meet the man, and at the end of the chapter, she leaves the threshing floor with a sack full of grain (vv. 14-15).<sup>4</sup>

And of course, this is where looks can be deceiving. As the narrator recalls, there is not the slightest hint of impropriety between Ruth and Boaz. And yet, to the outside observer, there would be in this encounter great material for gossip.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, we can assert that the actions of Ruth and Boaz are entirely righteous, but at the same time, it is possible to see the dubious counsel of Naomi. Upon close inspection, her instructions take on the worldly wisdom of Moab: If you want a man, go after him. If you can present yourself in an alluring manner, what would stop you? This is not pure and spiritual wisdom, but that which is of the flesh (cf. James 3:15-18).<sup>6</sup>

### ***Dangerous Instructions***

Naomi begins by telling Ruth, "Wash therefore and anoint yourself with oil" (Ruth 3:3a). Customarily this kind of washing preceded a sexual encounter or marriage, as in Ezekiel 16:8-9.<sup>7</sup> Next, she says, "Put on your cloak and go to the threshing floor" (Ruth 3:3b). Although the NIV suggests that Ruth put on her "best clothes," it seems more likely that Ruth removed her garments of mourning. Against a reading that suggests that Ruth is proposing to Boaz, Ruth is instead removing any barriers from Boaz redeeming her.<sup>8</sup>

Third, Naomi takes into account the condition of the man: "But do not make yourself known, until he is done eating and drinking" (v. 3a). In other words, "wait for the evening to come and when he is relaxed and merry with wine, go to him." It is too much to infer that Boaz would be drunk or that

Naomi is gambling on the fact that his food and drink would lower his inhibitions, but it is true that with a merry heart, in the middle of the night, with a young perfumed woman, Boaz is going to have to make decisions that deny his physical longings.

Naomi continues, “When he lies down . . . go and uncover his feet and lie down” (v. 4). The words here are highly suggestive. “Uncover” is a word often used to speak of sexual nakedness (Lev 18:6; Ezek 16:37; 23:10). “Feet” can sometimes refer to exposing oneself (Exod 4:25; Jdg 3:24; 1 Sam 24:3; Ezek 16:25). And “lie down” was a euphemism for intercourse (Gen 19:34; Deut 22:25). Collectively, these words (repeated again in v. 7) have a staggering effect on the reader. Even if Naomi is not commanding Ruth to proposition Boaz, the reader is forced to wonder what exactly Naomi is telling Ruth to do.<sup>9</sup>

Last, Naomi tells Ruth, “wait for him to tell you what to do.” This is Naomi’s final instruction. And it is the reason why I do not think Naomi is explicitly telling her to offer sex.<sup>10</sup> She is leading Ruth to present herself to Boaz, trusting that he will do the right thing. But what would that be? There is evidence in Ruth 2 that Boaz would seek to protect Ruth from disgrace and abuse. But how could she be sure? What *would* Boaz tell Ruth to do?

Naomi must have trusted that Boaz was not like the men of Benjamin who were notorious for abusing women (cf. Jdg 19). But was her confidence in this man too great? No man, especially in the period of the Judges, was incapable of unrighteousness. And thus Naomi’s brazen scheme endangers the purity of this union from the start.

### ***A Complicated Situation***

This presentation of Naomi accounts for the complexity of the chapter. Naomi is acting in faith, but she is simultaneously directed by folly. Her way of thinking is reminiscent of the women of Moab, but neither is it entirely inappropriate.

In fact, it seems that Naomi and Ruth are actually responding to the kindness of Boaz’s subtle advances.<sup>11</sup> Against feminist interpreters who understand Naomi and Ruth as models of female empowerment, Naomi and Ruth are actually displaying a kind of risky submission. They are

not taking their own initiative; they are following Boaz’s lead in a subtle but substantive form of complementarity.<sup>12</sup>

To press this point further, it is worth asking: What evidence is there that Boaz has given leadership to these women? Remember, Boaz is an older man, who is pleasantly surprised that Ruth had not run after younger men (3:10). He is a wealthy landowner with a great reputation among his peers. Under these circumstances, how could he communicate his interest to a younger woman, especially when she is a foreigner from Moab?

The situation is more than a little complicated. Boaz, the older bachelor, could not just ask her to Starbucks. He had to lead in other ways. In fact, he would have to do the things that we see him doing in chapter 2.<sup>13</sup> In that chapter, Boaz showed Ruth unusual favor (vv. 10, 13). He told his men to respect her (v. 9); he invited her to eat with him and then urged his men to help her (vv. 14–16). He initiated unusual kindness to her, and he waited to see if she would respond.

Under God’s providence, Ruth did respond, with the help of Naomi who perceived the intentions of her late husband’s relative. She saw his kindness as an invitation to respond. And though her exact steps may have been suspect, her counsel to Ruth set up a midnight rendezvous with redemptive-history on the line.

Such human actions, tainted even with folly, were not outside of God’s decree. In fact, the stratagems leading up to the scene at the threshing floor remind us that God works all things for the good of his purposes and his people. Instead of letting this midnight rendezvous slide into an illicit one-night stand, God reveals the character of these two lovers. In the moment of temptation the man and woman display unusual self-restraint. God is glorified. And in the process we are reminded that God’s wisdom far surpasses our own.

### **Ruth’s Faithful Approach (3:6-9)**

Moving from planning to execution, verse 6 takes us to the threshing floor. Verse 5 records Ruth’s words to Naomi: “All that you say, I will do.” And verse 6 says, “She went down . . . and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded.” As this

whole episode will reveal, Ruth is a woman of character, whose virtue is not seen in her willingness to break the rules, but in her unusual obedience to Naomi, Boaz, and God.

In context, verse 7 brings us to the threshing floor, where it says that after Boaz's heart was merry, he retired to the far end of the grain pile. Laying at a distance from the other men, Ruth approached him just as Naomi told her. In typical Hebrew narrative fashion, the words from verse 4 are recycled: "She came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down" (v. 7).

Verse 8 gives us the moment of truth. At midnight, after Ruth's anxious wait, the man suddenly stirs. He finds Ruth at his feet, and he asks: "Who are you?"

### ***A Humble Response***

Ruth responds and she says three things. First, she honestly identifies herself: "I am Ruth. . ." Next, she describes herself as "his servant." The wording is important. She does not come to instruct him or lead him in the way she wants. She comes as his servant, ready to do as he wills (cf. 3:4). Third, she entreats, "Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."

In this statement, she tells him that she sees him as her redeemer. She indicates that she wants to come under his wings. This language is vital to understand what is happening. First, the language of covering her with his skirt carries clear marital connotations (cf. Ezek 16:8–9). However, this language is not her own. She is repeating Boaz's language back to him.

Against the feminist reading of this verse, Ruth is not taking her own initiative to ask Boaz to marry her. This is not the Old Testament equivalent of a Sadie Hawkins dance. The author has made sure that we can see that Ruth's entreaty is in direct response to Boaz's own kind words to her.

In Ruth 2:12 Boaz applauds Ruth for taking refuge under the Lord's wings. Commending her for her willingness to leave her "father and mother" along with her "native land," Boaz says, "The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, *under whose wings you have come to take*

*refuge!*" Boaz recognized the hardships Ruth had to undergo to come to Israel, and he commended her for seeking refuge in the Lord.

Now Ruth is responding to Boaz in kind. After observing the way that Yahweh provided grain, protection, and favor at the hands of Boaz, Ruth is asking Boaz if he will continue to be the Lord's redeemer. After all, he has already acted in this way, and Ruth is now responding to the noble actions of this worthy man. Indeed, she is displaying her character by submitting herself to him as *his servant*.

### ***Complementarian Beauty***

While feminist interpreters want to make Ruth's actions a power play over the man, the evidence goes against that interpretation. First, the historical context is antithetical to such a modern view. Second, Ruth's language ("your servant") and posture (laying at his feet) indicate a submissive spirit (in the vein of 1 Peter 3:1–6). Third, the preceding chapter displays the initiative of Boaz. Fourth, Naomi's instruction is to do what the man says ("he will tell you what to do"). This is hardly a ploy to gain the upper hand.

It is far better to see the virtue of Ruth in her complementarian beauty. In her humble submission to follow her mother-in-law's plan, we see a woman willing to honor her authorities. Likewise, in coming to Boaz, she displays both courage and trust that this man will know what to do. Already, Ruth 1–2 shows her godly character in her willingness to unite herself to the people of Israel and in her industry to glean in the fields like the Proverbs 31 woman. In all these ways, Ruth stands tall as a complementarian woman who is following God and the authorities placed in her life.

### ***Boaz's Blessed Righteousness (Ruth 3:10–13)***

After Ruth discloses her identity in verse 9, the reader is left to guess what Boaz's response will be? The author answers the question immediately. Verses 10–13 reveal his blessed thankfulness for Ruth's kindness. He says,

And he said, "May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first

in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.”

Boaz praises Ruth for responding to his kindness (v. 10). He reaffirms her character and that her virtuous reputation is well known (v. 11). Then, he affirms the fact that he is a redeemer (v. 12). However, he also says something else—something that Naomi must not have been aware of and something that could have jeopardized her plan.

Boaz tells Ruth that he cannot legally have her because there is another redeemer who stands closer to her. If Ruth’s character sparkles in her obedience and submissive spirit, Boaz’s righteousness is just as sterling!

In the middle of the night, hidden from the sight of anyone else, under the covers with a perfumed young woman, Boaz has the presence of mind to say, “No! I must uphold the law, and consider my brother.” Boaz’s character is not just a public act; it is the genuine article. In a moment when a young woman lies beside him, he halts the action to make sure that he does not violate the laws of levirate marriage.

### *A Complementarian Model of Self-Controlled Purity*

Boaz’s actions are a powerful model for young men. Men, what would you do in his situation? Would you be so committed to consider your brother ahead of yourself (1 Thess 4:6)? Would you honor God in that moment, when no one else is looking? Boaz’s triumph in this situation reflects a heart that is set on the Lord, and a character that was established long before this night. He is a model of true manhood who does not need to grasp after what he cannot legally have. He trusts in the Lord and he is moved to do things the right way.

As a result, Boaz’s righteousness has a far-reaching effect. By exercising self-control in the moment, Boaz blesses Ruth, Naomi, and in time, the whole world. He is not interested in simply satisfying his libido. He has set apart the Lord as his king (he is the true Elimelech), and thus God is able to use him in an incredible way.

This scene is so breathtaking because it stands in such stark contrast to the world we live in. In the middle of what Hollywood would make a bedroom scene, Boaz, and Ruth too, stand out as two Spirit-empowered, self-controlled people. They do not give into temptation because they are not living for themselves but for God (cf. Ruth 1:16–17; 2:4).

They model the kind of purity God requires. They are a man and woman who are just, who love mercy, and who walk humbly with their God (cf. Mic 6:8). Indeed, by close examination of this event, we find not the least hint of impurity. Instead, we find a godly man protecting and leading Ruth to a long-term, legal commitment. And we find in Ruth, a woman who trusts in the character and decision of Boaz. Together, they model what a complementarian relationship should be.

### **Good News for the Unrighteous (Ruth 3:14–18)**

Still, God is doing more in them than simply giving us a model for righteousness. Yahweh is also working to bring a savior who will redeem the unrighteous. In other words, Ruth 3 is not just good news for those who have said “no” to sexual temptations. It is also good news for those who haven’t.

Don’t miss this. While Boaz and Ruth’s story calls you and I to be righteous, it also promises hope to those who have failed and taken foolish paths. The proof of this is found in the way God brings blessing to Naomi through this righteous couple.

Remember: Naomi has unwittingly put this couple in a compromising position. In the wisdom of Moab, she almost blew up the whole thing. She has set a powder keg next to a gas stove, and hoped that the sparks of romance would fly.

### *For Naomi and the Rest of Us*

Unfortunately, Christians do this all the time. Trying to do the right thing, they act in haste or ignorance. They mean well, but use worldly meth-

ods to achieve God's result. As a result they put themselves and others in terrible positions. Though, they are justified by faith in God's promise, they still make decisions like the world.

Maybe this describes something in your past. In trying to serve God you've made poor decisions. Your actions have hurt others; your decisions have brought about pain. If you have trusted Christ, you know you are forgiven, but now you suffer from the consequences of your folly. To those in this situation, Ruth 3 offers hope.

The hope is found in the fact that in this story, blessing comes to those who act righteously and to those who hope in them. In other words, blessing comes to Ruth and Naomi because of their similar trust in Boaz. Boaz is the agent of blessing in this story, and as both women trust in him, they both will find fulfillment. Ruth will receive a husband (4:13) and Naomi a son (4:17). While Ruth shows great character in this story and Naomi displays questionable wisdom, both women are eventually "redeemed" because of their relationship with Boaz.

### ***God Works for Those Who Wait***

In fact, in the remaining verses of Ruth 3 we see just how active Boaz is to bless Ruth and Naomi. In verses 14–15, Boaz tells Ruth to rest at his feet until morning. She complies, but before she departs, Boaz fills her shawl with grain. He does this so that Ruth would not leave "empty-handed" and so that Naomi would be blessed (v. 17). Indeed, as with every movement in this story, it is the man who leads, guides, and provides for these two destitute women.

We can see in his actions the way that God is favoring Ruth and Naomi through his instrument of blessing—Boaz. But there is something else. When Ruth returns to Naomi, the two women discuss all the intricacies of the night and Naomi makes this profound statement: "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today" (v. 18). This confidence in Boaz's action surely stems from the midnight rendezvous, but it also reveals something of the character of God.

In the story of Ruth, Boaz has become the human means by which God would bless Naomi

and Ruth. And thus his actions show how God himself is going to bless these women. And just as Naomi ascribed to Boaz a posture of earnest activity on their behalf, so we know that the Lord will not rest until he blesses his people (Ps 121). As Isaiah 64:4 says, "From of old no one has heard, or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who act for those who wait for him." Truly, in Boaz we have a man with the character of God, one who works vigorously for the women who wait for him.

In this way, the story of Boaz and Ruth prefigures the kind of complementarian service that is later substantiated in Christ and his church. Christ, as the righteous redeemer, acts on behalf of his bride, going so far as to even lay down his life for her (Eph 5:25–27). In turn, his bride waits upon him and trusts in him (Eph 5:22–24). Of course, like Ruth, this never means that the bride of Christ is inactive or lethargic; it simply notes that what we find in Ruth 3 is a perfect, historic parable of Christ and the church—a man who leads and redeems and a woman who trusts and obeys.

### **Conclusion**

Feminists have regularly co-opted this story to assert their agenda, but upon a closer reading of the passage, we find a beautiful and distinct harmony between a leading man and lovely lady.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, as we pull back from Ruth 3, we quickly discover that the redemptive-historical significance of their union relates to the coming of king David (Ruth 4:17–22) and later to the birth of Jesus Christ himself (Matt 1:1–17, esp. v. 5).

In this canonical perspective, it becomes evident that Boaz is not simply a righteous man who Israelite boys were supposed to imitate. Boaz was a type of the Messiah. His righteous care for Ruth was seen again in the relationship between Joseph and Mary (Matt 1:18–20), and beyond that in the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ for his bride.

Truly, as we situate the story of Ruth and Boaz in the larger canonical context, it becomes evident that the actions between Boaz and Ruth are not just the product of chance. They are part of God's design to reveal how his Son will relate to his bride. In this way, the complementarian actions between Ruth and Boaz are a beautiful prefigura-

tion of Christ and his church.

Moreover, by understanding their relationship we can also marvel at how God can work good out of our foolishness. We take comfort to see how God meets us in the awkward moments of everyday life.<sup>15</sup> And finally, we see how events that may hurt our reputations or put us in circumstances that look unrighteous can be used by God to bring about greater righteousness and blessing in the end. This was true with the couple who met on a threshing floor in the middle of the night. And this was true of their great, great grand-son, of whom the apostle Paul wrote: “He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

What a glorious God we serve, whose wisdom is unfathomable and whose name is willing to be scandalized in order to bring blessing to his bride. To him be all the glory, honor, and power, forever and ever. Amen!

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>John Piper’s interpretation of Ruth 3 has influenced my own reading, but I believe he is too positive towards Naomi (see his *A Sweet and Bitter Providence: Sex, Race, and the Sovereignty of God* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010], 80–83). It seems that her hope has moved her towards action (as Piper suggests), but her counsel is more than “odd” (ibid., 82). Her instructions are downright dangerous. All in all, the book of Ruth seems to be ambivalent towards Naomi, and may even contrast Naomi’s decision-making with Ruth’s virtuous character. Textually, only Ruth is called a virtuous woman (3:11).

<sup>2</sup>Daniel Block observes, “The order of the sentence, subject-predicate, is not merely emphatic; it establishes this as a verbless clause of identification, which suggests that in Naomi’s mind Boaz is not simply a relative but the near kinsman who must fulfill the role she has in mind” (*Judges, Ruth* [New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999], 682).

<sup>3</sup>“Apparently common prostitutes as well as cult prostitutes frequented the areas where harvest and shearing festivals took place” (John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000], 757), as Hosea 9:1 condemns Israel’s harlotry: “You have loved a prostitute’s wages on all threshing floors.”

<sup>4</sup>Dean Ulrich observes the danger of Naomi’s plan, saying, “the Bethlehemites would have savored a sex scandal. Naomi did no one any favor that night. She put both Ruth and Boaz at risk of yielding to temptation or being unjustly accused” (*From Famine to Fullness: The Gospel According to Ruth* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007], 90).

<sup>5</sup>Boaz’s own instruction to Ruth in verse 14 (“Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor”) sought to protect against any communal misunderstanding.

<sup>6</sup>Incidentally, it is this sort of bravado that feminist interpretations

commend. Carolyn Custis James applauds Ruth for being a “rule-breaker” (*The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008]), and Phyllis Tribble suggests that Ruth is a “defier of custom, the maker of decisions, and the worker of salvation” (*God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* [Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978], 184).

<sup>7</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 683; Ulrich, *From Famine to Fullness*, 90–91.

<sup>8</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 683–84.

<sup>9</sup>Ulrich, *From Famine to Fullness*, 90–93.

<sup>10</sup>Then again, it would not be unprecedented for a woman of faith to suggest something worldly to bring about God’s blessing. This is exactly what Sarai did when her faith in God’s promise ran low (Gen 16:1–16). And, to be clear, this illicit pursuit of blessing is not just something limited to women, either. The leading men of Israel often employed worldly strategies to protect themselves or advance God’s purposes.

<sup>11</sup>Piper, *A Sweet and Bitter Providence*, 83–84; Ulrich, *From Famine to Fullness*, 88–89.

<sup>12</sup>Contra Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 178.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Piper, *A Sweet and Bitter Providence*, 86–89.

<sup>14</sup>Interestingly, neither *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), nor *Discovering Biblical Equality*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005) take time to consider the story of Ruth and its implications for gender roles.

<sup>15</sup>Ulrich, *From Famine to Fullness*, 93–96.

## GENDER STUDIES IN REVIEW

**A Review of Benjamin Reaoch, *Women, Slaves, and the Gender Debate: A Complementarian Response to the Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2012. 224 pp. \$24.99.**

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Benjamin Reaoch, pastor of Three Rivers Grace Church (SBC) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has offered a thorough and compelling response to the redemptive-movement (or trajectory) hermeneutic endorsed by egalitarian scholars such as Krister Stendahl, R. T. France, Richard Longenecker, David Thomas, I. Howard Marshall, and especially Kevin Giles and William Webb. This work is a revision of his doctoral dissertation completed at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary under Thomas R. Schreiner. Reaoch's thesis is that the "significant differences between the New Testament instructions to slaves and to women seriously undermine the conclusions made by the redemptive-movement hermeneutic. The fact that the New Testament 'points beyond' the institution of slavery does not indicate that it likewise points beyond God's design for gender roles" (xix). In the end, the crucial distinction between the issues of slavery and women's role within marriage is that "no biblical writer advocates for slavery based on the order of creation" (xix).

Reaoch's approach includes a combination of an exegetical study with a hermeneutical analysis. Chapter 1 provides a description of the redemptive-movement hermeneutic, including the key scholars (those mentioned above) who advocate this hermeneutic. In its essence, the redemptive-movement hermeneutic insists that the New Testament sets a trajectory of ethics but does not necessarily give us the best or final ethic. It is only by following that trajectory that we arrive at the ethic the New Testament would have given us if it was not bound

or limited by cultural concerns. Chapters 2 and 3 offer an exegetical study of key passages that pertain to slaves (chapter 2: Eph 6:5–8; Col 3:22–4:1; 1 Tim 6:1; Titus 2:9–10; and 1 Pet 2:18–25) and to women (chapter 3: Eph 5:22–23; Col 3:18–19; 1 Tim 2:9–15; 1 Cor 11:2–16; 14:33b–35; 1 Pet 3:1–7; and Titus 2:3–5). Chapter 4 represents a synthesis of the exegetical study of the two previous chapters. Reaoch maintains that the issues of slavery and women's roles are not to be equated because, unlike the institution of marriage, the New Testament does not endorse or commend slavery (though neither does it explicitly condemn it). Rather, the basis or ground for slaves to obey their masters "is the reminder of God's reward for well-doing" (79). In addition, he notes that reference to creation is absent in every slavery passage. In contrast, there are repeated quotations or allusions in many of the passages that refer to women's roles (e.g., 1 Tim 2:13; 1 Cor 11:8–9; Eph 5:31; and possibly 1 Cor 14:34). Thus, unlike marriage (and the roles within marriage), slavery is not a God-ordained institution.

Chapters 4 and 5 are the hermeneutical portion of the book. In these two chapters Reaoch dissects eight (of the eighteen) criteria developed by William Webb in his book *Slaves, Wives, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001). In chapter 4 he examines (1) theological analogy, (2) preliminary movement, (3) seed ideas, and (4) purpose/intent statements, and in chapter 5 he analyses (5) basis in original creation, (6) pri-

mogeniture, (7) specific instructions versus general principles, and (8) the relationship between creation and redemption.

In order to illustrate Reaoch's work, we will examine his critique of Webb's criteria of *basis in original creation*. Webb maintains that although many doctrines that are rooted in creation are transcultural (e.g., divorce) or mildly transcultural (e.g., polygamy), some obviously have a significant cultural component (e.g., the Sabbath), and as such do not need to be upheld today. In response to Webb's analysis, Reaoch argues that polygamy was "a practice that was tolerated but never condoned, just as in the case of divorce" (116). Concerning the Sabbath, Reaoch notes that Webb's reasoning for our neglect of Sabbath observance is based mainly on culture. Thus, we have an example of a command that is based on creation that no longer applies to us (at least in the same way), opening the door that the prohibition of women teaching men likewise may be limited because of our cultural differences. Reaoch observes, however, that the main reason we don't observe the Sabbath as the Old Testament requires is not because we no longer live in an agrarian setting (i.e., a different culture), but because of the development in salvation history (i.e., a different covenant). It is therefore "overly simplistic, and thus misleading, to say that the pattern of Sabbath rest in the creation account is cultural. A more nuanced understanding of the issue would affirm that salvation history is by far the most significant factor in determining how to apply this creation pattern to our lives today" (117–18).

In order to bolster his point that some practices in the Bible are not transcultural but still grounded in creation, Webb also includes procreation, farming, ground transportation (i.e., walking), and vegetarian diet. But in each of these practices, Reaoch exposes significant holes in Webb's reasoning. For example, the command for Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" is not necessarily at odds with all forms of birth control (and therefore merely cultural) because we "should not read this as an absolute mandate for all individuals to bear as many children as possible" (118). Consequently,

"Webb has assumed unlikely and hermeneutically simplistic interpretations of the creation account in an attempt to heighten the perceived tension between original creation and today's culture" (119). Furthermore, since it is clear from Scripture that farming, ground transportation, and vegetarianism were never intended to be transcultural, Webb's inclusion of them "make it appear that he is grasping for ways to minimize the weight of the creation account" (120). Reaoch's conclusion, then, is that significant instructions that are grounded in creation are intended to be followed in every age and in every culture. Because gender and role distinctions are rooted in creation, and slavery is not, the two concepts cannot be equated. To argue that both should be treated the same is to overlook significant differences presented to us in Scripture. Slavery is not based on creation, whereas women's roles are.

Finally, Reaoch's book ends with a six-page conclusion, followed by a postscript of the continuing discussion of the redemptive-movement hermeneutic. He also offers summaries of current literature on the topic.

This work by Reaoch is a welcomed answer to the redemptive-movement hermeneutic. His treatment of opposing views is gracious and balanced. For example, when discussing Webb's hermeneutic he is always quick to point out where he agrees with Webb and where Webb's work has made a helpful contribution. At the same time, Reaoch has exposed significant weaknesses in the redemptive-movement hermeneutic. Ultimately, the presupposition that the Bible does not present us with a complete ethic and therefore we must follow the trajectory of the Bible's ethic is subjective and even dangerous. As Reaoch rightly states, "We need not (indeed, we must not) move beyond the final and authoritative instructions of God's Word" (96).

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A Review of Joel B. Green, ed., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*.  
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011. 912 pp. \$59.99.

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A comprehensive reference work on Christian ethics and the role of Scripture in ethics is a great idea. Regrettably, however, *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* is problematic at certain critical points. While granting that biblical interpretation isn't always easy, this volume seems to go out of its way to stress that Scripture doesn't speak directly to our ethical behavior and when it does speak it is not very clear. The book begins with three essays that frame the way the Bible should be and has been used to form ethical opinions. These essays stress that Scripture alone isn't sufficient for doing ethics. Granted, ethical questions do arise which are not directly addressed in Scripture, but Christians have historically affirmed that the Bible stands at the authoritative center of our ethics. By contrast, these essays undercut the idea that Scripture provides binding ethical norms, suggesting instead that it is a varied collection of witnesses which churches today must sift in order to determine what continues to be binding.

While still appealing to biblical authority in a vague way, it is clear that Scripture is not seen as *norma normans non normata* ("the norm of norms which cannot be normed") that is, the authority to which everything else must concede. Rather, this reference work, which will likely inhabit numerous pastors' studies and seminary libraries, addresses the ethical issues of our day from the perspective that Scripture is so culturally bound that we must decide which portions "continue to manifest the redeeming power of God" and which do not (32). A few quotes from one of the guiding essays will make its approach clear:

A proper understanding of canon emphasizes that canon is not a definitive collection of timeless, divinely revealed truths. Canon is a collection of witnesses to an ongoing encounter with the presence of God in the lives of persons and communities. . . . The canon functions not as a static deposit of timeless truth, but rather as a partner in conversation with our own experience of God's presence in our lives. . . . The end result toward which we should strive is a deabsolutized canon which allows for the honoring of ancient witness to the degree that it reveals to us the basic truths of our faith while at the same time honoring the power and authority of our own experience of God.<sup>1</sup> (28)

It would be helpful if anyone purchasing this book also obtained a copy of Greg Thornbury's recent *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism* so that he might hear a well-articulated rebuttal of this diminished view of Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, the dictionary's ensuing entries vary significantly in outlook, as might be expected. The entry on "Sanctity of Human Life" offers a robust affirmation, though the entry on "Abortion" is less clear. The immorality of prostitution, pedophilia, and abuse of various sorts is also explicitly affirmed, though less clarity exists on topics like euthanasia and assisted suicide. There appears to be a general reticence to stand on clear biblical mandates (see, for instance, the entry on "Evangelical Ethics")—a tendency particularly observable in the volume's entries on sexual ethics.

For example, associate editor Allen Verhey's "Marriage and Divorce" entry demonstrates the

outworking of the principles of the volume's guiding essays. He states:

Scripture is not a timeless code for marriage and divorce, but in Christian community it is *somehow the rule of our individual lives and of our common life*. We set the stories of our lives, including the stories of our singleness and of our marriages, alongside the story of Scripture to be judged, challenged, formed, re-formed, and sanctified. Fidelity to this text and to its story does not require (or permit) us to read Mark (or any other particular text) like a timeless moral code. We do not live in Mark's community (or in Matthew's or Paul's), but we do live in memory of Jesus, and we test our lives and our readings for fidelity. Fidelity requires creativity. And creativity licenses the formation of rules and judgments concerning divorce that need not be identical to Matthew's concession or Paul's, but that respect both the vows of marriage and the partners of a marriage, safeguard both the delight and vulnerability of sexuality, protect vulnerable partners, and honor God's creative and redemptive intentions. (512, emphasis added)

This isn't scriptural authority as the church has historically meant it. If we're left saying Scripture is "*somehow the rule of our individual lives and of our common life*," then it's not the rule for our lives. According to this entry, we are free to reset the boundaries in ways entirely different from what is seen in Scripture—and yet still call that consistent with Scripture.

Not surprisingly, Verhey goes even further, stating:

We need not regard divorce as good or homosexual acts as good in order to acknowledge fidelity and mutuality between divorced and homosexual persons as good. If we allow divorce in a world such as this for the sake of protecting marriage and marriage partners, and remarriage after divorce, then *perhaps we should also consider blessing homosexual*

*unions* for the sake of nurturing fidelity and mutuality and protecting the homosexual partners. (511-12, emphasis added)

Having jettisoned Scripture as the supreme authoritative norm, a dictionary of ethics from a publisher purporting to "represent historic Christianity and serve . . . evangelical readers" now encourages us to consider blessing homosexual unions.<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Siker's discussion of "Homosexuality" continues in this vein. His entry concludes:

The Bible serves as a key touchstone for this conversation within the church, though its interpretation, relevance, and application in relation to homosexuality remain points of significant contention, especially as interpreters seek to correlate and integrate the biblical witness with other sources of authority—tradition, reason, and experience. (374)

Since the apostle Paul may have only known of negative or abusive "forms of homoerotic activity," Siker argues, we cannot be certain his condemnation of homosexuality fits all expressions of it. "Like most Jews of his day," he writes, "[Paul] seems to presume heterosexual expression as the norm, though his own preference is for celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7)" (372). And with that, Paul's apostolic teaching to the church is reduced to first-century Jewish presumption and personal preference!

The central issue, as Siker rightly notes, is the role and authority of Scripture. However, his entry elevates "tradition, reason, and experience" as "other sources of authority" on par with Scripture, allowing us to therefore overturn its plain statements. And what "tradition" does Siker have in mind? We can only wonder, for the church's tradition of teaching on this issue has been very clear through the centuries. And what about reason? It certainly isn't clear to everyone that reason would support the affirmation of homosexuality. It seems to me the spirit of the age is posing as "tradition and reason" while Scripture is demoted. Indeed, it sounds like simply another echo of "Did God really say?"

Even though there are better entries, the vol-

ume as a whole is alarming and disappointing. I've focused primarily on entries concerning sexual ethics since they illustrate the dictionary's general approach to Scripture and since these issues are some of the most significant ethical issues facing the church today. The value of a tool is seen in how it works at the point of greatest pressure. At such points, the *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* fails.

When I asked an employee of Baker how this volume fits the mission of an evangelical publisher, he made it clear that Baker did not claim to be an evangelical publisher, that they were much broader than that. He pointed to their new Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture as an example and said their parameters were publishing books in keeping with Nicene Christianity. This was news to me, though it is still hard to see how the endorsement of homosexuality fits Nicene Christianity since the Nicene fathers are patently clear about the sinfulness of homosexuality.

Reading other reviews of this volume, one might think the affirmation of homosexuality was an interesting academic trifle—“*Hub! Baker's new dictionary of ethics affirms homosexuality. How interesting?*” However, the nominalization of Scripture and the normalization of homosexuality isn't a mere academic curiosity; it's a pastoral tragedy undercutting the work of faithful ministers and blunting the reception of the biblical witness. It may be chic to dismiss the normative clarity of the Scripture, but let us be clear that in this we are meddling with the claims of King Jesus over his church. This is no light step regardless of how common it may be. Furthermore Jesus promised judgment for those in Thyatira who were “teaching . . . my servants to practice sexual immorality” and strongly rebuked the church who tolerated such teaching (Rev. 2:20). As cultural pressure increases on the church to accommodate the spirit of the age rather than hold fast the truths of Scripture, we must decide where we stand. This volume has made its choice. Let us make ours.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>This final quotation comes from Birch and Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 156–57, and is cited approvingly by the author of the essay.

<sup>2</sup>Greg Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

<sup>3</sup>From the “Mission Statement” of Baker Publishing Group, accessed December 20, 2013, <http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/about>.

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**A Review of Rachel Held Evans, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood: How a Liberated Woman Found Herself Sitting on Her Roof, Covering Her Head, and Calling Her Husband "Master."*  
Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012. 352 pp. \$15.99.**

**Aimee Byrd**

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It seems that Rachel Held Evans and I have a lot in common. The cover of her book boasts a picture of Evans sitting on the roof of a house. Back in my college days, my roommate Michelle and I spent our free time sitting on our porch roof, listening to the Beatles, drinking coffee, and making up stories about the neighbors. Even after I graduated and married I still couldn't resist climbing out of the upstairs bathroom window onto my new, perfect roof spot for a different perspective.

But as I read her book, I discovered Evans and I 'roof-sat' for different purposes. For Evans, it was a time of penance based on her interpretation of Proverbs 21:9, "It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife."

### **Impressive Style, Slanted Interpretation**

Rachel Held Evans is an engaging writer. The more I read, the more I understood her popularity among women. She tells a great story, and I really appreciate her witty observations and inability to small talk.

The chapters in Evans' book are topics that every woman struggles with in her Christian walk. Topics relating to our roles, virtues, behavior, and lifestyle are important for each one of us to examine against Scripture. And this is what Evans claims she will be doing for one year.

I vowed to spend one year of my life in pursuit of *true* biblical womanhood. This quest of mine has required that I study every passage of Scripture that relates to women and learn how women around the world interpret and apply these passages to their lives. In addition, I would attempt to follow as many of the Bible's

teachings regarding women as possible in my day-to-day life, sometimes taking them to their literal extreme. (xxi)

And there is the kicker. With all the research that Evans does, she seemingly doesn't understand the basic principles of biblical hermeneutics. Literal interpretation, i.e., reading the Bible literally, always discerns the different genres that are involved. More specifically, faithful interpretation pays attention to both the grammar and redemptive historical setting of the passage in question. That is, we read Scripture in its historical and linguistic context, with the final revelation of Christ's fulfillment in all its words.

This is painfully missing in Evans' book. Instead, she playfully uses what I call an "Amelia Bedelia" method of Scripture interpretation to try and prove that the traditional view of biblical womanhood is nonsense. In these popular children's stories, when Amelia Bedelia sees a date cake on the Christmas baking list, she tears out actual days from the calendar and mixes them into the batter. You can use your imagination for what she does when told to "steal home plate."

In Evans' case, she does something similar with the Bible. In her chapter highlighting valor, she goes through Proverbs 31. Here are some of the assignments she gives herself to pursue "literal" biblical womanhood (77, 78):

- Work out those arms—"She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong." (v. 17)
- Knit a red scarf and/or hat for her husband Dan—"When it snows, she has no fear for her household, for all of them are clothed in scarlet." (v. 21)

- Praise Dan at the city gate—“Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.” (v. 23)

To fulfill that last one, Evans holds a sign that reads, “Dan is Awesome” in front of the “Welcome to Dayton” billboard at rush hour. Is this the way that anyone reads Proverbs 31? And yet Evans is inferring that this is what reading the Bible literally means. She does this chicanery in each chapter, gives the reader a lesson of what she *really* learned, and comes to her own conclusion about the value of each virtue once it’s rescued from “literal” interpreters.

### Where Is the Gospel?

While she does do some valuable research that can certainly shed more light on some of the verses at hand, Evans continually misses the opportunity to present these particular passages in their redemptive-historical context and demonstrate how they lead us to the gospel. For example, after failing at many of her attempts to emulate the Proverbs 31 woman, Evans consults her new Jewish friend, Ahava. Her friend explains how her Jewish husband actually serenades her weekly with the poetic words of Proverbs 31 at the Shabbat table. Ahava concludes, “I know that no matter what I do or don’t do, he praises me for blessing the family with my energy and creativity. All women can do that in their own way. I bet you do that as well” (88).

Evans is blown away that in Ahava’s case, it is the men who memorize Proverbs 31 to sing a blessing to their wives in the presence of family and friends. “*Eshet chayil* is at its core a blessing—one that was never meant to be earned, but to be given, unconditionally” (88). And so I tell myself, even though this is the fourth chapter and she still hasn’t presented the gospel, “Wait for it...”

But alas, the message of the gospel does not come. Evans misses yet another opportunity to point us to our Savior. Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom, does this exact thing for his bride, the church. He declares us righteous! Although we insist on earning our own way to God with our self-righteousness,

Jesus died for us while we were still his enemies. It was our perfect Bridegroom who lived the righteous life of valor on behalf of his beloved. He took all of our guilt, all of our shame, and bore the curse for our sin. Now he is seated at the right hand of the Father interceding for us, until all enemies are put under his feet, when he will return for his bride. What glorious song will he greet his bride with?

Do you see the difference? It is very helpful to gain more understanding of how the Jews would read this Scripture, but tragically they do not see Jesus in it. By comparison then, one interpretation says, “It’s okay if you’re not perfect, we are all doing our best and our husbands recognize that.” And the other says, “God demands perfection, but he loves us so much that he has sent his very own Son to represent his bride. And because of his work, women of faith really are being transformed into what he has declared us to be: perfectly righteous, *eshet chayil!*”

### Liberation Comes Through Submitting to a Higher Authority

Without explicit attention to the gospel, Evans misses the beauty of true biblical womanhood. But there is more. She concludes, “For those who count the Bible as sacred, interpretation is not a matter of *whether* to pick and choose, but *how* to pick and choose” (296). Evans believes that we read what we are looking for in Scripture, that it really is like a wax nose. Therefore, she encourages readers to read with a prejudice of love rather than power, self-interest, and greed. Ultimately, I’m afraid that my concerns move beyond Evans’ problems with interpretation, and straight to her view of Scripture itself. For her, authority lies with the reader, not the Word of God. This is very troubling.

Evans reads Scripture with the predisposition that a loving God would never keep women in a submissive role. And she is right when she challenges those who believe submission is a card that your husband can play, as if women have less value and contribution. I agree with many of her arguments that oppose caricatures of complementarianism. But Evans attacks caricatures, not biblical complementarianism.

Submission takes the greatest strength, and it is something that you offer voluntarily in love. A submissive disposition is a recognition that you are married to a man that has been called to lay down his life for you, as Christ has done for his bride. Women are to submit to their husbands as unto the Lord. Rather than sabotage God's beautiful design for marriage, I want to thankfully receive it in my valuable role as a helper.

Do I submit to God's great love for me in Christ? Do I submit to the beautiful design he has fashioned for me, to my husband that he has appointed for my care and nurturing in his Word? Unfortunately, too often I do not. But the truth is that God's Word is not a book of laws that enslave me as a woman. Rather, it points to the One who has freed me to live for his glory and my good. I look forward to that day of consummation when I will be the perfect woman in union with Christ for eternity. I will see the grand picture of all God's people, in our biblically proclaimed manhood and womanhood, in all our diversity, living in complete harmony with the Son. Unfortunately, I missed this message of the truly liberated woman in Evans' book.

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A Review of Justin Lee, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from Gays-vs.-Christians Debate*.  
New York: Jericho Books, 2012. 259 pp. \$21.99.

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*Torn* is an autobiographical account of Justin Lee's journey from being "God boy"—a conservative, Southern Baptist who was convinced the Bible condemned homosexual acts—to now believing that "God would bless gay couples" (206). Lee, the founder of the Gay Christian Network (GCN), recounts his personal and theological pilgrimage from a traditional understanding of marriage to his current convictions. In so doing, he proposes a way out of the current "gays-vs.-Christians" stalemate.

### Premise of the Book

Lee argues that the "Gays-vs.-Christians" debate is ripping the church apart in an already polarized culture. As Lee notes, "each camp has an unflattering image of the other to promote," often intensifying the conflict and creating more heat than light (6). In addition Lee argues that the gay community and Christian young people are becoming more disenchanted with the American church as churches adopt a message that is more political than biblical. "Today's young people have gay friends whom they love. If they view the church as an unsafe place for them, a place more focused on politics than on people, we just might be raising the most anti-Christian generation America has ever seen, a generation that believes they have to *choose* between being loving and being Christian" (10).

The result is that evangelical churches and their members are *torn*. Christian parents are torn between showing "unconditional love for their children and their deep desire to follow God at all costs" (7). Young men and women in the church who experience same sex attraction (SSA) are torn between their convictions and their feelings. Worse yet are those whose lives have been "torn apart by this cul-

ture war, and far too often, the Christian in their lives either left them to fend for themselves or took an active role in making their lives worse" (227). Lee proposes that there is a way forward that is compassionate and fitting for those who follow after Christ.

### Lee's Pilgrimage

Lee begins recounting his own journey in high school when—nicknamed "God boy" for his Christian devotion—he was asked by a peer, "What do you think about this big gay controversy?" (14). Lee's response, "love the sinner, hate the sin," is now something he regrets (17). While Lee was committed to what he perceived as the Bible's condemnation on homosexuality he had a "secret" he thought he would take to his grave; he was attracted to the same sex (19). Lee explains how over time he became more open and more accepting of his same-sex attraction. He describes how he first "came out" to his parents, his negative interactions with all types of ex-gay ministries and literature in college, and his seemingly incompatible involvement in two campus groups: Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues Awareness Group (GALBA) and Campus Christian Fellowship (CCF). The account ends with a brief description of the birth of Lee's Gay Christian Network (GCN), a ministry designed to provide encouragement and support for gay Christians and to help educate the church about how to respond to the "gays-vs.-Christians" debate.

A major theme of Lee's autobiography is his relentless pursuit to become straight and his continual frustration with the "ex-gay ministries" which did not work for him or, in Lee's estimation, for anyone else. Regrettably, theologically-anemic and emotionally-shallow Christians and churches

riddled Lee's journey. Lee recalls on one occasion a "well-intentioned Christian acquaintance" gave him a *Playboy* in an effort to turn him straight (110). He also tells about the time when the new leader of CCF took him to lunch just so that he could pull out a Bible and read Lee all the verses in the Bible that condemn homosexuality (121–122).

*Torn* also includes several non-autobiographical chapters. For example, chapter 5 tackles the question "why are people gay?" Chapter 12 examines all of the major passages from Scripture that discuss homosexuality. Chapter 13 provides Lee's theological exploration of the meaning *agape* love, which Lee believes ultimately provides the theological justification for affirming the validity of same-sex unions. In chapter 15 Lee encourages the American evangelical church that "the way forward" must include showing more grace in the midst of disagreement, shattering the myth that the Bible is anti-gay, allowing openly gay Christians their place throughout the church, as well as other solutions to the current "gays-vs.-Christians" predicament.

### Appreciation

I appreciate several aspects of Lee's book. First, Lee's honesty and openness is helpful. His personal narrative is gripping and evangelical Christians would do well to read about Lee's experiences so they can understand more fully what some people struggling with SSA in their own churches might be experiencing. Second, I also appreciate Lee's tone throughout the book and agree that vitriolic sentiments, caricatures, and careless thinking (on both sides of this debate) need to come to an end. The church needs genuinely-loving, theologically-rich, emotionally-mature responses to the issue of homosexuality and to homosexuals themselves. Third, I agree with Lee's criticism that the church is too thoroughly engaged in culture wars. Certainly, Christians should be a voice in the public square, but if a church is identified more by its political activism than by its gospel proclamation than something is terribly awry.

### The Main Problem

Appreciations aside, Lee's book left me uncon-

vinced that God blesses same-sex unions. The substance of Lee's biblical argument is in chapters 12 and 13. Lee's treatment of the typical passages which mention homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26–27; 1 Cor 6:9–11) is unpersuasive. Space does not permit addressing Lee's comments in any detail. Suffice it to say that I do not believe Lee has said anything about these texts that scholars supporting a traditional understanding of marriage have not already answered.<sup>1</sup>

However, there is a much deeper problem with Lee's treatment of the Bible's teaching on homosexuality and marriage. Christianity does not—or at least should not—develop its view of marriage, gender, and sexuality simply based on a few passages sprinkled here and there throughout Scripture. Christians believe marriage is between a man and a woman because a whole-Bible theology of marriage indicates that is the case. Playing theological ping-pong where one side quotes verse A in condemnation of homosexuality and the other side quotes verse B in support of homosexuality is theologically insufficient. Lee's analysis is too myopic. If we are going to overturn the church's traditional understanding of marriage and sexuality, then what is needed is not simply a reconsideration of a few passages here and there, but a whole-Bible theology of marriage. The place we begin that discussion is Genesis 1, not Leviticus 18.<sup>2</sup>

Lee indicates that the "gays-vs.-Christians" debate is at an impasse. One side continually comments "more truth," while the other demands "more loving" (146). Lee has tried to pave a *via media*. He essentially lands on the side of "more loving." However, God's commands must define the character of that love. I appreciate Lee's honesty and willingness to share his story; however, his argument that God blesses same-sex unions is unpersuasive.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>For a more detailed criticism of Lee's arguments see Christopher Yuan's excellent review, "Torn," *The Gospel Coalition*, accessed December 20, 2013, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/book-reviews/review/torn>.

<sup>2</sup>For a short treatment of the whole Bible's view of marriage, ironically from someone who has struggled with SSA, see Vaughn Roberts, *Life's Big Questions: Six Major Themes Traced Through the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 63–90.

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**A Review of Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-sex Attraction*. Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2013. 88 pp. \$7.99.**

**Chris Sarver**

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On college campuses across the nation, the number of believing eighteen to twenty-three year olds who have confided with their friends, pastors, and campus ministers that they struggle with same-sex attraction (SSA) is on the rise. For instance, on a 2013 summer missions project, nearly one in five male and female college students anonymously indicated that they had in the past engaged in “some sort of sexual activity with a person of the same gender.” Likewise, over the course of the last decade, I have seen a distinct rise in the number of students who have cyber-sexed with others of the same gender or viewed homosexual-themed pornography.

Though anecdotal, these aforementioned trends reaffirm the fact that our culture is experiencing a widespread moral change. Nowhere is this more acute than in America’s high schools and colleges. Young Christians today have serious questions about the Bible’s teaching on sexuality in general and homosexuality and gay marriage in particular. The church has struggled to answer these questions clearly, compassionately, and compellingly for the younger generation, and therefore the community called to herald the truth has stumbled in extending its pastoral care to those who profess Christ yet battle against same-sex attraction. Enter Sam Allberry’s new book.

Sam Allberry’s short (88 pages) new book, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-sex Attraction*, is a timely and helpful resource for clergy, lay-leaders, and campus missionaries laboring in this new context. Allberry is a pastor in Great Britain who battles SSA. His personal experience, exegetical and theological reflection, as well as years of pastoral ministry make this work sensitive, theologically satisfying, and practical.

He briefly shares his journey and struggles with SSA in the introduction. The first chapter examines what the Bible says about sexuality and marriage. In the next Allberry considers a number of biblical texts that address homosexuality. He provides concise interpretations that support a traditional understanding of the text, while also interacting with interpretations that condone homosexuality. Chapter three is written to aid believers struggling with SSA and contains both practical and helpful advice. The fourth chapter discusses ways the church can bless and encourage those battling SSA. In the final chapter, Allberry provides some specific ways Christians can begin to reach out to gay individuals in order to effectively engage them with the gospel. In addition to these helpful chapters, this work has five brief “sidebars” that answers questions like “But Jesus never mentions homosexuality, so how can it be wrong?” And “Aren’t we just picking and choosing which Old Testament laws apply?”

While there has been much praise and appreciation for *Is God Anti-Gay?*, some within the evangelical community have been critical. Some negative reactions center on the prospect of damage to congregations by the admission of pastors who personally struggle with SSA (though how such disclosures might harm a local church is not entirely made clear). In view of that, one individual asserts, “This struggle should be private—between the writer and God.” While such confessions ought not to be gratuitous (and Allberry is certainly not), such public admissions are consistent with Scriptural teaching on the importance of the body of believers in individual sanctification (see Gal 6:1–5; James 5:16). This is something often missed in the highly individualized American church.

Furthermore, far from being damaging, such

careful and thoughtful disclosures can actually benefit believers. It has been my experience that when leaders like Allberry or Vaughn Roberts or local pastors acknowledge these struggles, those within the church battling SSA are emboldened to pursue righteousness. In addition, fellow believers become more effective in their efforts to “to stir up one another to love and good works” as they begin to understand the nature of SSA.

Other critical responses contend that Allberry and others wrongly view SSA as an amoral problem when in fact it is a moral matter that might even disqualify one from pastoral ministry. The problem in this critique is to confuse lust, a sin that requires an act of the will, with an attraction like SSA, a predisposition that does not cohere with God’s created design. To be sure SSA is unnatural (unlike heterosexual attraction), and Allberry is clear to make that point. However, moral culpability seems to be present only when one seeks to grow that attraction or acts on it in some fashion.

Applied to the church then, there seems to be a place for elders who fight SSA with the promises of the gospel and the power of the Spirit. Since the New Testament’s requirements for the office of elder (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) emphasize one’s conduct, SSA by itself would not seem to be an immediate disqualifier. In other words, elder qualification is based more on an individual’s response to SSA. Those who battle SSA and identify themselves with Christ should be encouraged to use their gifts in the church.

In the end, I commend Allberry’s short book. *Is God Anti-Gay?* is a gospel-grounded, Christ-centered work that seeks to equip the saints for holiness and ministry. It is a clear and concise treatment of the subject, and while it is not a resource to be given to non-believers, it will serve as a profitable introduction for the church. It will help Christians of all ages care for believers with SSA and engage the LGBT community with the gospel. I plan to purchase this volume for many of my colleagues and those college students whom I lead.

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A Review of Peter Hubbard, *Love Into Light: The Gospel, The Homosexual, and the Church*.  
Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2013. 175 pp. \$12.99.

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Peter Hubbard begins his book *Love Into Light: The Gospel, the Homosexual, and the Church* by asking an important question.

The first time I counseled a man struggling with same-sex attraction (SSA), I felt awkward. I didn't really know what to say. I wanted to help, but I wasn't sure how. He didn't really know what to say either. He felt defeated, yet addicted to homosexual porn and anonymous 'hookups.' He wanted help, but he was uncomfortable talking about such a personal area of his life. We seemed so different. How could a happily married pastor help a man struggling with homosexuality? (11)

Hubbard's earnest question set him on a course to study the issues and embrace a ministry to those struggling with SSA. Pastor Hubbard led his church to do the same and over the course of years, God has grown his ministry and the ministry of his church to embrace homosexuals with compassion, even as they have called them to abandon homosexuality for the greater pleasures of knowing Christ.

*Love into Light* is the fruit of Hubbard's commitment to biblical truth and compassion for sexual sinners. His book consists of nine chapters with an additional introduction and conclusion. While no immediate outline guides the reader, Hubbard progresses from the heart to the ministry of the church, from faith to practice, and from the specifics of the gospel to the way Christians must communicate the gospel to others.

As a book that stands on God's Word and

employs a model of biblical counseling that reaches the heart, *Love into Light* has a number of strengths. First, Pastor Hubbard is unashamed of the gospel. In his first chapter, simply entitled "Gospel," Hubbard gives a series of reasons why Christians have difficulty relating to homosexuals. He challenges Christians to consider the fundamental truths of the gospel, and how it applies to everyone.

Outlining the 'gospel story' in four points, he states that all men (1) are made in God's image and (2) have turned aside from righteousness. Likewise, no matter what their background, if they have trusted in Christ, all believers (3) find a new identity in Christ and (4) have the promise of becoming more like Christ. Christians who are skeptical of how to relate to someone "unlike" themselves will find great help for building bridges with the gospel.

Second, Hubbard explains the problem of sin as a matter of idolatry, not homosexuality. Affirming the vulnerability and culpability of the human heart, Hubbard locates change in a personal encounter with Jesus Christ: "The antidote for homosexuality is not heterosexuality. . . . Jesus is not our get-out-of-homosexuality plan, but 'the way and the truth and the life.' Real change is not simply a reaction to our latest problem, but a miraculous step toward our new eternal identity" (47).

With the skill of a master surgeon, Hubbard slices into the human heart with the scalpel of God's Word. What he finds there is that man's greatest problem is a rejection of God and the love of false idols. This illicit worship is what opens the heart to all other sins. Specifically, Hubbard points out that the description of homosexuality in Romans 1 is one of illustration not maximization. That is to

say, homosexuality is not the worst sin; it is simply one that has been recognized by the majority of civilizations to be out of step with nature. Paul uses homosexuality to show the sinfulness of humanity, but he does not single out this sin as categorically different than other sins.

Last, chapters seven, eight, and nine do a nice job helping churches put into practice a ministry to homosexuals. He speaks candidly about the unkindness that some gays and lesbians have faced in evangelical churches, and he gives suggestions on how your church can reach out to this group of people.

One of the most compelling features of *Love Into Light* is its tone. Pastor Hubbard's compassion comes across in his writing. Displaying a Christ-like demeanor, he writes to bind up the bruised reeds and fan into flame smoldering wicks (Isa 42:1-4). This is much needed. Christians need to learn how to speak to sexual sinners with care and biblical conviction. Therefore, in regard to personal evangelism, biblical counseling, and local church ministry, *Love into Light* provides a compelling guide for reaching the hearts of sinners.

Still, with that commendation in place, the spiritual warfare that is homosexuality must be engaged on multiple fronts. In other words, homosexuality is not only an issue that affects individuals; as a movement it also threatens to unravel the moral fiber of our country and the religious liberty needed for free proclamation of the gospel. For Christians who only engage in 'culture wars,' Hubbard's book provides a corrective. He shows evangelicals how to address individuals ensnared by the sin of homosexuality.

However, *Love into Light* does not cover every mode of discourse related to homosexuality. This, of course, is not a fault or critique; it is simply a note to the alert reader that Hubbard brings the right tone and content for addressing individuals, but there is also a need for helping Christians discourse on the ethical and political issues related to homosexuality, religious liberty, and public theology.

To say it differently, Christians must learn to articulate the indivisible message of grace and truth with language, accent, and posture that comports to the setting and makeup of the audience. Paul

wrote different letters with different 'tones' (compare Philippians to Galatians, for instance). With compassionate conviction, he addressed different audiences with the same gospel. Twenty-first century Christians must do the same, and *Love into Light* is an excellent resource for preparing Christians for the kind of conversation that takes place in personal evangelism, biblical counseling, and ongoing discipleship.

In the end, *Love Into Light* is a pastoral guide written from a gifted biblical counselor. It gives ministers of reconciliation—vocational and otherwise—the resources to engage men and women who need to be delivered from the sin of homosexuality. Peter Hubbard superbly addresses the human heart and shows individuals how they can engage their family and neighbors who experience SSA. It also spurs on churches to reach out to homosexuals, leading them by love into light. For these reasons and many others, I highly recommend this new book.

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**A Review of Heath Lambert, *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace*.  
Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013. 176 pp. \$14.99.**

**Godwin Sathianathan**

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For six years I had the privilege of working with college students on Michigan State University's campus. The topic of sexual temptation and pornography would inevitably come up as I counseled and discipled young men. I tried to provide the support that was needed. While I saw some fruits of repentance, more often than not I fumbled around with my counsel. I would boldly exhort hardened hearts toward holiness, with little mention of blood-bought grace. Or I'd remind the guilt-ridden of God's lavish grace, without encouraging them toward practical change. My counsel was well-intentioned but sometimes ineffective. All the while I wondered: *How do I connect the dots between gospel grace and the trench warfare of sexual temptation?*

Enter Heath Lambert's recent contribution, *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace*. This book is all about "the amazing power of Jesus Christ to free you from pornography" (12). The book begins with a foundational chapter on gospel grace, and then offers eight gospel-shaped strategies for killing sexual sin.

Theology is for the soul. Biblical exegesis is for life change. Lambert understands these truths well. *Finally Free* is thoroughly biblical and grounds its principles in careful exegesis. Lambert lets the Bible speak for itself. Every chapter digs into one or two biblical texts and pulls the reader into God's vision for sexual health and holiness.

That vision begins with the cross of Christ. Christians know forgiveness comes from the Cross. But where do Christians get resources to fight sin? One of the most helpful emphases in this book is that blood-bought grace not only forgives but empowers. Through Christ, God provides resources to cover our shame and enable real

change. "Grace isn't just unmerited favor. Grace is power" (23). How heartening for those enslaved in sexual sin to believe this!

Embracing God's forgiving and transforming grace is just the beginning. Thankfully, Lambert works from the assumption that killing sin, not just managing it, is possible and expected (see Rom 6:1–14; 8:13). The majority of the book is dedicated to exploring *how* the grace of the cross helps Christians put to death sexual sin.

Lambert contends that addressing the heart is essential in the fight for purity. He speaks about the critical role godly sorrow, thanksgiving, and humility play in the war. He shows how greediness is at the heart of sexual immorality: "People are sexually immoral when they are greedy for impure things" (125). He concludes, "only arrogant men look at porn" (108).

More than just a call to impeccable character, Lambert exhorts his readers to intentionally cultivate biblical virtues. Christians can cultivate humility, he explains, when they meditate on our great salvation and our sin, while simultaneously stepping outside ourselves to serve others. Believers can abide in Christ daily by praying the words of Scripture, praying out loud, and singing songs to God. Greed is combatted by nurturing the opposite trait—deep joy in Christ. Humble, thankful, joyful Christians who abide in Christ simply do not look at porn.

Lambert's strategies demonstrate that God's transforming grace touches our hearts and changes our behavior. One chapter urges taking radical measures in our thought life, in our use of time, and in cutting off access to inappropriate materials. Another chapter offers a biblically-informed frame-



