

THE JOURNAL FOR BIBLICAL
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MANHOOD & WOMANHOOD

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**I Can't Fight This Feeling Anymore:
Discerning the Conflict Over Human Sexuality and Religious Liberty**

Andrew Walker

Should the Church Speak of "Gay Christians"?

Owen Strachan

True Sexual Morality: An Interview with Daniel Heimbach

David Schrock

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Okay To Change a Child's Sex but Not His Gender?

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In a 2013 post at TouchstoneMag.com, James Kushiner asks an insightful question that exposes the moral confusion of our day.¹ In essence he asks why it should be legal to change a child's sex but not his gender.

The question is provoked by a bill that New Jersey Governor Chris Christie signed into law last year. The law prohibits any attempt to change a child's "gender expression." That means that if a parent has a young boy who likes to put on dresses and wear make-up, New Jersey law prohibits licensed counselors from helping that boy. Counselors must approve and support whatever gender that child chooses regardless of the child's sex. This law reveals the rising social stigma in our culture against anyone who attempts to alter a child's gender identity.

But what about altering a child's sex? While there is a growing stigma attached to altering gender identity, there is a growing acceptance of surgical procedures that "alter" a child's biological sex. Last year, *The New Yorker* reported on a suburban teenage girl who wished to embrace a male gender identity.² Her parents allowed her to begin tes-

tosterone therapy when she was fourteen, and just before her seventeenth birthday they allowed her to get a double mastectomy. Now she is living out a male identity, although she says she still prefers to date boys.

Kushiner puts a fine point on the issue:

So if a professional can't talk to minor about sexual orientation (because it's fixed and messing with it is harmful?), then why was a professional doctor allowed to alter something as fixed as a biological body of a minor?³

Here's the fundamental moral inconsistency that the sexual revolutionaries have given us. It is not okay to change a child's mind, but it is okay to mutilate his body. Gender and sex ought to be in harmony, but surgical manipulation must be preferred over mental alteration. Why allow the one and not the other?

This inconsistency testifies to a much deeper spiritual rot. It exposes what has always been at the heart of the sexual revolution. The Creator's purposes for male and female (Gen 1:27; Matt 19:4)

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must give way to the creature's autonomous will. If a boy feels like he's a girl, then he is one even if his biology says otherwise. The Creator's distinction between male and female must bend to accommodate the sovereign will of the creature. Thus changing the body is better than changing the mind.

The gender confusion that characterizes our day tells us a lot about the human condition. God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices (Eccl 7:29). By nature, they suppress the truth in unrighteousness and have become futile in their speculations (Rom 1:18, 21). There's nothing new under the sun—just new incarnations of the ancient heresy, “Hath God really said?” And now to their own hurt, they prefer the mutilation of the flesh to the sanctification of their minds. They would offer up the bodies of their own children to the gods of sexual liberation.

ENDNOTES

¹James M. Kushiner, “Why Is Reparative Therapy Illegal for Boys but Gender Surgery for Girls Not?” Mere Comments, August 30, 2013, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://touchstonemag.com/merecomments/2013/08/reparative-therapy-illegal-boys-gender-surgery-girls/#sthash.vexpM6F.dpuf>.

²Margaret Talbot, “About a Boy: Transgender surgery at sixteen,” March 18, 2013, accessed April 30, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/03/18/130318fa_fact_talbot.

³Kushiner, “Why Is Reparative Therapy Illegal for Boys but Gender Surgery for Girls Not?”

Should the Church Speak of “Gay Christians”?

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It's difficult to overstate the importance of a name. Young parents feel the weighty responsibility of naming their children—do you go traditional? Ultra-modern? Use family names? Create your own? The possibilities are endless, even bewildering, but through it all, many young fathers and mothers feel the pressure of identifying their children by naming them.

A new text published by a historically evangelical imprint has raised afresh the question of name and identity for believers. In his new book *God and the Gay Christian*, Matthew Vines seeks to legitimate homosexual practice among evangelicals.¹ There's much to handle and refute in this new book. Interestingly, I think the very descriptor in his title invites more thought. Is it a good idea to identify some Christians who experience some degree of same-sex attraction (SSA) as “gay Christians?” Is this a name—so to speak—that Christians should gladly assign to fellow believers?

We should note, initially, this is not a new descriptor. Some well-known evangelicals have used it in recent days. Vines, however, has infused new meaning into this terminology. Authors who have previously described themselves as a “gay Christian” have done so with the understanding that they are a born-again believer who experiences, to some degree, ongoing same-sex attraction and who willingly resists gratifying this

desire. Vines, however, uses the term to signify a born-again believer who experiences same-sex attraction and indulges this desire in mutual, covenantal relationships to the glory of God. There is, in short, a vast and unbridgeable gulf between these two definitions.

The Present State of the Conversation Over SSA

Before looking more closely at the theological ramifications of the descriptor “gay Christian,” we need to think for a moment about the state of the conversation among evangelicals on the subject of SSA. Speaking generally, in past days, most churches had little sense of how to lovingly help a fellow believer who experienced some degree of SSA following their conversion. The general assumption was that coming to Christ effectively cancelled out homosexual desire of any kind. If a believer did continue to feel pulled in this way, he or she needed to “Pray the gay away,” as the phrase indelicately went.

Today, for a variety of reasons, the church is discovering new and needed nuance in its approach to SSA, and its pastoral care for believers who experience it. In short, many scholars and pastors now recognize a range of experiences on the part of those who have historically struggled with SSA.

- *Some believers with this past battle find that, upon conversion, they no longer experience sexual desire toward the same sex.* Their desire in this area is effectively mastered.
- *Some with SSA see the goodness of marriage and pursue it.* When married, these believers find that they are happy in marriage, though they must still manage their temptations of various kinds.
- *Others with some degree of SSA might see the goodness of marriage, but for whatever reason (lack of a suitable spouse, contentment in singleness, etc.) find themselves remaining single.* They are open to marriage but not sure they should presently pursue it.
- *Still other believers experience some level of ongoing attraction toward the same sex and do not find in themselves attraction to the opposite sex.* They are committed to fighting all sexual temptation, whether it is related to the same sex or not.

The church needs this kind of taxonomy, however limited it might be. In my view, and the judgment of other theologians and pastors, each of these believers is, in fighting sin by the overcoming power of the Holy Spirit, glorifying the Lord and pursuing holiness. Among these people are a range of experiences. Not all believers with SSA will get married; not all will face monumental degrees of SSA; some will experience a blend of temptations. Too often, evangelicals have adopted one of the preceding categories as that which all believers with SSA know. One hopes that the church will continue to nuance its understanding of this issue.

The Heart of the Matter

In this broader discussion, one common theme has emerged: the key matter is how one responds to temptation. Whatever one's exact experience, believers with SSA must, like all Christians, fight their lusts by the power of the gospel, kill sin, and pursue what is good and holy and God-glorifying. Like all Christians, they must never be comfortable with fallen instincts, but pray to God for overcoming power in the face of them. The gospel, as the biblical counseling movement has made so clear, is the true solution for all our fallenness, all our sin.

This is a much-needed perspective today. Even as the church has rightly expanded its understanding of how a Christian with SSA might live faithfully before Christ, we still fall prey to some problematic views. We must not make the common mistake, for example, of thinking that Christians who experience SSA are somehow consumed by their sexual desires. Sometimes this is the case, yes. But other times it surely is not. Christians with SSA are not tempted by only one sinful practice. Like any other believer, Christians with SSA must fight sin of many other kinds: pride, laziness, foolishness, anger, and so on, just as every follower of Christ must.

This is not to minimize the difficulties of SSA. Something is fundamentally amiss when one experiences homosexual desire. This is a fiercely controverted statement, but it is a biblical one (Romans 1:26–27). We must not cease to believe and preach it. But we must also avoid any spirituality that would make homosexual desire the sin of sins. To make this mistake is to fall into exact same trap that our secular culture makes: it defines Christians with SSA by their sexual temptations.

Sam Allberry, a pastor and author of the important book *Is God Anti-Gay?*, said just this at the 2014 Together for the Gospel conference.² Here's what I recorded him saying: "The culture says you are your sexuality. That is an appalling sense of identity to give people." Christians of any background can appreciate this incisive comment. We are not the sum of our lusts, our perversity, our fallenness, whatever shape such sin takes, whether heterosexual, homosexual, or any other form.

We must not be like the well-meaning but ultimately damaging Christian friend who, in first learning of a fellow church member's struggle with SSA, approaches them wide-eyed, fearful that their friend is perpetually on the brink of a Sodom-like outbreak. It is simply not the case that every Christian who experiences such temptation—or any other temptation—is about to lose themselves in gratification of their lusts. Those who respond to their brothers and sisters in this way seek to help. I fear, however, that they end up doing damage. This is caused, in particular, by making the ironic mistake of reading SSA as an

identity-shaping sin. It is not.

The Identity of Every Believer: Christ in Us

The preceding invites us to revisit biblical commentary on the identity of the believer. Though we could consider many texts, a couple will suffice. Think of the apostle Paul's words in Romans 6:6–7, which read:

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

To connect some textual dots, this cruciform selfhood means that born-again believers are, in the words of the same author, “new creations” in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). In Christ we have a new identity, a new self-understanding, a new daily experience. To the core of our being, we are remade. We are, in fact, renamed. The central truth about us is brand-new. We have taken on the name “Christian,” and lost the name “sinner” which we once did so much to deserve.

This is not to say, of course, that conversion means the cessation of sin. The apostle Peter in himself proves that we can know the Lord yet dishonor him by our thoughts and actions (see John 18). We must regularly “put off” the old nature and “put on” the new, according to Paul in Colossians 3:1–11.

In this sense, then, every believer is something like a former alcoholic. We are not mastered by our sin. In fact, we are a new person. We have broken with our old self and its old practices. But to varying degrees and from a range of sins, we still hear the Serpent's whisper in our ear. Sadly, we still give into temptation, even as we are being changed from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). So it is that Paul's words ring in our ears, words addressed to a Corinthian congregation that knew in all too familiar terms the reality of indwelling sin:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of

God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor 6:9–11)

This is remarkable stuff. Such *were* some of you. Paul teaches the Corinthians this even as he is aware that some of them were, at the time of his writing, struggling at a visceral level with various forms of iniquity. Yet we note carefully, very carefully, his teaching. Being “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified” meant that his audience was made new. They could no longer self-identify as an adulterer, a thief, or one who practices homosexuality. Paul directly teaches against such thinking here. The old had passed away, and the new had come.

So in sum: we have a new name, a new identity, even though we still sin. We take confidence in this, that we are being progressively changed.³ All of this is possible because we are a “new creation” through the atoning crucifixion and the vicarious resurrection of Christ. The regenerative agency of the Spirit has rendered us “more than conquerors” in the face of any sin and any trial (Rom 8:37).⁴

What does all this mean, practically? I believe this has overpowering significance for every Christian, whatever particular temptations they might face, and whatever their pre-conversion background might be.

- The converted person who was once an alcoholic and is still tempted by drunkenness is not an “alcoholic Christian” but a “Christian” who must battle his or her inclinations and by grace wrest victory over them.
- The former pornography addict who is still tempted by wicked images is not a “pornographic Christian” but a “Christian” who must by grace battle his or her lusts and subdue them.
- The former gossip who is still tempted to cut down his or her friends is not a “gossip-

ing Christian” but a “Christian” who must by grace fight the tongue and tame it.

- The former fighter who used to get violently angry is not a “violent Christian” but a “Christian” who is committed to mastering his or her temper by the power of God’s grace.
- The former doubter of God’s goodness is not a “doubting Christian” but a “Christian” who by grace steels his or her mind with Scripture to oppose and defeat doubt.
- The former pedophile is not a “pedophilic Christian” but a “Christian” who by grace fights and ignores the whispers of Satan to abuse little children.
- The former adulterer is not an “adulterous Christian” but a “Christian” who by grace struggles with and wards off adulterous desire.
- The former self-promoter who was enslaved to “selfish ambition” and obsessed with becoming famous is not a “self-promoting Christian” but a “Christian” who by grace dies to self.
- And finally: the person formerly ensnared by same-sex attraction is not a “gay Christian” but a “Christian” who by grace fights all sin, including same-sex desires, and experiences the transforming power of the cross.⁵

Conclusion: We Have a New Name

Can a Christian experience same-sex attraction of some kind and still be a believer? Yes, they can. Can they, like Matthew Vines, celebrate and enfranchise these desires, viewing them as part of their essential identity? They cannot. They must not. Tragically, Vines makes sin the constituent part of his identity.

No Christian, whatever their fallen predilections, can make them their identity. We do not have this authority. We are Christ’s. We have a new name. We still sin, but we are renewed, transformed, set free. Of course, Christians must be honest about our fallenness. We were all disordered by the fall: all of us. But our perversions and sins are not, *must not*, be our identity.⁶ Our identity is a reality that belongs only to Jesus. We have no power to ascribe our identity to sin. Satan would have us believe that, but he lost all power to mislead us in this way when Christ split his skull at the cross.

We’re all going to face in some way the challenges of nomenclature and identity. This is true

whether one is a stressed new parent or a Christian wrestling with how SSA fits with personal identity. In light of the foregoing, I urge this conclusion: let us as believers not use the term “gay Christian.” Let us, like the apostles, rejoice that we may suffer for the name of Jesus, and that his name is in fact ours (Acts 5:41).

In owning a one-word description of ourselves, “Christian,” let us exult only in this identity. This is no trifling term. Loaded with theological and practical weight, this name is the gift of God to every sinner who, comprehending the certainty of God’s just and terrible judgment, repents of all their wickedness and trusts in the magnificent work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

ENDNOTES

¹Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014). See the response by the Conversant imprint of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary entitled *God and the Gay Christian? A Response to Matthew Vines*, ed. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (SBTS, 2014), accessed on line, <http://126df895942e26f6b8a0-6b5d65e17b10129dda21364daca4e1f0.r8.cf1.rackcdn.com/GGC-Book.pdf>. I contributed a chapter to this eBook, as did my SBTS colleagues Jim Hamilton, Denny Burk, and Heath Lambert.

²Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-Sex Attraction* (Purcellville, VA: Good Book Company, 2013).

³For more on progressive sanctification, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 371–76; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 746–62.

⁴Two recent resources that explore at a pastoral level the believer’s identity in Christ and its ramifications: my book *Risky Gospel: Abandon Fear and Build Something Awesome* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013) and my colleague Heath Lambert’s *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013). For specific ethical treatment of sexual sins from a shared perspective, see Denny Burk, *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

⁵It is helpful to consider the theological *loci* of “union with Christ” in light of this section. See K. Scott Oliphint, *God with Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

⁶For one helpful treatment of sexual disorder, see Justin and Lindsay Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Abuse* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

True Sexual Morality: An Interview with Daniel Heimbach

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Ten years ago Daniel Heimbach, senior professor of Christian Ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, published the book *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis*.¹ In it Heimbach provides erudite research and faithful exposition to help Christians understand the culture in which we live and how God's unchanging word calls us to embrace true sexual morality.

Ten years later, Heimbach's prophetic warnings have come to fruition. True sexual morality is trammled in every corner of our society—including the evangelical church—and the need for Christians to be equipped on matters of sex and sexuality has never been greater. Therefore, it seems appropriate to revisit this book through an interview with its author.

1. David Schrock (DS): For those readers who do not know you, tell us a little bit about yourself and how a nice MK like yourself wound up devoting so much of your academic life to the promiscuous subject of sexual ethics?

Daniel Heimbach (DH): I am an MK (missionary kid) who was born under the Communists in China and raised in the jungles of North Thailand. I did not settle in the United States until the late 1960s at the height of the Sexual Revolution when everyone was rebelling against Judeo-Christian values in the name of free sex. That answers your question well enough, but let me offer two reasons that make sexual ethics so compelling for me.

The first is because I feel a terrible sense of urgency. Our culture and large sections of the institutional church are being flooded with sexual chaos threatening either to completely redefine the faith, or to leave it irreconcilably divided. And sexual moral rebellion is rising in the culture to the point of threatening social survival. The second is because I have a very strong sense of calling from God to address the church and our culture on this issue. Like Jeremiah, God wants me to speak and, if I do not, then so much the worse for my relation to Him.

2. DS: For those who have not read your book but should, please explain in a few words, what your book is about?

DH: The title, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis*, says it all. In that book I take a bold stand affirming there is indeed one true view of sexual morality for all people, which is the one set by our Creator for all time and cultures in the Bible. My book not only explains what God's true standards are, but also examines various ways his view of good sex is being challenged in our culture today.

3. DS: On the first page of your book, you sound the alarm that America's sexual revolution is "the most serious spiritual-moral crisis to arise in the history of Christianity and Western culture." Ten years later, I do not know anyone who would disagree. Is there anything

that you would add or qualify to the magnitude our cultural crisis?

DH: Nothing challenges Christian witness in our culture today more than deeply subversive sexual rebellion. Some institutional Christians now blame the Bible for threatening the faith rather than resist sexual trends in the culture, and our nation is deconstructing institutions without which no society can survive merely to accommodate the private feelings of a few individuals. Sexual ethics is the greatest religious and moral battleground of our day, and if we do not engage with vigor and fidelity, we will lose our right to be heard on anything else.

4. DS: Citing Philip Yancey, you state that the reason why you wrote *True Sexual Morality* was to address the need for Christians to present a persuasive approach to biblical sexuality. Are we doing a better job now addressing the subject than when you wrote your book?

DH: Perhaps a few more evangelicals now are speaking with a little more biblically grounded insight on the culture than before, and here I include Denny Burk, Russell Moore, and Wayne Grudem. But we are not keeping up with the pace of moral degradation in our culture. Other evangelicals have written books on sexual ethics since my book came out but, while repeating what Christians have always affirmed, no one else has engaged the actual questions driving cultural rebellion the way I did in *True Sexual Morality*. While things are getting rapidly worse all around, most evangelicals are side-lined by division. Older evangelicals seem mainly to be ignoring the problem, and younger evangelicals seem mainly to be attracted by accommodationists like David Gushee and Jim Wallis. Sadly both are failing the greatest challenge of our day—older evangelicals because they are ignoring the culture and younger evangelicals because they are accommodating the culture. Hardly anyone in the church comprehends the level of rebellion taking place. Francis Schaeffer once observed that, while evangelicals have the right answers,

most do not know the questions being asked in the culture. I fear that Schaeffer's criticism remains as true for us now as when he made it back almost 40 years ago.

5. DS: What area are Christians most deficient in considering? Where are our blind spots?

DH: The true church always has criticized how the world views sexual ethics, and vice versa. That alone is nothing new. What changes all the time, however, is the focus of criticism taking place. Basic features of biblical sexual morality—such as saving sex for marriage, expressing sex privately, honoring sexual fidelity in public, and disciplining adult appetites for the sake of family stability—were for ages respected in the West whether people were Christian or not. Now all that has evaporated in one generation and most Christians do not yet realize how much has shifted. Does this mean we should go on defense? Not at all! Rather we should be going on offense. Light is never so bright as when penetrating darkness.

6. DS: After ten years, what does your book contribute to the conversation that others still lack? Or are there other books that help continue the conversation?

DH: My book on sexual ethics is very different than any other book on the subject written either before or since. And, for that reason, it stands alone remaining as powerfully relevant now as in 2004. All theological writing falls into either of two categories. It either *compiles*, meaning it attempts only to repeat and review what others have said. Or it *constructs*, meaning it attempts to develop understanding in a way never done before. Theology interprets God's truth and so all was constructed at some time, usually when Christians were forced to examine more closely what the Bible really says about some previously unaddressed question. For example, the word *Trinity* does not appear in the Bible. But theologians discovered God's Trinitarian nature was indeed biblical when some began questioning the deity of Christ. I was forced to do something

like that when writing this book. Never before has the surrounding culture ever challenged the basic nature of sexual ethics the way it is doing today. This challenge forced me to dig more deeply into what God says about sexual ethics than theologians had done before. Now Christians must be cautious with *constructive* theology. We must focus on what the Bible truly reveals and must never forget that when it comes to theology mere newness is no asset by itself. I did not go to and rely on a different source of moral truth outside the Bible, but instead I dug deep into aspects of God's written Word that were always there but had never before been questioned as they are today.

7. DS: Before treating the biblical teaching on sexual morality in your book, you spend a number of chapters exposing something called "sexual paganism." Can you summarize what that term means and how paganism is a primary cause of our country's immorality?

DH: Sexual paganism is where people define the value and nature of God by sex rather than define the value and nature sex by the Living God. It is where people judge the meaning and value of spiritual life by their own sexual feelings rather than judge the meaning and value of sexual feelings by spiritual life of God. In other words, sexual paganism is the diabolical opposite of God's moral order in the area of sex. It takes the truth that sex is spiritual and affects the Power running the cosmos—and turns it upside down and inside out. It calls spiritual life "spiritual death" and calls spiritual death "spiritual life." It calls salvation "sin" and calls sin "salvation." And it sexualizes the incarnation by which God took on flesh to save sinners by reinterpreting sexual arousal as incarnating the presence of Deity. Sexual paganism, which characterized the ancient worlds of Canaan, Egypt, and Babylon, is roaring back into 21st century American culture and has become the anvil on which God's moral order is being deconstructed.

8. DS: Onto the biblical teaching on sexuality, what is most essential for Christians to under-

stand about human sexuality?

DH: The Bible is filled with references to sexual identity, sexual behavior, and sexual relationships and some might think the most important references addressing sexual ethics in the Bible are the prohibitions it contains. But as important as these prohibitions are, I believe the two most important passages in the Bible on sex and sexuality are first where it tells us that "God created man in his own image, . . . male and female he created them" (Gn 1:26–27), and second where God commands us to "be holy, for I am holy (Lv 11:45).

9. DS: If you were preaching a series on biblical sexuality, how would you do it? What biblical passages would you turn to and why? What do Christians most fundamentally need to know about true sexual morality?

DH: It is terribly important for Christians to understand how positively God views the gift of sex, while also understanding that God views good sex differently than fallen men and women. There are negatives in the biblical view of sex of course, but what God prohibits is not arbitrary. Each prohibition protects something very positive and desirable. In other words God views sex so positively he opposes anything messing it up.

10. DS: One of the many ongoing strengths of your book is its strong cultural analysis. Your fourfold taxonomy in chapters 12–15 gives the reader a well-researched survey of sexuality in the West. For those who haven't read your book, can you briefly summarize the four different counterfeit views of sexuality (e.g., romantic sexual morality, playboy sexuality, therapeutic sexuality, and pagan sexuality)?

DH: Western culture has seen the rise of four different counterfeit views—the romantic, playboy, therapeutic, and pagan views—on sexual morality, all of which are competing with the influence biblical sexual morality has had in our culture. In examining these counterfeits, one discovers two interesting things. First we can notice how there is a progression to how seriously each challenges true sexual

morality. The romantic view challenges it least, the playboy view challenges it more, the therapeutic view challenges it even more seriously, and the pagan view challenges it most seriously of all. Second, we can observe how these four counterfeit views have risen in Western history to usurp the influence of biblical standards in that exact same order. All four counterfeits challenge true sexual morality by raising a relative good to the level of absolute good and then using it to redefine sexual ethics. The romantic view absolutizes the relative value of affectionate feelings, the playboy view absolutizes the relative value of physical pleasure, the therapeutic view absolutizes the relative value of psychological fulfillment, and the pagan view absolutizes the relative value of spirituality as a self-defined experience.

11. DS: If you were writing this book in 2014, would you include a fifth counterfeit view of sexuality? If so, what would it be and why?

DH: My short answer is, No. But to explain I will give two reasons. First is because the four-fold taxonomy I use does not impose something foreign on reality in order to explain it but rather describes reality for what it is. And what I describe is not a chain of variations that might grow, but rather exhausts all the variations that can arise. The second reason no more counterfeits can arise is because, having reached the diabolical reverse of God's moral order, there is no way to get worse.

12. DS: In your book, you list sixteen biblical prohibitions that guard moral sex. One of those is "no homosexual sex." You devote three pages to the subject, but given the prominence that homosexuality has taken in our culture and among some Christians, might you have said more on that subject?

DH: Those who follow the world over the Word of God start with viewing sex as an individually experienced sensual event and therefore assume sexual ethics must come from what individuals feel or desire. In other words they view sexual ethics to be a matter of satisfying desires of the flesh rather than keep-

ing them within boundaries set a Divine Creator. I did not say much in particular about the drive in our culture to normalize homosexual desires and behavior because I was addressing something larger and more profound. Everything in my book undermines the homosexual movement, but I do it at a deeper level to give readers insight into not only what is happening but why. The book would have lost focus and power had I delved into particulars for the various sorts of sexual sin people get into after embracing false paradigms. I did not go into detail on how people reject God's prohibition of homosexual sex for the same reason I did not go into detail on how people reject God's prohibitions of adultery, lust or divorce, all of which are stressing our culture as much as homosexuality. There is a place for that but not in a book engaging ideological reasons driving moral rebellion in all areas of sexual behavior. But on that, it might interest you to know that I have just completed an entire book refuting same-sex marriage and am now working on another book that will have a chapter on homosexuality.

13. DS: In your book you write on page 129: "Christians who embrace the idea [of inborn sexual orientation] can no longer hold homosexuals responsible for having same-sex desires; they can no longer insist that must change; and they can no longer say that same-sex behavior is unnatural for everyone. Once the idea of inborn orientation takes hold, Christians start thinking the Bible is out-of-date and cannot be trusted on sex. Instead, they believe the culture is more trustworthy because it understands sex better than scripture does—better even than God himself. Biblical standards condemning homosexual behavior no longer make sense, and Christians sympathetic to inborn orientation end up having to choose between abandoning biblical sexual morality or holding to those standards even though they seem arbitrary and cruel." Can you articulate why the idea of an inborn sexual orientation is so deleterious to a

biblical worldview of sex? What is the greatest concern for Bible-believing Christians who argue for the notion of inborn same-sex attraction?

DH: I say that for two reasons. The first reason is because if sexual passions are trustworthy and should be indulged instead of disciplined, then the whole structure of biblical morality is wrong, not just in one or two places but throughout. Releasing sexual passions from moral restraint deconstructs God's moral order completely. The second reason is because the claim now is being used contrary to reliable evidence in order to justify the massively destructive idea that gender difference makes no difference. If gender difference makes no difference biologically or psychologically, then it makes no difference morally either. The idea cannot be accepted to any degree at all without rejecting God's moral ordering from top to bottom. If this is right, then God is wrong and evil; and if God is right and good, then this particular idea is wrong and evil. There is no middle ground.

14. DS: In your book, you make a strong case that followers of Christ must choose either God's view of sexuality or their own. In fact, you close the book with a sermonic appeal to choose life over sexual sin (358–59). Speaking to pastors, what counsel do you have for heralds of God's word when addressing the topic of sexuality?

DH: You cannot say God is generally right, except when it comes to sex. That cannot be done because there is no neutral ground between the two opposing sides. When it comes to sexual morality, people must either choose restraining sex with God or indulging sex without Him. God either is totally right about sex, or he is totally wrong about sex and everything else as well. Normalizing perverted sexual desire is the most strategic and most powerful weapon in Satan's arsenal.

15. DS: In the last ten years, what cultural trends and trajectories have surprised you? Did you foresee the threat to religious liberty?

DH: Much concerns me very deeply but nothing surprises me. I did anticipate the threat to religious liberty riding in on the wings of sexual moral deconstruction. If you do not believe me, then read Part III in my book. Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit, in the first chapter of Romans, was not simply referring to one of many possible illustrations when he used justifying sexual sin to explain how men and women come to revile God's true morality and to praise the reverse. Sexual sin can be forgiven. But no one can redefine sexual morality without also redefining God and his moral order. Other sins can be rationalized without redefining the moral structure of God's universe. But sex touches the spiritual core of humanity in such a unique way that no one can reject God's ordering of sexual ethics without revolutionizing the whole moral order.

16. DS: In your final chapter you refer to the sociological research of J. D. Unwin. Can you share what his research 'proved,' and why his work is so underappreciated—what Yancey calls "the lost sex study."

DH: The J.D. Unwin study is truly fascinating. It is the only truly comprehensive study ever to be conducted on how sexual ethics relates to the rise and fall of civilizations. The interesting part is that Unwin expected to find that restricting sex to man-woman marriage weakens social cohesion and that loosening sexual restrictions encourages social stability if it does not go too far. But he found the opposite of what he expected. He found that in every case without exception when societies limit sex to man-woman marriage they grow stronger, and when they loosen sexual restrictions they grow weaker and eventually collapse. No one has done further work on this since that time. No one has refuted the overwhelming evidence Unwin uncovered. And no one now talks about it either, which I suppose is because it flies in the face of present cultural desires. But Unwin's study reveals that, on the basis of social science alone, American culture

is losing sexual discipline at a pace no civilization can or ever has survived.

17. DS: Finally, as true sexual morality continues to be rejected and made illegal by our culture, what word of counsel do you have for Christians in general and pastors in particular.

DH: First I would say that Christians in general and pastors in particular should understand and communicate the truth that God's view of sex is amazingly positive. And that, while God forbids various sexual activities, he is not arbitrary or cruel and only is protecting what is best and most desirable. Second I think there is a connection between where Unwin's study suggests we are heading and what the Bible prophesies will occur before Jesus comes back. If so, all Christians need to remember God has not put the church in charge of winning the culture war over sexual ethics but only calls us to be a faithful witness until he returns. I wrote my book, *True Sexual Morality*, to equip Christians to be faithful; God is the One in charge of winning.

ENDNOTES

¹Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

I Can't Fight This Feeling Anymore: Discerning the Conflict Over Human Sexuality and Religious Liberty

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Introduction

This essay focuses on sexuality's role as a social organizing principle. In particular, it focuses on how the diversity of viewpoints around contraception, abortion, adoption, and same-sex marriage serves as an illustration of contemporary debates about religious liberty and sexuality. What this article highlights are practical examples in American public life in which divergent and competing conceptions about human sexuality are driving current debates about religious liberty. The article will also make the argument that restoring a robust understanding of religious liberty, particularly on controversial sexual issues, requires a clear, biblical sexual ethic as it relates to human flourishing.

The Rights of Sexual Liberty

The fault lines of contemporary American life run through divergent views of sex and religion. These factors alone are often an accurate predictor of how individuals will vote.¹

Present disputes over religious liberty in America, however, stem almost exclusively from deeply divergent cultural views about the design and purpose of human sexuality. How did we arrive at this current milieu? Many would argue that an evolving understanding of "rights" language is at

the center of current debates. If religious liberty is pitted against sexual liberty, and competing factions are both arguing on the grounds of "rights," whose side will prevail?

Natural rights, which were once the guarantor of liberty and which issued from a broadly theistic worldview are now challenged by a conception of rights that are derived from self-determination and self-will. It is a view of liberty issuing from autonomy. It is also a view of liberty in search of a "rights" language sufficient enough to secure it. And over time, coupled with cultural shifts and judicial rulings confirming this conception as a dominant legal reality, liberty is now conceived of less as an exercise in duty and responsibility, and more of an understanding of permissibility.

Political scientist Anthony Giddens has advanced the thesis that the "transformation of intimacy" that marks late modernity and our discussion about liberty is a creature resulting from the democratization of sexuality. In Giddens's view,

How do democratic norms bear upon sexual experience itself? This is the essence of the question of sexual emancipation . . . The democratization implied in the transformation of intimacy includes, but also transcends, 'radical pluralism.'

No limits are set upon sexual activity, save for those entailed by the generalizing of the principle of autonomy and by the negotiated norms of pure relationship. Sexual emancipation consists in integrating plastic sexuality with the reflexive project of self. Thus, for example, no prohibition is necessarily placed on episodic sexuality so long as the principle of self-autonomy, and other associated democratic norms, are sustained on all sides.²

How do *liberty as autonomy* and Giddens's thesis combine to shape present day? Starting in the 1960s, new and aberrant sexual moralities were introduced into American culture, which steadily recast traditional understandings of American morality, eventually making room for such moralities to lay claim to legal recognition.³ Hence, historical debates about a right of access to contraception, abortion, and same-sex marriage come as judicial afterthoughts issuing from a morality unknown at our country's founding. These issues have become, and indeed are fast becoming, deeply embedded institutions in American life so that the reigning sexual ethic in America is "if it feels good, do it."⁴

Contemporary culture finds its axis in an ever-expanding understanding of sexual liberty marked by—at least in America—collision with a large conservative evangelical population whose sexual ethics remain traditional.⁵ For example, if a gay rights organization asked a Christian-owned t-shirt company to print shirts advertising for a gay rights parade, and the t-shirt company declined—who is at fault? Is homosexuality a protected right? Can the t-shirt company exercise a religious belief that exempts it from lending its craft to causes it believes are sinful?⁶ These types of scenarios and debates over human sexuality and religious liberty stem from larger questions about which sexual morality and which sexual worldview will dominate the American landscape for decades to come. Academics shun generalization, but in short form, the question of the day is whether religious liberty or sexual liberty will prevail.

Sexual Cosmology

Sex defines our being. We enter this world endowed with a procreative capacity constituted by our sex as either male or female. So it is no coincidence that the first pages of Genesis begin with sex. Like a relational roadmap, God decrees that the relationship between a man and a woman is to be sexually unitive (Gen 2:7–24). Sexual identity and the sexual act itself are institutions that build civilizations. Between a man and a woman there is a microcosmic creation narrative such that the sexual arrangement of a man and woman lies at the heart of discerning what a properly ordered society looks like.⁷ Sexual desire is primal and visceral to our human experience.⁸ It powerfully foreshadows a future, heavenly mystery (Eph 5:31–32), but sex also encodes social patterns for human organization and societal ordering. While "cosmology" may be a grandiose term to describe sex's power over people, I agree with Rod Dreher who, in a provocative essay entitled "Sex after Christianity," argues that America's move away from traditional sexual morality really signals its move away from a sexual hegemony informed by a culture that was once predominantly Christian. He writes,

Is sex the linchpin of Christian cultural order? Is it really the case that to cast off Christian teaching on sex and sexuality is to remove the factor that gives—or gave—Christianity its power as a social force?⁹

According to Dreher, the ascendancy of same-sex marriage in America signals the "dethroning" of a Christian sexual cosmology in America's sexual heritage.¹⁰ Drawing on the work of sociologist Philip Rieff, Dreher summarizes the ties of "cosmology" to religion and sex:

He [Rieff] understood that religion is the key to understanding any culture. For Rieff, the essence of any and every culture can be identified by what it forbids. Each imposes a series of moral demands on its members, for the sake of serving communal purposes, and helps them cope with these demands. A culture requires

a cultus—a sense of sacred order, a cosmology that roots these moral demands within a metaphysical framework.¹¹

Sexual relations between a man and a woman constitute a crucial aspect to our being in that sexuality has a built-in organizing principle to it. According to Reiff, the sexual prohibitions that once issued from a shared cultural consensus about Christianity's demands for sexuality formed the fabric of our social order. According to Dreher, "Christianity did establish a way to harness the sexual instinct, embed it within a community, and direct it in positive ways."¹² The relationship between the sexes builds society and society in turn codifies sexual expectations for how men and women are to channel their sexual desire. According to a Christian sexual cosmology, Christianity's influence waxes or wanes to the extent that its sexual ethics are the standard community ethic that organizes a society. But as Dreher notes, that consensus about the design and purpose of sex is less recognizable with each passing generation, so that Christianity's cultural power is itself also less dominant. As Christianity is cast off, so is its sexual ethics and vice versa. But the hinge of the argument in determining how sexual morality leads to disputes over religious liberty is the following: *How a society orders itself sexually is consequential to what it values as a political community.* Sexual values shape political values. But according to the biblical narrative, what is sinful can never be ordered—teleologically—for human flourishing. The Bible and history reveal that disordered sexual relations make for corrupt, deteriorating societies.¹³ According to John Piper, sexual relationships signify spiritual enlightenment.

God created us in his image, male and female, with personhood and sexual passions, so that when he comes to us in this world there would be these powerful words and images to describe the promises and the pleasures of our covenant relationship with him through Christ. God made us powerfully sexual so that he would be more deeply knowable. We

were given the power to know each other sexually so that we might have some hint of what it will be like to know Christ supremely. Therefore, all misuses of our sexuality (adultery, fornication, illicit fantasies, masturbation, pornography, homosexual behavior, rape, sexual child abuse, bestiality, exhibitionism, and so on) distort the true knowledge of God. God means for human sexual life to be a pointer and foretaste of our relationship with him.¹⁴

Piper's comments have stunning implications for the type of sexuality practiced on a national scale. When a society embraces sexual practices abhorrent to Scripture, society experiences a similar "giving over" to lawlessness, rebellion, and wrath echoed in Romans 1:24.

When societies adopt and celebrate sexual relationships that the Bible condemns and moves away from norms that strengthen families, the deleterious effects on its people are empirically known. As Mary Eberstadt argues in her book, *How the West Really Lost God*, societal health is inextricably bound to religion's vitality and adherence within its people.¹⁵ If Dreher is right (and I think he is) about America's descent into further glorifying a sinful sexual culture and sinful sexual structures, this only deepens the divide between the Christian population and the American political culture. As differences become starker, disagreement intensifies about how sexuality should be channeled. This difference in sexual worldview is the catalyst for disputes about the rights of Christians to exercise their liberty. Below are examples concerning contemporary events and their significance to understanding the controversy over religious liberty in America.¹⁶

Contemporary Debates over Religious Liberty

Health & Human Services Mandate

President Obama's 2010 signature domestic policy achievement, the Affordable Care Act, included a preventative services mandate issued from the Health and Human Services Department's Institute of Medicine. The law mandates

that employers provide, at no cost to female employees, access to contraception, sterilization, and abortion-inducing drugs.¹⁷ While carving out narrow exceptions for church and some religious non-profits, the law has unsettled the conscience of business owners, notably the super-chain Hobby Lobby, whose owners desire to practice their business in accord with the principles of their faith. Many Christians—Catholic and Protestant—have a religious and moral objection to providing access to the aforementioned services.

Leaving aside the thornier issues about the constitutionality of the government's action, the immediate relevance to this article is the symbolic nature of government-mandated contraception services. The shift from *allowing* to *mandating* contraception signals a highly liberated view of sex, surely disconnected from the procreative emphasis, primacy, and function of human sexuality set forth in Scripture (Gen 2:24). Access to contraception has forever decoupled sex and childbearing. Moreover, once the consequence of sex, namely, children, could be cut-off from the act of sex, the relationship of a man and woman was forever transformed with the modern industrialization of contraception. While bracketing discussion about the morality of contraception, its impact on re-interpreting sex by licensing it for exclusively pleasurable purposes is a profound paradigm shift.¹⁸

Once considered taboo, access to contraception is now associated with any number of American ideals—self-liberation, self-empowerment, career mobility, and educational attainment among them. Further, any number of feminist interpretations about contraception would render the ability to control and overcome one's fertility as having acquired total independence from the burden of childbearing. In a telling admission, liberal advocates in favor of subsidized or free access to contraception have also cast their opposition to Christian concerns over infringements of religious liberty in a not-so-thinly-veiled appeal to liberty as well. Consider these words from an academic at the Center for American Progress, a liberal expositor of the sexual revolution:

Religious liberty means religious liberty for everyone. And that includes the freedom from having the theological doctrines of your boss or those of business owners in your community being forced upon you.¹⁹

Certainly, it should be admitted that the majority of Americans do exercise their right to use birth control under the rubric of personal liberty and family planning. But the shift from access to mandate is a step too far. It signals an overreaching government determined to enforce a rigid sexual worldview that contravenes Christian sexual ethics. In this instance, the government is putting a condition of marketplace entry on businesses by forcing business owners—private actors—to violate their conscience.

The HHS Mandate is an illustrative example of a government-mandated orthodoxy designed to communicate a truth about fertility and sexual freedom that conflicts with a large percentage of American Christians who have concerns about facilitating access to contraception, sterilization, or abortion-inducing drugs. American Christians persist in their opposition to the HHS Mandate, indicating that they will not be compliant with this particular government edict. While Catholics and evangelical Christians disagree on whether contraception can ever be used, both are co-belligerents against a “contraceptive mindset” that sees children as burdensome obstacles. In summary, diverse opinions on whether the sexual activity of persons should be subsidized via mandate is a clear illustration of the differences between Scripture's view of sex and our culture's view.

Adoption & Foster Services

In Illinois, Massachusetts, and Washington D.C., Catholic adoption and foster agencies have ended their services after their respective states mandated that these institutions work with same-sex couples looking to adopt or foster children. Rather than lay down their conscience and their belief that children need to know the differentiated love of both a mother and father, they ceased operation.²⁰ The irony of *faux*-tolerance peddled by

sexual liberationists is on full display in this situation. Rather than allow a religious entity to operate according to its beliefs in a “live and let live” scenario, activists forced a long-standing social service agency to close its doors before they would allow them to openly defy the new definition of sexual tolerance. This episode demonstrates the denial of sexual complementarity to the parenting enterprise and the belief that the unique traits of a male and female are interchangeable. This ethic defies the biblical mandate that a mother and father unite not only to create children, but also to care for them.

A similar, though admittedly new episode, involves the ACLU suing the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops over its health directive that prevents Catholic hospitals from performing abortion.²¹ Not content to honor the religious beliefs of one of America’s largest health-care providers, the plaintiff, under direction of the ACLU, is suing on the grounds that in emergency situations like the one presented in the case referenced, abortions should be mandated regardless of the conscience or religious beliefs of the treating institution—despite an abortion facility’s location two blocks from the Catholic hospital where the desired service could have been performed.

In the case of abortion, what’s at stake is whether the sexual ethics of a Catholic institution can withstand scrutiny brought on by the abortion industry’s insistence that abortion become institutionalized, despite prevailing objections. Arguments for life and personhood ignored, what this case typifies is the sacramentalizing of a sexual worldview that treats human sexuality as a libertine escape into sexual fulfillment, against the narrative of a Christian sexual ethic that reserves sex for marital relationships and the belief that all of life is sacred.

Homosexuality and Same-Sex Marriage

The examples involving same-sex marriage conflicting with religious liberty grow more numerous by the month.²² On this topic, I’d like to address two particular episodes. The first is from a debate in Colorado over its legislature passing a same-sex civil unions bill. This example is particu-

larly troublesome given the viciousness and hostility communicated towards Christians who hold orthodox beliefs about biblical sexuality. It demonstrates the rising tensions and atmospherics in the debate over advancing gay rights amidst concerns made by the Christian community.

Patrick Steadman is a Colorado State Senator who, in 2013, introduced a same-sex civil unions bill. During floor debate, Steadman offered a fiery floor speech denouncing those who disagree with his own purported homosexuality. According to Steadman,

Don’t claim religion as a reason the law should discriminate. We have laws against discrimination. Discrimination is banned in employment, and housing, and public accommodations, and so bakeries that serve the public aren’t supposed to look down their noses at one particular class of persons and say ‘we don’t sell cakes to you.’ It’s troubling, this discrimination. And it’s already illegal. So, what to say to those who claim that religion requires them to discriminate? I’ll tell you what I’d say: ‘Get thee to a nunnery!’ And live there then. Go live a monastic life away from modern society, away from people you can’t see as equals to yourself. Away from the stream of commerce where you may have to serve them or employ them or rent banquet halls to them. Go some place and be as judgmental as you like. Go inside your church, establish separate water fountains in there if you want, but don’t claim that free exercise of religion requires the state of Colorado to establish separate water fountains for her citizens. That’s not what we’re doing here.²³

Steadman’s language of outright marginalization and contempt for Colorado’s Christian population is a stunning admission of how intense debates can be about the role and purpose of sexuality. Advocates for homosexuality will no doubt cast this episode in terms of civil liberties, but for Christians, liberty unto itself is not a first-tier moral principle when evaluating whether a bill should be

made legal. Steadman's suggestion that Christians remove themselves from society shows just how stark debates over sexuality can be. In this case, a Colorado state senator makes moral compromise a condition of participation in the civil sphere.

A second example is found in the case of pastor Louie Giglio. In the run-up to President Obama's second inauguration, the White House invited Giglio to offer the closing benediction at the inauguration ceremony. As an articulate, evangelical pastor, Giglio has devoted much of his ministry to extinguishing sex trafficking and fueling evangelical passion for social justice. After his invitation was announced, liberal activists discovered an online sermon he preached. His offense? Preaching a message expounding a view of sexuality from the Bible and upheld by the Christian church for over two thousand years.²⁴ He was called "vehemently anti-gay" by the liberal think tank Think Progress.²⁵ Liberal critic Jonathan Capehart, also gay, dismissed Giglio, saying, "It is our right not to have an unrepentant bigot be given such a high honor on Inauguration Day."²⁶ Giglio voluntarily removed himself from inaugural festivities, but his withdrawal prompted several responses from notable Christian thinkers.²⁷

These cases indicate the growing chasm between a biblical sexual ethic and the gay lobby in America. While Christians affirm the complementarity of the sexes oriented towards the marital union, the homosexual lobby in America is unyielding in its quest to redefine and disempower the Christian sexual metanarrative. For the homosexual lobby to continue its ascendancy to cultural prominence, it will need to displace Christian sexual ethics, redefine Christianity, and marginalize and punish Christians, culturally, for holding firm to biblical Christianity.

Biblical Morality or Human Morality?

As the above examples intend to demonstrate, America is in the throes of a great conflict about human sexuality and religious liberty. Christians are being routinely told to bury their views for the sake of cultural and marketplace participation. Secular and liberal conceptions of personal sexual lib-

erty seem to be growing increasingly irreconcilable against a normative biblical sexual ethic—not just in theory, but in application seen in present disputes.

But that brings us to a closing consideration: Biblical sexual ethics, if they are to be Christian, are to be normative not just for Christians, but for all of humanity.²⁸ Moreover, Jesus Christ is Lord over sex, for he established sex and ordered its purpose. As Creator, Christ revealed the teleology of sex in Genesis 1–2 and reaffirmed it in his teaching (Matt 19:3–9). In this way, sexual ethics are Christotelic (John 1:3; Col 1:15–20).²⁹ Sexual ethics, properly ordered, are an earthly shadow (Gen 2:24) of a unitive bond fulfilled in the gospel (Eph 5:22–33). Therefore, a properly ordered sexuality is a witness to the watching world about the brokenness of human sexuality, the depths of sexual sin, and its restoration in Christ by its proper use toward its proper end—the glory of God (1 Cor 6:18–20; 10:31). I find myself in agreement with John Piper, who offers a telling insight about sexuality's connection to our knowledge of Christ.

Not only do all the misuses of our sexuality serve to conceal or distort the true knowledge of God in Christ, but it also works powerfully the other way around: the true knowledge of God in Christ serves to prevent the misuses of our sexuality. So, on the one hand, sexuality is designed by God as a way to know Christ more fully. And, on the other hand, knowing Christ more fully is designed as a way of guarding and guiding our sexuality.³⁰

But these realities and the gospel's hope in sexual brokenness will be challenged in the coming days. No one right now has the foresight to see what legal troubles Christians will find themselves in for maintaining a biblical sexual ethic. But I see no reason in offering Pollyannaish tales unmoored from reality. The times are dark. Chai Feldblum, an Obama appointee to Commissioner of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, is emblematic of the legal future facing Christians. In a now infamous remark discussing conflicts over

religious liberty, she made the following observation discussing how sexual liberty and religious liberty interact with one another:

Sexual liberty should win in most cases. There can be a conflict between religious liberty and sexual liberty, but in almost all cases the sexual liberty should win because that's the only way that the dignity of gay people can be affirmed in any realistic manner.³¹

This may be our future: Legal loss and cultural marginalization. In a very real way that is becoming increasingly known through experience; the tipping point of Christian influence and Christian identity in society may be the political and cultural witness we offer when we recognize and gladly submit to the authority and Lordship of Jesus Christ over sex. Christ and sexuality are never in tension when lived out according to his purposes. When aligned together, the teleology of Christian sexuality results in the glorifying of Christ and the sanctification of one's desires (2 Cor 4:4–6). Yet, where sexuality is divorced from its purposes found in Christ, the corrupting influence of sexual disorder remains unrivaled in breeding enemies of the cross (Phil 3:17–21). The reality of these stark differences is intensified when evaluated from the vantage point of which code of sexual ethics a culture adopts—God-glorifying sexual ethics or God-denying sexual ethics. But let us be clear: When God's glory is robbed, a nation's future is robbed, as well.

Times may be darkening in America as a Christian sexual ethic is treated with open hostility, but there is no reason for despair. The Christian Church does her best work when tested. While Feldblum's quote is disconcerting, I'm reminded of an even better quote offered by a Catholic Cardinal, Francis George:

I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square. His successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the church has done so often in human history.³²

ENDNOTES

¹Joseph Liu, "How the Faithful Voted: 2012 Preliminary Analysis," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, November 7, 2012, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/11/07/how-the-faithful-voted-2012-preliminary-exit-poll-analysis/>.

²Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992), 194.

³*Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) secured access to contraception for the general population. *Roe v. Wade* (1973) guaranteed access to abortion. And while a constitutional right to same-sex marriage has not yet been granted, legal proceedings in the states suggest that the Supreme Court will soon hear a state-level case asking whether the Constitution guarantees a right to same-sex marriage, an issue that Court avoided during its 2013 cases involving Proposition 8 and *Windsor*.

⁴Robert P. George, "What Is Religious Freedom?," *Public Discourse*, July 24, 2013, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2013/07/10622/>.

⁵I use "traditional" only in a descriptive sense to discuss how America's sexual ethics were once animated by a civil religion sexuality drawn from Christianity. America still is animated by a biblical sexual ethic, but as the argument in the paper will make clear, this is becoming less of a fact in contemporary America.

⁶This is not hypothetical. A case identical to what has been described is currently being litigated in Lexington, Kentucky.

⁷Excluding popular caricatures such as "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve," the Genesis narrative offers an authoritative narrative about God's intention for human sexuality. Hermeneutically, the biblical account of human relationships indicates that the pattern of the marriage union is to be biologically complementary, institutionally permanent, sexually exclusive, and monogamous. For a defense of a natural law explanation of marriage, see Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George, *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012). For a discussion about the authority of Christ in re-affirming the creational institution of marriage, see Andrew Walker, "Jesus And The Same-Sex Marriage Debate," *The Federalist*, November 22, 2013, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://thefederalist.com/2013/11/22/jesus-sex-marriage-debate/>.

⁸"God created us with sexual passion so that there would be language to describe what it means to cleave to him in love and what it means to turn away from him to others." John Piper, *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 28.

⁹Rod Dreher, "Sex After Christianity," *The American Conservative*, April 11, 2013, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/sex-after-christianity/>.

¹⁰*Ibid.* As Dreher notes, "Same-sex marriage strikes the decisive blow against the old order."

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³J.D. Unwin, *Sex and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934).

¹⁴Piper, *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, 29–30.

¹⁵Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2013).

¹⁶Space prevents me from offering an extended discussion about the nature of religious liberty, but the following are representative volumes that offer classical rendering of religious liberty: Robert P. George, *Conscience and Its Enemies: Confronting the Dogmas of*

Liberal Secularism (Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2013), 106–25; Timothy Samuel Shah, et al., *Religious Freedom: Why Now?: Defending an Embattled Human Right* (Princeton, NJ: Witherspoon Institute, 2012).

¹⁷For more information related to litigation and the Health and Human Services Mandate, see <http://www.becketfund.org/hhsinformationcentral/>. At this writing, the Supreme Court will hear oral arguments on the constitutionality of the HHS Mandate in late March and will issue its decision in late June.

¹⁸For an excellent discussion about Christian ethics and the morality of contraception, see Denny Burk, *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 139–55.

¹⁹Joshua Dorner, “Religious Liberty for Some or Religious Liberty for All?,” *Center for American Progress*, December 12, 2013, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/civil-liberties/report/2013/12/12/80968/religious-liberty-for-some-or-religious-liberty-for-all/>.

²⁰U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Religious Liberty Under Attack,” *U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops*, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/fortnight-for-freedom/upload/Catholic-Adoption-Services.pdf>.

²¹“*Tamesha Means v. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*,” *American Civil Liberties Union*, December 2, 2013, accessed April 30, 2014, <https://www.aclu.org/reproductive-freedom-womens-rights/tamesha-means-v-united-states-conference-catholic-bishops>.

²²There are currently disputes over homosexual rights and/or same-sex marriage and religious liberty in Kentucky, Washington, Colorado, and New Mexico. For an up-to-date reading of these cases, see alliancefendingfreedom.org. ADF is litigating these cases on behalf of Christian business owners.

²³Eric Dolan, “Colorado Lawmaker Tells Anti-Gay Christians: ‘Get Thee to a Nunnery,’” *The Raw Story*, February 21, 2013, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2013/02/21/colorado-lawmaker-tells-anti-gay-christians-get-thee-to-a-nunnery/>.

²⁴Melissa Steffan, “Louie Giglio Withdraws from Inauguration over Past Sermon on Homosexuality,” *ChristianityToday.com*, January 21, 2013, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/january/louie-giglio-withdraws-from-inauguration-over-past-sermon.html>.

²⁵Josh Israel, “Inaugural Benediction To Be Delivered By Pastor Who Gave Vehemently Anti-Gay Sermon,” *Think Progress*, January 9, 2013, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://thinkprogress.org/lgbt/2013/01/09/1422021/inaugural-benediction-to-be-delivered-by-anti-gay-pastor/>.

²⁶Jonathan Capehart, “Louie Giglio out from Inaugural: Good,” *Washington Post*, January 20, 2013, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2013/01/10/louie-giglio-out-from-inaugural-good/>.

²⁷“When it is now impossible for one who holds to the catholic Christian view of marriage and the gospel to pray at a public event, we now have a de facto established state church. Just as the pre-constitutional Anglican and congregational churches required a license to preach in order to exclude Baptists, the new state church requires a “license” of embracing sexual liberation in all its forms.” Russell Moore, “Louie Giglio and the New State Church,” *Russell-Moore.com*, January 10, 2013, accessed April 30, 2014, www.russell-moore.com/2013/01/10/louie-giglio-and-the-new-state-church/.

²⁸When we speak of sexuality as *only* a theological construct, we do a disservice to its public significance. There aren’t two kinds of

sexuality—one secular, one sacred. There is only one sexuality with one purpose.

²⁹Consider that marriage’s creational purpose in Genesis 2 is fulfilled in the picture of the Christ-Church union in Ephesians 5.

³⁰Piper, *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, 30.

³¹Maggie Gallagher, “Banned in Boston,” *The Weekly Standard*, May 15, 2006, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/012/191kgwgh.asp%3Fpage%3D2>.

³²Tim Drake, “The Myth and the Reality of ‘I’ll Die in My Bed,’” *National Catholic Register*, October 24, 2012, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/tim-drake/the-myth-and-the-reality-of-ill-die-in-my-bed>.

Did God Actually Say? Hearing God's Voice on Homosexuality From the Storyline of Scripture

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There's a video on YouTube that has received nearly 700,000 views. Penguins, cats, and babies best that every day. Hour-long lectures on texts from Leviticus, Romans, and 1 Corinthians don't. As a new Harvard student and professing Christian, Matthew Vines was amazed at the openness to homosexuality he witnessed on Harvard's campus. So, he took a year off of school to settle the question of what the Bible teaches on the subject. The video he uploaded to YouTube is his manifesto, and it resonates with an audience large enough to land him a book deal on the same subject.¹

What did he learn? His conclusion about "traditional" Christians and their view of homosexuality sums it up:

You are taking a few verses out of context and extracting from them an absolute condemnation that was never intended. But you are also striking to the very core of another human being and gutting them of their sense of dignity and of self-worth. You are reinforcing the message that gay people have heard for centuries: You will always be alone. You come from a family, but you'll never form one of your own. You are uniquely unworthy of loving and being loved by another person, and all because you're different, because you're gay.²

Vines is right that the Bible is important and that we should read every verse in context. And he is also right to suggest that getting the Bible wrong harms people.

But do Christians who believe that the Bible condemns homosexuality really arrive at that conclusion by taking a few verses out of context? Does this interpretation gut those with same-sex attraction of their dignity and worth as human beings? Does believing this resign those with same-sex attraction to a life of loveless isolation? We should want to know. We must give an answer (1 Pet 3:15).

What Did God Actually Say?

Today, we want to answer the question, "What has God said about homosexuality?"³ One way to answer this question is to study specific instances of the mention of "homosexuality" in Scripture. Matthew Vines takes this approach. By contrast, I will show how the framework of the entire Bible, not just a collection of proof-texts, presents heterosexual marriage as the normative context for sexual intimacy and the reason why same-sex marriage cannot be condoned by Christians who love God and their neighbor.⁴

We might think this question is out of our league, especially when scholars disagree.⁵ But, as we will see, God's Word when read in the context of God's whole Bible, is not confusing but clear.

Creation: God's Design for Human Sexuality

Everyone has an account for the meaning of gender, marriage, and sexuality. Christians, though, believe in a revealed morality in a world made a certain way and for a certain purpose—ultimately, the glory of God. Our sexual ethic begins in Genesis 1 and 2.

God created man in his own image ... male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" ... Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." (Gen 1:27–28; 2:18)

Even in Eden the man needed a complementary woman. To evince this need, God paraded various animals before Adam, none a suitable helper. Only then did God put Adam to sleep and make a woman out of his side. When Adam awoke he expressed his delight:

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken
out of Man." (Gen 2:23)

It is in this context that God gave us his sexual ethic:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Gen 2:24–25)

We learn at least five things from Genesis 1–2.⁶

First, we learn that God made two genders. We come in two bio-forms: male and female. Accordingly, gender is not a social construct developed later. It is determined by creation, and it is delimited to two sexes.⁷

Second, these two kinds of human beings complement one another. Though both individually made in the image of God, they can only fulfill their "mis-

sion" of filling the earth with the glory of God by means of sexual partnerships held together in the bonds of covenant marriage.⁸

Third, when a man and woman come together, they multiply. One purpose of human sexuality is to unite man and woman and to bring new life into the world. So while marriage is about more than procreation, it is nonetheless oriented toward the gift of children, the fruit of their union.⁹

Fourth, marriage unites man and woman in a complementary, comprehensive, exclusive, and permanent union. Human beings are to leave father and mother, and cleave to one another. Friendships come and go with varying degrees of closeness and commitment. Marriage is always a whole-human, whole-life union.

Fifth, gender, sexuality, and marriage are real, good, and beautiful. What God made was "very good." The man and the woman were naked and not ashamed.

This is how it is. Or, perhaps we should say, this is how it *was*. Because of the fall, none of us knows this perfection firsthand. And those who experience same-sex attraction must wonder if they live in a parallel universe. To ascertain what happened to this original design, we must consider what came next in the biblical storyline.

Fall: Our Universal Problem with Sex

In the fall, God tells us what went wrong with humanity. In Genesis 3, a new character enters the story.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?' ... 'You will not surely die.'" (vv. 1, 4)

God said, "Eat and die" (cf. Gen 2:17). The serpent said, "Eat and live." Adam and Eve trusted the serpent and ate.

When God called them to account, Adam blamed his wife, and Eve blamed the serpent. The first marriage was on the rocks. And now, as a result of their sin and God's ensuing curse, human sexu-

ality would be forever changed.

To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” (Gen 3:16)

God cursed Adam with trouble working the ground and with the promise that he would one day return to the ground. Finally, “He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). As a result, God’s image-bearers entered a world outside Eden without God and with hearts ready to invent sin, especially sexual sin.¹⁰ Genesis 3 teaches at least three things about sex after the fall.

First, it teaches us that Adam’s sin changed everything. Our problems are not because we came off the line bad. Humans broke bad. There are things about us that are broken, bent, and bad because we are not what we were made to be (Eccl 7:29). If you don’t struggle with same-sex attraction, you are nonetheless plagued by sexual sin or the inward corruption of sexual desires.

Second, men and women, after the fall, are ashamed. Adam and Eve hid from one another and from God. The plants in Eden were meant to reveal God’s goodness, not to hide our shame. And yet, fig leaves were used by Adam and Eve as a cover for nakedness.

Third, men and women are at odds. As a consequence of the fall, women will desire the place of their husband, and husbands will be constantly tempted to rule over their wives. One explanation for some cases of same-sex desire is a disordered relationship between sexes in a fallen world.

We could list many more ramifications, but it is enough to say that every aspect of human sexuality has been corrupted by the fall. Accordingly, God gave instructions (i.e., *torah*) about human sexuality.¹¹ These laws mitigated the effects of sexual sin and taught Israel (and the church) how to glorify God with their sexuality. We must consider these instructions, but only on the way to offering something more powerful in the gospel message—

namely, pardon for sexual sin and power to live a holy life in Christ.

Torah: Good Laws for Sexual Sinners

The rest of the Bible is written in response to Genesis 3. And as it relates to human sexuality, it is filled with commands concerning sexual conduct. In what follows, we will consider three passages that demonstrate how the biblical narrative esteems sexual purity through a consistent sexual ethic that is rooted in creation’s design and accords with God’s holy nature.

Leviticus 18:20–23 Reveals the Extent of Human Sexual Immorality

Although Moses addresses sexual immorality before the book of Leviticus (e.g., Genesis 19 or Genesis 37; Exod 20:14, 17), Leviticus 18 is a primary passage for explaining God’s view of sex.

And you shall not lie sexually with your neighbor’s wife and so make yourself unclean with her. You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion. (Lev 18:20–23)

In these four verses, three realities are evident.

First, it teaches us that East of Eden, men and women don’t always want to pursue one-flesh unions. These commands were given because human beings actually desire to do these things. We are now born wanting to unite with all kinds of things.

Second, departures from God’s creation design are perversions. That is, our wants are wrapped around the wrong things. And we’re all sexual sinners. That your struggle with sexual temptation may be common doesn’t mean it’s normal or life-giving. There was no lust in the garden, but in the graveyard of the world there is all sorts of necrophilia, (i.e., sexual desire for the spiritually dead and dying).

Third, perversions are abominations because they deny the greatness and goodness of God. God is the LORD, and his name is not to be profaned. It is a cosmic insult for a man or woman to reject God's gift of a divinely designed complement.

Before we move on from Leviticus, we need to answer a common question. We keep God's command about homosexuality, but what about his commands for farming, clothing, and food?

While Leviticus was written *for* us, it was not written immediately *to* us. Leviticus is written to the nation of Israel under the Mosaic covenant. The Lord gave Israel commands to govern her life as a nation, and these commands served a variety of purposes. Some were intended to remind the people that they were separated from the nations and belonged to the Lord. At every meal and with every change of clothes they would have a reminder.¹² But some commands were clearly tied to the nature of God and God's creation, such as commands concerning murder, or theft, or sexual immorality. The command, "you shall not lie with a male as with a woman," comes with a reason tied to Genesis 1–2. This text from the Old Testament in Leviticus is important, but it is not all we have.

1 Corinthians 6:9–10 Reveals the Cost of Sexual Immorality

In a letter that cites the Mosaic Law to endorse the practice of "purg[ing] the evil person from among you" for sins such as incest (1 Cor 5:13), Paul writes in the next chapter.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor 6:9–10)

What does 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 teach us? We don't need to reflect long on this one. Those who practice unrighteousness, which includes homosexuality, will not enter the kingdom. The unrighteous who love their lives more than God,

will go to hell because they did not repent and lose their lives for the sake of Christ (cf. Matt 10:39). Still, Paul's most explicit teaching on homosexuality is not in 1 Corinthians but Romans.

Romans 1:24–32 Reveals the True Impulses behind Sexual Immorality

Beginning his massive exposé of sin (Rom 1:18–3:23), Paul shows how sin at its root is a matter of idolatry. He writes in Romans 1:24–32:

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

...They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness ...Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Romans 1 teaches us at least five things about the nature of sin, in general, and homosexuality, in particular.

First, we learn that God made the world so that certain things would be plain. So clear are God's "invisible attributes" in "the things that have been made," that Paul can say, "they are without excuse" (vv. 20–21). Paul also speaks of "natural relations" between men and women (v. 27). In Paul's mind (and in the mind of his audience) there exists an "obviousness" about the way human sexuality works.

Second, in sin, humans reject God's divine design. In Romans 1:18 Paul says that we "suppress the truth" in our unrighteousness. More than just rejecting

what seems obvious, sinful humanity rejects God's created order ("the truth"). The truth is unappealing to the unrighteous, and so they "exchange" it for a lie (Rom 1:24). This has many effects, but sexual sin is one of the most evident.

Third, homosexuality is a particularly vivid example of our rejection of God. The glory of God and the complementarity of the sexes are evident in nature. Similarly, when our idolatry distorts our relationship with our Creator, our orientation towards other humans suffers as a result. The example of men having sexual relations with other men, and women with women reaffirms this axiom of creation.

Fourth, unrestrained sin, including homosexuality, is an evidence of God's wrath in passive form. The non-interference of God in our lives is not a tacit endorsement of God's permission. Just the opposite, it is a way in which God brings judgment on an individual.

Fifth, the approval of sin exacerbates the guilt of sin. Endorsement is the end of the line. Here, illicit passions are not just expressed but celebrated and defended. Nothing could be sadder for the image-bearer than to embrace their brokenness as beauty, and their rebellion as righteousness. And yet, this is happening around us today.

Though advocated and legislated in an increasing number of states, the proposal for "same-sex marriage" does not honor these couples but institutionalizes human shame. It is a modern-day fig leaf that Christians must reject since it dishonors both God and human beings.

Still in our boldness to call sin "sin," we must be equally bold to proclaim forgiveness, grace, and love. And not surprisingly, in each of the passages we've surveyed, there is an explicit invitation for sinners to find mercy at the altar of grace.

Redemption: Good News for Sexual Sinners

In his plan of redemption, God tells us how the sexually immoral can be redeemed. Lest we think that God's only word on homosexuality is judgment, let's read around in the immediate context of each of the verses we've explored.

There is good news of substitution in the book of Leviticus

Remember God's judgment that men sleeping with men is an abomination? That command comes in the context of the book of Leviticus, a book whose very shape and substance highlights the marvelous initiative of God to make a way for sinful people to meet with him. Through a comprehensive system of sacrifice and priestly representation God's people could find a way of pardon and cleansing. And yet the entire system points forward to a greater priest who would solve the problem of sin once and for all by the sacrifice of himself (Heb 9:13–14; 10:14). The "point" of Leviticus is to lead guilty, defiled, *repentant* sinners to find redemption and cleansing in Christ (cf. 1 John 1:9).

There is good news of cleansing in 1 Corinthians 6:11

Remember Paul's clear words that those who practice homosexuality will not enter the kingdom? He followed that warning with this gracious proclamation: "And such *were* some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). Our various temptations may never leave us, but a sinners' hope is that in the gospel God ultimately takes away sin. The Christian has undergone a fundamental change so that they are a new person with a new standing before God and a new future.

There is good news of salvation in Romans 3:24–25

Remember how God's righteous wrath is revealed against the unrighteous who suppress the truth about him? Here's where Paul was headed. In Romans 3:24–25, after bringing all men under the judgment of God's wrath, Paul writes,

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

Honestly, the power of the gospel is that it levels all sinners at the cross and it raises those who believe to new life by means of justification, redemption, and propitiation. While the good news won't condone our sexual proclivities, it will crucify them and give us a new power to put to death the deeds of the flesh (Rom 1:16–17; 8:13).

The good news of the gospel is a message of a love beyond compare

Without Christ, we have no hope; but in Christ we have great hope. Because of God's gospel, repentant sinners can honestly admit their wickedness before God, while simultaneously reveling in God's loving forgiveness. There is no contradiction. And there is therefore no contradiction for us to speak about the sin of homosexuality and to do so with love. We speak about sin in order that sinners might know washing, sanctification, and justification through Christ.

This was the promise first made in Genesis 3:15 after Adam and Eve sinned. And it is the invitation that God gives until the last chapter of Revelation (22:17): "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come." While we began with Genesis, let us now conclude by a consideration of the new creation and a world better than sex.

New Creation: A World Better Than Sex

In his promise of a new creation, God tells us about a world better than sex. Listen to this description of the future world of love.

Revelation 21:1–9

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth ...And I saw the holy city ...prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. ...He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore ... [And he said] "Behold, I am making all things new. ...To the thirsty I will

give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ...But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." Then came one of the seven angels...saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

What does Revelation 21 teach us?

First, it teaches us that heaven unifies us with God.

The union we were made to enjoy with a spouse in this life is but a flicker of what the believer will enjoy with God. Marriage is a picture of that union, a parable of the infinite bliss of marriage with God. He is our Bridegroom; the church is his bride (cf. Eph 5:31–32).

Second, heaven is filled with only good things. God wipes away our tears. All pain is gone. In heaven illicit desires are erased and sexual sin is stopped. While this world is filled with sexual confusion, the world to come is crystal clear. Accordingly, it is worth looking into the future to better understand God's will about sexuality in the present.

Third, heaven will be utterly satisfying. In the city of God there is river of delights (cf. Ps 36:8), a spring of living water. Its cost is free; its worth is priceless. For the sexually unsatisfied in this age, the holy city will more than make up for all the feelings of loss now. But it is a "holy city," and one whose inhabitants are clothed in the righteous garments of a purified virgin (Rev 19:7–8).

Fourth and finally, there is a direction and goal to history. The right side of history is a side with an eternal, monogamous, complementary union between Christ the groom and his bride, the church. Same-sex marriage is an unreality that does not cohere with the Bible or the final goal of creation—the marriage supper of the Lamb.

This is the story of the Bible. And this is the context and ground of our sexual ethic. It's not just biblical. It's beautiful. And while more questions need to be answered, we cannot escape the fact that from the beginning of the Bible until the end there is a unified story about marriage, from Adam and

Eve to Christ and his church. And, thus, the story of Scripture reveals the voice of God on homosexuality because it reveals the voice of God on marriage, gender, human sexuality.

Homosexuality, Human Dignity, and the Gospel

In the end, how should we respond to those who resonate with Matthew Vines? In the first place, we must remember who we are. Paul didn't struggle with same-sex attraction, and yet he could say, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Tim 1:15). We must let our sin temper our speech.

But we must also remember what we have—the purifying power of God's gracious gospel. We have a Word from God about sin, and we have a Word from God about salvation. Accordingly, we must not be ashamed of the gospel and we must boldly defend its unified message even as we engaged a fractured world.

Here's what that might sound like in response to Matthew Vines, or anyone else struggling with same-sex attraction:

You are not alone and you are not uniquely unworthy of love. In Adam, we are all sinners by birth (Rom 5:12, 18–19). But, as Scripture says, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

Jesus Christ took our condemnation so that we might be forgiven and live without guilt. And he took our rejection so that we might never be alone. So, my friend, I urge you to exchange the lie that your desires define you for the truth that God defines us all. Turn from sin, trust the cross, and know total forgiveness and true family. Nothing is more humanly dignifying than this.

ENDNOTES

¹Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014).

²"The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality," by Matthew Vines. Accessed on April 2, 2014. <http://www.matthewvines.com/transcript>

³This article is an adaptation of a three part lecture given on April 5,

2014 at Desert Springs Church, entitled, *Homosexual Marriage: Seeking Clarity, Conviction, and Compassion*. http://www.desertspringschurch.org/messages/By_Series/Seminar-Homosexual_Marriage/.

⁴Samuel Emadi makes this point in his review of Jason Lee, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from Gays-vs.-Christian Debate*, in *JBMW* 18.2 (Fall 2013): 38–39.

⁵For help in answering objections to the traditional interpretation of Scripture on this issue, I have found extensive help from the fine work of Robert A.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).

⁶Cf. Denny Burk who lists seven: marriage is (1) covenantal, (2) sexual, (3) procreative, (4) heterosexual, (5) monogamous, (6) non-incestuous, and (7) symbolic of Christ and the church (*What is the Meaning of Sex?* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013], 87–109).

⁷On the subject of inter-sex and how people who suffer from gender disorders (e.g., Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia, Klinefelter's, etc.) do not disprove this gender essentialism, see Denny Burk, *What is the Meaning of Sex?*, 20–21, 77–78, 169–76, 180–82.

⁸Christopher Ash, *Married for God: Making Your Marriage the Best It Can Be* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 2007), 29–45.

⁹On the centrality of pursuing children in marriage, see David Schrock, "Children: A Blessed Necessity for Christian Marriages," in *The Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 4.1 (Fall/Winter 2013): 62–64.

¹⁰In only seven generations, we see recorded in the biblical text a prominent deviation from God's design for marriage: Lamech married two women and boasted of his ungodly exploits (Gen 4:23–24).

¹¹Interestingly, laws about sexuality are not infralapsarian. When God created Adam and Eve, he commanded them to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). Hence, from the inception of mankind, there were divine imperatives regarding human sexuality.

¹²See Tom Schreiner, "Leviticus," in *The King and His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 56–61.

GENDER STUDIES IN REVIEW

**A Review of Denny Burk, *What is the Meaning of Sex?*
Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. 262 pp. \$17.99.**

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A number of years ago I had the opportunity to hear the Christian philosopher Peter Kreeft speak on the topic, “Will there be sex in heaven?” Judging by audience reaction at the lecture, Kreeft’s talk was disappointing to most who attended, for the title of his talk was a bit of a gimmick—that is, his topic was not sexual intercourse, but sexual gender. When I received a copy of Denny Burk’s new book, *What is the Meaning of Sex?*, my mind went back to Kreeft’s lecture, as I wondered if Burk’s book was about intercourse or about gender. As it turns out, this volume is about intercourse, gender, and much, much more.

Denny Burk is well known to many readers of this journal, as he currently serves as the editor of *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. Additionally, Burk is professor of biblical studies at Boyce College, and associate pastor of Kenwood Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Burk’s extensive speaking and previous writings on gender, marriage, parenting, and sexuality make him well qualified to write a book on the meaning of sex.

The general purpose of this book is easily inferred from its title—that is, Burk writes to answer the question, *What is the Meaning of Sex?* However, more specifically, in Burk’s own words, “This book is an attempt to show from the Bible what the meaning of sex is and thereby how we ought to order our sexual lives under God” (12). The answer to the question of the meaning of sex that Burk provides—indeed, it resounds like a mantra throughout his entire book—is that sex exists to glorify God. In saying this, Burk is speak-

ing both about sex in the sense of intercourse, as well as gender. In fact, intercourse and gender are really not separate fields of study, as what an individual believes about one will necessarily impact the other, along with a host of other related topics. This is what Burk means when he writes that this book aims to show “how we ought to order our sexual lives under God.”

Structurally, *What is the Meaning of Sex?* consists of eight chapters. The range of issues Burk manages to cover is impressive, including abortion, adultery, birth control, celibacy, divorce, homosexuality, incest, marriage, masturbation, polygamy, sex toys, and singleness, among many others. Chapter 1 is foundational in nature as it focuses on glorifying God in one’s body through a study of 1 Corinthians 6:12–20. The focus of chapter 2 is hermeneutics, where Burk challenges the idea that Jesus and Paul had divergent ethics of sex. Chapter 3 studies the covenantal nature of marriage. In chapter 4 Burk focuses on the ethics of sexual intercourse, as well as tackling the difficult issue of divorce. Chapter 5 contains an excellent discussion of birth control and family planning, including an analysis of popular methods of contraception. The topic of chapter 6 is manhood and womanhood, as biblical gender roles are explained. Chapter 7 gives an excellent discussion of homosexuality, including a call for compassionate ministry to those who struggle with this temptation. Finally, chapter 8 contains a discussion of singleness, as well as drawing the book to a synthesis and conclusion.

Identifying strengths and positive aspects of

What is the Meaning of Sex? is not hard. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any Christian reading this book and walking away disappointed. This book is on a topic that is relevant to everyone, in one way or another, and it is written in such a clear, conversational tone that even teenagers in a youth group could read this book with ease. At the same time, this volume is so well researched that seminary students could use this book in an academic environment. Moreover, upon reading *What is the Meaning of Sex?* the one word that encapsulates the entire text is “biblical.” In his discussions, explanations, and arguments Burk is continually interacting with, appealing to, and explaining Scripture. Judging from the small print scriptural index appended to this volume, I would estimate Burk makes more than 500 biblical references. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why this book is so relevant and practical.

Because this volume is so biblical, it is difficult to find many faults with it. However, allow me to indulge in two minor quibbles. First, I wish this 262-page book were shorter, perhaps about half of its current length. Of course, this is not a content-related critique, but I mention the length of the text because a book this good would find its way into the hands of more people if it were shorter. In his defense, Burk notes in the preface that his original intention was to write a shorter text, but as often happens, the book took on a life of its own.

A second quibble is that in explaining the subordinate purposes of sex in this volume, Burk adopts Hollinger’s rubric of consummation, procreation, love, and pleasure.¹ While this is helpful, I believe Hollinger’s list to be incomplete. To it I would add companionship, avoidance of sexual sin, depiction of the Trinitarian relationship, and communication of certain dynamics of the Christ/Church relationship. To be sure, Burk would affirm these additional purposes, and he does discuss them in the narrative of his text; however, I believe they could be better emphasized if specifically identified as subordinate purposes.

In summary, then, *What is the Meaning of Sex?* is an excellent book—one of the best I have read in the field in a very long time. Indeed, I believe

this book will become the standard textbook in the field over the next few years. I plan on using this book in both my church and my seminary classes. This book ought to find its way on to the bookshelf of layperson, student, and pastor alike.

ENDNOTES

¹Dennis P. Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

**A Review of Aimee Byrd, *Housewife Theologian: How the Gospel Interrupts the Ordinary*.
Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013. 240 pp. \$12.99.**

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This book is for women. It is for all women who want to know God, or better yet, want to be known by God. Striving to find meaning amidst the mundanity of everyday living, many of us feel swallowed up in mixed messages of purpose and significance, all the while merely wanting to contribute, to connect, to share joy and suffering. (11)

With these words Aimee Byrd begins her book *Housewife Theologian* and invites her readers to discover the meaning of true womanhood. Byrd wants to elevate the term “housewife” by understanding the value of a woman’s connection to the home and calling women to greater intentionality in understanding and living out their faith in Christ.

Intended as a group study (even including journaling questions), Byrd divides her book into twelve, topical chapters. These chapters cover a number of relevant topics such as the unique roles of women and wives, the nature of true beauty founded in Christ-centered humility, theology and the life of the mind, sexuality, hospitality, and involvement in the local church and community.

A Few Highlights

As a housewife myself I can personally attest that each of these topics are important, and Byrd has several incisive things to say about each of them. First, I have often felt the temptation to “check out” after a hard day. My job as a stay-at-home mom is *do... and redo*. I *do* the dishes in the morning, *redo* them in that afternoon, and *redo* them *again* at night. I make the beds on Monday morning and *redo* them the other six days of the week. I feed people at breakfast and *redo* the job several times throughout the day.

You get the point. Do . . . redo. Every day, every week . . . the work is unrelentingly repetitive.

At the end of a day filled with such relentless redundancy, after being constantly pulled in so many directions with so many tasks to accomplish, it is tempting to fade into the la-la land of Facebook, or drift into the mindlessness of a Netflix movie. In response to this temptation to check out and enjoy the ease of passive entertainment, Byrd encourages all of us to foster the life of the mind and commit ourselves to learn theology. Byrd says many do not see the importance of learning theology because they see it as a “specialized form of knowledge for a select few” (65). Byrd, however, reminds us that our “faith has content” (13). In order to love God more and grow in faith we must know Him.

Second, Byrd appropriately warns us that when we do not commit ourselves to knowing God and studying His Word we open ourselves up to temptation, just as Eve did in the garden. When we begin listening to the voices around us that compete for our attention and do not focus on the truth of God’s Word we can so quickly wander. These exhortations can seem obvious, but are frighteningly easy to forget in a world filled with noise, distractions, and competing worldviews.

Third, another helpful part of the book was Byrd’s chapter on hospitality entitled “Welcome In.” To put it bluntly, you need this chapter. There are many days, when after hours of cleaning, cooking, and laundering, I feel like my day has been full of “monkey work.” Many people in our society might look at my life and think I am “wasting” my college education. The society sees the tasks I do as necessary, but menial. Byrd seeks to “recover the dignity” (124) of the position of the housewife. She makes the worthy point that “if keeping a home is for the

uneducated, how come there are so many women these days who have no idea how to cook or clean well? Aren't *they* the ones who are uneducated in these basic skills of life?" (125) She then goes on to encourage us housewives not to be isolated while doing these tasks, but to include others in them. Including our children, husbands, and others in our sphere of influence can provide for quiet times to connect with them and pass these skills on to them. This was a helpful reminder to me, and I suspect it will be to other moms of small children, as it is often easier to simply complete a task rather than to welcome others—especially my children—into the experience and take the time to teach.

Finally, Byrd reminds us to think Christianly about hospitality. The biblical command for the believer to extend hospitality is intended to cause us to share our lives with others for the sake of building each other up and point each other toward the gospel of Christ. It is not to show off our immaculate homes and perfectly behaved children. This is a good reminder in a world where Pinterest has set the bar for birthday cakes and interior design at an impossible level.

A Message Christian Women Need to Hear

The message of *Housewife Theologian* is one that women in the church need to hear. Aimee Byrd calls the women who read her book to greater faithfulness, theological fervor and intellectual excellence as they seek to live out their roles as Christian women and wives.

Housewife Theologian is an excellent book with many helpful insights and applications of God's Word. Byrd's book provides a good jumping off point for the group discussions. The tone of the chapters is very conversational and accessible to the average reader. My primary critique of this good book had to do with the meandering nature of the chapters. Byrd seemed to wander a bit and get off message at times. While these wanderings had generally good content, more concentrated focus throughout the book would have made it easier to follow.

Overall, *Housewife Theologian* is a valuable resource for women in the church. It is a helpful

tool that will inform and challenge women to use both their unique roles as women and their God-given intellect to glorify God and serve those around them.

A Review of William Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. 168 pp. \$24.00.

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Has there ever been a society in history where sex isn't a hot topic? I am not qualified to give a definitive answer, but my gut tells me "no." Today, as we peruse news headlines or watch reality shows or listen to conversations at water coolers and play-dates, it's easy to see how pervasive sexuality has become. It's everywhere. And it is awfully controversial.

What does God say about sexuality? That's another big question. The first step in approaching this delicate subject is to keep one eye on our present culture while putting the other squarely on the biblical world. We need to grasp the ancient setting behind the text and the literary world of the text. If we miss these, we may not accept the validity of Leviticus' restrictions on homosexuality (Lev 18:22) or embrace Jesus' heavy teaching on divorce and remarriage (Matt 19:1–12) or enjoy Solomon's poem on marital sexuality (Song of Solomon).

William Loader helps us see the ancient world more vividly in his work *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature*. He says, "This book is about listening to what ancient authors were saying [about sex]. In particular it looks at attitudes towards sex in early Judaism and one of the movements it generated, Christianity" (1).

The Flesh and Bones of the Book

Making Sense of Sex is an accessible summary of five scholarly works on ancient sexuality, researched and published by Loader over several years.¹ These books assess attitudes towards sex from a variety of Jewish and Christian sources, written between 300 BC and 100 AD – including Philo, the Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls,

and the New Testament.

Not surprisingly then, this book is not only thoroughly researched, it is also carefully organized. It's divided into four sections that explore sexuality within creational beliefs, the family structure, the temple system, and the intersection of Hellenistic and Jewish thought. The book also includes a subject index that covers all six works. Thus, the book can be enjoyed on its own or used as a guide for his larger corpus.

Sexuality in the Ancient World

One thing Loader does effectively is paint the ancient world. For example, first century wives were viewed as inferior to their husbands. Typically 10–15 years younger than their husbands, they had less life experience and lower social standing. Some in the Roman world even considered women dangerous because their sexual drives could not be controlled. The Apostle Paul's teaching on sacrificial, Christ-like headship and Jesus' reversal of norms in his interactions with women must have turned many heads.

Loader also locates a tension in first century Judaism between those who adopted Greek culture and those who resisted it. Most rejected the widespread adultery, prostitution, and nakedness in sports. Surprisingly, small pockets of Greco-Roman society actually celebrated marital fidelity. Loader insightfully concludes "The respected and respectable in the best of the Roman world easily became the benchmark for Christian households and enabled them to assert that they were not an oddity but models of virtue" (109). Perhaps the first century Christian marriage witnessed to the gospel in a way that was valued and not quickly dismissed

by the broader culture.

Hermeneutical Assumptions Matter

My main interest in reading *Making Sense of Sex* is evaluating how Loader handles biblical texts. Does he listen well to the Gospel writers and to the Apostle Paul? Does he consider the Bible as a transcultural text, for all people and times, inspired by God and authoritative for life?

Hermeneutical assumptions matter, and Loader and I come from fundamentally different interpretive paradigms. He assumes the biblical text has no more authority than Philo or *The Book of Jubilees*. He believes the biblical writers were significantly influenced by outside sources in ways that give no credit to a Divine Author who gives authoritative insight.

Loader's faulty assumptions taint his ability to accurately interpret biblical texts. When considering Jesus' teaching on divorce (Matt 19:1–12), he claims that Jesus' restrictions "could trap people in abusive and destructive marriages" (74). Here he misses the heart of Jesus, which is to emphasize the sacredness of the marriage union and discourage flippant divorcing.

When reflecting on Paul's understanding of men's and women's roles, he claims Paul has a "dichotomous view of women" (37)—in one place affirming women's dignity (Gal 3:28) and elsewhere teaching hierarchy in marriage (Eph 5:22–33). He fails to recognize the distinction between role and dignity. Husbands and wives are equally valuable yet play different roles in the marital drama. Unity and diversity is an important motif in the Bible, not only applied to husbands and wives but also to the persons of the Godhead.

Loader also misreads Paul's teaching on Romans 1 as only condemning certain homosexual acts. Paul only denounces unusual acts that are abusive, out-of-control, or stem from stifled heterosexual desires. "This is not about natural orientation into which people might have been born or which they might have developed in the processes of maturation" (137).

Romans 1:18–32 is a treatise on the origin and development of sin, not just a response to ped-

erasty or out-of-control sexual urges. People suppress the truth in unrighteousness and exchange God's glory for idol worship. The result is the moral breakdown of society, which includes homosexual acts (vv. 26–27). Paul calls these acts "dishonorable," "unnatural," and "shameless," which echo Jewish tradition and Old Testament teaching. Natural sexual relationships for Paul were between a man and a woman, as verse 27 clearly indicates: "men likewise gave up natural relationships with women."

In the opening chapter, Loader says that sex is not an optional extra—it's part of what and who we are. Indeed, sexuality is beautiful, powerful, and potentially dangerous. It is vital that we grasp God's heart on this subject. Unfortunately *Making Sense of Sex* is unhelpful in accurately understanding the truth of the biblical authors. For a more careful interpretation of what the New Testament says about sex, I recommend Denny Burk's *What is the Meaning of Sex?*

ENDNOTES

¹Loader's books on sexuality in early Judaism and Christianity include *Enoch, Levi, and Jubilees on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); *Philo, Josephus, and the Testaments on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); *The Pseudepigrapha on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); and *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

**A Review of Sarah Bessey, *Jesus Feminist: An Invitation to Revisit the Bible's View of Women*.
New York: Howard Books, 2013. 256 pp. \$14.99.**

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Much has been said about feminism over the years. From non-Christians to Christians, people from varying walks of life claim feminism as their own. Sarah Bessey, however, is making a new claim: Jesus was a feminist.

In her new book, *Jesus Feminist*, Bessey argues that feminism finds its home in Christ (14). The book is a departure from the more typical didactic approach to talking about the gender debate. *Jesus Feminist* is Bessey's story. It's an account about how she learned to love God's people and live out her Christian life. It's also a story about how she came to see her feminism as part of her love for Jesus.

The Good

Perhaps no issue can get blood boiling in the church like feminism can. *Jesus Feminist*, however, avoids the rancor. Bessey is gracious in her tone. She doesn't resort to name calling. She seems to be genuinely humble about her view of women's roles in the church, home, and abroad. Even as someone who disagreed with her conclusions, I greatly appreciated her tone. In fact, I felt like she was someone I could have a conversation with about this issue without finding myself in the middle of a heated argument (48). I hope I can do that with her in person someday.

Unlike a lot of women who embrace feminism, Bessey came by it naturally. She didn't have a great awakening after years in an ultra-conservative church. Feminism is a part of her. So, in many ways, she is an outsider looking in on complementarianism. This perspective gives her some helpful insights. She asks some good questions and complementarians would do well to listen carefully. For example, in her early days in ministry she struggled with the typical generalizations of how men and women

operate (44–45). When she struggled to conceive, her heart ached as she heard sermons about being a “real woman”—i.e. having children (72). Bessey wonders if there is another way to talk about men and women, in a way that does not reduce their “realness” to marriage and children. I agree. Womanhood is not only about bearing children and loving a husband. If it were, then millions of women would be alienated from God's design. I don't think, however, that feminism is the answer.

Nothing New Under the Sun

For a book that is promoted as innovative, Bessey doesn't really say anything that hasn't already been said. While she is writing for a more mainstream audience, rather than the halls of academia—where so much of the debate has been housed in years past—I was a little surprised that she relied so heavily on the work of other egalitarians. I wrongly assumed that her book was embarking in new territory, but was reminded again that there really is nothing new under the sun. She cites William Webb's “redemptive movement hermeneutic” as an important way to read Peter and Paul (28).¹ When interpreting Paul's exhortation for women to be silent in church, she says that Paul was actually speaking against disorder and disruption from women who have never been allowed in such places until now (66). In talking about submission, she uses the egalitarian teaching on mutual submission to show that God's plan for marriage is for men and women to lead together (71–84). In many ways, the book compiles the various voices of egalitarianism and shows how she made them her own. Not a bad thing at all, especially if her goal is to help other women see that they can claim these voices as their own. But in

terms of innovation, the book doesn't present a lot by way of new ideas.

Broad Strokes and a Story

Bessey hurts her argument by painting complementarianism with such a broad brush. In her chapter on women in ministry, she reduces women's ministry to craft parties and fashion shows (125). This section seemed a little unfair to the countless women's ministries that are actually seeking to help women grow in their love for the Lord. Women like Susan Hunt and Nancy Leigh DeMoss have spent their lives working hard to help women love the Bible, love other women, and love what it means to be a woman. While (regretfully) some women's ministries can be shallow, it is a straw-man argument to speak of all women's ministry in this way.

Also, while Bessey spends a great deal of time interacting with other egalitarians, she spends virtually no time interacting with complementarians. She just presents her position as absolute fact with no room for disagreement; from a woman's ability to preach and teach (69), to the absurdity of women submitting to their husbands (72, 83). Her argument would have been strengthened by actually interacting with complementarians instead of interacting with stereotypes and fringe arguments.

Perhaps the most troubling, and most intriguing, part of Bessey's book is that she relies heavily on her own story—a story I loved reading. In some ways, she is the complete opposite of me. And that fascinated me. But in others, I found a deep connection. Like Bessey, I have faced pregnancy loss and the deep ache of wondering if I would ever bear children (106–121). I wrestled with finding my place as a woman when I wasn't yet married or couldn't yet bear children. But I came to very different conclusions.

As I already said, Bessey asks some very important questions that complementarians would do well to think about. Womanhood can't be reduced to a neat little box or checklist anymore than the Christian life can. But by relying on her own story and the stories of others she makes it very hard to disagree with her. Story is important. Story moves us. But story isn't absolute truth. Our experiences

don't make things right and true—even with the best of intentions.

Bessey would like for us all to get along with regard to the gender debate. I agree. Fighting words don't serve anyone. But at some point we have to agree to disagree and recognize that this is an area where we are not unified. Complementarians and egalitarians can both love the lost, proclaim the gospel, and serve in ministry but at the end of the day I do not see how we can do that together. The main premise of Bessey's book is that Jesus thinks women are people, too. I'm glad. So do I. Yet we see the application of equality differently.

Bessey has started a helpful dialogue. I hope that the tenor with which she has written this book provides a model for similar conversations in the future. While there really is nothing new under the sun, complementarians can all agree that we have not yet arrived and always need to understand more fully how God would have us live. While I appreciated Bessey's tone and humility, I am still not convinced that becoming a feminist helps us along that path.

ENDNOTES

¹William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

**A Review of Vern Bengston, Norella Putney, and Susan Harris,
Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down across Generations.
New York: Oxford, 2013. 288 pp. \$29.95.**

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In *Families and Faith*, social scientist Vern Bengston, along with his research assistants Norella Putney, and Susan Harris, offers three intriguing questions:

- To what extent are families able to pass on their religious faith to the next generation in today's rapidly changing society?
- How has this changed over the past several decades, in the context of remarkable cultural, familial, and religious change in American society?
- Why are some families able to achieve their goal of transmitting their faith to their children, while others are not? (11,12)

The responses to these lines of inquiry, as outlined by Bengston, form the core of *Families and Faith*. The book is the result of a 35-year longitudinal study, involving over 3,500 participants across four generations, which took place from 1970 to 2005.

The primary areas of exploration center around the concepts of "religious transmission" and "religious continuity" (4). The operative theory at work in the text is the "life course perspective," which "focuses on the influences represented by historical time ('period'), biographical time ('age'), and generational time ('cohort') and the way these intertwine to mold human behavior" (12).

The associated concept of "linked lives" is consistently emphasized, as Bengston looks at an

individual's maturation and notes that "their development is enmeshed with the developing lives of others in their social network, particularly parents and grandparents (or children and grandchildren)" (12). This becomes an integral focus of the proposed use of the research findings, as this framework disavows the notion of "a passive child receiving religious input from a parent," while providing added insight needed for the "longer years of linked lives" which are to come with increased life expectancy (12).

The summary conclusions derived from the data collection and analysis processes are as follows:

- Religious families are surprisingly successful at transmission.
- Parental influence has not declined since the 1970s.
- Parental warmth is the key to successful transmission.
- Grandparents are more important than we recognize.
- Interfaith marriage and divorce deter religious transmission.
- Religious Rebels, Zealots, and Prodigals are outcomes of nontransmission.
- Religious "nones" are also products of intergenerational transmission.
- High-boundary religious groups have high rates of transmission.
- Generations differ in their perceptions of God and spirituality. (184–92)

These conclusions lead the research team to formulate a theoretical framework that they term “intergenerational religious momentum” (192). The theory seeks to account for all of the varying “religious influences” (e.g., family religious inheritance, grandparent religious influences, parents’ role modeling, parent-child relationship quality) (192–206). While factors related to “contemporary culture,” “religious influence of peers,” “influences of historical events,” “generational religious differences,” “church, synagogue, temple activities,” “religious leaders,” and “religious influences in school or college” are maintained, Bengston declares that “at the center of the theory are family influences” (193).

Strengths

There is much to be commended in *Families and Faith*. First, performing a longitudinal study of this magnitude is a mammoth undertaking, which demands extensive dedication over decades. Bengston notes that this project, which in all its facets has taken 50 years to develop and complete, “became my academic career” (ix). This demonstration of both personal, and professional, commitment is a worthy example to those who seek to make significant contributions to their respective field(s) through research and writing.

Second, it is refreshing to pour over research findings that confirm parental influence and investment as primary and vital to a child’s “faith development.” The findings make clear that “interfaith marriages,” as well as those “ending in divorce,” inhibit “transmission” and “continuation” of faith (114–19), while “same-faith marriages” serve to provide a fertile environment for faith relay to take place (127–28). This is particularly evident in the even more direct emphasis placed on the role of the father. Bengston’s summative observations for family practice, for example, note, “Fervent faith cannot compensate for a distant dad” (196). The place of familial intergenerational influence is encouraging in an era where the “common knowledge” base, as Bengston labels it, assumes limited parental influence.

Third, among those faith traditions which are represented in the research sample, Mormons,

Jews, and “born-again” Evangelical Christians had the “highest degree of family continuity in religion across generations” (166). Bengston attributes these findings, in part, to the “common traits” of being both “distinct religious communities” and “minorities” (166). These traits also lend themselves to tight bonds between “family and church,” as well as “strong role modeling” along with “family closeness” (181). This emphasis on the relationship between the family and broader “faith community” is a primary factor in establishing religious commitment.

These familial, intergenerational, and community emphases serve to highlight related norms which are integral to the new covenant community. Examples of these biblical concepts are: (1) the parental, and particularly paternal, responsibility to instruct and train children (e.g., Deut 6:6–7; Ps 78:5–8; Eph 6:4); (2) the intergenerational nature of church community discipleship (e.g., Titus 2:1–10); and (3) the biblical portrait of community as a reconciled *people* (not unrelated individuals) to God and each other, by the “mercy” work of the gospel (e.g., 1 Pet 2:9–10). The findings cataloged in *Families and Faith* consistently uphold the value of general principles and practices associated with these biblical conventions.

Limitations

While these points of commendation are evident, they do not come without attendant limitations. First, among these concerns is the largely undefined concept of “faith.” The terms “faith,” “religion,” “spirituality,” and “values” are used interchangeably throughout the work (e.g., ix, 19, 54–55, 101, 142–44, 194–95). Since the data pool includes such varied backgrounds as Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, and None (nonreligious) participants, it would appear that establishing firm definitional categories would help to clarify the full import of the research (57–58).

A related weakness is that while the research measures religious “affiliation,” “intensity,” “participation,” and “beliefs,” each of these categories is assessed purely on the basis of socialization and relational-webbing (“linked lives”), which proves

limiting, or incomplete, for traditions that uphold not simply a passing on of societal or familial “values” and “ethics,” but a “faith” that is intended to be humanity’s “link” to God (57–64). Treating “religious” or “faith” appropriation as socially-derived, purely, does not make allowance for the formative “variable” of interaction with God, leading to transmission and continuity. In hope, New Covenant people actively long to see their children embrace the God of the gospel himself, not simply assume “religious practices” and “ethics” associated with him.

It is this inability to adequately address, or satisfactorily account for, the more holistic nature of biblical faith which warrants a cautious reading of *Families and Faith*. Bengston and his team offer a unique and helpful contribution to the social science pursuit of understanding how families come to bear on religious commitment; however, admittedly, their research does not intend to provide a biblical and theological understanding of intergenerational and familial faith development. As those who maintain gospel hope, assessing faith without establishing the central place of the God who is the founder and perfecter of such faith (Heb 12:2) will leave our attempts at family discipleship sorely wanting.

A Review of A. G. Roeber, *Hopes for Better Spouses: Protestant Marriage and Church Renewal in Early Modern Europe, India, and North America*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. 317 pp. \$29.00.

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Although many credit the Protestant Reformers for restoring the church to a biblical view of marriage, one prominent historian has recently suggested that their work was left unfinished. In *Hopes for Better Spouses: Protestant Marriage and Church Renewal in Early Modern Europe, India, and North America*, A. G. Roeber, a professor of history at Penn State University, argues that Martin Luther's writings on marriage led to centuries of confusion and conflict on the subject.

In Luther's day, skepticism regarding marriage was rampant in both the church and the state. According to Roeber's reading of Luther, the German Reformer struggled to articulate the goodness of marriage in this context because he wanted to avoid labeling marriage a sacrament, as the Roman Catholics argued. Furthermore, Luther was ambiguous about who exactly had the final word in defining marriage, at times calling it a "worldly" affair under the control of the state and at other times referring to it as a "godly estate" that answered to the church (24). This tension in Luther's definition of marriage set the stage for the controversies that followed.

When his successors such as Philip Melancthon and Philipp Jakob Spener failed to bring clarity to the subject, subsequent generations of Lutherans became embroiled in conflicts related to marriage. From arguments over polygamy to disputes about the regulations for wedding celebrations, Roeber traces how "the ambivalent standing of marriage . . . spread like a cancer" throughout Lutheranism, but especially within pietist circles (95).

This ambiguity eventually plagued the mission efforts abroad as Protestant missionaries began to advance in the early eighteenth century. Roe-

ber argues that the specific issues in India, which included the question of whether missionaries could marry local converts and what to do with converted males who had multiple wives, pushed the issue "toward the official legal and theological teaching that marriage was solely a civil matter" (126).

In North America a similar shift occurred. Roeber notes that the conversations on marriage "largely succumbed to pragmatic concerns for property succession, the legal dimension of the relationship between spouses, and a reaffirmation of the husband's authority" (238).

In the end, Roeber argues that marriage became firmly situated under state control and Luther's vision for spousal relations grounded in the mysterious relationship of Christ and his church was all but lost. Thus, Roeber concludes, "Despite the Reformers' claim to have recovered the ancient Christian church from Roman innovation, they had failed, on the subject of the spousal relationship, to make their case" (278).

Some Missing Pieces

At times, it appears as if Roeber sees a final dichotomy between a vision for marriage that includes sanctification, friendship, and equality and one built on hierarchy that answers to the state. He seems to suggest that marriage must necessarily be one or the other, as if total equality within the relationship is the only path to true friendship and a pursuit of holiness. For example, he states that the early pietists faced a difficult dilemma: "either emphasize order and proper subordination in marriage as a mirror of a much-needed order in society and the state, or encourage the view of the spousal relationship as one of mutuality and spiritual help

between the partners” (31). As he fleshes out these two positions in the following pages, Roeber hints that only a quasi-sacramental view of marriage that yields equality between the spouses can lead to a truly healthy friendship. To put it another way, he suggests that there is no hope for better spouses among marriages built on a traditional distinction of roles.

However, subordination within the marriage relationship is not mutually exclusive to friendship and sanctification. An 18th-century theologian who typified the balance that seemed to elude the German pietists described by Roeber was the British Baptist pastor, Andrew Fuller (1754–1815). Fuller preached toward maintaining a distinction of roles in the home, while also arguing that the wife is to be “treated as a friend, as naturally an equal, a soother of man’s cares, a softener of his griefs, and a partner of his joys.”¹ There are times in Roeber’s presentation that he does not leave room for such a position to exist. While Fuller was not a German pietist, he is an example of a Protestant from that time period who bridged the gap between Roeber’s two general categories, illustrating that the dichotomy may be less clear than it is sometimes presented in *Hopes for Better Spouses*.

Some Lessons to Learn

Nonetheless, Roeber’s extensive collection of data establishes a convincing argument that Luther’s ambiguity on the subject of marriage presented a persistent problem for his theological heirs. His lack of clarity opened the door for his followers to reinterpret it again and again under the pressures of their own day.

Such a history recommends the necessity of clear arguments for theological convictions, lest visionary ideas be watered down in the centuries to come. This is a helpful reminder for conservative thinkers today who are struggling to address an evolving culture on this very subject. If a biblical understanding of marriage is to survive to the next generation, modern theologians must not only address contemporary aberrations of human sexuality, but also set forth a compelling vision for what God has intended marriage to be.

Some readers may wish that Roeber would have included more contemporary application in his presentation. Indeed, the church is still hoping for better spouses and many are turning away from the traditional definition of marriage to find the kind of relationship they desire. Roeber has suggested some application of the book in an online blog, in which he writes, “The scope of this book—intentionally comparative and transformational—speaks directly to the challenges of global Christianity in the twenty-first century and to the ongoing debates about what marriage has meant—and continues to mean—to both Christian and non-Christian populations.”²

In particular, Roeber points out how his work provides “a historical perspective on what is now at stake as ‘global south’ Christians appear to be diverging steadily from many European and North American Protestants’ willingness to expand the understanding of marriage to include same-sex relationships.”³ This work could have been strengthened by insights such as these throughout the story or perhaps a closing section that synthesized the lessons that can be learned from this bit of history.

These critiques aside, A. G. Roeber has provided a fascinating study on marriage in German pietism, which should be read by any who are interested in the subject. His attention to detail, vast array of sources, and willingness to trace the complex controversy through centuries and across continents make this a compelling work. The resulting study will be of interest to sociologists, historians, ethicists, and theologians, but it also deserves the attention of thoughtful Christians. Roeber has uncovered an important story in this work and there are many lessons that the contemporary church can learn from it.

ENDNOTES

¹Andrew Fuller, *Discourses on Genesis* in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845; repr. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 10.

²A. G. Roeber, “Marriage and Protestant Hopes, Then and Now,” [on-line]; accessed 5 November, 2013; <http://eerdword.wordpress.com/2013/07/10/marriage-and-protestant-hopes-then-and-now-by-a-g-roeber>.

³Ibid.

**A Review of Jennifer Lahl, *Eggsploitation* (DVD)
The Center for Bioethics and Culture, 2013.**

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Over the last few years, The Center for Bioethics and Culture (CBC) has released a trio of vitally important documentary videos addressing egg donation, surrogate pregnancy, and sperm donation. *Eggsploitation* was the first of those videos. It won the Best Documentary award at the 2011 California Independent Film Festival, and it is a video that Christians should watch in order to know about the risks involved in egg donation.

Summary

Jennifer Lahl, President of the CBC, begins the documentary with these stark words:

Young women around the world are solicited by a largely unregulated global, multi-billion dollar industry to help people have babies. What is this industry after? Their fertility. Their good genes. Their eggs.

In the forty-minute video, Lahl narrates the history of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) and the way it has negatively impacted many women. In the video, the process of egg donation is explained with the successive steps of stopping the woman's natural cycle, restarting her cycle to synchronize with the recipient's cycle, super-ovulating the ovaries (such that a woman might produce anywhere between thirty and sixty eggs in one cycle, instead of one or two), releasing the eggs by means of a hormonal injection, and extracting the eggs by means of a surgical procedure with general anesthesia.

Throughout this information, viewers are given a variety of statistics. For instance, the first

"test tube baby," Louise Brown, was born on July 25, 1978. The IVF industry took off in the 1980s and by 2010, 100,000 IVF cycles were performed with non-donors. Since less than twenty percent result in the birth of a baby, donors (like the women interviewed by Lahl) are solicited, because donor eggs improve the odds a child will result. They accounted for 17,000 cycles in 2010.

Of these collected eggs, many of them fail to be fertilized. These numbers show the number of women affected, but it is the dollar figures that show how powerful this medical industry is. Each year, the industry in the United States alone makes over 6.5 billion dollars.

Lahl stresses that this economic consideration is one of the two greatest ethical concerns about the practice of donating eggs. By treating eggs as dollar figures, women are commodified. They are being exploited by means of financial inducement to risk their health, fertility, and even their lives. Advertised as a way to help another woman have a baby, young women—typically college-educated with good health and good genes—are offered tens of thousands of dollars to donate their eggs. With the medical complications that women have faced in egg donation, this monetary sum invites them to endanger themselves in order to gain a financial reward.

This leads to the second concern. To date, no medical research has been published in a peer-reviewed journal on the long-term effects of egg donation. Therefore, women considering egg donation cannot be given enough information about the potential problems that egg donors may face.

While some state legislators have inquired into the medical practices regarding egg donation, other states (like New York) use tax-payer dollars to fund compensation for egg donors to donate their eggs for scientific research like embryonic stem cell research and human cloning.

For these ethical and legal reasons, Jennifer Lahl and the CBC produced *Eggsploitation* in 2011 with updates in 2013. In the title, they have coined a neologism to expose the way vendors inviting women to sell their eggs aim to “plunder, pillage, rob, despoil, fleece, and strip ruthlessly a young woman of her eggs, by means of fraud, coercion, or deception, to be used selfishly for another’s gain, with a total lack of regard for the well-being of the donor.”

It could be argued that the choice of language in this definition is a bit over the top, but not when the stories of the women are told. In all, six women were interviewed—two of whom suffered a stroke as a result of super-ovulation, two experienced OHSS (ovarian hyper-stimulation syndrome), one lost an ovary, and one nearly bled to death. In each case, the women recounted their traumatic experience with egg donation, and the physical effects that came later. After hearing the stories of their suffering, it is most difficult not to conclude that research and regulations on this industry are needed.

Evaluation

In its effort to engender support against the widespread use of egg donors, *Eggsploitation* hits its mark. The medical testimony and the personal stories from the women in the video will make any young woman think twice before considering this practice. However, for Christians our primary concern cannot be limited to legislation. For those who hold a Christian worldview about procreation, we must understand that “eggsploitation” is another example of sin compounding the effects of the fall.

In Genesis 3, God said to the woman, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.” Tragically, one of the most painful manifestations of that curse is infertility, what the Bible calls barrenness. Count-

less are the tears of women who have been unable to have children.

In ancient times, women literally hired out slaves in order to have offspring. This is what Sarai did with Hagar (Genesis 16). Hagar’s womb was put into service for the sake of Sarai and Abram. The immediate effect of this action brought resentment, heartache, and pain into Abram’s home. In the long run, it created competition between Abram’s children. One kind of suffering brought on another.

Today, egg donation also brings further suffering. In response to the hardship of barrenness, modern-day Hagars are invited to use their wombs to furnish the eggs necessary for creating a new life. However, the effects are not nearly as sanguine as the solicitations suggest. The women who sell their eggs are put in great jeopardy, without the guarantee that the collection or fertilization of the egg will produce life. Sometimes it does, but in many other cases it does not. All in all, the whole system preys on one class of women (typically young and financially at risk) in order to serve another class of women (those looking for donor eggs with good genes).

Though the modern procedures are far removed from the days of Genesis, the impulses that lead women to look for modern-day Hagars are not. They remind us that the creation of life, like every other aspect of life, is under threat from the evil one. And that in this case, as is evidenced through this documentary, the serpent is preying on young, vulnerable women. It is a reminder that the image of God is still under threat from the seed of the serpent, and that Christians have an obligation to cherish and protect women.

Conclusion

In the end, this is a video that every young woman should see. But it is not just for young women. Pastors, youth leaders, college ministers, and women’s ministry directors should be aware of this video and the industry that it describes. Those in Christian ministry, especially around college campuses, need to be aware of the way that the world is preying on women. Men need to watch this video, because we need to protect our sisters

and our daughters, so that one day they might be able to be mothers in their own right. And Christians who are thinking about using donated eggs, must know the fraudulent and dangerous ways that women are being exploited in order to harvest their eggs.

In the end, *Eggsploitation* is a must-see documentary. It succinctly explains a medical procedure that is available to anyone today, but one that many do not know about. It should give us pause to think about what is for sale, and what isn't. Children are a precious gift from God, but indeed they are a gift, not a commodity that we can ethically create by means of tempting women to endanger themselves to produce offspring for someone else.

THE DANVERS STATEMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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