THE JOURNAL FOR BIBLICAL MANHOOD & WOMANHOOD



Editorial Jason G. Duesing

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The Not-So-Unified Narrative of the LGBT Movement Evan Lenow

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Gender Studies in Review





THE COUNCIL ON BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD

#### THE JOURNAL FOR BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD

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# **EDITORIAL**

# LIGHT AND FELLOWSHIP IN THE DARKNESS

Jason G. Duesing | Editor Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood Provost and Associate Professor of Historical Theology Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Kansas City, Missouri

here is a moment in J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy where his fellowship is faced with the daunting task of traversing the underground mines of Moria. Once a noble and industrious empire of dwarves, Moria now is reduced to something dark and dreadful. Following the leadership of the wizard Gandalf, the company of travelers seek to move quickly and quietly through the darkness—yet without a map. The wisdom of Gandalf, who normally possesses a level of omniscience, manifests itself when he admits he does not know exactly how to proceed. Facing such darkness, he counsels that before "we make up our minds we ought to look about us." Not seeing many options, the wizard determines that the fellowship should "go towards that light in the north door."<sup>1</sup> Following the light, however faint, proves essential to their successful navigation, not only through the mines, but also to the achievement of their overarching quest—to see evil destroyed and the return of their King.

In the real world of the twenty-first century, I liken the Christian's sojourn through our culture very much to that of the fellowship's journey through the mines. That our culture trends toward that which is dark and dreadful is no surprise or cause for panic, but knowing how, as Christians, to live

<sup>1</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book 2, Chapter 5.

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and move within it, in order to achieve our overarching quest, is often difficult and discouraging. What is needed are regular sources of light—well placed windows shining at the right time and to the right degree. These windows, in turn, allow us who live in the darkness to see, understand, and move more freely in the direction of godliness. Second Peter 1:19 is one of many places in the Bible reminding us that the Word of God functions as a lamp shining in a dark place for the express purpose of illuminating the Christian traveler's path until "the day dawns and the morning star rises." As pilgrims on a dangerous quest traveling through a world that is not our own, we have been given regular access to light.

In this illuminating spirit, I welcome you to the most recent issue of the *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. Our hope is that the articles contained herein will serve as clarifying commentaries on cultural trends and what the Word of God has to say about them. Christians are not meant to traverse this world alone; we need one another and require the wisdom that comes from traveling in a fellowship. What is more, light gleaned is meant to be light shared (Matt 5:14–16). Often the clarity one receives from another is the very gospel truth that transfers others from the domain of darkness into kingdom of the Son's light (Col 1:13). This is our aim and hope for the *Journal*.

When, for example, in recent days we hear of an evangelical congregation in San Francisco determining to move away from the light of the Word in order to embrace homosexual practice in their membership, it is natural that many will have questions related to those and several related issues. The *JBMW* exists to provide timely and biblically-reasoned answers to those types of questions that guide and edify. To that end, this issue of the Journal begins with four essays. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, provides a distinctive treatment on "Biblical Theology and the Sexuality Crisis;" Evan Lenow, assistant professor of ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary offers clarity on "The Not-So-Unified Narrative of the LGBT Movement;" and Garrett Kell, pastor of Delray Baptist Church in Arlington, Virginia asks "What Would Jesus Say to Someone Like Leelah Alcorn?" reflecting on the tragedy of a high school student who took her life after wrestling with her gender identity. The final essay by Derek J. Brown, pastoral assistant at Grace Bible Fellowship in Sunnyvale, California, gives a helpful word to those ministering to men, "Admonish the Idle: Thoughts on How to Motivate Lazy Men."

This issue also contains three in-depth studies. CBMW President, Owen Strachan, offers a profound and needed word in his article, "A Referendum on Depravity: Same-Sex Attraction as Sinful Desire." Next, Craig Kline, general surgeon at the Southwestern Medical Clinic in St. Joseph, Michigan and JBMW Assistant Editor, David Schrock, give a unique medical assessment and analysis in "What is Gender Reassignment Surgery?" Last, Sam Allberry, assistant pastor of St. Mary's Church in Maidenhead, United Kingdom adds an instructive review of the Trinity and gender, called "You May Now Serve the Bride."

Following the essays and studies, this issue contains a sermon on 1 Peter 1:3–7, "God's Design for Marriage," by Matthew Barrett, senior pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church in Riverside, California, which celebrates gender distinction. And finally, the *Journal* concludes, as is our regular practice, with several thoughtful reviews by Matthew Arbo, Josh Philpot, Alex Carr, Megan Hill, Andrew Walker, and Godwin Sathianathan. We are grateful for their helpful presentations of recent volumes of interest to our readers.

As a long time reader of *JBMW*, I count it a significant honor now to take the editor's baton and run with a skilled and dedicated team at the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. The dedicated labors of Denny Burk for the last seven years, and Pete Schemm before him, has made

#### EDITORIAL

*JBMW* what it is today, and it is a joy to continue along the trail they have blazed with such light. Special thanks are extended to Assistant Editor David Schrock for bringing his editing skills, careful eyes, and discerning heart to this issue as well as to Mathew Sims for his efforts in creating the newly designed format. Finally, thanks to you, our readers. We treasure and value your comments, requests, and submissions and hope your support will continue as you benefit from and are encouraged by the thoughts and research that we have assembled for you. As I mentioned above, perhaps the most rewarding thing a writer for *JBMW* could hear is that someone has benefited from his work and then shared it with another. If you find anything of help within these pages, please take the time to pass it along and help shine the light of gospel truth.

Tolkien's fellowship, searching for help in a dark corridor, found a faint source of light, and by it were able to move forward in their quest. May this *Journal* aid you in doing the same—until evil is destroyed and the return of our King.

### **ESSAYS & PERSPECTIVES**

# **BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND THE SEXUALITY CRISIS**<sup>1</sup>

R. Albert Mohler | President The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Louisville, Kentucky

estern society is currently experiencing what can only be described as a moral revolution. Our society's moral code and collective ethical evaluation on a particular issue has undergone not small adjustments but a complete reversal. That which was once condemned is now celebrated, and the refusal to celebrate is now condemned. What makes the current moral and sexual revolution so different from previous moral revolutions is that it is taking place at an utterly unprecedented velocity. Previous generations experienced moral revolutions over decades, even centuries. This current revolution is happening at warp speed.

As the church responds to this revolution, we must remember that current debates on sexuality present to the church a crisis that is irreducibly and inescapably theological. This crisis is tantamount to the type of theological crisis that Gnosticism presented to the early church or that Pelagianism presented to the church in the time of Augustine. In other words, the crisis of sexuality challenges the church's understanding of the gospel, sin, salvation, and sanctification. Advocates of the new sexuality demand a complete rewriting of Scripture's metanarrative, a complete reordering of theology, and a fundamental change to how we think about the church's ministry.

# WHY THE CONCORDANCE METHOD FAILS

Proof-texting is the first reflex of conservative Protestants seeking a strategy of theological retrieval and restatement. This hermeneutical reflex comes naturally to evangelical Christians because we believe the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This article was originally published at AlbertMohler.com. "Biblical Theology and the Sexuality Crisis," accessed October 15, 2014, http://www.albertmohler.com/2014/09/16/biblical-theology-and-the-sexuality-crisis/.

Bible to be the inerrant and infallible word of God. We understand that, as B.B. Warfield said, "When Scripture speaks, God speaks." I should make clear that this reflex is not entirely wrong, but it's not entirely right either. It's not entirely wrong because certain Scriptures (that is, "proof texts") speak to specific issues in a direct and identifiable way.

There are, however, obvious limitations to this type of theological method—what I like to call the "concordance method." What happens when you are wrestling with a theological issue for which no corresponding word appears in the concordance? Many of the most important theological issues cannot be reduced to merely finding relevant words and their corresponding verses in a concordance. Try looking up "transgender" in your concordance. How about "lesbian"? Or "in vitro fertilization"? They're certainly not in the back of my Bible.

It's not that Scripture is insufficient. The problem is not a failure of Scripture but a failure of our approach to Scripture. The concordance method to theology produces a flat Bible without context, covenant, or master-narrative—three hermeneutical foundations that are essential to understand Scripture rightly.

### NEEDED: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

Biblical theology is absolutely indispensable for the church to craft an appropriate response to the current sexual crisis. The church must learn to read Scripture according to its context, embedded in its master-narrative, and progressively revealed along covenantal lines. We must learn to interpret each theological issue through Scripture's metanarrative of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. Specifically, evangelicals need a theology of the body that is anchored in the Bible's own unfolding drama of redemption.

#### Movement One: Creation

Genesis 1:26–28 indicates that God made man—unlike the rest of creation—in his own image. This passage also demonstrates that God's purpose for humanity was an embodied existence. Genesis 2:7 highlights this point as well. God makes man out of the dust and then breathes into him the breath of life. This indicates that we were a body before we were a person. The body, as it turns out, is not incidental to our personhood. Adam and Eve are given the commission to multiply and subdue the earth. Their bodies allow them, by God's creation and his sovereign plan, to fulfill that task of image-bearing.

The Genesis narrative also suggests that the body comes with needs. Adam would be hungry, so God gave him the fruit of the garden. These needs are an expression embedded within the created order that Adam is finite, dependent, and derived.

Further, Adam would have a need for companionship, so God gave him a wife, Eve. Both Adam and Eve were to fulfill the mandate to multiply and fill the earth with God's image-bearers by a proper use of the bodily reproductive ability with which they were created. Coupled with this is the bodily pleasure each would experience as the two became one flesh—that is, *one* body.

The Genesis narrative also demonstrates that gender is part of the goodness of God's creation. Gender is not merely a sociological construct forced upon human beings who otherwise could negotiate any number of permutations. But Genesis teaches us that gender is created by God for our good and his glory. Gender is intended for human flourishing and is assigned by the Creator's determination—just as he determined *when*, *where*, and *that* we should exist. In sum, God created his image as an embodied person. As embodied, we are given the gift and stewardship of sexuality from God himself. We are constructed in a way that testifies to God's purposes in this. Genesis also frames this entire discussion in a covenantal perspective. Human reproduction is not merely an order to propagate the race. Instead, reproduction highlights the fact that Adam and Eve were to multiply in order to fill the earth with the glory of God as reflected by his image bearers.

#### Movement Two: The Fall

The fall, the second movement in redemptive history, corrupts God's good gift of the body. The entrance of sin brings mortality to the body. In terms of sexuality, the fall subverts God's good plans for sexual complementarity. Eve's desire is to rule over her husband (Gen 3:16). Adam's leadership will be harsh (3:17–19). Eve will experience pain in childbearing (3:16).

The narratives that follow demonstrate the development of aberrant sexual practices, from polygamy to rape, which Scripture addresses with remarkable candor. These Genesis accounts are followed by the giving of the Law which is intended to curb aberrant sexual behavior. It regulates sexuality and expressions of gender and makes clear pronouncements on sexual morals, cross-dressing, marriage, divorce, and host of other bodily and sexual matters.

The Old Testament also connects sexual sin to idolatry. Orgiastic worship, temple prostitution, and other horrible distortions of God's good gift of the body are all seen as part and parcel of idolatrous worship. The same connection is made by Paul in Romans 1. Having "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (Rom 1:22), and having "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (1:25), men and women exchange their natural relations with one another (1:26–27).

#### Movement Three: Redemption

With regard to redemption, we must note that one of the most important aspects of our redemption is that it came by way of a Savior with *a body*. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14; cf. Phil 2:5–11). Human redemption is accomplished by the Son of God incarnate—who remains *incarnate* eternally.

Paul indicates that this salvation includes not merely our souls but also our bodies. Romans 6:12 speaks of sin that reigns in our "mortal bodies"—which implies the hope of future bodily redemption. Romans 8:23 indicates part of our eschatological hope is the "redemption of our bodies." Even now, in our life of sanctification we are commanded to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God in worship (Rom 12:2). Further, Paul describes the redeemed body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19) and clearly we must understand sanctification as having effects upon the body (1 Thess. 4:3–4).

Sexual ethics in the New Testament, as in the Old Testament, regulate our expressions of gender and sexuality. *Porneia*, sexual immorality of any kind, is categorically condemned by Jesus and the apostles. Likewise, Paul clearly indicates to the church at Corinth that sexual sin—sins committed in the body (1 Cor 6:18)—are what bring the church and the gospel into disrepute because they proclaim to a watching world that the gospel has been to no effect (1 Corinthians 5–6).

#### Movement Four: New Creation

Finally, we reach the fourth and final act of the drama of redemption—new creation. In 1 Corinthians 15:42–47, Paul directs us not only to the resurrection of our own bodies in the new creation but to the fact that Christ's bodily resurrection is the promise and power for that future hope. Our resurrection will be the experience of eternal glory in the body. This body will be a transformed, consummated continuation of our present embodied existence in the same way that Jesus' body is the same body he had on earth, yet utterly glorified.

The new creation will not simply be a reset of the garden. It will be better than Eden. As Calvin noted, in the new creation we will know God not only as Creator but also as Redeemer—and that redemption includes our bodies. We will reign with Christ in bodily form, as he also is the embodied and reigning cosmic Lord.

In terms of our sexuality, while gender will remain in the new creation, sexual activity will not. It is not that sex is nullified in the resurrection; rather, it is fulfilled. The eschatological marriage supper of the Lamb, to which marriage and sexuality point, will finally arrive (Rev 19:6–9). No longer will there be any need to fill the earth with image-bearers as was the case in Genesis 1. Instead, the earth will be filled with knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

### **BIBLICAL THEOLOGY IS INDISPENSABLE**

The sexuality crisis has demonstrated the failure of theological method on the part of many pastors. The "concordance method" simply cannot accomplish the type of rigorous theological thinking needed in pulpits today. Pastors and churches must learn the indispensability of biblical theology and must practice reading Scripture according to its own internal logic—the logic of a story that moves from creation to new creation. The hermeneutical task before us is great, but it is also indispensable for faithful evangelical engagement with the culture.

# THE NOT-SO-UNIFIED NARRATIVE OF THE LGBT MOVEMENT

Evan Lenow | Assistant Professor of Ethics Fort Worth, Texas

any Americans see the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) movement as a unified whole marching toward an end-goal of equality, acceptance, and significance within society.<sup>1</sup> The four letters used to describe the coalition flow off the tongues and through the keyboards of activists and dissenters alike. However, not everything is as unified as some may portray. Is the narrative of the LGBT movement really a unified whole, or are there underlying differences between factions in the group? Is there a unified political goal to be achieved that hides a schism below the surface? Such questions are beginning to be asked, and Christians contending for truth need to be aware of fissures within the LGBT movement.

What rests beneath the surface is a conflict of narratives between the LG's (Lesbians and Gays) and the BT's (Bisexuals and Transgenders). Jillian Todd Weiss acknowledges this division when she observes,

While many gays and lesbians feel that 'bisexual' and 'transgender' are simply names for part of their community, others actively reject the idea that bisexuals and transgenders are part of their community, seeing them as entirely separate and distinct. Heterosexism against bisexuals and transgenders exists not only in the straight community, but in the gay and lesbian community as well. Some feel, as we shall see, that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> As it stands today in the ever-evolving world of queer studies, LGBT is an outdated acronym. As Allen Metcalf observes in a recent article in *The Chronicle for Higher Education*, the alphabet soup of queer studies now includes queer and questioning, unidentified, intersex, asexual, and genderqueer, resulting in a new acronym: LGBTQQ2IA (Allen Metcalf, "LGBTQQ2IA," *Lingua Franca*, August 19, 2014, accessed October 24, 2014, http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/08/19/lgbtqq2ia/). For the purpose of this article we will simply focus on the first four classifications.

bisexuality and transgenderism are detrimental to the social and political acceptance of gays and lesbians.<sup>2</sup>

Because the divisions between LG's and BT's are clearest on the issues of gender and marriage, this essay will sketch out the typical, public LGBT narrative on gender and marriage and then demonstrate how bisexuals and transgendered people undermine the public agenda of the LGBT movement. In doing so, we will see that this coalition of convenience may rupture unless one of the two groups is willing to shift its narrative to appease the other.

#### THE GENDER NARRATIVE

The unified LGBT agenda attempts to remove any distinction among genders, particularly for roles in relationships, ability in the workforce, and cultural stereotypes. There is a commitment to pure egalitarianism whereby no specific gender has a unique role or function. This is crucial especially for homosexuality because the nature of their relationships require no gender differences. When two women or two men enter into an intimate relationship, any gender roles they express must be socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Thus, one of the points of the LGBT narrative is that gender has no real impact on roles. Supporters of the LGBT movement who also claim to write from a Christian perspective have picked up on this and even point out the inconsistency of Christian egalitarians for dismissing specific gender roles in heterosexual couples as unbiblical while still holding to anatomical differences for a proper understanding of sexual intercourse.<sup>3</sup>

An added aspect to the LGBT narrative regarding gender is the idea that any gender roles evident in society are the result of outdated cultural stereotypes. These stereotypes have been carried along from days of yore by older generations, but the LGBT movement calls on the younger generation to jettison such distinctions between male and female for the sake of gender equality. They demand equality without distinction. They want culture to be "gender blind." While these calls for gender equality have some merit—because it is important to acknowledge there have existed and still exist women who are oppressed—the current push for gender equality goes much further than a desire for equal rights or equal pay. The LGBT agenda demands that there be no distinction made on the basis of gender for anything—public facilities, athletic competition, and even marriage. The LGBT position on gender appears to be the epitome of egalitarianism. But is it consistent?

### CHANGING GENDER REINFORCES STEREOTYPES

The often-forgotten quadrant of the LGBT movement is the 'T'—transgendered individuals who sometimes face the scorn and opposition of the more mainstream lesbians and gays. Even though some may find it odd that there is division in the ranks of this powerful movement, there is good reason for division. Transgenderism undermines the public gender narrative that has been successfully promoted in the culture.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Jillian Todd Weiss, "GL vs. BT: The Archaeology of Biphobia and Transphobia Within the U.S. Gay and Lesbian Community," in *Bisexuality and Transgenderism: InsterSEXions of the Others*, ed. Jonathan Alexander and Karen Yescavage; (New York: Rutledge, 2012), 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Matthew Vines, God and the Gay Christian (New York: Convergent, 2014), 27–28.

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Susannah Cornwall describes transgender people as those "who feel that their gender identity, or sense of being a gendered self, doesn't 'fit' their biological sex according to the usual pattern."<sup>4</sup> As a result of this conflict of identity, transgender individuals take various measures to conform to their sense of gender. This can include anything from dressing in styles typical of the opposite gender, taking hormones to change hair growth and voice, or even include the radical measure of gender reassignment surgery to change their genitals to match their sense of gender. In June 2014 *Time* released a magazine issue with the cover story headline: "The Transgender Tipping Point: America's Next Civil Rights Frontier." In the article, Katy Steinmetz follows the lives of several people who have made the transition from the gender with which they were born to the opposite gender. In each case, however, the transgendered individual took steps to conform to the cultural norms of male or female. In no example did the author attempt to demonstrate how transgendered individuals sought to lose all gender identification.<sup>5</sup>

The problem with such behavior for the LGBT movement is that changing appearance or physical features conforms to stereotypical gender norms that the LGBT movement publicly dismisses as unimportant. Thus, it should come as no surprise that there is a competing narrative within the LGBT community regarding gender. The public narrative calls on society to erase gender distinctions and make gender a cultural artifact. At the same time, transgendered individuals seek to conform to cultural stereotypes of dress, appearance, voice pitch, and sometimes even sexual complementarity. Such conformity undermines the public narrative on gender. However, as Weiss notes,

The difference between 'homosexual' and 'GLBT' is elusive to many Americans.... Many are unaware of any significant distinction between 'GLBT' and 'homosexual.' Yet within the GLBT population itself, these distinctions mark intense personal and political struggles. The divisions between gay and lesbian and bisexual and transgender are far deeper and more significant to each other than to those outside.<sup>6</sup>

For those of us pursuing a biblical understanding of gender, we can actually take note of the division within the LGBT movement to emphasize our perspective. While we do not condone the lifestyle of transgendered individuals, we recognize that they have a glimpse of the truth that gays and lesbians have sought to eradicate. The underlying goal of transgendered individuals is to pursue the unique gender distinctions of either male or female. The problem is that they deny their own biological gender to do so. Thus, they see the beauty of gender distinctions, but they deny the gender they were born to be. Gender distinction is part of what God has revealed to us in nature about how he created mankind (Gen 1:27; cf. Rom 1:18–32); however, the specific way that transgendered individuals pursue such distinctions is still corrupted by the fall. Even in sin, we sometimes get a glimpse of the truth.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Susannah Cornwall, *Theology and Sexuality* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Katy Steinmetz, "America's Transition," *Time*, 9 June 2014, 38–46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Weiss, "GL vs. BT," 29.

### THE MARRIAGE NARRATIVE

The second area of conflict within the LGBT movement is on the question of marriage. Since the historic Supreme Court decisions issued in *Hollingsworth v. Perry* and *United States v. Windsor* on June 26, 2013, marriage amendments in states that had defined marriage as a union of one man and one woman have been steadily falling in court cases. Later this year, the Supreme Court will again rule on this issue, and based on all legal, political, and cultural trends, it is quite possible that 2015 will be the year same sex marriage arrives in all fifty states.

The LGBT movement has publicly supported the repeal of these marriage amendments as they seek "marriage equality" nationwide. Part of the narrative for marriage equality involves the call for the right to marry whomever one wishes. Any refusal to allow same-sex marriage couples to wed is tantamount to a denial of their ability to express themselves freely. The recognition of same-sex relationships as marriage has become a central feature of the LGBT movement. In their minds, to deny those relationships is to deny members of that community equal personhood.

Among those who claim to be Christians and lobby for same-sex marriage, the language is often stronger. Matthew Vines proposes there are only two options for gay Christians—mandatory celibacy or church-sanctioned same-sex marriage. However, he states that mandatory celibacy is harmful.

For gay Christians, the challenge of mandatory celibacy goes far beyond their mere capacity to live it out. Mandatory celibacy corrodes gay Christians' capacity for relationship in general. But it does something else equally harmful: by requiring gay Christians to view all their sexual desires as temptations to sin, it causes many of them to devalue, if not loathe, their bodies.

Vines' proposal, then, is that both the church and the state should recognize and commend same-sex marriage as an equal expression of relationship and sexuality.

Within the LGBT narrative regarding marriage, the overwhelming majority calls for monogamous same-sex marriage.<sup>7</sup> Monogamous same-sex marriage keeps the general idea of marriage as a relationship between two individuals in place while dismissing the importance of gender complementarity as a necessity for that relationship. As the public narrative of the LGBT push for marriage equality, monogamy continues to be important, keeping this relational chimera as close to traditional foundations as possible.

# THE INEQUALITY OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Following the logic of the same-sex marriage agenda, it is not difficult to see another rift within the LGBT movement. This time it comes directly from the bisexuals in the movement. As Matthew Vines implies in his appeal for authorizing same-sex marriage, a denial of such a relationship in effect denies the value and identity of the individual. When applied to bisexuals, that same logic calls into question why the LGBT movement is solely focused on monogamous marriage.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> There are exceptions like Jilliam Keenan, who calls for the legalization of polygamy, and Kody Brown, who sued the state of Utah in order to decriminalize bigamy. See Jillian Keenan, "Legalize Polygamy!: No. I am not kidding," *Slate*, April 15, 2013, accessed March 29, 2015, http://www.slate.com/articles/double\_x/doublex/2013/04/legalize\_polygamy\_marriage\_equality\_for\_all.html. See also the decision in *Brown, et al v. Buhman*, available at https://ecf.utd.uscourts.gov/ cgi-bin/show\_public\_doc?211cv0652-78.

The struggle for inclusion of bisexuals in the larger homosexual movement has always revolved around whether bisexuality is an actual identity. Paula C. Rodríguez Rust notes the tension as she writes,

As the gay and lesbian civil rights movements gained momentum in the mid- to late twentieth century, the lack of conceptual "space" for bisexuality grew into a lack of social and political space as well. Bisexual men and women were regarded as disingenuous homosexuals who would not come out to join the lesbian and gay community and political struggle and who wanted the 'best of both worlds' without sharing the burdens of minority status. To lesbians and gay men, continued heterosexual desires and behavior implied a lack of commitment to the struggle for gay and lesbian equality; bisexual persons were often labeled as traitors or told to 'finish' coming out as lesbian or gay.<sup>8</sup>

As the culture continues to struggle with the identity of bisexuals, the LGBT push for same-sex marriage has left them on the outside looking in. For marriage to be truly inclusive of the entire LGBT community, the marriage equality movement would also call for polygamy and polyamory. For example, a person who identifies as bisexual may appreciate the option of entering into a same-sex marriage relationship; however, to do so, he must deny the heterosexual desires that he also claims as part of his identity. This would limit his legally-recognized sexual expression to just one half of his self-proclaimed sexual identity. To use Vines' logic, this could be harmful to his identity and cause him to "devalue, if not loathe, [his] body."9

Within Christian circles that are open to same-sex marriage, the call for anything more than monogamy has been absent. However, the definitions of marriage offered in those circles leave little to prevent the next step from happening. Vines argues that procreation and complementary gender roles are not necessary for a biblical vision of marriage. Instead, he argues, "What seems to me to be most important in marriage is not whether the partners are anatomically different from one another. It's whether the inherently different people involved are willing to keep covenant with each other in a relationship of mutual self-giving."<sup>10</sup> On the basis of mutual self-giving and covenant-keeping, Vines calls for Christians to endorse monogamous same-sex marriage. Yet, he offers no logical reason for discriminating on the basis of number. If all that is involved is self-giving and covenant-keeping, could not more than two people live up to that standard? The LGBT marriage narrative is not an inclusive narrative, and those who identify as bisexual should be opposed to the public marriage narrative being pushed by their community. The marriage equality movement is not equal for all.

If marriage equality is truly unequal, then it provides another approach to the debate for those of us who understand marriage to be limited to one man and one woman. Although we may be accused of "crying wolf" or inventing a slippery slope, the logic is sound. Marriage equality intentionally excludes bisexuals, and the only way to include them is a redefinition of marriage so radical that it strips the term "marriage" of all its meaning.<sup>11</sup> All that would be left is a government-sanctioned, voluntary

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> "Aging in the Bisexual Community," in Paula C. Rodrígeuz Rust, *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Aging: Challenges in Research, Practice, and Policy* (ed. Tarynn M. Witten and A. Evan Eyler; Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 168.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Vines, God and the Gay Christian, 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, we are already seeing this kind of argument take shape from polyamorous and polygamous "marriages."

relationship for the purpose of asset distribution, tax benefits, and inheritance rights. Real marriage equality bears no resemblance to the historical institution of marriage.

## A CALL TO BIBLICAL SEXUALITY

Through the evidence above, we have seen that the LGBT movement is not as unified as the public face of the community would have us to believe. There are major divisions and inequalities in the movement that typically rest below the surface of what most people in our culture see. However, the divisions are real, and they threaten the strength of the movement if they ever come to the surface.

Even though the focus of this essay has been to expose the fissures in the LGBT movement, I want to end with a call back to biblical sexuality. Genesis 1–2 gives us a clear picture of God's design for sexuality from the beginning. In Genesis 1:27 we read, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female, he created them." From the outset, God created two genders—male and female. Every example of godly sexual expression we see from that point forward in Scripture comes through the union of a man and woman in marriage. Genesis 2:24 tells us, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." When Jesus discusses marriage and sexuality in Matthew 19 and Mark 10, he appeals to these two foundational verses in Genesis. When Paul talks about marriage in Ephesians 5, he also appeals to the complementary nature of man and woman and points back to Genesis 2:24 as the key text.

Monogamous, heterosexual marriage is commended, and even celebrated, as the biblical expression of sexuality. All departures from this standard are considered acquiescence to the sinful, fallen nature of mankind. Thus, we do not point out the conflict in the LGBT movement as an end in itself, but we do so for the purpose of calling everyone caught up in sexual sin back to God's plan for sexuality. We should be reminded of the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:11 after he pointed out a number of sins—including some of a sexual nature—in the church at Corinth: "Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

For instance, in the wake of the *Windsor* decision, CNN reported about the rising desire of polyamorous relationships to be legally recognized. Emanuella Grinberg, "Polyamory: When Three Isn't a Crowd," *CNN Living*, October 26, 2013, accessed October 24, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/26/living/relationships-polyamory/. Likewise, as mentioned above, Utah took steps towards legalizing polygamy with its ruling in the "Sister Wives Case," John Schwartz, "A Utah Law Prohibiting Polygamy Is Weakened," *New York Times*, December 14, 2013, accessed October 24, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/15/us/a-utah-law-prohibiting-polygamy-is-weakened.html.

# WHAT WOULD JESUS SAY TO SOMEONE LIKE LEELAH ALCORN?<sup>1</sup>

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n December 28, 2014 a 17-year old high school student apparently committed suicide after a difficult journey with confusion over gender identity. In his suicide note, Josh Alcorn said that since he was 4 years old he felt like "a girl trapped inside a boy's body." Because of this Josh desired to be called "Leelah" and wished for people to relate to him as a woman. I will refer to Josh as "Leelah" in this article, but will also refer to him as a male, please bear with me, even if you passionately disagree with either of those choices.

This is an excerpt from Leelah's final words posted shortly before taking his own life:

When I was 14, I learned what transgender meant and cried of happiness. After 10 years of confusion I finally understood who I was. I immediately told my mom, and she reacted extremely negatively, telling me that it was a phase, that I would never truly be a girl, that God doesn't make mistakes, that I am wrong. If you are reading this, parents, *please* don't tell this to your kids. Even if you are Christian or are against transgender people don't ever say that to someone, especially your kid. That won't do anything but make them hate them self [*sic*]. That's exactly what it did to me.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This article was originally published on Garrett Kell's blog ("What Would Jesus Have Said to Leelah Alcorn," *All Things for God*, January 2, 2015, accessed March 9, 2015, http://garrettkell.com/what-would-jesus-have-said-to-leelah-alcorn/) and later published at the ERLC blog ("What Would Jesus Say to Someone Like Leelah Alcorn," *Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission*, January 7, 2015, accessed March 9, 2015, http://erlc.com/article/what-would-jesus-say-to-someone-like-leelah-alcorn). We offer it again as it responds pastorally to the pain experienced by men and women like Leelah Alcorn. May God be pleased to use it to minister to you and draw many to Christ.

My mom started taking to a therapist, but would only take me to Christian therapists, (who were all very biased) so I never actually got the therapy I needed to cure me of my depression. I only got more Christians telling me that I was selfish and wrong and that I should look to God for help.

The letter goes on with sad details that I hope none of us are ever tempted to write or left to read in the wake of losing a loved one in such a tragic way. Leelah's final request was, "my death needs to mean something." I could not agree more.

It is heart-wrenching to know that a young person was so overwhelmed with pain that their only response was to stop living. That should mean something. Whether you're LGBT, Christian, liberal, conservative, religious, or otherwise—we are humans and a tragedy like this should lead us to stop, weep, pray, and take notice.

For me, it made me wonder what I would say to my own child if they felt the same way Leelah did. And more importantly, it made me wonder, *what would Jesus say to someone who feels the same way Leelah did?* 

I do not know exactly what Jesus would say to them, but there are a few truths from the Bible that give me a pretty good idea.

### 1. JESUS WOULD SAY, "YOU ARE MADE IN MY IMAGE, AND I LOVE YOU."

Just like Leelah, all people are wonderfully made in God's image (Gen 1:26–28). We are each knit together in our mother's womb (Ps 139:13–14) and brought safely into this world to walk as an image bearer of God. When people see you, they see a reflection of the glory of the God who made you.

Jesus would say to you that you have value and worth because God made you. He would say something like, "no matter what anyone tells you, you are valuable and I love you. Come and find refuge in my faithful arms, I made you and I will protect you" (Ps 91:4).

#### 2. JESUS WOULD SAY, "YOU ARE BROKEN, JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE."

Leelah was an image bearer of God, but he was a broken one. Just like you are. Just like I am. Every person who has ever been born, except Jesus, is deeply and totally affected by the curse of sin (Ps 51:4; Rom 5:12). We are all relationally, sexually, morally, rationally—broken. Sin does this to us. It corrupts our feelings and desires and understanding of life and of ourselves. We are all aware of this brokenness, though we experience it in different ways.

Jesus would say to you there is hope for your brokenness because "in me you can have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

# 3. JESUS WOULD SAY, "YOU HAVE A UNIQUE STRUGGLE, AND I WILL USE IT."

There is a scene in the Bible where Jesus declared that a man was born blind so "that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3). God works in the midst of our fallen, sinful, broken lives for his glory. In fact, he only uses broken, sinful, needy people who have sinful struggles.

That does not give us an excuse to give into temptation, but it does give us hope that God can use even the most heinous sinful struggles to display his grace and sufficiency in our lives. If God did this with a self-righteous murderer like the apostle Paul (Acts 9) and an impulsive denier like Peter (John 21), he can do it with you and me.

Jesus would say something like this to you, "I know you do not understand how I can use your struggle and your pain, but I can. I can work all things together for the good of those who love me and are called according to my purpose—I can even use your struggle with transgender feelings in ways you cannot imagine" (Rom 8:28).

# 4. JESUS WOULD SAY, "I CAME TO RESCUE PEOPLE LIKE YOU, SO TRUST IN ME."

Jesus didn't come to rescue people who had it all together. In fact, he said "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). It may seem insensitive to talk about sin at a time when you already feel so unloved and misunderstood, but all of our confusion about who we are in life flows from this very issue.

All of us, whether we consider ourselves straight or gay or transgender or anything else, are sinners. That means that we have disobeyed God's design in every imaginable way. In the way we think, the way we talk, the way we treat others—the ways are too many for us to count. But God has counted our sins, none have escaped his eye (Ps 69:5).

But in spite of our rebellion against God, he still loves us. There's a place in the Bible where we are told, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Jesus came to rescue us from our sin by dying in the place of sinners and then rising from the dead to forgive us of our sins.

For those who truly believe in Jesus, God will never turn away (John 6:37) and rather than count all their sins against them, he will forgive them and throw them "as far as the east is from the west" (Pss 32:1–2, 103:11–12; 2 Cor 5:17–19).

Anyone who says that is a message of hate is not listening to what has really been said. That is the greatest act of love anyone could ever show us (John 15:13). Jesus laid down his life so that we could be forgiven and made right with God. Does this new relationship change us? Yes, in every way. But please do not dismiss this good news because God calls us to change. He only wishes to transform us into the image of his own dear Son (Romans 8:29). He is better than whatever else we wish to hold on to. Ask God if it is really true that Jesus died for you.

# 5. JESUS WOULD SAY, "THE JOURNEY IS HARD, BUT IT IS WORTH IT AND I WILL HELP YOU."

Just because someone becomes a Christian, does not mean things get easy. There is still much pain in this life. People you love will still hurt you at times. Some people will still misunderstand you. You will still struggle with sin—in all sorts of ways (Rom 7:15–19). Your affections will change toward sin, but often that change doesn't happen all at once and sometimes it happens very slowly (2 Cor 3:18).

You may never "feel" like your body looks. Your sexual desires may never be redirected. But as you walk with Jesus you will understand and respond to your passions differently. This may be a struggle

for a long time, possibly for your whole life. But Jesus promises that you don't have to carry the weight alone. He says to you "come to me all you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28).

If you are a born again child of God (John 1:12), your primary identity is now rooted in God's acceptance of you in Christ. This radically alters the way you see everything, including your gender identity. This journey of understanding how to please God in spite of your struggles may be daunting but it will be worth it because it comes with the promise "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Heb 13:5).

# 6. JESUS WOULD SAY, "YOUR PARENTS AREN'T PERFECT, BUT THEY LOVE YOU."

I am a parent and as I've reflected on this heart-breaking story, I weep for Mr. and Mrs. Alcorn. I cannot imagine how anguishing it must have been to see their child struggling and despairing over such deep questions. I'm sure they wish they had answers to help their child understand why God allowed this pain into their child's life and how to trust God in the midst of it all. I'm sure they wish they could take their child's pain and bear it themselves.

Some will scorn Christian parents for attempting to help their child live according to their biological sex, but ridicule is not the answer. You may be upset that it sounds like I'm taking the parent's side. I'm only saying that sympathy needs to go both ways in a situation like this.

Parents who love God and love their children will do all they can to help their child live in God's perfect ways. How parents do this will sometimes be right and sometimes be wrong. There are no easy answers for parents either. I wish there were.

If you are at odds with your parents like Leelah was, I want to encourage you to be patient with them. Your parents aren't perfect, but I suspect they do love you—even if their love feels oppressive. There is a great difference between being an abusive parent and a parent that in good faith is trying to help guide their child.

If your parents are pointing you toward trusting Jesus, don't receive that as unloving—it is the most loving thing anyone could ever do for you. If they are doing it in a way that hurts you, talk with them and pray for God to help you not give up.

# 7. JESUS WOULD SAY, "GO TO MY PEOPLE, THEY WILL WALK WITH YOU IN GRACE AND TRUTH."

Many of your friends may tell you that the church is filled with hateful, bigoted, backwards people. Sadly, there are some people who do horrible things in the name of Christ—things that Jesus himself would condemn. Sometimes Christians fall short of Jesus' standard of love, but there are countless others who are trying by the grace of God to do better. You need to find a church that is not Christian in name only. Find a Bible-believing, Spirit-led community that will love you and walk with you

Jesus came "in grace and truth" (John 1:17) and his people are to live in the same way (John 15:12). The church is filled with people who need your help to walk in humility before God, and you need them to do the same (Heb 3:13, 10:24–25). Jesus would tell you that you should not struggle alone, and that the people who tell you the truth are the people you can trust the most.

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A true church is a community of people who are patient and compassionate, because Jesus has been patient and compassionate with them. They are a people who will help you fight against your sins, because Jesus has forgiven their sins and helps them fight against their own sins. You may be surprised to find how many Christians there are who struggle with the same kinds of things you do.

## 8. JESUS WOULD SAY, "DON'T GIVE UP ON LIFE, I MAKE LIFE WORTH LIVING."

There are some struggles that feel like they are too much to bear. Sometimes it seems as if ending your life will bring you the peace that has been so fleeting up until now. Maybe it feels like the only way to silence those who hurt you or get the attention of those who won't listen to you.

If this is how you feel, Jesus would say do not give up because "the Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Ps 34:18). He would say your weeping is not ignored and "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears" (2 Kgs 20:5). Jesus would tell you that he made you and he has all your days numbered in his book (Ps 139:16).

He would tell you to not give up on life because he knows how he plans to work all of this together for your good if you will surrender to him (Rom 8:28). And he would tell you that a day is coming when God "...will wipe away every tear from (your) eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4).

This is the promise for those who trust in Christ. Do not give up on life, but cling to the Jesus who will bring you through the many trials and temptations you are facing.

#### DRAW NEAR TO JESUS, AND HE WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU

Some will say that because I am a Christian and believe the Bible to be true that I am the kind of person who causes deaths like Leelah's. If you feel that way, please look past any of my shortcomings in this article and consider Christ himself. Take up the Bible and read about Jesus for yourself.

There are no easy answers for any of our brokenness, including the kind of brokenness that Leelah Alcorn knew so deeply. But that does not mean that his death should mean nothing. It should lead us to listen to one another's stories rather than spew hate at one another. Jesus is the hope for those who are LBGT, just as he is the hope for everyone else. He is the one who understands us, and our brokenness, even when no one else does. Draw near to him in faith and ask him if this is true and he will draw near to you (James 4:8).

# ADMONISH THE IDLE: THOUGHTS ON HOW TO MOTIVATE LAZY MEN

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s we sat down to lunch, it became apparent that this brother whom I had recently met was depressed, full of anxiety, and generally discouraged about his circumstances. He didn't have a plan for life after college, nor did he have a job. He was now in graduate school, but he wasn't sure why. He was still living off his parents and most of his time was spent in his dorm room doing who knows what.

It is difficult to see a man who is given over to listlessness and laziness. Something in us recognizes that his unwillingness to work, plan, and forge ahead in life is contrary to God's design. Most would agree: the sluggard's sleepy-eyed approach to life is discouraging to those who have opportunity to observe it. By contrast, men who have a zest for life and a zeal to make significant contributions to their family, church, and society not only possess a genuine attractiveness, but they also motivate people around them to make the most of their own time on earth.

I admit there have been seasons of sloth in my own life. Many times I have neglected important responsibilities to watch television, or surfed the Internet while resisting schoolwork, or even procrastinated in the face of difficult projects. Yet, I must also confess that, when I succumb to the lull of passivity and indolence, I am afterward never satisfied. The sweet promise of pleasure that laziness offers always turns to gravel in my mouth.

#### WHY SHOULD WE SEEK TO MOTIVATE LAZY MEN?

When it comes to our labor in the church and among Christian brothers, we should desire their unwavering pursuit of diligence for at least three reasons. First, a pattern of diligence and a strong work ethic fulfills a significant part of their calling as Christian men. Man was created in the image of God and recreated in the image of Christ to work, and work a lot. A man's unwillingness to work is a rebellion against the Lord and a rebellion against a fundamental facet of his personhood.

Second, a solid example of masculine industriousness provides encouragement to other brothers to set their hand to the plow and do something with their lives. I am daily motivated to pursue godly productivity by other men in our church, by my pastors, and by my heroes in the faith. Their model of single-minded persistence and productivity is inspiring, to say the least.

Finally, we should lovingly admonish our brothers because we are convinced that the path of obedience is the path of true satisfaction. We know and they know (if they have truly tasted it) that only a life of Spirit-empowered labor for the glory of God is truly fulfilling—if only they could get off the couch. The rest of this article aims to help them do just that.

#### NINE WAYS TO MOTIVATE LAZY MEN

#### Give Them a Compelling Vision of What They Could Be

It may be tempting to approach a lazy brother with the exclusive use of exhortation: "Get up! Do something! Be a man!" There is a place for this kind of appeal; the sluggard will typically need patient yet prodding words to wake him from his slumber. I will talk more about this form of motivation below, but at this point it is vital to remember our speech must involve more than in-your-face locker room talk. Men need a compelling vision of what they could be.

Scripture does not merely give us negative admonitions and rebukes; nearly every time Solomon offers a cautionary description of the lazy, foolish man, he precedes or follows such warnings with counter examples of the diligent, wise man. Our pattern should be similar.

Rather than only telling our lethargic friend he will suffer loss if he follows his current path, we should also make the effort to place before him a picture of what he could be if he would turn from his folly and pursue a life of gospel-motivated diligence. Jesus Christ is in the business of taking wandering, listless, lethargic boys and transforming them into decisive, purposeful, active men. So help your brother see that he could be, by God's grace, a Christ-like husband, a courageous father, a productive employee, a fruitful church member, a respected neighbor, and an influential leader. You will be amazed at how a positive vision of godly masculinity will motivate a man to find his way out of an idle existence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> A couple of recent books for providing you many useful ideas for helping men see what they could be are Matt Perman, *What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get things Done* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) and Dave Harvey, *Rescuing Ambition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

#### **Remove Their Objections**

As we deliver this vision of what our brother could be, we must be ready to dismantle his objections. If he knows the Lord Jesus, he possesses the spiritual resources necessary for a life of gospel fruitfulness. He must grasp this essential truth if he is going to make headway out of the mire of his purposelessness.

Now, I don't mean to suggest that one's past, personality, or present circumstances are irrelevant we must exercise compassion with our brothers in Christ and seek to really understand why they are having so much trouble getting out of bed in the morning. But in order to combat the discouragement that assuredly pervades their life, we must bring men to a place where they are convinced there are no permanent barriers between where they are now and where God would have them be in the future. They can find forgiveness in Christ for their past sins. God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (Exod 34:6–7). Their Savior has given to all Christians everything pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3–4).

By removing your brother's objections you are not being unkind; you are giving him hope that halts the way laziness feeds discouragement, and vice versa. Eliminate all objections, and you have done much to stop his vicious cycle of apathy and despair.

#### Help Them Understand Work is Essential to Being Human

Although they may claim to know what Scripture teaches on the issue of vocation, you cannot take the depth of their knowledge for granted. They must see afresh how pervasive the theme of work is in Scripture, and how sloth is a sinful rejection of a fundamental component of their humanity. To be made in the image of God means, first and foremost, that we are to exercise dominion over the earth for the sake of human flourishing (Gen 1:26–31). Man was designed for the purpose of work (Gen 2:15). Thus, the refusal to work is a sure sign of foolishness (Prov 12:11) that impoverishes a person physically and spiritually (Prov 6:9–11; 10:4). Indeed, the one who is lazy is closely related to one who destroys (Prov 18:9) and is in need of a stern rebuke (2 Thess 3:6–11; Titus 1:13).

If it is true, then, that work is fundamental to human personhood, refusal to work will naturally lead to problems in other areas of life. Thus, you must make a direct connection between a person's anxiety, depression, and lack of fulfillment with their refusal to work. Help your brother consider that their spiritual condition may in large part be due to their unwillingness to do what God created them to do. While it may be difficult to determine whether one's laziness caused the depression or the reverse, we must acknowledge that to remain in a state of perpetual lethargy will most assuredly lead to more depression.<sup>2</sup>

#### Show Them From Scripture What Happens to a Lazy Person

Not only must we offer positive encouragement, we must also help our brothers see what their future holds if they continue in their current path: spiritual and physical poverty (Prov 10:4–5; 12:11; 19:15), unshakable feelings of purposelessness (Prov 15:19), despondency, depression, and a life devoid of real accomplishment awaits them (Prov 10:26; 13:4; 20:4; 21:25–26).<sup>3</sup> Find a way to help your brother

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> I recognize that uncovering the root causes of one's depression can be a complex and difficult process. Nevertheless, I believe it is unwise to allow a person who is struggling with depression to remain in a perpetual state of sloth, for they cannot expect much deliverance from their depression so long as they are refusing to work. Applying oneself to one's responsibilities can often serve as the first step out of depression. See Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 143–-44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Bruce Waltke insightfully observes that Proverbs 13:4 ("The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul

taste the bitterness of these fruits before they are in full harvest in his own life. In the same way you painted a picture of wonderful possibilities, cast for them a vision of dreadful consequences, praying that the Spirit might make their sloth morally reprehensible and utterly unattractive.

# Explain to Them How the Curse Has Affected Their Manhood

While we seek to show our brothers that work is essential to their humanity and that laziness leads only to loss, it will also be necessary to help them see that the path of diligence will often be the path of most resistance. The conflict they experience is a direct result of the fall of humankind into sin. Explain to them that after the fall, God cursed an aspect of creation that is central to their masculine calling (see Gen 3:17–19). Temptation to passivity and laziness is now compounded by the fact that work is difficult, occasionally fruitless, and will not often yield satisfaction until a man has expended significant effort. A right understanding of the curse is essential for helping men cultivate a life of diligence, for they must know that they are fighting an uphill battle lest they become discouraged.

# Ask Them About Pornography

In his first epistle, Peter exhorts his readers to abstain from fleshly lusts because they "wage war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11). Peter's use of the word "soul" (Gr. *psychē*) in his admonishment is instructive, because it tells us that the apostle intends to ground our motivation for abstinence from lust in the well-being of our *whole* inner-person. An addiction to pornography doesn't merely wreak havoc on the mind; it devastates the affections and the will. Lust robs men of ambition, discourages initiative, perverts inclinations, sabotages desire for godly productivity, promotes passivity, dampens passion for adventure, hinders taste for spiritual truth, and weakens the ability to concentrate. It could be that the brother you are seeking to encourage in a path of diligence is caught in a slough of lust. Ask him about pornography.<sup>4</sup>

## Address the Assurance of their Salvation

We cannot confine our admonishments to only address temporal troubles. Scripture indicates there are eternal issues to be considered in relation to one's tendency toward sloth. In Jesus' parable of the talents, for example, we learn that an unproductive life is evidence that one may not know the Lord. The man who hid his one talent because he perceived his master as a hard, unfair man received a damning rebuke for his laziness and a promise of eternal punishment (Matt 25:24–26).

We must communicate straightforwardly to our lazy brother that he should not expect an abiding sense of assurance of his salvation so long as he remains in his current condition. While salvation does

of the diligent is richly supplied" [ESV]) includes all human appetites in its chastisement of the lazy man: the sluggard is unable to acquire or accomplish *anything* of significance! "By contrast, the sluggard's appetite is not fattened but *craves* ... and he has not ( $wa^{i}ayin$ ). The unqualified  $wa^{i}ayin$  refers to everything his human drives and appetites aspire to, such as eating (Job 33:20; Mic 7:1), drinking (2 Sam 23:15), and the opposite sex (Ps 45:11[12]; Jer. 2:24). The antithesis implies that every appetite of the diligent person is abundantly satisfied, including his hunger for God (see Pss 42:1[2]; 63:1[2]). The proverb assumes that everything needful in life is richly available under God's good hand (Ps 128:1–3), but it is non-existant for the sluggard (Ps 128:1)." Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 554–55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For some excellent help in the area of sexual purity and finding victory over pornography addiction, see Heath Lambert *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity by the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013) and Tim Challies, *Sexual Detox:* A Guide for Guys Who Are Sick of Porn (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2010).

not come by our works of obedience, assurance of our salvation certainly does. A professing Christian who resides in a perpetual state of idleness cannot have assurance that the energizing, fruit-producing, work-compelling Spirit resides in him.<sup>5</sup>

## Be Firm

While it is vital that we warm our brother's affections by providing a compelling vision of what is possible in his life, it is equally essential that we apply an appropriate amount of forthright admonishment to wake him from his slumber. Paul says, "admonish the idle" (1 Thess 5:14). The book of Proverbs makes it clear that rebuke is the way of wisdom. Irresolute, timid, inconsequential suggestions rarely if ever—make their way deep into the heart of the lazy man. He is right in his own eyes (Prov 26:16) and therefore desperately needs strong, straightforward, unflinching, eye-to-eye rebuke for wasting the life God has given him. Be firm.

### Be Patient

In the same verse where Paul instructs the Thessalonians to admonish the idle, he reminds us to be patient. The apostle recognized a tendency in all of us to grow exasperated with our brothers and throw up our hands in resignation as their progress sputters and stalls. Our frustration, however, will only prove deadly to their growth and is probably rooted in our own self-righteousness. It is likely that change will be gradual, so we must resolve to make consistent effort to persevere through seemingly fruitless seasons. "Let us not grow weary of doing good," the apostle reminds us, "for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up" (Gal 6:9). Be patient.

# **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Even though I have offered several strategies to spur on a lazy brother to love and good deeds, I do not mean to imply that such a list is exhaustive. The labor required to understand your friend and pinpoint the root cause of his troubles is complicated and demanding. Below the surface of an indolent life lurk deeper issues of the heart, and only a man of understanding is able to draw them out (Prov 20:5). So, I have not attempted to address all the issues related to the topic of laziness; rather, I have offered a few basic principles to help guide you in your efforts to counsel your brother to get off the couch and fulfill the calling God has for him.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> While you will not be able to say definitively that the professing brother in this case is an unbeliever due to his laziness (for only God can see the heart), you can safely question his assurance of salvation based on his unwillingness to diligently steward the Lord's resources. For an excellent discussion of perseverance, assurance, and the role of warnings in Scripture, see Thomas R. Schreiner, "Perseverance and Assurance: A Survey and a Proposal" *SBJT* 2.1 (Spring 1998), 32–62. Schreiner has also expanded on these ideas in a book co-authored with Ardel B. Caneday. See Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001).

### **STUDIES**

# A REFERENDUM ON DEPRAVITY: SAME-SEX ATTRACTION AS SINFUL DESIRE

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My conscience is without conviction or contrition, With nothing to repent of. My will is without power of decision or resolution. My heart is without affection, and full of leaks. My memory has no retention, So I forget so easily the lessons learned, And thy truths seep away. Give me a broken heart that yet carries home the water of grace.

*he Valley of Vision*, a collection of Puritan prayers edited by Arthur Bennett, has trained Christians for several generations in the daily confession of sin.<sup>1</sup> Rarely is the book's verse more poignant than when it considers the problem of indwelling sin in the Christian. As with much of the Protestant tradition, the Puritans understood they were shot through with iniquity.

For some time now, it has been customary to appreciate this humble spirituality. What we could call the Puritan worldview, or Puritan spirituality, has had a tremendous effect on the "big gospel" movement of the last decade of evangelical life. Included in this retrieval has been a revival of belief in the comprehensive sinfulness of humanity. Sometimes this is called "total depravity," sometimes not, but a fulsome confession of human sinfulness is quite common in mainstream evangelical life. Many agree in theory with the words of Martin Luther in the first of his famous 95 Theses: "When our Lord

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012 [1975]), 128–29.

and Master Jesus Christ, said 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."2

In recent days, evangelicals have considered how this theoretical belief bears on the everyday life of the believer. A lively conversation has developed that is centered in the nature of sexual attraction, and in particular, same-sex attraction (SSA). The core issue is this: when we experience SSA, do we need to repent if we turn away from the sexual element of this desire? Some have argued that while this impulse is not ideal, neither is it sinful. It is part of our disordered post-fall condition. We need only repent when our will actively fastens on the object of desire, to use language associated with Thomas Aquinas and the Catholic moral tradition.<sup>3</sup>

I am thankful for this fruitful conversation among friends. I personally engaged in it on a scholarly level by moderating a panel of gifted evangelical theologians at the 66th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in November 2014.<sup>4</sup> In what follows, I want to build off of that profitable debate by suggesting that Scripture leads the believer to treat same-sex desire as a moral category, an impulse of the heart that calls for repentance. Our desires, I seek to show from James 1:14, are not neutral. We tempt ourselves to sin through our fallen instincts. Because of this, pastors of congregants struggling with such desires—and any like them—should lead church members to confess, repent, and seek divine mastery of these desires.

### WHAT IS HOMOSEXUAL ORIENTATION?

Before we move to exegetical considerations, we need to establish a working definition of sexual orientation. The American Psychological Association (APA) has rendered the following conception:

Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, women, or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.<sup>5</sup>

There is much to consider in this definition. For our purposes, we zero in on one specific aspect: the "enduring pattern" of sexual attraction expressed in the term "sexual orientation." To simplify, an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, "95 Theses," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, Second Edition, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 41.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See, for example, John J. Elmendorf, *Elements of Moral Theology: Based on the Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: James Pott & Co., 1892), 86–96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The panel session, entitled "Issues in Sexuality and Gender," considered the relative sinfulness of homosexual orientation and consisted of Wesley Hill, Denny Burk, and Preston Sprinkle. Each of these men offered helpful material that sharpened my thinking on this subject. Hill and Sprinkle argue that the experience of SSA does not necessarily merit repentance, while Burk argues that it does. See, for example, Preston Sprinkle, "Is Same-Sex Attraction Sinful?," *Patheos*, accessible at http://www.patheos.com/blogs/theologyintheraw/2014/12/is-same-sex-attraction-sinful.

Beyond this conversation, Hill in particular has sparked the debate through his book *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010). I am deeply thankful for Hill's clear witness about the sinfulness of homosexual behavior, a witness joined by many writers at the Spiritual Friendship site he helped start (www.spiritualfriendship.org). Hill, Julie Rodgers, Nick Roen, and numerous other talented writers together testify to the transforming power of Christ's gospel. How encouraged I am by their collective desire to choose celibacy and exalt Christ over all earthly pleasures.

American Psychological Association, "Answers to Your Questions: For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality," accessible at http://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.pdf.

orientation is essentially an established pattern of desire. You desire something over and over and the APA considers you to be "oriented" toward that end. This is a workable definition for our purposes.

The discussion of SSA should not revolve around whether one chooses, initially, this pattern of attraction. Many people who feel SSA testify to experiencing such desire for as long as they can remember. For a good number of people, this desire was unwanted. Those who were raised in sound biblical churches give testimony to detesting their innate attraction all the more because of the biblical witness. Despite it, however, they continued to experience SSA, no matter how much they sought to scrub it from their Christian experience. We hear these stories, which will be increasingly common in the church, and we feel great compassion for people caught in such straits.<sup>6</sup>

What once seemed cloudy now seems clear to many: the issue of choosing sin is not ultimately in our moral deliberations. Many who seek to follow Christ feel SSA without any predetermined act of the will. It is a natural part of their experience.<sup>7</sup> The crucial matter before the church today is not primarily the precise physio-psychological origin of SSA, but rather the church's response to it.<sup>8</sup>

This is a theological issue, to be sure. But it also has profound pastoral implications. When people share this struggle with their pastor, what should the pastor say? Here are some responses that we have heard in recent days:

- "That's fine; it's a natural part of who you are."
- "Your SSA is disordered, but since it's innate, you don't have to repent of it."
- "Acting on homosexual desire is wrong, but it's not wrong to feel that desire."
- "That's just your orientation. Orientation isn't sinful. Desire is."9

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> In fact, we do not only feel sympathy-from-afar. We may not experience SSA personally or regularly, but we all have sin problems that bedevil us and that we struggle, over months or years or even decades, to defeat. This constitutes one of my primary concerns with the "gay Christian" movement, in fact. While seeking to minister grace to Christians who face SSA, it ironically seems to distance them from the body, rendering them a special category of sinner (and saint). While I recognize the initial impulse, I worry that it leads to an unfortunate result that ends up countering the witness of God's Word. 1 Cor 6:9–11, for example, does not identify any one group of sinners as more damaged or more privileged than any other. Sinners of varying sin-patterns are listed. The swindler is as far from God as the homosexual; the greedy businessman is as inherently evil as the adulterer.

It is true that human cultures sometimes elevate and are drawn to certain sins. Our modern culture, for example, has made an idol out of sexuality. But we must be very careful in our terminology and our theology to not make the mistake of baptizing cultural distinctions when Scripture counts us all equally guilty in Adam. Thankfully, per the witness of 1 Cor 6:9–11, we know that no matter what our pre-Christ past was like, and no matter what our present struggles with sin are, we are all washed, justified, and sanctified by God in Christ through the Spirit. This, and no other, is our identity. See Owen Strachan, "Should the Church Speak of Gay Christians?," *Journal for Biblical Manhood* 19.1, accessible at http://cbmw.org/journal/19-1-spring-2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> For further commentary on the development of this understanding of orientation in a conservative Christian approach to homosexuality, see the message by R. Albert Mohler, Jr. entitled "Aftermath" at the 2014 ERLC National Conference. The video link is here: http://www.albertmohler.com/2014/10/29/erlc-2014-ministering-in-a-post-modern-marriage-culture. See also the forthcoming book by Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015). Denny in particular has produced a body of work on this topic that is exceptically instructive and pastorally sensitive. I am also thankful for the wisdom and counsel of Wayne Grudem, Bruce Ware, James Hamilton, Jr., Oren Martin, Mark Coppenger, Grant Castleberry, Colin Smothers, and Gavin Peacock on this topic.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> For a website offering original research from a Christian worldview on this general subject, see The Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity (ISSI) at Regent University, led by Mark Yarhouse. The ISSI website is accessible at http://www.sexualidentityinstitute.org.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> These are a representative collection of responses I have seen on Twitter, Facebook, and heard in personal conversations.

I want to suggest a different response to this vexing matter. When a church member comes to a pastor for counsel on this front, the pastor should say: "This is a battle for holiness. Your desires, just like mine, are sinful and need rewiring. Confess them to God and repent of them. This is a serious struggle, but the gospel is sufficient for these things."

In what follows, I want to lay a foundation for this response and unpack why homosexual desire calls for repentance. I believe that James 1:14, buttressed by Matthew 5:21–30, provides the clarity the church needs on this matter.

#### JAMES 1:14 AND THE ENTRAPMENT OF THE WILL

James 1:13–15 lifts the hood on our hearts. In it, we peer into the awful—but arresting—process by which sin forms in the human heart:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

The key phrase for our purposes is that the sinner is *exelkomenos* and *deleazomenos*—"lured and enticed," respectively, by "his own lusts" (*tēs idias epithymias*). <sup>10</sup> This is a dark picture of how desire eventuates in sin, which eventuates in death.<sup>11</sup> Before the fallen instinct is fully manifested, before it comes to full fruition, a toxic alchemy occurs in the human will. This is not simply a "disordered" process, however. It is a sinful one.<sup>12</sup>

The language James uses to describe the workings of desire is not neutral. He describes each step of the process of sin-formation in moral terms. Sin first emerges when the sinner allows himself to fall prey to "his own lusts," not those of someone else. This is directly counter to the way we frequently diagnose our evil deeds. "*I didn't mean to hurt you*," we say to someone we just wounded by our words. "*It wasn't my intention to do so*." By this we mean that we did not have a 19-point premeditated plan by which we devised a way to hurt our friends and loved ones. In this very narrow sense, we didn't "mean" to do so.

But in another sense, James teaches us that our sinful action was indeed an act of the will. We allowed ourselves to be "lured and enticed" by our own fleshly desire. This is a chilling metaphor. We are not harmlessly drawn out-of-bounds when we allow ourselves to be tempted. Instead, we are "dragged away" in a "violent sense," Kurt Richardson notes.<sup>13</sup> The focus in James 1:14 is resolutely, even stub-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> This word need not signal necessarily evil desire; see, for example, its usage in Luke 22:15, Phil 1:23, and 1 Thess 2:17. It refers either to moral or immoral desires, and the *telos* of the desire is crucial for understanding which form of desire is in view in a given text. The context makes clear that this it is used here of immoral desires. D. Edmond Hiebert, *James* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Catholic scholar Patrick J. Hartin notes that this force is nothing other than "evil desire." Idem, *James*, (Sacra Pagina Series; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ralph P. Martin notes that in the broader Greek literature, the Stoic Epictetus uses this imagery to depict the temptations of pleasure. See Idem., *James* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco: Word Books, 1988), 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Kurt Richardson, *James: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (The New American Commentary; Nashville: Holman Reference: 1997), 81.

bornly, on our own actions. We are not hauled off by someone else's volition. We are the agent here. "We entice ourselves with the object we desire," Richardson concludes. Whether or not we are fully conscious of this process (which often occurs very quickly), we act as our own tempters and enticers.

Our sinful will, fallen because of Adam's unrighteous act, entraps us. D. Edmond Hiebert suggests that the latter term referenced above, *deleazomenos*, harkens to the enticing call of the prostitute, a call presented (and critiqued) in Proverbs 7:6–23.<sup>14</sup> This is instructive: when we sin, the text suggests, we effectively play the role of the prostitute to *ourselves*. We fall into unrighteousness not through any external operation, but when our will "has sanctioned the performance of the sinful act," as Hiebert explains.<sup>15</sup> It is as if our fallen instincts call out to our better nature, our new nature, to abandon our God-given virtue. With such a vivid textual portrait, the takeaway seems obvious: we regularly act as our own worst enemy.

James 1:14 shows that God does not tempt us. Though the biblical authors are well aware of Satan's influence, James does not suggest here—as in 4:7—that Satan is the problem. The picture in this particular passage is much more troubling: sin comes from within, and only from within. We bait the hook; we then, by our own lustful appetite, take the bait.<sup>16</sup> The metaphor speaks to an inborn hunger for evil. We search for it. We are eager to tempt ourselves toward it.

This depiction of sin-formation is both good news and bad news for the Christian. Positively, it restores responsibility and moral ability to us. Negatively, it renders impermissible the central impulse of the sinful heart, namely, its ferocious appetite for self-justification. As noted above, we blame other people; we blame the weather; we even, like our father Adam, blame God himself for our failings (see Gen 3:12). James tells us differently. When we sin, it is because we want to do so. What Douglas Moo calls our "illicit desire" pushes and goads us into doing what is wrong.<sup>17</sup> These are not someone else's illicit desires. They are, as we saw above, *tēs idias* — "our own."

Our desires, therefore, are not neutral. In James 1:13–15, they are depicted as sinful. R. V. G. Tasker makes the point concisely: "Lustful desires, as our Lord so clearly taught (Mt. v. 28), are themselves sinful even when they have not yet issued in lustful actions."<sup>18</sup> Christopher Morgan agrees: "Sinners who sin according to their very sinful core have minds, wills, desires, actions, and attitudes shaped by such sin."<sup>19</sup> John Calvin concurs, James "treats here of inward temptations, which are nothing else than the inordinate desires which entice to sin. For this reason James calls us to confess our own guilt, and not to implicate God."<sup>20</sup> In Calvin's handling, we cannot only identify acts and deeds as sinful; we must broaden our categories:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Hiebert, 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> See Simon Kistemaker for more on this metaphor, drawn from "the art of fishing" (49). Idem, *Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> James, 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> R.V.G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 46-47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Christopher W. Morgan, "Sin in the Biblical Story" in idem and Robert A. Peterson, eds. *Fallen: A Theology of Sin, Theology in Community* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 153. Morgan also quotes Philip Hughes, who notes: "there is an inner root of sinfulness which corrupts man's true nature and from which his sinful deeds spring." Hughes, "Another Doctrine Falls," *Christianity Today*, 13.17 (May 23, 1969), 13. My thanks to David Schrock for this quotation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on James*, entry on James 1:15, accessible at http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/cal/view. cgi?bk=jas&ch=1.

It seems however improper and not according to the use of Scripture, to constrict the word sin to outward works, as though indeed lust itself were not a sin, and as though corrupt desires, remaining closed up within and suppressed, were not so many sins. But as the use of a word is various, there is nothing unreasonable if it be taken here, as in many other places, for actual sin.<sup>21</sup>

Sin cannot only be the "outward work" for Calvin. Opposing what he called the "Papist" view, the Genevan pastor argued, "Corrupt desires," though "closed up within and suppressed," are nonetheless "actual sin." They call for confession and repentance. That which produces external deeds has internal roots. We are reminded of Luke 6:45, where Christ makes this very point: "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."<sup>22</sup>

In James' understanding, our lustful desires "conceive" (*syllabousa*) sin and then "bear" (*tiktei*) it (1:15). This text shows that the metaphorical child to be born is the same in the womb as out of it. Lustful desires conceive sin and then birth it. The process from start to finish is immoral. Lust is not neutral in the womb, so to speak, only to become externally evil once acted upon in concrete form. Sinful instincts pop up in us, we experience desire for an object that is ungodly, and we then produce fully-formed sinful actions.

It is wholly right to preserve the distinction between "corrupt desires" and "outward works" as Calvin is careful to do. We would not collapse internal sin into external manifestation, or else we would all be guilty of murder in a court of law, for example. But this distinction does not allow us to conclude that what takes place internally in us is morally neutral or merely disordered, as the Catholic moral tradition would have it. We are disordered by the fall, but the truth is bleaker still: as the Reformers recognized, we are sinful at our core. Sinful instincts cause us to tempt ourselves.

Because we sinfully desire to go along with this temptation, we create full-blown sinful acts. Pastor-theologian David Platt has made this very point: "the responsibility for temptation and sin lies squarely with us, for our sinful desires within give in to temptation."<sup>23</sup> This sober reminder shows us afresh just how much repentance is required in the life of faith. This is not an easy cross to bear. This biblical portrait of our complicity in sin will surprise some modern evangelicals who have been taught a kinder, softer version of sin.

The church faces a wake-up call in this explosive little passage. We must not embrace evangelical spirituality without holiness anchored in a God without authority leading to a conversion without transformation.

### WHAT ABOUT THE TEMPTATIONS JESUS FACED?

What about temptation, though? If the preceding interpretation is biblically faithful, does it follow that being tempted means that we are necessarily sinful? If so, then how do we avoid concluding that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Calvin, Commentary on James.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Thanks to Grant Castleberry of CBMW for this textual connection.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in James* (ed. Platt, Daniel Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary; Nashville: B&H, 2014), 10.

Jesus, who was tempted, was sinful? Sharp-thinking friends have voiced this set of concerns. These questions demand a careful response.

The form of self-temptation described in James 1:14 is a manifestly different form of temptation than what Jesus experienced when in the presence of Satan. James is mapping out for us what *internal temptation* looks like; this is a temptation that is itself sinful, for we lure ourselves to sin. Jesus never did this to himself. He surely faced the temptation to sin, but he did not experience sinful desire. This reality does not take away from the seriousness of the prospects to sin that he faced. In Matthew 4:1–11, for example, Jesus was externally tempted by his nemesis. He was confronted externally by all sorts of prospects and opportunities: the chance to lust, the chance to make himself an impressive king in worldly terms, the possibility of concluding that his cause was hopeless. In these respects, Jesus was tempted "in all things" as we are (Heb 4:15).

It is clear that as fallen sinners, we face several kinds of temptation. Even as redeemed people, we face temptation from Satan himself (James 4:7). We are tempted by a sinful world-order under the curse of darkness (Proverbs 6). We are also tempted, as James makes clear, by our own sinful nature. We wish to be delivered from this body of predatory presences in our lives. We gladly pray the words of Christ in Matthew 6:13, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." This is not a prayer that speaks to just one experience of temptation. It speaks to our God-given desire to escape the snare of Satan, the world, and the flesh. We need divine aid to do so.

Temptation is thus not exclusively external to us nor exclusively internal. We surely face the enticement of sin from factors outside of us—Satan, the harlot, even our friends and family (Job 2:9). Such allurements are a common part of the Christian experience. We in no way sin by being tempted in such ways. There is no repentance needed when the harlot calls to us or Satan whispers to us. There is no guilt that should overtake us in such scenarios, which will regularly occur. We need not repent when temptation attempts to ambush us, as it regularly does.

But this is not the only way we face temptation. As the preceding section showed, we also tempt ourselves. As sinners, we "lure and entice" ourselves to hunger after that which is forbidden. We cannot flatly say, therefore, that temptation is morally neutral. Sometimes it is, as when Satan dangles something desirable but wrong before us. But sometimes it is not, as in the situation spelled out in James 1:14. God has not tempted us, to be sure; Satan is nowhere to be found; the fallen world-order is not dragging us violently away. We tempt ourselves, and even if our actions do not manifest in full-blown manifestations of our sinful instincts, we should repent of this self-temptation. Sometimes, when external temptation emerges, we do not initially give in to it, but then find our will weakening. We are complex creatures, and we sin far more easily than we sometimes admit.

Jesus experienced the full range of temptation offered him by a fallen world. He "knew no sin," whether of instinct or act (2 Cor 5:21). The Scripture records no instance of him committing a sinful act, doubting God, or sinning in thought or impulse. This truth does not blunt the beauty of Christ's mastery of temptation. It ought not discourage us or distance him from us. To the contrary, it inspires worship and thankfulness in us.

Jesus' obedience to his Father compels us to worship him and to pray to be like him (John 15:9– 10). It shows us that though fallen forces might feel stronger than our new nature, we never need to give into temptation of any kind. Jesus overcame temptation. Because of that fact, so can we.

#### **CONNECTING JAMES 1 TO MATTHEW 5**

There are many textual connections to make on this point—Pauline, Petrine, and numerous others. For the purpose of space, we will list just one connection. James 1:14 corresponds elegantly with the words of Christ in Matthew 5:21–30. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explains that it is not only wrong to commit murder, but to be immorally angry at a brother. So too with lust. It is not only wrong to commit adultery, but to desire the sexual act in one's mind.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery," Jesus says, "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt 5:27–28). D. A. Carson identifies the lustful desire condemned here: it is a "deep-seated lust which consumes and devours, which in imagination attacks and rapes, which mentally contemplates and commits adultery."<sup>24</sup> This desire seeks something off-limits without respect to degree of desire. The married person who is not our spouse is completely closed to us as an object of desire, unlike our own spouse. We may be drawn toward marrying a person of the opposite sex, but this does not enfranchise our lusting after such persons. Sexual passion is only appropriate in the context of marriage.<sup>25</sup>

There is thus a fundamental difference between opposite-sex attraction and same-sex attraction. One has a proper outlet; the other does not. One is acceptable if consecrated to God and not allowed to manifest in lust; the other is never acceptable. Thus we come to an important conclusion: if the object of the desire is wrong, then the desire is wrong. It is not only wrong to physically engage in homosexual acts, but to desire them. Homosexual conduct is univocally considered immoral in Scripture (see Genesis 19; Lev 18:22; Deut 23:17–18; Rom 1:26–27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10). There is no deviance from this portrait. If it is wrong to physically commit a homosexual act, it can only be wrong to desire that act. There is no God-glorifying outlet for a desire that fails to honor God.

It may be that such desires are few and fleeting or that they constitute a regular pattern. The frequency or the intensity of same-sex desire is not the issue. It is the experience of same-sex desire just like the experience of heterosexual lust or unrighteous anger in one's heart that calls for confession

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> D. A. Carson, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Of course, we must handle heterosexual desire with care. Though it has a proper end, marriage (unlike homosexual desire), even our good desires are tainted by sin. We cannot thus embrace "being attracted" to diverse members of the opposite sex without respect to the Pauline injunction to treat brothers and sisters with "absolute purity" (1 Tim 5:2). We may have an innate and God-given desire to marry a member of the opposite sex. This is a good desire. We will not be able to avoid being conscious of possible spouses before marriage, nor should we be. But no degree of lust is sanctioned when we possess this instinct. It is right to be drawn to a member of the opposite sex, but we have a very high standard for such engagement: absolute purity.

The biblical picture of marriage, and not the "hotness" of the opposite sex, is our starting point for understanding our God-given attractional instincts. Our churches and youth programs would benefit immensely from a reordering of the way we talk about relationships, sex, and marriage. This relates, for example, to dating. We cannot enfranchise dating relationships simply because they allow heterosexual couples to be attracted to one another. We should train boys and girls to exalt and eventually, when mature, pursue the covenant of marriage. This, and not simply any form of heterosexual coupling, is the Bible's exclusive context for sexual activity. We still have issues to sort out in terms of the experience of attraction and the proper age for marriage, but this starting point reframes the entire conversation on dating and holiness, and pushes Christian youth to desire covenantal union with all its benefits, not pseudo-marriages without biblical sanction or holy protection.

For sound words on this topic, which bears much wider discussion among sincere Christians due to the prevalence of morally disastrous dating culture, see Denny Burk, *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

and repentance on the believer's heart. The term "orientation" cannot thus absolve a person from their moral duties before the Lord. If it refers to a pattern of illicit sexual attraction, then it demands a consequent pattern of Godward confession and repentance.

### HOW TOTAL DEPRAVITY CLARIFIES OUR CONDITION

The foregoing helps us understand the complex workings of our wills. Sometimes, we are conscious of willfully choosing to sin. At other times, sin seems to strike us like a drone from the sky. We say something so cutting we're shocked into silence by our own words. We think something so foul that we're relieved that no one (human) knows our minds. A scary circumstance or trial presents itself and we're instantly awash in doubt, anxiety, and misery. These are not uncommon experiences for believers, even mature believers.

The modern church seems tempted (no pun intended) to be voluntarist in its understanding of the will. We have overemphasized sins of commission, and underemphasized what we could call sins of instinct. We need a healthy dose of Augustinianism to correct this shift. We surely do sin in discrete, plotted-out ways. But biblical Christians cannot stop there. We must recognize that we are sinful through-and-through (see Rom 3:10–18).

We cannot be voluntarists. We do not have the theological luxury of concluding that we sin only when we consciously assent to sin. Calvin spoke against this view directly in his commentary on James: "Hence is the dotage of those confuted, who conclude from these words, that sin is not mortal until it breaks forth, as they say, into an external act." For Calvin, God holds us accountable for "the completed course of sinning,"<sup>26</sup> the entire process, and not merely the outward manifestation of the inward desire. The Lord teaches us in James, "There is in us the root of our destruction." The root, no less than the finished product, owes to evil, and must be handled in such terms.

This means that we cannot affirm the biblical doctrine of depravity but then fail to repent in a holistic manner. We cannot read *The Valley of Vision* with reverence but then turn aside from confession and repentance just moments later. We cannot passionately sing worship songs that give voice to our moral failings but then fight off contrition when confronted. We cannot nod our head to sermons and conference messages that spell out how far short we fall of God's glory but then avoid apologizing in the car ride home over an unkind word. These standards are high. We are dealing with life lived before God, after all.

We cannot extol repentance from the pulpit but flinch from it in our living room. If, on every single day of our lives, we do not worship God as we ought, we do not repent as we ought, we do not pray as we ought, we do not read our Bibles as we ought, we do not love our neighbor as we ought, we do not care for the body of Christ as we ought, we do not look on brothers and sisters with absolute purity as we ought, then we should repent in a comprehensive way. This is true of each and every day that we live.

This is the takeaway of "total depravity" or some concomitant formulation for the believer. Sin is not our master, but it is our companion. When we are pulled toward it through fallen desire, we should repent. The whole of the Christian life, Luther reminds us, is repentance. Repentance is not the exception, then. It is the rule.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Calvin, James, entry on James 1:15.

#### HOPE FOR SINNERS OF EVERY KIND

Some people who have engaged the conversation over "gay Christianity" have argued that this reality, if true, breeds discouragement. It surely can. These passages force us to confront in a fresh and deadly serious way the specter of our immorality. We are worse than we know. We are more sinful than we like to admit in polite society.

The bogeyman in our day, as in every era, is not one particular sin. It is not SSA. SSA is just one aspect of the much larger problem: indwelling sin. People with SSA are not a special group. They are not particularly evil. They are just like every other believer who faces temptation of varying kinds. They do not need a special dispensation to deal with their lust; they do not need a different gospel. Every believer should lead a life of continual repentance of both act and desire. Every believer will find unbelievable power and fresh forgiveness in the gospel of grace. There is one enemy of us all: sin. There is one conqueror of that sin: Christ.

Whatever our fleshly battle, the death of Christ has broken the power of sin (Rom 6:6). We have a new nature, and we are a new creation in Christ (Rom 6:6; 8:12; 2 Cor 5:17).<sup>27</sup> We must battle the flesh, putting it to death, but we will also know significant victory as we embrace the cruciform power of salvation. Carson says it well: "We are to deal drastically with sin. We must not pamper it, flirt with it, enjoy nibbling a little of it around the edges." We cannot explain it away, excuse it, or downplay it: instead, "We are to hate it, crush it, dig it out," he concludes.<sup>28</sup> This speaks to the work of the pastor. He must lead his people to see that they cannot trifle with sinful desire or act, but must put both to death by the power of the gospel (Col 3:5).

#### CONCLUSION

As noted above, our conversation over SSA is not an end in itself. It is a referendum on pervasive depravity. Do we believe it? Or will we embrace moral voluntarism, which leaves a place for sin in our lives, but overlooks our smaller, quieter, inborn instincts? People who love the Bible cannot do so. We recognize that we dishonor God through "sins of presumption," by premeditation and forethought, but also through "hidden sins," the quiet impulses of our old nature that instinctively rise up in us (see Ps 19:12–13).<sup>29</sup> We cannot be voluntarists, in the sense that we only locate transgression in the conscious act of the will. We must also be "instinctualists," seeing our iniquity in even the inborn desires of our heart.

The nature of object is crucial here. If we desire that which is wrong in itself, then we sin. We might even have the best of intentions. Uzzah certainly did, but Uzzah had the wrong object in view. He was struck dead for missing the mark (2 Sam 6:6–7). If we allow ourselves to go on desiring sinful and fallen things, we too will miss the mark. We will grieve the Lord (Eph 4:30).

This we must not do. We should instead return to the old paths. Repentance is only joy squelching if you believe that God exists solely to affirm you. True believers are by no means miserable. But we are sober and watchful when it comes to our sin. We see, by divine grace, that repentance is both necessary and a means to delight. We do not want to remain in our sinful patterns. We want to identify

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> See Heath Lambert's *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013). *My own Risky Gospel: Abandon Fear and Build Something Awesome* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013) has several chapters on the power of the cross as the conqueror of our daily evils.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> D. A. Carson, The Sermon on the Mount: An Exposition of Matthew 5-7 (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1994), 49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> I am grateful to Brian Payne for pointing out this text, and its crucial distinction.

them, repent of them, and with God's help leave them. We want not only to cease sinful acts, but to take every thought captive (2 Cor 10:5). This necessarily entails that we confess and repent of our very thoughts and the desires that influence them.

To do so, we must recover a strong doctrine of sin grounded in a robust doctrine of God. Sin is not merely self-violence. It is an infinite offense to our holy Father. We do well to recover the prayers of old, which captured this perspective, and which left no place for excusing sin of any kind, whether inborn or premeditated.

Perhaps the Book of Common Prayer (1662) will help us to find the old paths once more:

ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father;
We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep.
We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.
We have offended against thy holy laws.
We have left undone those things which we ought to have done;
And we have done those things which we ought not to have done;
And we have done those things which we ought not to have done;
And there is no health in us.
But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders.
Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults.
Restore thou them that are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord.
And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life,
To the glory of thy holy Name.

# WHAT IS GENDER REASSIGNMENT SURGERY? A MEDICAL ASSESSMENT WITH A BIBLICAL APPRAISAL

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# INTRODUCTION

The subject of gender reassignment has overrun major media over the last few years, gracing the cover of *TIME* magazine,<sup>1</sup> commanding a 2-hour special on *CNN*,<sup>2</sup> and headlining articles in many leading newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*.<sup>3</sup> Christians will be increasingly confronted with the topic of gender reassignment, and will be challenged to look at this subject (and more importantly the persons who undergo such treatments) with compassion and truth rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is important to recognize the wide range of treatments currently available for persons with "gender dysphoria"—the term used for individuals who report psychological distress over the asymmetry between ones perceived gender identity and his or her biological sex. We take up this technical subject because Christians have a growing need to grasp the diversity of these treatments, perceive their limitations, and appreciate their ever-widening application in our modern world. In a sentence, the majority of this article will introduce the subject of gender reassignment surgery, including the medical

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See Katy Steinmetz, "The Transgender Tipping Point," *TIME*, May 29, 2014, accessed February 25, 2015, http://time. com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See "Ex-Navy SEAL: Transgender is My Journey," *CNN*, September 4, 2014, accessed February 25, 2015, http://www. cnn.com/video/data/2.0/video/bestoftv/2014/09/04/newday-intv-beck-lady-valor-transgender-ex-navy-seal.cnn.html.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See Paul McHugh, "Transgender Surgery Isn't the Solution," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 2014, accessed February 22, 2015, http://online.wsj.com/articles/paul-mchugh-transgender-surgery-isnt-the-solution-1402615120, and the "Transgender and Transsexual" section of the *The New York Times*, accessed February 25, 2015, http://topics.nytimes. com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/t/transsexuals/index.html.

risks involved. It will close with some biblical and pastoral reflections on how Christians might think about these procedures and more importantly how we might minister to men and women who desire to change their gender through medical technology.

# WHAT THIS ARTICLE DOES NOT DISCUSS

There are many medical conditions framed in our sexual identification and function as humans. Such conditions could arise from inherited genetic defects, failures of normal tissue growth during fetal development, or as the unintended result of physical trauma or other medical conditions acquired after birth. This article will not discuss the attempts of patients, their parents (in the case of children), or health professionals to restore the perceived original, God-authored design of our bodies (including our sexuality and sexual functioning) through hormonal therapies, medical treatments, or surgical procedures.<sup>4</sup> Rather, this article will concern itself with treatments designed to alter the normal physical bodies of individuals who identify their sex at birth as differing from their desired gender.

# WHO IS A CANDIDATE FOR TREATMENT?

Gender dysphoria is defined as the "discomfort or distress that is caused by a discrepancy between a person's gender identity and that person's sex assigned at birth."<sup>5</sup> This definition should be understood clearly, as gender-nonconforming persons may (or may not) experience the *psychological stress* associated with this perceived discrepancy. Thus, simple cross-dressing, transvestitism (defined here as the practice of cross-dressing while adopting the attitudes and behaviors of the opposite sex), or "gender fluid" persons may not fulfill the definition of gender dysphoria. In America, candidates for sex reassignment therapies and surgery must meet this definition. When Christians interact with transgendered persons, they should understand that the discrepancy between their given and perceived sex has caused them a significant amount of distress, and that even being considered for therapy requires more than simple cross-dressing or the occasional assumption of roles of the opposite sex.<sup>6</sup>

The World Professional Association for Transgendered Health (WPATH, formerly the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association) has established clinical guidelines regarding the care of transgendered persons.<sup>7</sup> The WPATH guidelines state that candidates for treatment must have a well-established diagnosis of gender dysphoria. In addition, for many surgical procedures (such as genital surgery) it is required that patients have lived as the opposite sex for at least 12 months, adopting

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For an ethical response to issues related to intersex, see Denny Burk, *What is the Meaning of Sex?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 169–83.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> E. Coleman, W. Bockting, and M. Botzer, "Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People, Version 7," *International Journal of Transgenderism*, no. 13 (2011): 166.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> For a description of terms (e.g., transgendered, transsexual, trans, etc.), see Gwynn Kessler, "Transgender/Third Gender/ Transsexualism," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Gender and Gender Studies* (ed. Julia M. O'Brien; New York: OUP, 2014), 2:421–29. According to Kessler, "transsexual" is used of "individuals who take hormones and who may undergo surgery to align their biological sexes with their [self-perceived or self-defined] genders" (ibid., 422). While this article is more directly related to Kessler's definition of *transsexual*, we will use the broader, "umbrella term" *transgender* to speak of those pursuing a wide-range of medical and surgical procedures. Acknowledging that *transgender* and *transsexual* are sometimes in conflict (ibid., 423–24), we are using the more general term, as it has become more commonplace to speak of transgendered persons. In some places "trans" will be used to speak of transgendered community as a whole (ibid., 427).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> The full guidelines can be found online for those interested at http://www.wpath.org

their desired gender's clothing, attitudes, and behaviors. Relapses of converting back to the dress and behaviors of the sex at birth are a strong caution not to proceed with irreversible surgical procedures.<sup>8</sup>

The demand for gender reassignment treatments is increasing in America,<sup>9</sup> and there is no reason to believe this trend will change in the near future. Christians will experience increasing contact with transgendered persons throughout the next decade, and beyond.

# GOALS OF GENDER REASSIGNMENT TREATMENTS AND SURGERY

The goals of gender reassignment therapies and surgeries differ among individuals. Generally, the goals of therapy are to diminish the sexual characteristics of the sex given at birth, and to induce the development or appearance of sexual characteristics of the opposite sex.<sup>10</sup>

Complete "gender reassignment," or the comprehensive transformation of one sex to the opposite, is impossible. Interestingly, this fact was recently echoed in an editorial in *The Wall Street Journal* written by the former psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital.<sup>11</sup> This important fact needs to be remembered during any discussion of gender reassignment therapies. No treatment may alter the genetic genotype, and sex-linked traits will always be expressed by the native genome. Many sexual characteristics, such as stature, bone structure, pelvic anatomy, and vocal cord structure (i.e., the deepening of the voice) cannot be reversed with any treatment. Aware of these limitations, physicians treating patients with gender dysphoria seek to bring about limited changes in the bodies of their patients to produce an appearance that is acceptable to them and allows them to more fully integrate their bodily appearance with their desired gender.

In addition to thinking about fully developed adults pursuing such therapies, many of these interventions are explored by *adolescents* (and their parents) at the beginning of puberty. Treatment of adolescents differs in many respects to adults, and generally requires that the adolescent patient reaches an age of legal consent.<sup>12</sup> We will explore how treatment of adolescents differs from adults below.

# HORMONAL THERAPY

Hormonal therapy may be pursued as a sole intervention in gender reassignment therapy, or in conjunction with surgical treatments. In general, hormonal therapy seeks to masculinize or feminize the opposite gender through the use of medications that suppress the native sexual hormones, and supplement the hormones of the opposite sex. No randomized controlled trials have been performed to date comparing different hormone regimens, and thus the individual regimens may vary. Contraindications to using certain hormones exist, such as the use of estrogen in patients with a hypercoagulable state (a condition where blood clots more easily), due to an increased risk of blood clots. Hormonal treatment will begin to show effects in several months, reaching its maximum effect in 1–2 years in most cases.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Louis J. Gooren, "Care of Transsexual Persons," *New England Journal of Medicine*, no. 364.13 (2011): 1252, and Coleman, W. Bockting, and M. Botzer, "Standards of Care," 178.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> E. Coleman, W. Bockting, and M. Botzer, "Standards of Care," 170.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Gooren, "Care of Transsexual Persons," 1253.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> McHugh, "Transgender Surgery Isn't the Solution."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Coleman, Bockting, and Botzer, "Standards of Care," 188–190.

For men taking feminizing hormones, hormonal therapy will increase the proportion of body fat, decrease muscle mass, initiate breast enlargement, induce atrophy of testicles, create skin changes including softening of the skin and decreased oil production, decrease libido and spontaneous erections, decrease sperm production, produce thinning and slowed growth of facial and body hair, and initiate male pattern hair loss. Risks associated with these hormones include increased venous blood clots and possible dislodgement of the clots that may then plug another blood vessel (such as in a heart attack, stroke, or pulmonary embolism), an increase in triglyceride levels, increased risk of cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure, and may contribute to the development of diabetes.<sup>13</sup> One long-term study reported up to a 25% incidence of osteoporosis in this population after 10 years of treatment at certain locations in the skeleton.<sup>14</sup> There is not conclusive evidence at this time that feminizing hormones increase the risk of male breast cancer.<sup>15</sup>

Women taking masculinizing hormones will experience increased muscle mass and strength, a decreased proportion of body fat, deepening of the voice, clitoral enlargement, cessation of menstrual periods, vaginal atrophy, scalp hair loss, and an increase in acne and skin oil. Risks associated with masculinizing hormones include polycythemia (i.e., increased red blood cell counts in the blood), hyperlipidemia, and may contribute to worsening of psychiatric conditions, heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure.<sup>16</sup> There is not conclusive evidence that treatment with masculinizing hormones will increase the risk of breast, cervical, uterine, or ovarian cancer.<sup>17</sup>

Hormonal therapy for *adolescents* may have the goal of simply *delaying the onset of puberty*. This would allow the young person to explore their sexual identity prior to undergoing the irreversible sexual changes associated with puberty, such as the deepening of the male voice in response to testosterone. Delaying the onset of puberty in males and females may involve hormones that suppress the production of estrogen or progesterone, or delay their peripheral effects in tissues. Oral contraceptive pills may delay the onset of menses in females. These effects are fully reversible. Additionally, adolescents may be given hormones to masculinize or feminize the body, as in adults (the regimens vary from adult regimens in several ways). These effects may be partially reversible depending on the situation.<sup>18</sup>

A comprehensive knowledge of the desired (and undesired) consequences of hormonal therapy in gender reassignment treatments is lacking. However, research has questioned whether puberty suppression treatments may harm bone mass and brain development.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, exploration of the positive and negative links between cardiovascular risk and testosterone supplementation in men highlight our limited and evolving understanding of hormonal therapies even in the *native* birth sex.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Coleman, Bockting, and Botzer, "Standards of Care," 188-190 and Gooren, "Care of Transsexual Persons," 1253–1254.
 <sup>14</sup> K. Wierckx, S. Mueller, and S. Weyers, "Long-Term Evaluation of Cross Sex Hormone Treatment in Transsexual Per-

sons," Journal of Sexual Medicine, no. 9 (2012): 2646.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Coleman, Bockting, and Botzer, "Standards of Care," 190; Wierckx, Mueller, and Weyers, "Long-Term Evaluation," 2648; and E. L. Knezevich, L. K. Viereck, and A. T. Drincic, "Medical Management of Adult Transsexual Persons," Pharmacotherapy, no. 32.1 (2012): 60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Coleman, Bockting, and Botzer, "Standards of Care," 188-190 and Gooren, "Care of Transsexual Persons," 1253–1254.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Coleman, Bockting, and Botzer, "Standards of Care," 190; Wierckx, Mueller, and Weyers, "Long-Term Evaluation," 2648; and Knezevich, Viereck, and Drincic, "Medical Management of Adult Transsexual Persons," 61–62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Coleman, Bockting, and Botzer, "Standards of Care," 172–178.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> B.P.C. Kreukels and P.T. Cohen-Kettenis, "Puberty Suppression in Gender Identity Disorders: The Amsterdam Experience, *Nature* 7 (2011):470.

### GENDER REASSIGNMENT SURGERIES

Patients who desire to alter their physical appearance in ways that cannot be achieved through hormonal therapies may pursue surgery. There is a wide range of surgical therapies available today, ranging from simple plastic surgical procedures to major genital reassignment surgery.

As highlighted earlier, before being considered for irreversible surgical procedures, especially genital reassignment, patients must live as the opposite sex, including cross-dressing and adopting the behaviors and attitudes of the desired sex for at least 12 months. For adolescents, most surgeons in the West would advise that irreversible surgery be delayed until the patient can give personal, legal consent to such procedures.<sup>20</sup>

# MINOR SURGICAL PROCEDURES

Many minor surgical procedures to alter the appearance of the face may be undertaken as a part of gender reassignment surgery. Many of these procedures will seem familiar as common "plastic surgeries" but can have particular applications for sex reassignment surgery. These procedures include liposuction/lipoplasties to alter the contour of the body (especially at the waist), rhinoplasties ("nose jobs"), "face lifts," facial bone reconstruction, blepharoplasties (i.e., rejuvenation of the eyelid), and more specialized surgeries such as reduction thyroid chondroplasty (i.e., reduction of the "Adam's apple"), voice modification surgery, pectoral muscle implants, gluteal implants, etc.<sup>21</sup>

Males undergoing surgery to transition to the female sex may pursue breast augmentation, which is similar to breast augmentation in females, using synthetic breast implants. This is usually only carried out after hormonal therapy has allowed some enlargement of the male breast tissue, for better contour and shaping.<sup>22</sup> Complications from this treatment are similar to breast enlargement procedures in women and may include rupture or infection of the implant. Many men pursue hair removal procedures to approach a female distribution.<sup>23</sup>

For female-to-male patients, many will only undergo a mastectomy to achieve a masculine appearance of their chest. This surgery does not differ significantly from mastectomy undertaken for breast cancer, but may preserve slightly more breast tissue, removing only what is necessary to produce a chest that appears masculine. Complications from such surgery, which aims to preserve the nipple, include scar formation, irregularities of the contour of the chest wall, and nipple necrosis, complications similar to nipple-sparing mastectomies performed for breast cancer.<sup>24</sup>

# GENITAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

The most complex field of surgery in gender reassignment consists of genital reassignment surgery. From a medical perspective, these surgeries are fascinating and complex procedures, and are what is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid., 178

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid., 199–205; Gooren, "Care of Transsexual Persons," 1255; and P. A. Sutcliffe, S. Dixon, and R. L. Akehurst, "Evaluation of Surgical Procedures for Sex Reassignment: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Plastic, Reconstructive & Aesthetic Surgery*, no. 62 (2009): 296.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Coleman, Bockting, and Botzer, "Standards of Care," 202.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Sutcliffe, Dixon, and Akehurst, "Evaluation of Surgical Procedures," 296.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Coleman, Bockting, and Botzer, "Standards of Care," 203–204.

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popularly imagined when discussing a "sex change" operation. There are actually many reasons why individuals desire genital reassignment surgery. As will be discussed below, some procedures may simply allow a person to assume traditional roles of the opposite sex, such as allowing a woman to urinate standing up, or a man to wear a woman's bathing suit. Other, more complex surgeries seek to provide functioning external genitalia to provide the opportunity for intercourse.

Genital reassignment surgery for males transitioning to females may include a variety of procedures, including orchiectomy (removal of the testicles) and penectomy (removal of the penis). The scrotum is shaped into labia in a procedure known as a labiaplasty, which may require several surgeries. Many times, a portion of the penis may be preserved and fashioned into a new clitoris by preserving the blood supply along a wall of tissue known as a "pedicle." Death (necrosis) of this flap of tissue has been reported, as can occur with any pedicled flap in wider surgical applications.

The most complicated step in male to female genital reassignment surgery involves creation of tissue resembling a vagina, or "neo-vagina." Interestingly, the vagina may be fashioned from a segment of colon, as the colon lining is similar to the mucous lining of the vagina. A segment of the sigmoid colon is resected from the large intestine, and the segment of divided colon is brought into the pelvis with a flap of mesentery, which provides the blood supply to the segment of colon. Bowel continuity is reestablished in the colon by rejoining the divided ends where the colonic segment was harvested, so that a person may pass stool in a normal fashion. With the interior end of the colon stapled off, the exterior end may be opened and sutured to the skin of the groin to simulate the vaginal opening. Techniques to invert the skin of the removed penis have also been described, which sometimes require additional skin grafts taken from the inside of the thigh. Some reports have suggested that this technique may lead to poor functional (sexual) outcomes.<sup>25</sup>

Complications from such surgery can range from surgical site wound infections (more than 50% in one long-term study),<sup>26</sup> massive bleeding, minor changes in urinary habits such as urinary dribbling and incontinence, stricture of the urethra (or an abnormal scarring or tightening of the tube that carries urine out of the body), and fistula formation of the urethra (an abnormal connection of the urethra to another organ, usually the rectum).<sup>27</sup> One study reported that major complications during and immediately after surgery were as high as 14%.<sup>28</sup> Case reports of perforations of the segment of colon used to fashion the new vagina have also been described.<sup>29</sup> In a long-term follow-up study, 90% of patients were satisfied with their surgery and capacity for orgasm, but only 58% actually reported ever having sexual intercourse after their gender reassignment surgery.<sup>30</sup> One disturbing fact concerning the orgasm experienced by male-to-female transgendered persons can be the persistence of emission of fluid from the urethral meatus (i.e., ejaculation), because the prostate and seminal glands have not been removed.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibid., 200–204 and Sutcliffe, Dixon, and Akehurst, "Evaluation of Surgical Procedures for Sex Reassignment," 297–299.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> J.J. Zhao, D. Marchaim, and M. B. Palla, "Surgical Site Infections in Genital Reconstruction Surgery for Gender Reassignment, Detroit:1984–2008," *Surgical Infections*, no. 15.2 (2014):103.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> P. Hoebeke, G. Selvaggi, and P. Ceulemans, "Impact of Sex Reassignment Surgery on Lower Urinary Tract Function," *European Urology*, no. 47 (2005): 399.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Sutcliffe, Dixon, and Akehurst, "Evaluation of Surgical Procedures," 299.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> G. Liguori, C. Trombetta, and L. Buttazzi, "Acute Peritonitis Due to Introital Stenosis and Perforation of a Bowel Neovagina in a Transsexual," *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, no. 97.5 (2001): 828–829.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> S. Krege, A. Bex, and G. Lummen, "Male-to-Female Transsexualism: A Technique, Results and Long-Term Follow-Up in 66 Patients," *British Journal of Urology International*, no. 88 (2001): 399.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> A. A. Lawrence, "Sexuality Before and After Male-to-Female Sex Reassignment Surgery," *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, no. 34.2 (2005): 150

#### STUDIES

Genital reassignment surgery for female-to-male patients can involve several procedures, and in general is slightly more complicated than the opposite techniques in male-to-female patients. The initial procedure is a hysterectomy (removal of the uterus) and removal of the ovaries. Further efforts continue with fashioning the clitoris, elongated by the presence of male hormones, to construct a small "penis," or microphallus. The urethra (the tube that carries urine from the bladder) can be elongated to exit the end of the clitoris in a procedure is known as a metoidioplasty. This small phallus, however, is not large enough for sexual penetration, and also may not allow a woman to urinate while standing up.<sup>32</sup>

A technique exists to create tissue that more closely resembles a penis (a "neophallus") through the use of a tissue graft based on the radial artery from the forearm, whereby it is attached near the pubic bone. Nerves are reattached from the forearm skin to nerves in the groin to reestablish sensation and to provide for some sexual arousal—though, it should be noted, surgery in this area also runs the risk of severing or destroying the nerves providing this sensation.

Next, the urethra is elongated, and ideally can exit the end of the neophallus. This new tissue of course has no erectile properties, and so inflatable devices or cartilage can be inserted into the tissue to simulate an erection. This technique has a complication rate cited at over 40% and can include strictures, fistulas (abnormal, draining openings between two structures such as the urethra and the skin), and necrosis (tissue death) of the neophallus. The labial skin may be enlarged, and implants resembling testicles can be inserted to simulate the male external genitalia.<sup>33</sup>

Results from genital reassignment surgery on sexual functioning are mixed, complex, and inconclusive. A review in 2009 demonstrated that transgendered persons seemed to have adequate sexual functioning and satisfaction following treatments.<sup>34</sup> However, a more recent study revealed that after sex reassignment therapies, two-thirds of males transitioning to females had hypoactive sex drives, with 73% never or rarely experiencing spontaneous or responsive sexual arousal. But interestingly, this fact seemed to distress only 22% of these persons with this hypoactive sexual desire. Genital reassignment surgery (beyond simple hormonal therapies) seemed to improve sexual desire and functioning in the individuals that had gender reassignment surgery.<sup>35</sup>

In persons undergoing female-to-male genital reassignment, studies generally reveal that these persons are more satisfied with their sexual functioning following hormonal and surgical treatments than men who have transitioned to women. Many have suggested that the testosterone treatments given to women undergoing reassignment may have a role in the increase in sexual desire and satisfaction.<sup>36</sup> A single center study revealed that though more than 50% of the participants had a complication during their surgeries, most were able to achieve orgasm, and relayed that this orgasm was of shorter duration and more intense in nature, similar to the typical male response.<sup>37</sup>

Genital reassignment surgery should be considered a major surgical procedure. I [Craig Kline] have

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Coleman, Bockting, and Botzer, "Standards of Care," 204; G. Selvaggi and J. Bellringer, "Gender Reassignment Surgery: An Overview," *Nature Reviews Urology*, no. 8.5 (2011): 278.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Selvaggi and Bellringer, "Gender Reassignment Surgery: An Overview," 280.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> C. Klein and B. B. Gorzalka, "Sexual Functioning in Transsexuals Following Hormone Therapy and Genital Surgery: A Review," *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, no. 6 (2009): 2934.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> K. Wierckx, E. Elaut, and B. Van Hoorde, "Sexual Desire in Trans Persons: Associations with Sex Reassignment Treatment," *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, no. 11 (2014): 111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Klein and Gorzalka, "Sexual Functioning in Transsexuals Following Hormone Therapy and Genital Surgery," 2928– 2929 and K. Wierckx, E. Van Caenegem, and E. Elaut E, "Quality of Life and Sexual Health after Sex Reassignment Surgery in Transsexual Men," *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, no. 8 (2011): 3385.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 3384.

personally witnessed some of the complications listed above in patients I cared for during my surgical training, and also in my surgical practice. This field will continue to evolve and change over the next few decades as newer procedures and techniques are developed, but the short survey above gives a broad glimpse into the treatments as they are practiced today.

# OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: GLOBAL IMPACT AND THE BLACK MARKET OF GENDER REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

This article has mainly dealt with the treatment of transgendered persons by skilled health professionals in a Western context. However, surgical practice in developing countries differs in many respects to surgical care in the West, and surgeries and treatments for gender dysphoria are no exception. The social stigma attached to these practices may drive such procedures and treatments to be performed outside of hospitals. Even in Western nations, many attempt "do-it-yourself" surgeries and take hormones obtained without a prescription, as highlighted by a recent study of transgendered persons in Ontario.<sup>38</sup>

One example is the injection of "filler" material, such as silicone, beneath the skin to achieve body "contouring," as an alternative to seeking treatments from licensed professionals. The lower cost, rapid results, and ability to avoid uncomfortable interactions with surgeons and other health care providers has made this "black market" option attractive. Studies in Chicago and San Francisco found the prevalence of these injections to be between 16% and 29%, but one study from Thailand found that almost 70% of women seeking a male appearance obtained these injections.<sup>39</sup> These free silicone injections into the buttocks, hips, face, breasts, and calves have been known to cause blood clots, lung damage, high calcium levels, kidney failure, and death.<sup>40</sup>

A long-term follow-up study in Sweden, which followed more than 300 persons who underwent gender reassignment surgery, revealed this population to have a considerably higher risk for mortality, suicidal behavior, and psychiatric disease when compared to the general population, and individuals of both sexes who underwent gender reassignment had an overall mortality rate *three times higher* than the average population, from all causes.<sup>41</sup> This should alert those caring for transgendered persons to watch their emotional, psychological, and psychiatric needs. And for Christian health care professionals, it must lead believers to care for the mental and spiritual health of these persons through professional medical and psychiatric services, support groups, prayer, and a wise and discerning ministry of the Word.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> N. K. Rotondi, G. R. Bauer, and K. Scanlon, "Nonprescribed Hormone Use and Self-Performed Surgeries: 'Do-It-Yourself' Transitions in Transgender Communities in Ontario, Canada," *American Journal of Public Health*, no. 103.10 (2013): 1830.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> E. Wilson, J. Rapues, and H. Jin, "The Use and Correlates of Illicit Silicone or 'Fillers' in a Population-Based Sample of Transwomen, San Francisco, 2013," *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, no. 11 (2013): 1721.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Ibid., 1718 and A. L. Negri, G. R. Diez, and E. Del Valle, "Hypercalcemia Secondary to Granulomatous Disease caused by the Injection of Methacrylate: A Case Series," *Clinical Cases in Mineral and Bone Metabolism*, no. 11.1 (2014): 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> C. Dhejne, P. Lichtenstein, and M. Boman, "Long-Term Follow-Up of Transsexual Persons Undergoing Sex Reassignment Surgery: Cohort Study in Sweden," *PLoS One*, no. 6.2 (2011): e16885, 4-6.

# **EVALUATION**

It is worth noting that the world of transgendered people has largely not shrugged off the dual relationship of the male and female gender. Most people, even in the trans community, prefer to identify as *either* a man or a woman. However, some within this community (occasionally referred to as "non-binary" persons) seek a gender identity outside of the male/female paradigm. We can be assured that medical and surgical treatments for such persons will increasingly be explored.

Study of this topic should deepen our amazement for the complexity of God's created order. Our sexual identity is profoundly related to our physical bodies, evidenced by the surprisingly numerous physical alterations that a person must endure to "change" their gender through medical and surgical reassignment. The metabolic networks and complex anatomical structures of our physical bodies, glorious in their purpose and yet distinct in their complementary male and female sex, should cause us to marvel at the God who created the sexes and the purposes behind his creation of gender.<sup>42</sup> We see from this study that our sexuality permeates through our whole physical body, not just the differences in our genitals, breasts, and stature.

As to ministry, imagine the message that a Christian could convey to the trans community if they could listen and speak about gender reassignment without misconception, displaying some knowledge of the treatments or surgeries this person may have endured. This informed compassion may not be expected from everyone in the church, but it would certainly go along way to reaching the trans community for Christ. The effort made to understand their predicament, their pain, and their procedures would open lines of communication to advance the conversation about God, the gospel, and its impact on gender.

We stand together with persons suffering from gender dysphoria as imperfect sinners, with imperfect bodies, and long with them for the day when we, too, may receive new bodies (Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 15:5–53). Amazingly, Jesus mentions those who had a sexuality that could not have been perfectly fulfilled by their physical bodies (Matt 19:12). Even sexuality that seems disjointed from our physical bodies can be used of God in his kingdom. Any vain attempt to find fulfillment from a perceived disordering of God's providence outside of his gospel would be a rebellion against the God who authored us, and who will eventually restore every imperfection in glory.

All in all, Christians should prayerfully ask our Lord to increase our love for persons struggling with gender dysphoria, deepen our understanding of their personal pain, broaden our understanding of the complex medical and social implications of gender reassignment, and encourage us to speak truth into the confusion surrounding gender reassignment therapies. This article has introduced the various treatments and complications associated with gender reassignment, but as medical technology continues to advance and surgical options continue to proliferate, it will be an area of increasing study that Christian medical ethicists will need to keep in view, and that ministers of the gospel—vocational or otherwise—will need to be aware of as they minister to a sexually-confused world.

# WHAT THE GOSPEL HAS TO SAY TO TRANSGENDERED PERSONS

It may be surprising to discover how much the Bible speaks about surgery on the genitalia. Among the many instances, the most prolific concerns the topic of circumcision. Beginning with the Abrahamic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> For a discussion on the definition of gender, see Burk, What is the Meaning of Sex?, 157-83.

covenant (see Gen 17:10–14, 23–27) and legislated in the covenant with Israel (Lev 12:3), circumcision is found throughout the Bible.<sup>43</sup> Though the theological meaning of circumcision is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noticing that this covenant included a form of surgery on male genitalia, displaying a distinguishing mark that served as a sign of the covenant made between God and man. Later, in a section of Leviticus where qualifications for priesthood were described (Lev 21:20) and again when Moses prepared Israel to enter the Promised Land (Deut 23:1), the Law excluded from the assembly of the LORD anyone who had "crushed testicles" or "whose male organ is cut off."<sup>44</sup>

Circumcision continues to play an important role in the New Testament. While the physical act of removing the foreskin is associated with the old covenant and thus discontinued in the church, its typological fulfillment—the circumcised heart (Deut 10:16; 30:6; cf. Ezek 36:26–27)—is common to all new covenant believers (Col 2:11). Transitioning from old covenant to new, the New Testament records many heated discussions about the discontinuity of physical circumcision (e.g., Acts 15; Romans 2 and 4; Galatians 2). Without engaging all these passages, what, if anything, might Scripture's discussion of circumcision contribute to the modern discussion about gender reassignment surgery? Let me suggest two things.

First, gender reassignment surgery may, metaphorically speaking, be the "circumcision" of transgenderism's "gospel." Just as the true gospel includes a circumcision—*of the flesh* under the old covenant, which pointed forward to the true circumcision *of the heart* under the new covenant—so the false gospel of transgenderism invites its participants to mutilate their genitalia in order to find a kind of "salvation." Likewise, just as the true gospel has a mediator who inaugurates a covenant with blood (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 9:18), so too transgenderism's gospel has created a guild of mediators—advocates, entertainers, politicians, and now surgeons—who following the cultural zeitgeist can put to death the old man and raise "her" anew.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, in denying God his rightful place as sovereign creator, they establish themselves as autonomous lords. By consequence, transgenderism mimicks the true gospel by solving a "fallen condition" that is not revealed by God's Word, but that comes from an autonomous, personal feeling (i.e., men and women trapped in the wrong body). At the same time, transgenderism prescribes a method of "salvation" by way of bloodshed—a "new creation" through surgical "circumcision."<sup>46</sup>

Of course, sexual rebellion and the distortion of gender roles is nothing new. Lamech boasts of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> For an overview and bibliography of the history and significance of circumcision in the Bible and ancient Near Eastern cultures, see John Meade, "Circumcision of the Heart in Leviticus and Deuteronomy: Divine Means for Resolving Curse and Bringing Blessing," *SBJT* 18.3 (2014): 59–85.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Against the overly permissive interpretation of Peter C. Craigie (*The Book of Deuteronomy* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976], 296–97), Eugene Merrill (*Deuteronomy* [NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994], 307) rightly observes the importance of physical purity in the presence of God: "The emasculation, described here as a 'wounding by crushing' (*pěsûa dakkâ*) or a 'cutting off of the male organ' (*kěrût šapkâ*), may, presumably, be genetic, accidental, or intentional; but that is irrelevant because the end result is the same—the male thus deformed could have no access to the assembly of the Lord."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Credit to Andrew Walker for this observation, as well as pointing out that just as the Law of Moses called for obedience to external laws, so too transgenderism, as a cultural phenomenon, calls those afflicted by its conditions to obey its "laws," which are enforced through political and legal pressure applied by approved "mediators." What is the lasting effect? Gender reassignment becomes a type of works salvation that in the end neither saves nor works.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Though unlikely that transsexuals think of their plight in terms of salvation, it is striking to read the words of Susan Stryker ("(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* [ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle; New York: Routledge, 2006], 3), who says that the social "systems of power" associated with transgenderism "operate on actual bodies [i.e., persons], capable of producing pain and pleasure, health and sickness, punishment and reward, life and death" (cited in Kessler, "Transgender/Third Gender/Transsexualism," 2:425). Without realizing it, she is employing the language of redemption.

#### STUDIES

twisting God's creation when he sings of claiming two wives (Gen 4:23–24), and the Law of Moses lists cross-dressing as a way humans reject the goodness of God's creation (Deut 22:5).<sup>47</sup> But now, with advances in medical technology, what used to be feigned through clothes and mannerisms is now surgically possible. There is nothing new under the sun, but what is new is the plethora of medically-acceptable ways to deface God's creation.

Therefore, with many moral, theological, epochal, and physical differences between old covenant Israel and the modern transsexual, the one similarity worth noting is that both "religions" present salvation through the manipulation of the flesh. By doing something to the genitalia, it is perceived that blessings will follow—in Israel these blessings were the holy promises given to Abraham and his offspring; to the trans community blessing is found in sexual gratification—however that is defined by them.<sup>48</sup> To be clear, there is a radical difference between circumcision under the old covenant and genital mutilation of modern transgenderism—the former was instituted by God (Genesis 17); the latter is the invention of men (cf. Rom 1:32). Likewise, Abraham's circumcision was an act of faith, while gender reassignment surgery is an act of rebellion against God, his created order, and his sovereignty over gender.

Nevertheless, when we understand that circumcision of the flesh was always a sign pointing to the need for an interior purification (Deut 10:16; Deut 4:4; cf. Acts 7:51) and never meant to be salvific in itself, there are also striking similarities. For instance, consider the parallel logic at work in these two systems of salvation. Writing of circumcision's ultimate futility, Paul encourages the Judaizers to go the whole way and "emasculate themselves" (Gal 5:12). Whereas the Judaizers believed that circumcision brought them closer to God, Paul knew as an inveterate sinner physical circumcision accomplished nothing. Therefore, he commissioned the Judaizers to go further and emasculate themselves, which under the Law invoked the judgment of God—i.e., separation from his holy presence. By analogy, Christians believe that despite the sincerest intentions of transsexuals, the surgery they desire to perform on the body needs to be performed on their heart. While these children of Adam long to match their bodies with their inner perception, what they need is not a new body, but a new heart. In this way, the Jews of old and the modern trans community are not without similarities, because both face the same problem: They have exchanged the glory of God for the glory of created things, and therefore God has given them over to a "depraved mind to what ought not to be done" (Rom 1:23, 28).

To reiterate, this comparison between Old Testament ritual and modern surgery is not materially the same, but when we consider how Jews misused circumcision (as means of salvation) and the way transsexuals pursue surgery as functionally *salvific*, their comparison becomes more apparent. Whereas circumcision was ordained by God and pointed to a circumcision of the heart that God himself would perform at the right time, the "circumcision" of transsexuals is the invention of (technologically advanced) mankind. Inspired by the father of lies, gender reassignment surgery promises abundant life through the manipulation of the flesh.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> As we understand the pagan roots of ancient Near Eastern cross-dressing, it becomes clear the differences between then and now are not a matter of kind but degree. Illustrating that point, Daniel I. Block observes, "this injunction seeks to preserve the order built into creation, specifically the fundamental distinction between male and female. For a person to wear anything associated with the opposite gender confuses one's sexual identity and blurs established boundaries" (*Deuteronomy* [NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 512).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> On sex as a way of salvation, see Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 55–56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> For an illuminating theological and cultural commentary, see Timothy George, *Galatians* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman

On this comparison, it reminds us that when we engage family and friends grappling with gender reassignment surgery, we cannot fight flesh with flesh—"Just learn to live with and love your God-given gender." No, like Paul and Jesus in the New Testament, we must present a better circumcision—one that strips off the old man and gives disciples new life in Christ (Col 2:11–13; 3:1–3) so that learning to live out one's God-given gender is not harsh and heavy, but a yoke that is light and easy (see Matt 11:28–30). Indeed, by understanding gender reassignment surgery as a kind of rite of circumcision, it helps us understand why someone would desire to cut on their genitalia—it is part of our story and religious hope too. By remembering circumcision, and ultimately a greater bodily transformation—the redemption of the body promised to all who are alive in Christ (Rom 8:23).

Second, moving from a big picture analysis of circumcision to a particular text, we return to one verse in Galatians. In Galatians 5:12 Paul expresses with rhetorical force how he wishes Judaizers who were stressing the need for circumcision would "mutilate" or "emasculate" themselves. In the context of Galatians this hyperbole emphasizes the worthlessness of physical circumcision, now that Christ has come. Against the backdrop of the Law, such an action would be both humiliating and disqualifying for temple service (see Lev 21:20; Deut 23:1). Applied to the present discussion, such genital mutilation would invite the curse of God, under the old covenant. Just as sacrifices under the old covenant could not be offered with "testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut" (Lev 22:24), because they did not meet God's perfect standard, so willful mutilation of the genitals tears at God's created design.<sup>50</sup> To those who pursue "salvation" by genital surgery, the Law of God offers a warning and threat—"if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision" (Rom 2:27). This goes for the Judaizers in Galatia and modern advocates of gender reassignment surgery.

To both of these parties (as well as to those who sinfully take pride in their uncircumcision), the gospel of Jesus Christ makes a new way to find life. It offers forgiveness now and a glorified body in the new heavens and the new earth. Yet, as Russell Moore has observed, gender reassignment surgery, in the here and now, may "mangle" the body and "create an illusion of a biological reality that isn't there," but it cannot reassign gender.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, as men and women come to Christ on the other side of their gender reassignment, the solution is not just external reassembly. Reconstructing a person's bodily appearance may not be possible or (medically) wise, but what can be done and must be done is to point new creations in Christ to the approaching reality of their bodily redemption, and to live in light of that reality. As Paul says in Colossians 3, "If you have been raised with Christ, *seek the things that are above*, where Christ is. . . . *Put to death* what is earthly in you, . . . *Put on then* [like a new gar-

<sup>&</sup>amp; Holman, 1994), 371–73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Drawing the parallel closer between the Judaizers' heresy and the genital mutilation of the pagan priests near Galatia, George writes, "One of the major centers for the worship of Cybele [a mother goddess, whose priests were known to castrate themselves] was at Pessinus, a leading city in North Galatia. It is quite possible that some of Paul's readers may themselves have been devotees of the Cybeline cult in their pre-Christian days. In any event, they could not have missed the insinuation of Paul's allusion: the Judaizers who made so much of circumcision were really no better guides to the spiritual life than the pagan priest who castrated themselves in service to an idolatrous religion" (ibid., 372). If Paul could compare the wrong use of the Law with pagan practices, which he clearly did in Galatians 4:8–9, it is equally permissible (hermeneutically-speaking) to make the comparison between the wrongful use of circumcision with the pagan mutilation of the flesh today. On gender reassignment surgery as a pagan practice, see the way Heimbach defines paganism in *True Sexual Morality*, 52–54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Russell D. Moore, "Joan or John? Christian Ethics: This Year's Dilemma," May 2009, accessed February 17, 2015, http:// cdn1.russellmoore.com/2009/06/joan-or-john.pdf.

ment], as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience" (vv. 1, 5, 12).<sup>52</sup>

Until the resurrection of the body, Christians groan like the eunuchs of old. But like eunuchs in Israel who mourned their displacement from the covenant promises, the gospel of Jesus Christ promises family, children, and blessing in the kingdom of God (see Isaiah 54). On this point, Moore has again made the comparison between those who undergo gender reassignment surgeries with those are eunuchs.<sup>53</sup> As with circumcision, eunuchs are mentioned throughout the Bible. In some instances they were males who were castrated, or had other genital surgery, to serve in special roles within their respective kingdoms. Others may have been born as eunuchs. Jesus speaks to both of these conditions when he says, "For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 19:12). Still in everyone of these cases, the main point is that God is big enough to bring blessing to all who repent and believe in the gospel of the kingdom—even those who were deceived into pursuing gender reassignment surgery.

That being said, we must close with this unassailable truth. In the Bible, with all that it speaks about circumcision and the existence of eunuchs, it never supports practices changing a child's sex at birth towards the opposite sex. It does present circumcision of the heart (Deut 30:6) as *the only way* of lasting joy and salvation. In its affirmation of this spiritual surgery, the Bible stands against any kind of gender reassignment surgery, as a way of gratifying the flesh. Therefore, in all cases, we conclude that the Bible never supports the desire to change the appearance of the body to mimic the opposite gender. As with those who pursue sexual immorality—heterosexuals or homosexuals—the hope of the gospel is that any person through faith and repentance can be changed through the washing, sanctification, and justification of Jesus Christ, and not through the adoption, assimilation, or acceptance of sinful roles or practices (1 Cor 6:9–11).

Thus, a biblical understanding of sexuality cannot support gender reassignment surgery. This truth must be compassionately affirmed to those who are struggling with gender dysphoria, and who are contemplating such surgical procedures. Where the Bible affirms that we should receive our birth gender as a gift from God and that it should direct the nature of our sexual desires, it never affirms a person's desire should dictate their gender. In every case, anatomy dictates and directs gender—not the reverse. Scripture commands that our physical bodies are meant to glorify God (1 Cor 6:19), and followers must humbly and willingly submit to God's providence in giving us the body he wants us to have, in order to glorify him in the gender that comports to our anatomy.

May God honor our efforts to think biblically and critically about the issue of gender reassignment surgery. May he give us gospel-fueled grace to love the trans community in the name of Christ. And may he glorify himself by saving many in Christ who are now pursuing salvation in the flesh.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Emphasis mine. Read all of Colossians 3:1–17 to see the way that death and resurrection with Christ changes the believer.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Moore, "Joan or John?"

# YOU MAY NOW SERVE THE BRIDE: THE TRINITY AND GENDER

Sam Allberry | Assistant Pastor St. Mary's Church Maidenhead, United Kingdom

ric Schlosser's book *Fast Food Nation* was an exposé of what he called "the dark side" of the fast-food industry. It became a global phenomenon, eventually being made into a movie. The fast-food giants have been on the back foot ever since. The chapter on slaughterhouses put me off burgers for a very long time.

But as well as identifying some of the dubious practices of some well-known fast-food brands, Schlosser's research also introduced him to some of the amazing technological innovation that lies behind this industry. Just take the technology used to produce French fries:

Conveyor belts took the wet, clean potatoes into a machine that blasted them with steam for twelve seconds, boiled the water under their skins, and exploded their skins off. Then the potatoes were pumped into a preheat tank and shot through a Lamb Water Gun Knife. They emerged as shoestring fries. Four video cameras scrutinized them from different angles, looking for flaws. When a French fry with a blemish was detected, an optical sorting machine time-sequenced a single burst of compressed air that knocked the bad fry off the production line and onto a separate conveyor belt, which carried it to a machine with tiny automated knives that precisely removed the blemish. And the fry was returned to the main production line.

Sprays of hot water blanched the fries, gusts of hot air dried them, and 25,000 pounds of boiling oil fried them to a slight crisp. Air cooled by compressed ammonia quickly froze them, a computerized sorter that spun like an out-of-control lazy Susan used centrifugal force to align the french fries so that they all pointed in the same direction.

The fries were sealed in brown bags, then the bags were loaded by robots into cardboard boxes, and the boxes were stacked by robots onto wooden pallets.<sup>1</sup>

All in all, the technology put into making French fries is huge, and so is the money it takes to make French fries. But the end product shows the pay-off: millions and millions of French fries that look, and more importantly taste, exactly the same.

We like uniformity.

Think about it. You could be anywhere on the globe, facing an unfamiliar climate and trying to deal with unfamiliar languages and customs. Immersed in an utterly alien world. And yet step into McDonald's and you know exactly what they will have and exactly how it will taste. It's the same with countless global chains: coffee shops, restaurants, hotels, you name it. It doesn't matter if you are in Delhi, Detroit, Dublin, or Dubai; you are never far away from your favorite frappuccino.

There's something reassuring in all this. Surrounded by unpredictability and unfamiliarity, there is value in this kind of sameness. And we go to considerable lengths to attain it.

As we think about what it means for God to be Trinity, we have to come to terms, sooner or later, with a fundamental principle: the one God is three persons, and always has been. These three persons are distinct; the Father, Son and Spirit are not identical. They cannot be interchanged. Yet these three persons are one. And so the unity that God has always exhibited and enjoyed, the unity that stands at the center of reality and has done for all eternity—this perfect and foundational unity—this unity is of a particular kind.

What we see in God is this: unity not in sameness, but unity in difference.

#### A MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

It was 5:00 in the morning and it had woken me up again. I had only been in Kuala Lumpur for a few days, and so far each one had started involuntarily at this hour. We were staying in a guesthouse, and just around the corner the local mosque was broadcasting its morning call to prayer.

I'll be honest, I'm not at my best at 5:00AM. My initial thoughts were not of peace and goodwill towards my fellow man. But once the grumpiness had eventually subsided and I had become reconciled to the fact that the day had now started, the call to prayer got me thinking.

I'm not much of an expert on Islam, but it struck me that the call to prayer might be a pretty good musical expression of what Muslims believe about God. Allah is understood to be a solitary entity, a singularity. In the language of people who know these things, he is a monad. (Note to self: a *monad* is an irreducible, singular entity or being. A *nomad* is someone looking for affordable accommodation anywhere in London.)

This, it seemed to me, was what the call to prayer was reflecting musically—aural theology, if you like. It was the cry of a lone voice (in this case, I think, pre-recorded). No instrumentation. No accompaniment of any kind. No polyphony. No harmony. Just a singular melody.

It is surely no accident that societies that have been significantly influenced by biblical Christianity and, by extension, the Christian understanding of Trinity, have produced complex polyphony. One thinks, for example, of the music of a devout Christian like J. S. Bach. It would be natural for there to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Eric Schlosser, Fast Food Nation (Penguin, 2002), 130–131.

be a relationship between a society's theology and its music. Interestingly, in his book on the Trinity, Robert Letham notes that touring orchestras tend to be in less demand in strongly Islamic cultures.<sup>2</sup>

If this is so, then it should not surprise us. The God of Scripture has revealed himself as Trinity: unity in three different persons. Theological harmony, a beautiful musical integration.

Unity-in-diversity. This is significant. We will get God wrong if we don't grasp this. We will also get some other key things wrong. As we have come to expect, what God shows us about himself will have innumerable practical implications. We are not just to notice this aspect of what it means for God to be Trinity, but to live in the light of it.

We are not left in the dark as to how this applies. This feature of God's unity is applied directly in the New Testament to the area of gender. Consider Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:3, "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

Paul lists three things that are the "head" of other things:

- 1. Christ is the *head* of man.
- 2. Man is the *head* of woman.
- 3. God is the *head* of Christ.

Taken together, Paul has just mentioned the words "man," "head," and "woman" in the same sentence.<sup>3</sup> Wherever he's going with this, we who inhabit the egalitarian West immediately feel ourselves stepping onto dodgy ground. It feels a little like Paul might be about to roll back all that has been achieved in women's rights over the last century. But he isn't.

Whatever Paul means by 'headship' it flows out of how God exists as Trinity. Whatever man is supposed to be to woman is meant to correspond to how God (the Father) is to God (the Son). The dynamic of this relationship within the Trinity is something we are to map onto our relationships as men and women, with especial application to marriage. In other words, to properly understand what it means to have been created as men and women, we need to understand how the Father and Son relate to each other. Our view of gender needs to correspond with our view of the Trinity.

This being so, what is actually at stake in this discussion is not whether we find ourselves out of step with the surrounding culture, but whether we find ourselves in step with God himself. Therefore, we need to understand who God is and from there what 1 Corinthians 11 says about gender.

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FATHER AND SON

There exists, somewhere deep in my psyche, an unshakeable conviction that I am a "maps person." All I need is a casual glance at a map before heading off, and I have, according to this conviction, a virtually flawless internal compass. I can confidently assert that I am oriented in a south-south-west direction as I type this. I also possess, where cartographic information is concerned, unusual powers of retention.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Robert Letham, The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 445.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The words translated (in the NIV) as 'man' and 'woman' can also mean 'husband' and 'wife' (as in the ESV). There is some discussion about whether Paul primarily has marriage relationships in mind, or whether he is talking about male/ female relationships more generally. I am inclined to favor the latter. Briefly, Paul seems to be addressing public/church matters more than home matters, and issues that relate to "all men" and "all women," rather than just husbands and wives. Most interpretations that favor the husband/wife view still acknowledge that there is a wider, more general application.

At least, that's the theory.

The reality presents a rather different case. It is a curiosity of my self-belief where directions are concerned that it has endured, unwavering, in the face of so much evidence to the contrary. Many times I have found myself in places that were patently not my destination. On one memorable occasion, my navigational instincts forced me to execute a U-turn on a railway station platform.

There are times when we need to come back and look at something again, this time more closely. The first glance might have given a helpful overall sense of where things lie. But closer study is what is needed if we are to find our way around at street level. It is true for me (I need to learn) when it comes to maps and directions. And it is also true when it comes to the Trinity.

We have already seen something of the equality and distinction that exist between the persons of the Trinity. But a closer look is needed—a closer look at the equality and difference between the Son and the Father.

#### Probing more deeply into their equality

When it comes to the equality between the members of the Trinity, Bruce Ware hits the nail on the head:

There is one and only one God, eternally existing and fully expressed in three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each member of the Godhead is equally God, each is eternally God, and each is fully God–not three gods but three Persons of the one Godhead. Each Person is equal in essence as each possesses fully the identically same, eternal divine nature, yet each is also an eternal and distinct personal expression of the one undivided nature.<sup>4</sup>

Father and Son are each fully divine. The Son is as much God as the Father is. They share the same nature and same substance. The words of the Nicene Creed help shed a little more light on this. Jesus, we are reminded, is:

The only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.

"Begotten, not made" is an important distinction. C. S. Lewis explains why:

When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers and a bird begets eggs which turn into little birds. But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam, a man makes a wireless set . . . What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man creates is not man.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Bruce A. Ware, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 157–158.

Jesus is fully divine. The Father and Son are equal in essence and divinity.<sup>6</sup>

#### Probing more deeply into their difference

The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. There are differences in their roles. They play different parts within the divine economy. And this means that there is a particular shape to their relationship.

#### Difference during Jesus' earthly ministry

We see this in operation during the time when Jesus was on the earth. Consider the following: "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him" (John 8:28–29).

The Father teaches the Son what the Son is to say. The Father is the one who sends the Son. We see the Father being the one who leads, and the Son the one who follows that lead.

And the Son *always* does what will please the Father. Jesus is not selective in this. He doesn't exercise his own discretion at this point. He is not even pleasing generally. But always. In everything. No exceptions. In all he did, Jesus showed unswerving commitment to bringing pleasure to his Father. So Bruce Ware says: "The eternal Son of the Father is both 'God the Son' and 'God the *Son*."<sup>7</sup> Equal in divinity; submissive in role.

We see this again later in John's Gospel: "I love the Father and I do exactly what my Father has commanded me" (14:31).

This is the shape of their relationship. The Father sends, teaches, and commands. The Son responds and obeys. And this dynamic is never reversed. We never see the Son commanding the Father or sending the Father. We never see the Father obeying the Son or following him.<sup>8</sup>

We also need to see that this is not a cold, heartless dynamic. The Father is not some faceless autocrat firing off instructions to a distant underling. Jesus is not some lackey trapped in a thankless existence that he would love to break out of. Listen again to what Jesus says: "I love the Father and I do exactly what my Father has commanded me." Jesus is not under the thumb or serving his Father through clenched teeth. There is a delight for him in obeying the Father, precisely because by doing so he is able to express his love for the Father. As he walked this earth, it was his pleasure to do so in full obedience to all that the Father had commanded him.

But this arrangement was not temporary.

#### Difference in eternity past

When I organize interviews for those applying to become ministry apprentices at our church, I and the other interviewers normally work out in advance who is going to cover which questions. I like to take the chatty, tell-us-about-your-hobbies questions that we tend to ask during the first part of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> For a more theological (and exegetical) defense of Christ's deity, as developed in the New Testament, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ware, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, p. 74; emphasis his.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> For a exploration of the trinitarian relations in John's Gospel, see Andreas J. Kostenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (NSBT; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2008).

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interview. And I like my female colleague to take the deeper theological questions: she tends to sound more gentle and less threatening. It's our version of good cop/bad cop.

It is not like that with the Trinity. As we have seen, before the birth of Jesus, there was not a conversation within the Trinity about who was going to come to earth, and who was going to stay behind, who was going to take the "Son" role and who the "Father" role. No, the Father-Son dynamic we see during Jesus' earthly ministry has actually existed for all eternity.

Before the birth of Jesus, there was a sender and a Son, one who initiated in love and one who followed in obedience. It is part of the Father's *father-ness* to send and part of the Son's *son-ness* to respond. The Father and Son have always had these roles.

Or again, "What about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?" (John 10:36). The dynamic we saw during the earthly life of Jesus was not an anomaly, but a reflection of the dynamic that has existed between the Father and Son for all eternity.

And will continue to exist.

#### Difference in eternity future

The exaltation and ascension of Jesus after his death and resurrection is not a graduation from being the Son of the Father to some supposedly better, less submissive role. In fact, his very exaltation is itself "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:11).

Elsewhere, Paul looks forward to the day when everything in creation will be subject to the Son:

Then the end will come, when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power . . . When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:24, 28)

Creation will be entirely subject to the Son. Everything will have been put under his feet. But it is the Father who has put everything under him, and the Son will hand over the kingdom to the Father and will himself be subjected to the Father. The dynamic we have seen all along will continue into the future forever.

So the relationship between Father and Son has a particular shape. They share the same essence and divine nature, and yet express that divine nature differently. They are Father and Son; there is authority and submission. This shape has always existed and will always continue to exist. And, returning to where we began, Paul sums up this shape using the concept of headship: the head of Christ is God the Father.

#### Headship in the Trinity

Having seen this dynamic at work between the Father and the Son, we can now begin to anticipate what Paul means by "head." "Head" in Paul's day could refer to the same things as it does today:

- The peculiar cranial protrusion on top of your shoulders.
- The origin or source of something. (I grew up just down the road from a place called Riverhead, though I have yet to find any evidence of a river starting there.)

• A position of leadership and responsibility: someone might be the head of a company or of a department or a school, or even the head of a state.<sup>9</sup>

Although Bible-believing Christians sometimes differ on this, it seems clear from what we have already seen that there is an authority-submission dynamic in relation to the Father and Son. And so it makes most sense for this to be the kind of headship Paul is talking about here. It fits with what he says elsewhere about men and women, where the context is clearly one of differing roles and authority: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church" (Eph 5:22–23).

Headship here is clearly not referring to the husband being the "source" of his wife, but of his having a position of authority over her. It is a headship the wife is to submit to. This sense of headship also fits in with the first part of 1 Corinthians 11, where, again, the issue concerns the woman being under the authority of the man (see v. 10).

In fact, this has been Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Just as the Father exercises headship over the Son, so too the husband is to have headship over his wife. The dynamic of the husband/wife relationship is to take its cue from, and correspond to, the dynamic of God the Father and God the Son, where this dynamic has eternally existed.

# Implications of this relationship

Before we get into how this dynamic is reflected between men and women, we need to step back and draw a few conclusions from what we have seen about headship from its existence in the Trinity.

# Equality and difference are not mutually exclusive

Equality and difference exist together within the Trinity and have always done so. There is no tension between them. They in no way threaten God's unity, as if this depended on some kind of precarious stand-off between the two. The opposite is in fact the case. The complementarity of the persons of the Trinity is what constitutes God's unity. His unity is not in uniformity or sameness but difference. The result is beautiful, relational harmony.

## Within the Trinity, headship and submission do not involve inequality

There is always the potential for human expressions of this dynamic to lead to the demeaning of one party, but in such cases the wrong sort of headship is being promoted—one that does not faithfully reflect the loving headship of God the Father. The Son is never demeaned by the Father's headship. He is not inferior because he submits to the Father, any more than the Father is superior because he has authority over the Son. In fact, both headship and submission are means of delight for the Father and Son, expressions of their love for each other.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> For an exhaustive study on "head" (*kephale*) in biblical and secondary literature, see Wayne Grudem's two articles: "Does *Kephale* ("Head") Mean "Source" Or "Authority Over" in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples," *Trinity Journal* 6.1 (Spring 1985): 38–59; "The Meaning Of *Kephale* ("Head"): An Evaluation Of New Evidence, Real And Alleged," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:1 (March 2001): 25–65.

#### Headship and submission are not intrinsically bad

God is good. Nothing in his nature is flawed. What he exhibits is perfection. And that includes all the dynamics we see within the Trinity. We have already noted that the headship and submission between Father and Son were not temporary roles adopted only for Jesus' earthly ministry as a sort of regrettable necessity. They always existed and always will, as eternal qualities within the Godhead. It is always possible for humans to twist and distort the good things of reality into a means of evil. But this does not diminish the goodness of those things in the first place.

Often in Western culture, two people are only considered to be equal if they are allowed to do exactly the same things. But this is not so within the Trinity. Equality does not require sameness. And the different roles being exercised are how we end up with the God we know and love.

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MAN AND WOMAN

Back to 1 Corinthians 11—Paul wants us to see that there is correspondence between the relationship between the Father and the Son, and the intended relationship between man and woman. Just as we saw equality and headship/submission within the Trinity, so too we see it between the sexes.

# Equality and difference

The Bible shows us the equal worth and value of the persons of the Trinity; it also shows us the same of men and women. Just as with the Father and Son, so also men and women are made of the same stuff. Eve, Adam exulted, is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). She shared his human nature and corresponded to him physically.

We have already seen from the creation account that men and women are created equal. Both are made in the image of God and share this dignity equally. Neither gender is more or less the image of God than the other. There is no inferiority of one sex and superiority of the other. Wayne Grudem can therefore say,

Wherever men are thought to be better than women, wherever husbands act as selfish dictators, wherever wives are forbidden to have their own jobs outside the home or to vote or to own property or to be educated, wherever women are treated as inferior, wherever there is abuse or violence against women or rape or female infanticide or polygamy or harems, the biblical truth of equality in the image of God is being denied.<sup>10</sup>

Tragically, there is no shortage of examples of these scenarios today. It is a reminder of how urgently this message needs to be heard in our world. There are many places where baby girls are less valued than baby boys, leading to gendercide, girls being aborted, killed, or abandoned. India and China, for example, have wildly disproportionate gender ratios, with tens of millions (if not hundreds of millions) of women effectively missing from the population.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelicalism and Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibid.

We are equal. No one should feel particularly proud or ashamed that they are a man or that they are a woman, as if one was better or worse. Both equally have the dignity of bearing the image of God.

But equality, as we have seen, does not mean sameness. Adam and Eve were not interchangeable; neither are husbands and wives. Men and women are made of the same stuff, but in a way that means there is complementarity. Kathy Keller is worth quoting at length:

Using all the qualifiers in the world, in general, as a whole and across the spectrum, men have a gift of independence, a 'sending' gift. They look outward. They initiate. Under sin, these traits can become either an alpha male individualism, if this capacity is turned into an idol, or dependence, if the calling is utterly rejected and the opposite embraced in rebellion. The first sin is hypermasculinity, while the second sin is a rejection of masculinity.

Using all the qualifiers in the world, on the whole and across the spectrum, women have a gift of interdependence, a 'receiving' gift. They are inwardly perceptive. They nurture. Under sin, these traits can become either a clinging dependence, if attachment is turned into an idol, or individualism, if the calling is utterly rejected and the opposite embraced in rebellion. The first sin is hyperfemininity, while the second sin is a rejection of femininity.<sup>12</sup>

### Headship in male-female relationships

As we have seen, there is headship. The head of Christ is God the Father, and the head of the woman is man.

We see this applied to two contexts. In Ephesians 5, we see the headship of men within marriage: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church." (Eph 5:22–23)

In 1 Corinthians 11, we see male headship within the local church. Let me quote the passage in full:

Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head – it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. (1 Cor 11:3–10)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Kathy Keller, "Embracing the Other," in Timothy Keller with Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 180.

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This passage is part of a wider section dealing with various areas of local church life, such as the administration of the Lord's Supper and the exercise of spiritual gifts. But here Paul's concern seems to be the importance of headship of men in the church being acknowledged in the way men and women present and comport themselves.<sup>13</sup>

I am conscious that in both these areas—church life and marriage—the issue of male headship has felled entire forests. There is legitimate room for discussion about what it might look like in practice. Our main concern here is that we see how it comes from the Trinitarian nature of God. But before we go, let's consider some important implications.

#### All of us are under headship

It is not as if one gender is under a head and the other is not. Paul is not saying that women need headship and that men do not. Both men and women have a head. The head in each case is different, but each sex alike is under authority. Accordingly, no one is being demeaned. God the Son has a head. For a woman to be under the headship of her husband is no more demeaning than for God the Son to be under the headship of the Father, or for man to be under the head of Christ. All of us are under authority.

#### Christ is the example for us all

The Son is under the headship of the Father. He is also the head over every man. He is therefore an example both of headship and of submission. He is an example for both sexes to follow: an example to men of how to exercise loving headship, and an example to women of loving submission to headship. All of us alike are to look to him as our model.

#### Male headship is to correspond to the loving headship of God the Father

Headship is to be marked by responsibility. There is a general sense in which men are to take the initiative. This is particularly true in marriage, but is also true in a more general way. Men are especially to be looking out for the spiritual welfare of others and to be taking a lead in corporate spiritual life, not least in prayer. This, after all, is the point Paul makes in 1 Timothy 2:8, the verse which precedes Paul's exhortation to women not to teach or have authority over a man (v. 12).

Headship is also to be marked by kindness. The Father loves exalting the Son. He delights in him. There is authority, but it is not authoritarian. It is gentle and strong (Isa 42:1–4) and other-person-centered (Phil 2:3–4).

So, women, if you think it is demeaning to be under the headship of man, you have not understood the Trinity, in which this pattern of headship and submission is not only present but a beautiful reality. The headship Paul speaks of for you is akin to that of the Father's over the Son.

And men, if at this point you are smiling to yourself because this sounds like a fun deal, you have not understood the Trinity either. It does not mean you get to be a domineering jerk to women. The headship required of you is to be one of service, care, and love. In marriage, women must submit to men (Eph 5:22–24), but husbands must "die" for their wives (Eph 5:25–27).

It is only by understanding the triune nature of God that men and women can truly learn to relate rightly to one another. It is only the Trinity that can give us a true framework of difference and equality

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> It goes without saying that there are a number of details in this passage that are hard for us to understand.

going together, of the unity that comes from diversity being prized and cherished, and therefore people being encouraged to fulfill their vocation as men and women.

We perhaps see this most clearly by considering what would happen if we lost a trinitarian understanding of God. God would not be Trinity; he would just be a divine singularity: utter undifferentiated oneness. That would become our understanding of what is ultimate. And the presence of two different genders would be something of an obstacle to that. And so, inevitably, the physically stronger of the two sexes would assert itself over the other, forcing it indoors and away from visibility in the public sphere. Without the Trinity, one of the sexes will end up putting a veil over the other.

Similarly, if we retain a sense of the goodness of diversity and difference, but lose sight of the concept of that diversity being put into the service of unity, we will also end up with a dysfunctional understanding of gender.

We will affirm every expression of diversity, but without a rationale for how it could ever produce an integrated whole. There will be diversity aplenty, but with no sense of order, still less of any concept of headship. The result will be a denial of the idea of gender as being fixed and definite. It will become an entirely fluid concept, something as changeable (in theory, at least) as hair coloring.

But the Bible sounds neither the air-horn blast of uniformity nor the white noise of utter diversity. There are neither McPeople nor sub-people. Instead we hear music. The harmony of unity-in-diversity. The divine orchestra of the Trinity itself, and the echo played back by men and women made in their image.

# FROM THE SACRED DESK

# GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE: CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY OF GENDER ROLES IN 1 PETER 3:1-7

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istorians have often said that Jonathan Edwards was the greatest American philosopher-theologian of the eighteenth-century.<sup>1</sup> However, what sometimes goes unnoticed is that we can only say this about him because behind this man was a remarkable woman, Sarah Edwards. Certainly the title of Noël Piper's book captures the character and life of *Sarah Edwards: Faithful Women and Their Extraordinary God*.<sup>2</sup>

Though brilliant and godly, Jonathan could be a difficult man to live with. He was often deep in thought; his moods could be intense as he sometimes became discouraged by his own sinfulness, and because of his pastoral responsibilities he needed to spend the majority of his day studying. Sarah, however, did everything in her power to make sure their home was a happy one for Jonathan. Over time, Sarah gained quite a reputation for just how well she raised her children in the things of the Lord. Her responsibilities were innumerable. Not only did she bear the weight of raising eleven children, but she was also responsible for the upkeep of the household and the family's land, not to mention the care of interns and other guests who sometimes lived in their house in order to visit with and learn from Jonathan.

George Whitefield, arguably the most famous preacher of the Great Awakening, said this after staying at their home:

Felt wonderful satisfaction in being at the house of Mr. Edwards. He is a Son himself, and hath also a Daughter of Abraham for his wife. A sweeter couple I have not yet

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This article has been adapted from a sermon preached on August 24, 2014 at Fellowship Baptist Church in Riverside, CA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> For the section that follows on Sarah Edwards, including quotations, see Noël Piper, *Faithful Women and Their Extraordinary God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 15–40.

seen. Their children were dressed not in silks and satins, but plain, as becomes the children of those who, in all things ought to be examples of Christian simplicity. She is a woman adorned with a meek and quiet spirit, talked feelingly and solidly of the Things of God, and seemed to be such a help meet for her husband, that she caused me to renew those prayers, which, for many months, I have put up to God, that he would be pleased to send me a daughter of Abraham to be my wife.<sup>3</sup>

Sarah was a wife who stood by her husband through thick and thin. There were times when finances were incredibly tight and the church did not provide their family with the income they desired. When Jonathan was fired from his church as pastor, Sarah willingly followed her husband as he relocated their family from Northampton, Massachusetts, to the wilderness of Stockbridge in order to minister to the Native Americans. Just imagine what this must have entailed for a family in the eighteenth-century!

Sarah submitted herself to Jonathan's lead and trusted God in the process. She was a redwood of a Christian wife, and her love and submission to her husband was so faithful that the Lord raised up generations after her that would call her blessed. Just listen to the legacy that this marriage produced by the end of 1900. From their line came 13 college presidents, 65 professors, 100 lawyers, 30 judges, 66 physicians, and 80 holders of public office, including 3 US Senators, 3 mayors, 3 governors, a vice president of the United States, and a controller of the US Treasury, not to mention countless pastors and missionaries.<sup>4</sup> All of this came from a woman who faithfully served her husband. Certainly Sarah was a 1 Peter 3 woman.

With examples like Sarah Edwards in mind, in what follows we will turn our attention to 1 Peter 3 not only to better understand gender roles in Scripture but to celebrate God's design for marriage. Before we do so, however, we cannot neglect the context. In chapter 2 Peter instructs his readers that as elect exiles and sojourners they are to keep their conduct honorable in front of an on looking world. Peter gave two ways Christians do this: (1) by submitting to the governing authorities (2:13–17), and (2) by servants submitting to their masters (2:18–25). In 1 Peter 3:1–7, Peter is going to press into a third way, namely, wives submitting to their husbands, as seen in the first word he uses to open chapter 3, "Likewise."

#### 1. Wives are to submit to their husbands (1 Peter 3:1-2)

There are few statements more counter-cultural than 1 Peter 3:1–2: "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct." Many Christians today reject this biblical teaching. But here it is in the text and without apology: *wives are to be subject to their husbands.* 

It is important to clarify what Peter is and is not saying. Peter in verse 1a is not assuming that the wife is less of a person or a Christian than her husband. This would have been the assumption in the culture of Peter's day, namely, that women were inferior in their nature to men and more prone to wickedness. But Peter nowhere teaches this. In fact, he assumes the exact opposite when he later says wives are coheirs with their husbands of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7). So the wife is equal to her husband in personhood and as a believer in Jesus Christ. She has just as much share in the riches of the gospel as the husband does. It appears, then, that Peter was being counter-cultural in his assumption that the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ibid., 22.

wife is a co-heir with her husband in salvation.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, such a teaching would have caught the attention of those in society.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, while there may be equality in personhood and in salvation, there is a hierarchy in roles. By calling upon wives to submit to their husbands (1 Pet 3:1), Peter reveals to the reader where authority resides in marriage, as well as how the marriage relationship is to function. Paul does the same in Ephesians 5:22–33. The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church (v. 23), and as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit in everything to their husbands (v. 24).

For Peter and Paul, the apostolic vision of men and women's roles in marriage is the same—and goes back to the beginning. While both Adam and Eve were made in God's image, and therefore equal in personhood and human dignity, they were given very different roles. For example, in 1 Timothy 2 Paul says that women are not to teach or exercise authority over men in the church. And why? Paul supports his command by appealing to God's design in creation: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (v. 13).

If we return to 1 Peter 3, we cannot bypass a key question: who is Peter addressing when he gives this command to wives? Certainly he is addressing all women, but he especially has in mind wives who are married to unbelieving husbands. Peter says in verse 1, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, *so that even if some do not obey the word*, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct."<sup>7</sup> When Peter says of these husbands that they do not obey the word, he means that they do not obey the gospel. There may have been a number of wives in this position in the early church. Remember, the gospel was being preached for the first time by the apostles and many were saved. But not all were saved. As the gospel was proclaimed, a wife might believe while her husband did not. The gospel, in other words, divided families. How heartbreaking this must have been for believing wives.

What are Christian wives to do if they find themselves in such a circumstance? How are they to treat their husbands? Like every other Christian woman, they are to submit to their husbands. But Peter gives further instruction: win your unbelieving husband over to the faith not by word but by deed. Peter doesn't mean wives are never to *verbally* share the gospel with their husbands. Peter assumes this much. Instead, Peter is warning wives against pestering, nagging, begging, and badgering their husbands to convert. The result of such an approach is that the husband is only further alienated, pushed away, irritated, and annoyed.

Perhaps the situation Peter envisions might be described this way: As a believing wife, you have already shared the gospel with your unbelieving husband on several occasions, but he has not believed, and your words are getting you nowhere. So, says Peter, stop. Instead, attract him to the beauty of the gospel by how you behave. Live out the implications of the gospel in front of him, not in a teasing in-your-face kind of way, but in a gentle, respectful way. Peter says in 3:2, may husbands be won when they "see your respectful and pure conduct." Actually, we could better translate this phrase: "as they observe your pure conduct with fear." By "fear" Peter is not referring to the wife fearing her husband,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Egalitarians have argued that Peter is merely accommodating himself to the patriarchy that was inescapable in the culture. For a helpful response to this argument, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 149–151.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> For the first-century background, see Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter* (The Bible Speaks Today; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 129.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Emphasis added.

but fearing God. In other words, the husband will see the purity of his wife and her reverent fear of God, and believe.<sup>8</sup>

Notice, Peter is once again radically counter-cultural. In the culture it was expected that when a woman married she would adopt and submit to the morals and religion of her husband.<sup>9</sup> His gods now became her gods. But Peter is assuming just the opposite. These women have become Christians while their husbands have not! Peter, therefore, is not teaching *absolute* submission. Wives are to submit to their husbands, but should the husband tell his wife to sin or to worship a false god, she must refuse. At the same time, *it is by her submission* and her quiet purity that Peter says she is to win her husband over. So while there may not be absolute submission, submission is key *as a means* to the husband's salvation.

#### 2. Wives are to seek internal rather than external beauty (1 Peter 3:3–6)

Not only does Peter instruct wives to submit to their husbands, but he also reminds wives what God values in a woman. In 1 Peter 3:3–4 we read, "Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious." When God looks upon a woman, *where* does he look? He is not concerned about the external, but the internal.

Peter uses the examples of braided hair, gold jewelry, and clothing (as does Paul in 1 Tim 2:9–10). What is his point? Peter is not forbidding women to wear jewelry or nice clothing, or make their hair look nice. Actually, the verse literally reads: "Let not your adoring be ... putting on clothing."<sup>10</sup> If Peter was teaching that they could not braid their hair or wear jewelry he would have to be teaching they could not wear clothes too! To the contrary, what Peter is warning against is placing one's identity in external things like these, making them her source of beauty.<sup>11</sup>

If you are a woman—whether a teenager or a wife and mother—the world is going to tell you the opposite of what Peter is saying. In countless ways, the world uses a megaphone to tell you appearance is everything. When you are in the checkout line at the supermarket, what magazines stare at you? Scantily-clad supermodels in dozens of magazines crave your attention. When you turn on the television, what commercials accost you? Commercials about lotions, hair products, and stylish clothes cry out to you. We laugh, but it's true: It doesn't matter what the product is, commercials will try to sell you just about anything by making it look sexy. If you are a teenager, you may have it the worst. When you go to school, who are the cool kids? They are typically those who wear the trendiest clothes and drive the sportiest cars.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> "When Peter spoke of the 'reverence of [the wives] lives,' it should be noted that the word translated 'reverence' is not actually an adjective, but in the Greek we have a prepositional phrase 'in fear' (*en phobo*), so that a literal translation would be 'as they observe your pure conduct in fear.' What should be emphasized here is that the fear is not directed to the husband, but as we saw in 2:18 (see commentary) 'fear' in 1 Peter is always directed toward God. Peter was not suggesting, therefore, that wives should fear their husbands (though Paul commended such in Eph 5:33). Instead, Peter's point was that the good conduct of wives should stem from their relationship with God." Schreiner, *1, 2, Peter, Jude*, 152.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See Clowney, The Message of 1 Peter, 129; Schreiner, 1, 2, Peter, Jude, 152–53.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter* (TNTC; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 148.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 154, believes Peter may specifically be prohibiting women "from spending an excessive amount of money on their outward adornment or from wearing clothing that is seductive." It is hard to tell if Schreiner is right as the text just doesn't get that specific. Nevertheless, it would still support the overall thrust of Peter's point, which encourages women not to be consumed with the external (physical), but the internal (spiritual).

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God, on the other hand, has a very different message. While you should take care of your external appearance, God is most concerned with the state of your heart. This is why Peter says in 3:4, "but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious." External beauty will perish, but internal beauty is eternal, and it is what God considers most valuable.

What does this shift in focus look like for women? It means that your source of authority and validation is not *People* magazine but the Bible. It means that your heroes are Ruth, Rahab, and Lydia, not Miley Cyrus, Beyoncé, or Katie Perry. Isn't this exactly what Peter does? He takes us to a biblical woman, Sarah, the wife of Abraham.

Still, before spotlighting Sarah's beauty, Peter paints a picture of what this internal beauty looks like. Peter says imperishable beauty consists of a "gentle and quiet spirit" (3:4). Have you ever noticed that the women who place their identity in external appearances tend to be loud? By their actions they scream for attention—"Look at me, I am beautiful!" Not so with the godly woman. Her beauty is within; she possesses a quiet and gentle spirit. It is not that she never speaks her mind or voices her opinion in public. But when she does, people listen because they know that this is a woman of godly character.

Quietness and gentleness are traits that characterize all believers (Matt. 5:5; 11:29; 1 Thess 4:11; 1 Tim 2:9–12; 1 Pet 3:16), but in a wife they are especially notable.<sup>12</sup> It is through these traits she exhibits her godliness and her trust in God, particularly if she is married to an unbelieving husband. Rather than beating him down with her words—"Why don't you behave?" "Stop acting like that." "Life would be easier if you were a Christian!"—she wins him by her gentle and quiet spirit.

For a model of gentleness, Peter puts forth Sarah. He writes, "For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord" (1 Pet 3:5–6). Peter's reference to Sarah probably indicates that by "holy women" he is referring to Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. These holy women hoped in God. What set these women apart? It was the fact that they adorned themselves with a gentle and quiet spirit, *by submitting to their husbands*.<sup>13</sup> "By submitting" they demonstrated that they were actually submitting to God himself, trusting him and his promises.

But Peter draws our attention particularly to Sarah and her obedience to Abraham by calling him "lord."<sup>14</sup> Peter is referring to Genesis 18:1–21, where the Lord tells Abraham that Sarah will have a son in her old age. What is so fascinating about Peter quoting this passage is that in the story Sarah is listening at the tent door to God's conversation with Abraham. When she hears God's announcement she laughs, saying to herself, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" (v. 12). But the Lord exposes her, saying to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh … Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (vv. 13–14). Even in this very embarrassing moment, Peter draws our attention to Sarah's godly

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> For these qualities as displayed in Christ, see Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 128–129.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Verse 5 is "wrongly translated by the NIV as an independent clause, 'They were submissive to their own husbands.' The NRSV rightly sees that the participle is instrumental, explaining how the women adorned themselves, 'by accepting the authority of their husbands.' A better translation would be 'by submitting [hypotassomenai] to their own husbands.' Peter meant, of course, that they submitted to their husbands with the gentle and quiet spirit extolled in v. 4" (Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 155–156). So Grudem, *1 Peter*, 143.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Clowney (*The Message of 1 Peter*, 133) shows that this title does not indicate that Sarah's submission was slavish, but freely given.

submission. Certainly Sarah respected her husband, but this episode reminds us that submission is characterized by obedience.<sup>15</sup>

The conclusion Peter draws from this episode is remarkable: "And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening" (1 Pet 3:6b). What could be so frightening that would lead a wife to fear? Peter doesn't tell us, but perhaps it is being married to an unbelieving husband; maybe one who is harsh with his wife because she is a believer.<sup>16</sup> Yet Peter says, do not give in to fear. Do not fear man, but fear God (cf. Matt 10:28). Certainly, the temptation of the wife is to please her husband even if it means giving up her faith.<sup>17</sup> Peter says, "No." Persevere, for if you do, you will receive that final salvation, being called one of Sarah's children. It would not be surprising if one day, when the saints are gathered together before the Lord, there is a large group of women standing next to Sarah, for in the midst of their marital hardships they trusted that the Lord would vindicate them.

#### 3. Husbands are to live with their wives in an understanding way (1 Peter 3:7)

Peter has something to say to husbands as well. Many translations read something like this: "Be considerate as you live with your wives" (NIV). But the verse more literally reads: "according to knowledge." In other words, husbands are to live with their wives informed by the knowledge of the will of God.<sup>18</sup> They are to live *knowledgeably* with their wives. Or as the ESV says, they are to live in an *understanding way.*<sup>19</sup>

Peter then says husbands are to show honor to the woman as the "weaker vessel." Peter doesn't mean the woman is inferior in personhood, or that she is inferior spiritually or intellectually. Peter is merely pointing out the obvious: Physically, women are not typically as big and strong as men. (Such an interpretation may be hinted at in the fact that Peter does not use the word "wife" but "female" or "woman.")<sup>20</sup> Peter's purpose in pointing out the obvious is to instruct husbands not to be harsh with their wives, but to honor, respect, and cherish them as God has commanded.<sup>21</sup> Peter grounds his command in the fact that women are "heirs with you of the grace of life."

Peter's conclusion in verse 7 ("so that your prayers may not be hindered") is a stern and serious warning to husbands. If you do not listen to God's command to live with your wife in an understanding way and show her honor, recognizing that she is a coheir with you in the kingdom of God, but instead are harsh, brutal, and mean to her with your words or actions, God will not listen to your prayers. Husband, how dare you think you can come before God in prayer when you have not loved your wife as Christ has loved the church! God will shut the door in your face if you abuse your authority or fail to lead your wife in an understanding way.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Some have argued that obedience is not an example of submission. For a response, see Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 156.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Clowney, The Message of 1 Peter, 128.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, 160.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> On what this looks like, see Grudem, *1 Peter*, 151.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> γυναικείω; lexical form: γυναικεῖος. See Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, 160.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> "Respect is not strong enough. Peter uses the word translated 'precious' in 2:7; literally it means 'preciousness'. The honour or preciousness that the husband must bestow on his wife is not only the recognition of her place in God's ordinance of marriage; it is the honour that is hers as one of God's precious and holy people" (Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 135–36).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Grudem captures the force of Peter's warning: "So concerned is God that Christian husbands live in an understanding and loving way with their wives, that he 'interrupts' his relationship with them when they are not doing so. No Christian

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Now that husbands have been warned, a word of practical encouragement and instruction is also in order. If you are frustrated with your wife and do not feel that she is submitting to your leadership as you would like, the place to begin is by first asking yourself whether or not you have been gracious, kind, considerate, tender, and loving toward her. If not, you need to repent. Go to the Lord, confess your sin, and then go to your wife and ask her for forgiveness. Should your leadership change in this way, and should you be married to one of those holy women that Peter speaks of, you will be shocked to discover that your wife will follow you through hell and back if you ask her too. You will also be pleasantly refreshed to find the Lord with an open ear to your prayers once again.

#### Conclusion: The Beauty of True Manhood and Womanhood

Jonathan Edwards was away from his wife, Sarah, when he died from a smallpox inoculation. He had not seen her in almost three months when he laid on his deathbed. Just before he died he whispered to one of his daughters,

It seems to me to be the will of God, that I must shortly leave you; therefore give my kindest love to my dear wife, and tell her, that the uncommon union, which has so long subsisted between us, has been of such a nature, as I trust is spiritual, and therefore will continue for ever: I hope she will be supported under so great a trial, and submit cheerfully to the will of God.<sup>23</sup>

A week and a half later Sarah wrote to their daughter Esther (who had just lost her husband six months earlier):

My very dear child, What shall I say? A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. O that we may kiss the rod, and lay our hands upon our mouths! The Lord has done it. He has made me adore his goodness, that we had him [Jonathan] so long. But my God lives; and he has my heart. O what a legacy my husband, and your father, has left us! We are all given to God; and there I am, and love to be.<sup>24</sup>

Wives, submit to your husbands. Husbands, honor your wives.

husband should presume to think that any spiritual good will be accomplished by his life without an effective ministry of prayer. And no husband may expect an effective prayer life unless he lives with his wife 'in an understanding way, bestowing honour' on her. To take the time to develop and maintain a good marriage is God's will; it is serving God; it is a spiritual activity pleasing in his sight." Grudem, *1 Peter*, 154.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Piper, Faithful Women and Their Extraordinary God, 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ibid

# A Review of Ellen K. Feder. *Making Sense of Intersex: Changing Ethical Perspectives in Biomedicine.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014. \$28.00.

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Suppose a male competitor in the upcoming summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro perceived himself as female and wished to qualify for the women's decathlon rather than the men's. Virtually everything about this individual's physical appearance is masculine, save the complicating fact that this individual sees himself as female. Observers might feel this strategy would give the competitor obvious athletic advantages over other women in the field. In fact, even if the International Olympic Committee allowed such gender re-qualification, it is likely that the international community would remain deeply skeptical, if not vehemently opposed to the idea. Although fictitious, it is not outside the realm of possibility to see a transgender competitor participating with official approval in another gender's Olympic event at some point in the near future.

Consider now a different, more complex case. At a new community book group, you are introduced to an earnest young man during coffee break named David. You notice from day one that David is a judicious reader. His comments to the group are circumspect and, on the whole, illuminating. You and David naturally befriend one another, meeting for lunch from time to time, sitting beside one another at book group; you even invite him along to church. With terrifying vulnerability, David confides in you one day that he was born intersex. And in admitting this to you he sees in your face that you haven't the faintest idea what he's talking about, though you sense intuitively that his admission will change the nature of your relationship fundamentally. He doesn't blame you for your surprise—no one he tells has really ever heard of the condition. He then tells you his difficult condition once went by another name—"hermaphroditism"—if that helps.

According to the Intersex Society of North America, "intersex" applies to "a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male."<sup>1</sup> That is the broad definition. More specifically, it refers to individuals born with both male and female reproductive organs, or individuals with "ambiguous" sexual anatomy. These sexual abnormalities can also appear to a lesser or greater degree; in other words, an intersex person can be "more" male than female or "more" female than male. To put it yet another way, intersex persons with significant anatomical ambiguity do not appear either male or female, but both male and female. Obviously this presents a special biological case deserving patient, scrupulous moral interrogation.

# HOW DO WE MAKE SENSE OF INTERSEX?

In her new book, *Making Sense of Intersex*, philosopher Ellen Feder offers her own account of what it means to be intersex and how, morally, it should be treated by families and physicians. It isn't often one can say with sincerity that a book is truly groundbreaking, but given the absence of substantive ethical treatment of this particular biomedical subject, Feder's book actually does just that.

Now, the question for our purposes is what kind of soil the breaking turns over. Admittedly, some of the soil offers fertile ground for further moral reflection, as when the author narrates first-hand testimonies of those who were themselves born intersex. In other places, the soil is simply too stale or polluted to produce good ethical fruit, as when gender is essentially characterized as a fluid social construction. In one sense, then, the book is indeed quite morally circumspect, and yet in another the impression is given that important ethical implications are being glossed. Let me first survey a few of the strengths and weaknesses of the book, and then conclude with a few remarks on the kind of moral contribution this book makes.

#### STRENGTHS

First, throughout the book Feder strikes the right sympathetic tone in just the right places. This is especially true with the personal testimonies of those who have experienced the frustrations of being born intersex or who have a close loved one with the condition. Many of these stories are indeed *deeply* moving. One cannot help but empathize with the trauma of a young child coming to grips with their own emotional and physiological abnormalities. Parents likewise admit to having regrets over past decisions that shaped their children's future, decisions that incur life-long resentment from the child and that constantly threatens the parent-child relationship.

Feder does a marvelous job capturing the familial agony associated with the unique experiences of being or being related to someone with an intersex condition. Feder is to be commended for her regular care in treating these relations with delicate compassion. Her work, moreover, is well-researched and reflects intimate knowledge of contemporary biomedical treatment, protocols, and procedures of intersex patients. She wishes to draw special attention to the experience of young children, particularly infants, born intersex. In this, she succeeds and Christians can rely on her research for their own work on this subject.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> FAQ, http://www.isna.org/faq/what\_is\_intersex, Accessed August 28, 2014.

# WEAKNESS

The central thesis of Feder's book, which heavily relies on a secular worldview, is only partly correct. Feder's argument is that the medical response to intersex births should not be immediately corrective—i.e., assigning or reassigning gender based on physical anatomy or parental preference—but should be delayed until the intersex child is able to decide upon their gender themselves. Gender is self-assigned because it is deeply, existentially *felt*, at least according to Feder.

We can sympathize perhaps with Feder's plea for medical patience for two reasons. First, because intersex relates both to *anatomical* and *chromosomal* sexual abnormalities this means it is possible for an intersexed child to appear "mostly" male or female but to have acute chromosomal abnormalities rendering gender determinations based purely on anatomical appearance rather tenuous. Second, irreversible surgical correction is never something to rush. A decision to reconstitute a child's sexual anatomy is as perplexing a decision as any parent will ever make—especially in the first few days of life! Parents would do well to wait until the gender of the child manifests itself more clearly before opting for surgical reconstruction.

Until recently, medical policy instructed physicians to situate an intersexed infant on a gender scale. If the child's penis was not to a minimal length, for example, or perhaps other female genitalia are present, then doctors may advise the child's parents of what they believe is in the child's best interest. There are additional physiological criteria too, of course, but the vast majority of intersex cases are still treated mere days after birth. Historically, some judgments have been correct, but some have not. The misjudged cases are naturally the most tragic, and Feder documents the accounts of several in her book. The important thing to remember here is that immediate intervention is *rarely* a pressing necessity.

Feder's moral solution is far more troubling. She believes gender is a social construction and the best way to resolve intersex ambiguities is for the person to self-assign their own gender. Her advice is to leave the infant alone, because he or she or "it" will acknowledge its own sexual identity in due time. This fluid notion of gender is notably imprecise and misjudged when compared to the great care she shows the personal cases and actual medical procedures. Thus it is difficult to distinguish her view ethically from the basic self-selecting transgender cases.

The truth is that every child, even in a fallen world, is born male or female (Gen 5:2). When faced with the birth of an intersex child, parents should listen attentively to the counsel of physicians. If the child is far more male than female in anatomy, or vice versa, then there might be good grounds for intervening early to put the child's sexual development on the right track. That said, chromosomal abnormalities must also be considered. If there is some physiological ambiguity and it is not altogether obvious what the gender of the child is, then the parents would be prudent to wait and allow the child's gender to manifest itself naturally. As anyone with children can attest, a child's gender often begins to manifest itself within mere months, so the wait need not be long.

Waiting in this way is not acquiescence to false medical mores, but a prayerful anticipation of what God has yet to reveal about the child's gender. The child is not "both" and it is not "neither"; the child is *gendered* as a male or a female. If it is allowed to develop according to norms of self-ascription, wandering into and out of different male or female lifestyles, testing them out recurrently for personal preference, then the person inevitably becomes spiritually misshapen and emotionally confused. Forcing the decision of gender selection upon a child is tantamount to depriving the child of its childhood. Every moral agent must have some strong sense of his or her own gender; it is after all a tacit, existential presumption. Our gender serves as a kind of gravity to our moral agency. Every image-bearer is either a man or a woman (Gen 1:27); we are not androgynous "its."

# CONCLUSION

Feder's book breaks important ground and provides the reader with many case studies, but it does not plow deep enough for successful cultivation. Its narratives of first-hand experiences and descriptions of medical corrective procedures are wonderfully precise. The aim is clearly to portray intersex persons in their full dignity. So the problem isn't Feder's diagnosis of the biological and medical problems; it is the moral solution she proposes to address them.

Humans do not choose their gender; rather they acknowledge the *givenness* of their gender. It is part of our *telos*. Characterizing gender as something we self-realize inverts the teleological purpose of gender, recasting its purpose into something we define ourselves rather than something that defines *us*. And in attempting this inversion it contributes to the ongoing program of modern liberalism, where we are the answers to our own questions and the granters of our own desires. This notion is of course foreign to any orthodox Christian anthropology, but considering the morally heterodox dispositions of our contemporary modern culture, that should not much surprise us.

# A Review of Carol Meyers. *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 295 pp. \$24.95.

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Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context is a revision of Carol Meyers' 1988 work, Discovering Eve (Oxford), a feminist study that garnered much praise and enthusiasm in feminist biblical studies. Meyers aims to reconsider in context "Eden Eve," the first woman in Genesis 2–3, and "Everywoman Eve," the average Israelite woman in Israelite history (particularly in the entire Iron Age, ca. 1200–586 BC). Much of the book is taken up with archeological, ethnographic, and sociological studies surrounding the "Everywoman Eve" of the Levant, which I will not discuss in detail here since Meyers' analysis of the former ("Eden Eve") is, in my view, of greater import for ongoing studies in biblical manhood and womanhood. A summary of the contents, however, is in order, followed by critical interaction.

## SUMMARY

In chapter 1 Meyers demonstrates how the character of Eve is familiar to Western culture and therefore links the present with the past. The twenty-first century woman can learn much from the representative "first woman" of the Hebrew Bible. Her stated objective is to "confront the problematic stereotypes projected on the biblical past in popular culture and biblical scholarship, both of which follow the long tradition of reading later ideas about women into Israelite contexts" (202).

In chapter 2 Meyers discusses the sources for her project, namely, the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern (ANE) writings, anthropological data, and archeological findings, especially in the last 50 years. The Hebrew Bible is for Meyers a "resource" for understanding the daily lives of "Everywoman Eve," but is insufficient for giving readers a full picture of their daily lives and tasks (24).

Chapter 3 describes the setting and context for the lives of Israelites in Iron Age I and II. In chapter

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4, Meyers attempts an exegesis of Genesis 2–3 without reading into it the influence of later misogynist, post-Hebrew Bible commentators and translators, which only serve to perpetuate a false reading of the text in her opinion, biased on false presuppositions. She aims, on the other hand, to consider only the problems and customs associated with the Israelites at the time when they emerged as a nation among the culture productions of the Iron Age (66).

Chapter 5 discusses the five Hebrew lines of Genesis 3:16 in detail, a verse she considers troubling on the basis that it has been used for centuries to validate male dominance and female subordination to men, particularly in the home. The context of the verse, according to Meyers, is peasant life in the Iron Age, where female labor was essential to the agrarian culture and reproduction was a necessity. The "curse" of Eve is not a curse in the traditional sense. Indeed, "curse" language is not used with the woman as it is with the serpent and male. Rather, 3:16 provides the sexual ideology from which women (and men) should live complementary lifestyles. In other words, the verse has to do with male sexual control of female reproduction, which "can be understood as a cultural measure to encourage or sanction multiple pregnancies" (100). Thus, Eve initiates the "productivity and procreativity of 'Everywoman Eve" (102). Meyers offers a translation of 3:16 that reveals her central hermeneutic:

I will make great your toil and many your pregnancies; with hardship shall you have children. Your turning is to your man/husband, and he shall rule/control you [sexually].

Chapter 6 provides a detailed overview of the aspects of the agrarian household, which was the immediate and determinative social context for ancient Israelites. The household is "the most salient feature of biblical antiquity for reconstructing and understanding women's lives" (103). Meyers gives attention to economic, social, and religious concerns in the household. Her concern is to avoid applying current ideas or perspectives in considering women's lives in the biblical past.

In Chapters 7 and 8 Meyers describes the daily activities for women in agrarian cultures and their social and economic impact on the family unit and wider community, which also includes religious activities. Chapter 9 assesses various women's positions held in the community according their "professional" value. In concluding the book, chapter 10 offers a rebuttal to the widely held view that the Israelite community was "patriarchal" and male-dominated at every social level. Meyers suggests to the contrary that the Israelites operated under a "heterarchy" model in which women functioned in complementarity with other leaders and held power alongside of their male counterparts.

# **CRITICAL INTERACTION**

The nucleus of any society is the home, the place where direct change on a society begins. In examining women's roles in Israelite society, Meyers is right to begin here rather than the political spheres of influence. Her book is replete with helpful details about Israelite home life and the key roles that women and mothers play in the home. Whatever differences there are between the complementarian and egalitarian positions, Meyers' study sheds honest light on the importance of women in the home and in the family, not least as mothers but also as shapers of values, morality, and ethics. Meyers' presuppositions are decidedly feminist and egalitarian, but this does not mean that there is no value to the archeological and ethnographic evidence she presents. At many points, I benefited from learning about these studies. Even so, I have significant points of disagreement with Meyers, which I will try to enumerate here.

The first point of contention is with Meyers' attempt at a contextualized argument for Genesis 3:16. She says that interpreters have long contextualized the man's role in toiling in the ground, but treat what God tells the woman as a dictum for all time (95). But Meyers' translation of 3:16 (see above) is troubling on a number of levels, and is an example of eisegesis and author-imposed hermeneutics. She argues, for instance, that the Hebrew use of *ish* and *ishah* as translated "husband" and "wife" in Genesis 2-3 is anachronistic because the social process shaping marriage did not yet exist. She is content to say that *ish* only means "man," and *ishah* "woman" (93). Are we to assume that marriage is an anachronism in Genesis and Iron Age Israelite societies based on the gloss of these two Hebrew words?

If Genesis 3 is an example of an independent tradition as Meyers assumes, seized and spliced together with the rest of the creation narrative in order to make sense of the origins of man (at least, from an Israelite perspective), her interpretation of *ish* and *ishah* is perfectly legitimate. If, however, the entire Pentateuch (including Genesis) is the work of one author in a covenant community, then the semantic range for ish and *ishah* is broader.

It is true that *ish* in general means "man," but it also means "husband" in the Pentateuch just as *ishah* means "wife." See, for instance, Genesis 16:3; 29:32, 34; Leviticus 21:7; and Numbers 30:7. The latter two of which deals with marriage and divorce laws. Is it not fairly obvious that the context for the serpent's temptation comes immediately on the heels of God joining Adam to his *ishah* as his wife in Genesis 2? Meyers' exegesis is insufficient, therefore, and fails to examine even the immediate context of the words and phrases in Genesis, leading to a forced and unusual translation.

Further, I am suspicious of Meyers' understanding of "your desire will be" in line 4 of Genesis 3:16 (94). Meyers says that "virtually all modern scholars" take "desire" to be "sexual desire," but then she fails to list any of them. Who are these scholars? She then depends upon Lohr (2011) for "examples of those problematic commentaries" (221, fn26) with which she is referring. But the passage is not really about a woman's sexual predicament, and Meyers' interpretation ("and he shall rule/control you [sexually]") sounds more akin to a divine justification for rape.

One is perplexed at Meyers' understanding of the word "desire" and "rule over," not least because of her significant revision in the translation, but especially given that the verbal parallel in Genesis 4:7 is not even mentioned in her book. Surely, context is key, which is one of Meyers' stated goals! Even if we grant that the terms in 3:16 are ambiguous, they are disambiguated in the following chapter. In 4:7, it is sin's "desire" for Cain that ultimately "masters" him (both Hebrew words from 3:16 are repeated), just as it is woman's desire to master her husband via insubordination. Sin complicates and frustrates all male-female relationships.

Overall, the "curse" of Genesis 3 is not really a curse for Meyers. There is no vestige of sin embedded in the discourse, rather the chapter is troubled with sociological concerns. In her view, Genesis 3:14–19 is cause for optimism. For the woman, her "turning" to the man has to do with the "rejoining" after the separation of 2:22–24. For the man, he "turns" to the soil, i.e., he dies. Both of these reverse the original creation mandate of being fruitful and multiplying, and account for the procreation of humanity and its mortality (95). As she explains on 3:16, "In the Hebrew Bible, God's words proclaiming male control of female sexuality can be understood as a way to overcome pregnancy reluctance so that agrarian households would have essential offspring. In both cases the goal was motherhood in the service of a greater social interest" (101). Additionally, "Cultural values encouraging childbirth to maintain or even increase population are embedded in Genesis 3:16" (101). Thus, the issue of Genesis 3 is a sociological one: "Genesis 3:17–19 mandates exhausting labor for men, and 3:16 orders women to work hard and have multiple pregnancies. Together these passages reflect the Israelite environment and demographic context" (101). For Meyers, the curse of Genesis 3 is not really a curse. Nothing could be further from the truth. The curse of Genesis 3 is the cause of infant mortality, not the solution to population control.

Second, Meyers goes to great lengths to show gender co-leadership in ancient Israel by highlighting the "professional" and managerial roles that some women held in the biblical text and wider ANE culture. Yet, while women certainly held important roles in Israelite societies, these likely were the result of needs in the community and framed by the patriarchal leadership at the top of society. Patriarchy (a term Meyers dismisses) is not inherently ill-willed and does not denigrate those women of society. Every society has hierarchy as long as civilization has existed. Meyers fails to shed light on this reality, which is unhelpful in a book saturated with the goal of highlighting women's roles in the family and community.

Meyers' examples of those women who held high positions in Israelite society (Abigail [1 Sam 25], Micah's mother [Judg 17], the woman of Shunem [2 Kgs 4, 8], and the Proverbs 31 woman) seem to be all woman of significant financial standing, elite in their own right. These women certainly bring in focus the managerial skills of some females in society, but Meyers fails to indicate that these examples are likely the result of their high status in society and natural mobility among the elites. They do not fit well with Meyers' "Everywoman Eve" caricature and enjoyed greater autonomy than the average Israelite woman with whom Meyers so eagerly wishes to have them associate. The poorer women likely had fewer freedoms and enjoyed far less autonomy.

Third, Meyers provides a helpful overview of the instances in the OT of a mother's household, giving attention to Rebekah, Ruth and Naomi, the Proverbs 31 woman, and the woman in the Song of Solomon (112ff.). Each of the texts she examines identifies the "household" with the senior female. However, she attempts to associate female wisdom (in the general, subjective sense) with the grammatically feminine word for "wisdom" (*hokmah*) arguing that the benefits of female wisdom was intended by the Hebrew author to underlie the propensity to view wisdom as female in the book of Proverbs and other Wisdom Literature.

This seems to me to be another error in which a scholar overemphasizing one theme or ideology tends to read that idea into many other passages of Scripture. The Hebrew word TCCC is naturally feminine in gender, yet we cannot assume that in the original development of the word the purpose was to highlight the wisdom of the women of society, even if many of those women are highlighted as "wise" in the biblical text. More likely, the personification of "wisdom" (not necessarily its grammatical form) is to contrast the beautiful character of one "lady" over the ugly character of another—the adulteress. This point is rather clear in Proverbs 1–9, where "Lady Wisdom" always triumphs over against "Lady Folly" (see especially Proverbs 9). Given that the lectures of Proverbs 1–9 address the male heir and particularly exhort "the son" to avoid the lure of illicit sex personified in the adulteress Lady Folly, it makes sense that the author of Proverbs would offer to him a more beautiful woman for the son to pursue—Lady Wisdom. This idea is illustrated in poetic form in Proverbs 4:6–9, as the son is exhorted to find sweet satisfaction in wisdom as opposed to folly.

# CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, we should be wary of scholarship that proposes significant reconstructions of an ancient biblical text, especially a work that seeks inherently to impose a feminist revision of Genesis 3. Works like *Rediscovering Eve* begin with the presupposition not that the biblical text is wrong but that it has been misinterpreted and mistranslated for over 2,000 years. Genesis 3:16 is not a paradigm for optimistic feminism—a paradigm, as Meyers contends, that influences our understanding of the rest of the Hebrew Bible and our application in the social sphere. What we find in Genesis 3:16, rather, is the first feminism that attempts to thwart God's design. The woman was made to be a helper for the man (2:18), but now, in light of her sin in Eden, she desires to rule over him, and he responds likewise with more force than is necessary. This is judgment in need of redemption, not cause for optimistic, egalitarian relationships and population control.

Meyers asserts that the Hebrew Bible is insufficient for giving us a complete picture of Israelite women in context. This is true in some respect with regard to the finer details of ANE communities. The Bible is not a textbook on ANE life. But I cannot agree with this statement in full. As evangelicals have often argued, the scope of women's roles within the family/community as communicated in the Bible is *sufficient* for "every woman" of the family of God. The "rule" of the man is not male tyranny as Meyers supposes. There are safeguards for women provided in the Torah (e.g., Numbers 30; Deut 24:1–4), and in the Christian era. Paul in particular stresses mutual submission, love, and protection between men and women in the home and in the church community (Eph 5:22–33; Col 3:19).

A Review of Ronald Cole-Turner. *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011. 219 pp. \$32.95.

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# WHAT IS AT STAKE?

hat if a friend tells you that it is ethical to enhance your body beyond normal human capacity using technology? What if someone wanting to join your church believes technology is part of God's plan to save the world? What if you have to weigh in on public policy regarding issues surrounding biotechnology? Questions like these, once relegated to the late night realm of Science Fiction, are now common, and Christians must be increasingly biblical and bold in answering them.

The book *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* is a collection of essays responding to the view that technology can fix all of humanity's problems, including death itself—i.e., "transhumanism." The contributors seek to understand transhumanism on its own terms and to provide a Christian response. Editor Ronald Cole-Turner explains that each contributor varies in his or her position on "how far" transhumanism may go and still be within ethical boundaries.

While this book is not focused on evolutionary theory, the chapters are all influenced by the idea, and so Cole-Turner provides clarity to the reader that all the contributors hold to evolution (193–94). The editor summarizes each chapter in his introduction. More broadly, the book runs from a select history (chapters 2 and 3), to specific issues (chapters 4–10), to Christian theology in general (chapters 11 and 12). As to focus and content, even chapters 4–10 are used to discuss mostly theoretical ideas regarding transhumanism and transcendence. From this simple outline, it is evident that conservative Christians will have reservations about this book. But let me list this books strengths and then some areas of concern.

## STRENGTHS

There are a number of well-done pieces in this volume. Any successful debate requires each side to understand the position of the other, and the contributors have met this requirement admirably. Around half of each chapter is devoted to understanding transhumanist thought, in which the authors show what many transhumanists believe. For example, many understand human life as defined by consciousness alone; childbearing is assumed to be a burden; and some or all emotions should be eliminated. One writer, Gerald McKenny, even attempts to break down the different types of transhumanists (just as one might categorize different Christian denominations). It is important to understand that all transhumanists do not think alike.

A specific strength is the ability of these authors to take their understanding of the transhumanist worldview and demonstrate inconsistencies within it—like winning a court battle using the other side's evidence. For instance, some groups think it would be a good idea to suppress the emotions of soldiers in order to protect them from post-traumatic stress disorder. However, contributor Michael Spezio points out the opposite effect emotional control enhancement would have on soldiers. Technology that neuters emotions would "likely render them unable to respond *relationally* and thus effectively to injuries sustained by fellow war fighters, not to mention their inability to deal adequately with civilian life" (158, emphasis original). These types of arguments are helpful, especially as it concerns drafting public policy. In essence, the contributors first respond to transhumanists "on their own turf." In this way, transhumanists themselves can benefit from the book, in addition to considering how the gospel of Jesus Christ is itself a response.

# **AREAS OF CONCERN**

The book's purpose is to provide theological answers to issues related to transhumanism, and it is here that there are a number of weaknesses. The Bible speaks to any worldview offering ultimate salvation to the world, but the Bible must be interpreted rightly with sound hermeneutical principles. Due to some of the theological positions of the authors, this book will provide limited help in defining a local church's stance on transhumanism.

An example of weakness in the book is the way it speaks inconsistently of God as creator. On the one hand, the book highlights the use of being made in the image of God (174). This assumes the relevancy and authority of Genesis 1. On the other hand, the book sometimes operates under the assumption that "Redemption trumps Creation and Fall and therefore permits some latitude for enhancement" (55). This drives a wedge between Genesis and today's question of technological enhancement. This inconsistency is analogous to interpreters who, on the one hand, dismiss one argument from creation as normative (1 Tim 2:9–15), while on the other hand affirm another argument from creation (1 Tim 4:1–5). Moreover, while theistic evolution is not the focus of the book, it may also hinder seeing Genesis as directly relevant for transhumanism.

# **QUESTIONS TO ASK**

Reading this book provides us with many additional questions for the conversation. Here are some of them: Humanly speaking, how does one's view of biological gender inform the ethics of biotechnology? Can human relationships be computerized? Why are technological resources directed towards

the body if rationality is the essence of personhood? Philosophically, what is the relationship between free will and the "inevitability" of technological advancements? Theologically, how does technology address the problem of evil and keep free will intact? Some of these questions may already be asked of technology in the church today, but certainly this book increases the number of questions that are swirling about this issue today.

# **FINAL THOUGHTS**

This book is a good example of how one can learn from others who do not share the same worldview. The contributors are courteous, academic, and seek to build bridges for conversation. It cannot be stressed enough for each side on every issue to seek to understand the meaning of the other before responding. Yet, many of the Christian responses in this essay are not consistent with a conservative reading of Scripture.

The book briefly mentions the issue of idolatry (173–74), but a book responding to transhumanism would do well to give an entire chapter to this topic. Discussion on Isaiah 44:6–28 could be a good starting place. In the end, we can gladly affirm that science has potential to benefit humanity, but it cannot save. Salvation belongs to the Lord and not to men who play god. *Transhumanism and Transcedence* is a fascinating read in exploring the logical conclusions to a purely scientific (i.e., naturalistic) worldview, but it is not sufficient to engage the increasing predominance of (bio)technology in our world. A more robust, biblical treatment is yet needed.

# A Review of Jen Wilkin. Women of the Word: How to Study the Bible with Both Our Hearts and Our Minds. Wheaton, IL: Crossway. 2014. 180pp. \$12.99.

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tudying the Bible is hard work. But Jen Wilkin is adamant that women are up for the task. In fact, in her excellent new book *Women of the Word: How to Study the Bible* with *Both Our Hearts and Our Minds*, she challenges women living in an age of swipes and clicks, to study God's word with *purpose, perspective, patience, process, prayer*. With these five P's, she guides women to take the radical step of taking time and effort to study the Bible.

# **READING IN A PIXELATED AGE**

We live in an era of the screen, and screens impact the way we interact with text. In April of last year, a *Washington Post* article summarized the recent body of research on our changing reading habits: "Before the Internet, the brain read in mostly linear ways—one page led to the next page, and so on. . .The Internet is different. With so much information, hyperlinked text, videos alongside words and interactivity everywhere, our brains form shortcuts to deal with it all—scanning, searching for key words, scrolling up and down quickly."

The research suggests that scanning and skimming digital content makes us less able to read deeply off-screen. Cognitive neuroscientist Maryanne Wolf was quoted in the *Post* article: "I worry that the superficial way we read during the day is affecting us when we have to read with more in-depth processing."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Michael S. Rosenwald, "Serious reading takes a hit from online scanning and skimming, researchers say," *Washington Post*, April 6, 2014, accessed March 19, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/serious-reading-takes-a-hit-from-online-scanning-and-skimming-researchers-say/2014/04/06/088028d2-b5d2-11e3-b899-20667de76985\_story.html.

And this surely has implications for our Bible reading. A national survey reported that of adult Americans who increased their Bible reading last year, 26% attributed their additional time in the Word to downloading the Bible onto their phone or tablet.<sup>2</sup> And *The New York Times* reported that on Sunday mornings Bible app YouVersion receives more than 600,000 search requests every minute.<sup>3</sup> And the Word became pixels.

# LEARNING TO FEED ON THE WORD

Of course, from the first speaking of God, to the printing press of Gutenberg, to the common-language translation of Tyndale, the Bible has always been on the cutting edge of communication technology. The capability of digital Bibles to encourage cross-referencing, word- and phrase-searching, and translations in parallel has been a great boon for modern Bible students. But quick and easy are not always best.

"When you begin a study of a text," Wilkin writes, "print out a double-spaced copy in 12-point font on nice, thick printer paper . . . Print a copy that will allow you to annotate the text as a true student would. Go ahead and treat yourself to a nice set of colored pencils and new highlighter while you are at it." (90)

*Women of the Word*, in a spirit similar to the counter-cultural movements of slow-food and slow-reading, is a helpful encouragement for slow-study, slow-theology, and slow-learning. "If we want to feel deeply about God," she writes, "we must learn to think deeply about God." (33) And this takes work.

To an audience accustomed to grabbing bytes of information, Wilkin's process may be a hard sell. And so throughout the book she makes well-reasoned arguments for *why* serious Bible study ought to be fundamentally different than other kinds of reading:

Arriving at understanding is much harder than simply taking in new facts. When we read a newspaper, we do not feel frustrated by our ability to understand it. This is because a newspaper does not intend to stretch our understanding—it is a delivery system for information. Learning the Bible is a quest for knowledge, but it is ultimately a quest for understanding. Unlike a newspaper, the Bible is far more than a delivery system for information—it aims to shape the way we think. This means that, more often than not, we should expect to experience frustration when we sit down to read it. (77)

Early in the book, Wilkin paints the big picture: "Sound Bible study transforms the heart by training the mind, and it places God at the center of the story" (36). Then, she helpfully critiques some of the poor approaches aspiring Bible students often adopt. "The Xanax Approach," for example, where a reader looks for quick-fix verses to make herself feel better. "In reality," she writes, "the Bible doesn't always make us feel better. In fact, quite often it does just the opposite" (39).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> "The State of the Bible: 6 Trends in 2014," *Barna Group*, April 8, 2014, accessed March 19, 2015, https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/664-the-state-of-the-bible-6-trends-for-2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Amy O'Leary, "In the Beginning Was the Word; Now the Word Is on an App," *New York Times*, July 26, 2013, accessed March 19, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/27/technology/the-faithful-embrace-youversion-a-bible-app.html.

Finally, she lays out a methodical prescription for prayerfully studying Scripture in the context of the entire biblical metanarrative: moving from initial comprehension of a text, toward thoughtful interpretation of its meaning, ending with application of its message to the student's life.

In the end, seasoned Bible students are unlikely to find anything novel in Wilkin's approach, but her directives are helpfully organized and clearly explained. Therefore, *Women of the Word* is a well-crafted resource for women of all ages who are interested in growing deeper in God's Word.

# **ONE SHORTCOMING AND A GREAT STRENGTH**

If *Women of the Word* has a weakness, it is in the book's failure to begin with a comprehensive doctrine of Scripture. The way we approach the Bible—the necessity of using a careful and demanding course of study like Wilkin endorses—depends largely on our understanding of Scripture as inspired, infallible, inerrant, sufficient, unified, and clear. In our current culture the idea of spending hours wrestling with a text to discover objective truth is quite foreign. We cannot assume that Christians naturally understand the doctrine of the Word, and therefore, I wished Wilkin had given a brief explanation of what motivates and undergirds her high view of Scripture.

One of the greatest treasures in this book is Wilkin's insistence that the mind transforms the heart. This is a message women need to hear. Interestingly, Wilkin applies cognitive science to Bible study, encouraging women that knowledge increases affection. The book's directives for Bible study, while very academic in character are not cold and lifeless. Instead, Wilkin desires women to kindle hearts afresh through a deeper knowledge of God. It is my hope that Wilkin's book will offer a way to substantive delight in God for a generation of skimmers and scanners.

#### STUDYING THE BIBLE WITH PEN IN HAND

The true test of any method is to put it into practice. So, a few days ago, I printed a hard copy of the five chapters of 1 John and sat down with my pen. At this writing, I have read the book in its entirety four times. I've highlighted repeated words and phrases. I've resisted the temptation to Google. I've written questions in the margins that I don't really want to answer. In short, I've worked hard, I've done what Wilkin said, and I'm nowhere near finished. But Wilkin's instructions have been easy to follow, and I find myself encouraged to continue.

Though such a method takes time, I can almost hear Wilkin saying to me, "The fruit of Word-labor is sweet." But then again maybe it is the Holy Spirit: "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Ps 119:103)!

# A Review of Robert R. Reilly. Making Gay Okay: How Rationalizing Homosexual Behavior Is Changing Everything. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014. 215 pp. \$17.74.

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n late 2013, *Duck Dynasty* reality TV star Phil Robertson, an outspoken evangelical Christian, made a moral proposition that drew public outcry: He stated that homosexual conduct is sinful. While refraining from offering the full quote, Robertson ended his statement on homosexuality saying, "It's not logical, my man. It's just not logical." However crude or inarticulate Robertson's comments were (and indeed, his language isn't commendable), Robertson expressed what was once a common moral sentiment in American life: That homosexuality is immoral, taboo, and indecent; that it defies the pillars of human essence.

Robertson's appeal to logic, and the seeming obviousness of his statement, didn't seem logical to the adherents of sexual libertinism. Robertson's statements muster an important proposition—that there is an intelligibility or structure inherent to sexual activity. But what happens when the obviousness of male and female complementarity is cast asunder? What happens if sexuality is construed solely by the assumptions of modern society— assumptions that deny sexual *telos* and renders sexuality purposeless? Sexuality becomes subject entirely to self-definition.

An important book was published in early 2014 that addresses how society can rationalize and internalize sexual error. The book is Robert Reilly's *Making Gay Okay: How Rationalizing Homosexual Behavior Is Changing Everything*.

I want to state this book's praise upfront. Though I'm weary of the theatrics that arise from grandiose praise, *Making Gay Okay* stands as the most persuasive natural law argument against homosexuality I've ever read.

# THE RATIONALIZATION OF IMMORAL BEHAVIOR

To conserve space I will focus more on the foundation of Reilly's main argument and less on the supplementary and evidentiary examples that Reilly uses to strengthen his main point. The second half of the book, titled "Marching through the Institutions" simply demonstrates how the rationalization of homosexuality has become mainstreamed in prominent American institutions such as education, the Boy Scouts, and the military.

Reilly begins his book by offering a meta-level analysis on the two ways in which persons can construe reality:

There are two fundamental views of reality. One is that things have a Nature that is teleologically ordered to ends that inhere in their essence and make them what they are. In other words, things have inbuilt purposes. The other is that things do not have a Nature with ends: things are nothing in themselves, but are only what we make them to be according to our wills and desires. (xii)

The role of "Nature" weighs heavily throughout the book. Borrowing a metaphysical concept from Aristotle, he cites the claim: "Nature is a cause that operates for a purpose." Reilly argues that Nature is not something we manufacture. We recognize it as something intrinsic to a being's structure. It is *what is.* So, for example, a tree is to live out the qualities of tree-*ness* (a function of being), which necessitates growth and the bearing of leaves. When a tree can operate in accord with its purpose, it achieves or fulfills its essence. Something is unnatural if a being frustrates its natural purpose and acts out of sync with its full potential or actualization.

For Reilly, the cultural debate about homosexuality and same-sex marriage is about the "Nature of reality itself" versus the "primacy of the will." The backdrop of Reilly's argument is that the structure of male and female complementarity exists and is ordered by nature to constitute and fulfill the marital goods that follow from their comprehensive union. Thus, a male and female united in marriage, a marriage oriented to, and fulfilled by, the presence of children is an immutable good beneficial for society.

Humanity and society can choose to live between these two options. The first option recognizes restraint, order, and purpose as inherent goods to the universe. The second does not. The second is one in which humanity self-wills or manufactures reality according to moral, legal, and cultural fictions.

There are two options available to society that underwrite our current social and moral predicament, derivable from either the Aristotelian tradition that recognizes *telos*; or a tradition found in Jean Jacques Rousseau, a tradition that insists upon the malleability of human personhood and the denial of *telos* or nature. He quotes Aristotle who wrote, "Men start revolutionary changes for reasons connected with their private lives."

Since acts of sodomy (defined as anal intercourse performed by either heterosexuals or homosexuals) frustrate or thwart humanity's sexual *telos*, Reilly argues that the acceptance or affirmation of such acts requires a re-wiring, so to speak, of public morality. "Habitual moral failure, what used to be called vice," Reilly writes, "can be tolerated only by creating a rationalization to justify it" (7). Society will need to "rationalize" such behavior by way of moral inversion. As he writes, "Entrenched moral aberrations then impel people to rationalize vice not only to themselves but to others as well" (9). Pursuing a vice works to "pervert reason," thus allowing a true moral revolution to have occurred. Fast forward to present day where the former taboo reserved for homosexual practice has now been transferred to those who still deem homosexual conduct immoral. In a memorable statement, Reilly writes:

The homosexual cause moved naturally from a plea for tolerance to cultural conquest because the rationalization upon which it is based *requires* the assent of the community to the normative nature of the act of sodomy. In other words, we all must say that the bad is good in order for the rationalization to be secure in itself. (10)

It is at this point that Reilly's explanation for the ubiquity of cultural affirmation for homosexuality seems most compelling. He argues that moral wrongs, in order to become persuasive, must "aspire to universality." Certainly Reilly is right in this conjecture, which explains the fixation that contemporary society has with sexual behavior, not least of which is homosexual conduct. The degree at which homosexuality has become a rallying cry for expansive notions of justice simply demonstrates the profundity of America's rationalization of homosexual conduct.

Readers will notice that Reilly uses categories dominant within Catholic social ethics. Reilly does not locate our current predicament solely on the LGBT "agenda" as some call it. Instead, long trains of privations have worked to coordinate our current context. The de-linking of sex to procreation, according to Reilly, forever severed the social and legal necessity to keep the marriage union as inherently distinct from other illicit sexual activity.

If sex can be denied its purpose—and accepted at a societal level—Reilly argues that revision and revolution were then inevitable. At one point, he cites the Catholic intellectual Mary Eberstadt, writing that "Once heterosexuals start claiming the right to act as homosexuals [non-procreative sexual acts], it would not be long before homosexuals started claiming the rights of heterosexuals."

It's at this point that Protestant ethics would have a point of disagreement with Reilly, as Protestant renderings of marriage locate the unitive and procreative goods of marriage within the larger covenant of marriage, not the primacy of each individual marital act. That disagreement aside, Reilly's argument remains forceful and persuasive.

The progression away from privileging heterosexual marriage relations as normative has dire consequences according to Reilly: "The separation of sex from procreation logically leads to the legalization of contraception, then to abortion, and finally to homosexual marriage and beyond. The logic is compelling, in fact, inescapable. Only the premise is insane" (82).

The seamlessness at which he weaves the progression of Sexual Revolution throughout the US legal system is perhaps the most practical section of the book, one that details how far America has gone in its adoption of sexually libertine policies. With the adoption of privacy jurisprudence starting in the 1960s with the *Griswold v. Connecticut* case, Reilly traces how several opinions related to contraception, abortion, and same-sex marriage all follow from the trajectory of having first divorced sexuality from the idea of sexual telos—which in his heavily Catholic rendering is the procreative and unitive goods of marriage. When sexuality lacks any normative poise, it becomes subject to judicial and democratic revision, which is where Reilly places the causes for today's moral and sexual free-for-all.

Frustrating "Nature," as he calls it, results in corresponding and corroding effects for those who violate the rational goods of sexual *telos*. Here, Reilly demonstrates how homosexuality results in real bodily harm for those practice it—male homosexuals have drastically high rates of promiscuity, which results in bodily damage, psychological duress, and catastrophic rates of disease. These factors considered, Reilly explains how professional guilds such as the American Psychological Association are full

endorsers of homosexuality due to the politicization of sexual politics, of which the homosexual lobby is the most vocal.

This work is a commendable asset to social ethics. Moreover, his concise and accessible overview of such thinkers as Aristotle and Rousseau, along with the detail to which he has traced the legal proceedings of our culture's sexual regression, makes the book's purchase fully justified.

#### APPLICATION TO CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICS

To review *Making Gay Okay* fairly, I must assess Reilly's argument on the grounds upon which he makes his argument, not how I would prefer him to make it. As a young Christian ethicist this means there are not only preferences, but also requirements to measure all claims against a biblical standard, regardless of whether the book is argued on biblical grounds or not.

*Making Gay Okay* does not make biblical arguments nor does it appeal to divine revelation. The author, a Catholic, relies exclusively on philosophical categories long associated with the natural law tradition. Nonetheless, the book does not make arguments that materially conflict with Scripture.

Consider one argument aside from his larger argument that homosexuality is immoral. Reilly's argument of how immoral behavior can become "rationalized" comports with biblical precedent that warns against the searing of one's conscience (1 Tim 4:2). Indeed, his argument is a natural law appropriation of having inverted the understanding of sin on a social level, such that biblical warnings of Isaiah 5:20 ("Woe to those who call evil good and good evil") bear exact resemblance.

Reilly's book comes at a time when America's moral revolution seems to have made its peace with homosexuality. Picking back up with Phil Robertson, it's important to recognize that hostility to Reilly's arguments are part of a larger cultural trend now against an older sexual order informed almost exclusively from the Christian sexual metanarrative, a metanarrative that Christianity assumes is normative for all of humanity.

In the end, Reilly's book makes an important contribution to public theology and Christian social ethics. *Making Gay Okay* supplies Christians with a social grammar to discuss sexual morality within the categories of natural law and general revelation. This is important because among Christians, there is a temptation to base the authority or appropriateness of our views within the public square on claims of free speech and pluralism (which is certainly true and commendable). Often, however, these statements are made ignoring the moral basis for why Christians believe what they do about sexuality. Christians believe there are biblical and moral goods associated with human sexuality. Christianity's teaching on sexuality is not merely a preference; it is one inextricably tied to our basic understanding of humanity's composition and fulfillment. It seems odd that a natural law argument would better bolster the Christian understanding of homosexuality's error, yet that is what I believe this book has accomplished.

When Christians engage in social ethics to the exclusion of moral proclamation for fear of moral indictment, we are guilty of ignoring biblical criteria necessary for moral reasoning, and we unwittingly bow to the idea of the Naked Public Square. Reilly's volume is an important contribution to social ethics, one that is complementary to Holy Scripture, in providing Christians a social grammar related to sexual ethics; ethics that we believe are normative and must be accounted for. *Making Gay Okay* is an invaluable aid in offering a comprehensive view of sexuality based on natural law inferences to the purposes of human sexuality.

# A Review of Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger. God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. 380 pp. \$22.99.

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od has given me two compelling reasons to explore Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger's new book on biblical complementarianism: Emma and Sam. My children are too young to shape directly, but it's not too early for mommy and daddy to start praying and preparing. What will daddy say when Sam asks why girls are so different? What will mommy say when Emma asks about the two boys holding hands in school? What counsel will we give Emma when a young man is looking to date her, or when Sam prepares to propose?

Today the modern church lives in two-fold confusion. First, the evangelical church is confused about what the Bible teaches on manhood and womanhood. Some have strong convictions—one way or the other—while many avoid the topic for fear of entering into another divisive debate. But what are the consequences of punting on this? What happens when boys and girls, men and women within churches are confused about who they are as male and female? Second, the broader culture is confused, sometimes violently, on masculinity and femininity. Will the idea of gender be eventually deleted from our societal vocabulary? And if so, at what cost?

# A UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION

Thankfully, in *God's Design for Man and Woman* Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger serve up the fresh, life-giving truth from the Word of God. They have written this book because they are convinced "it's vital to wrestle with our identity as men and women for the sake of healthy marriages, families, and churches, but more importantly, for the true expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world" (14).

*God's Design for Man and Woman* is a unique contribution to the conversation in that its approach is biblical-theological. This means it traces the theme of manhood and womanhood across the canon,

from Genesis to Revelation. Many other important works, such as John Piper and Wayne Grudem's classic *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* address the topic from other angles (e.g., exegetical, theological/historical, and practical). But no book-length study before this one maps out Scripture's overarching pattern related to masculinity and femininity.

To be brief, the book is divided into eight chapters:

- God's Original Design and Its Corruption (Genesis 1-3)
- · Patriarchs, Kings, Priests, and Prophets (Old Testament)
- What did Jesus do? (Gospels)
- What did the Early Church do? (Acts)
- Paul's Message to the Churches (First Ten Letters)
- Paul's Legacy (Letters to Timothy and Titus)
- The Rest of the Story (Other New Testament teaching)
- God's Design Lived Out Today

Each chapter is carefully organized, providing key points of summary at the outset, tables (55 in all) that highlight patterns, application and implication sections, and finally a resource list for further study. The book closes with three appendices that address the three waves of feminism, biblical hermeneutics, and special issues in interpreting gender passages.

## CONTINUITY, DEVELOPMENT, AND APPLICATION

The Köstenbergers main argument is that the biblical narrative contains "a continuing thread pertaining to God's plan for man and woman" and that "this plan is beautiful, consistent, and good" (258). It's not like the Old Testament introduced teaching that was later trumped by the New Testament. While there is development, the New Testament continues and fulfills the traditions of the Old in the life and ministry of Jesus and his church.

So what is this "continuing thread" that is woven through the pages of scripture? Mining the first three chapters of Genesis leads us to two initial truths. First, man and woman are created in God's image, to be partners in subduing the earth and filling it with more image-bearers. And second, in this unique partnership God has designed man to lead and be ultimately responsible, while the woman is called to be his collaborator and supporter—what the Bible calls his "helper" (Gen 2:18, 20).

The Köstenbergers believe this two-fold complementarian confession is consistently upheld throughout the biblical story. Sin not only damaged God's image in humanity but put a curse upon the partnership between man and woman. The rest of the Old Testament documents how humanity's sin leads to polygamy, divorce, homosexuality, adultery, and the general misuse and abuse of gender roles. Still, in the face of sin's effect, the biblical pattern of male leadership continues with male kings and priests as the institutional and authoritative leaders of Israel.

God's Design for Man and Woman then examines the life and ministry of Jesus. God's Son clearly holds women in high regard. He taught, healed, freely interacted with, and received support from both men and women. Women were even the first witnesses of his resurrection. All this was certainly

stunning in a broader culture that deemed women as inferior! Still, Jesus affirmed the same husband-wife relationship taught in the Old Testament and appointed only men as apostles, the institutional and authoritative leaders of the Church. The Apostles continued the traditions of the Old Testament and Jesus, fleshing out what biblical manhood and womanhood look like within Christian marriage and the church.

My favorite part of *God's Design for Man and Woman* is the closing application chapter. In the midst of messy lives and sinful people, many wrestle with how this captivating vision of manhood and womanhood actually plays out. What does it look like in the nitty-gritty, day-to-day life of a Christian? The Köstenbergers give us keen wisdom and practical guidance without pulling punches or pressing beyond the text.

## SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

My father-in-law recently commented on a sermon we heard together: "I liked what he said and I liked the way he said it!" The Köstenbergers get this right as well. They tackle this touchy subject with both exegetical rigor and a humble, irenic tone. They even say this is one of their goals in the introduction: "We're committed to go about exploring the topic with an open mind and to reach out in love and ministry while doing so" (14). How I wish more of our books, sermons, and conversations would be like this!

I enthusiastically commend this book for three reasons. First, it is a fresh study of a neglected topic within the evangelical world. Second, applying its teachings will help grow healthy families and churches. And third, Christian marriages and churches that embrace biblical complementarianism display the gospel more clearly to a watching world. Read, digest, teach, and most importantly apply this book!

# The Danvers Statement

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

- I. 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).
- II. 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).
- III. 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).
- IV. 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.
- V. 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).
- VI. Redemption in Christ aims atremoving 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).
- VII. 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).
- VIII. 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 authorityfor testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
- IX. 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).
- X. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and theculture at large.



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