

LIVING IN THE FAMILY:
THOUGHTS FROM WILLIAM
GOUGE

Joel R. Beeke

THE POWER OF THE TWO-
PARENT HOME

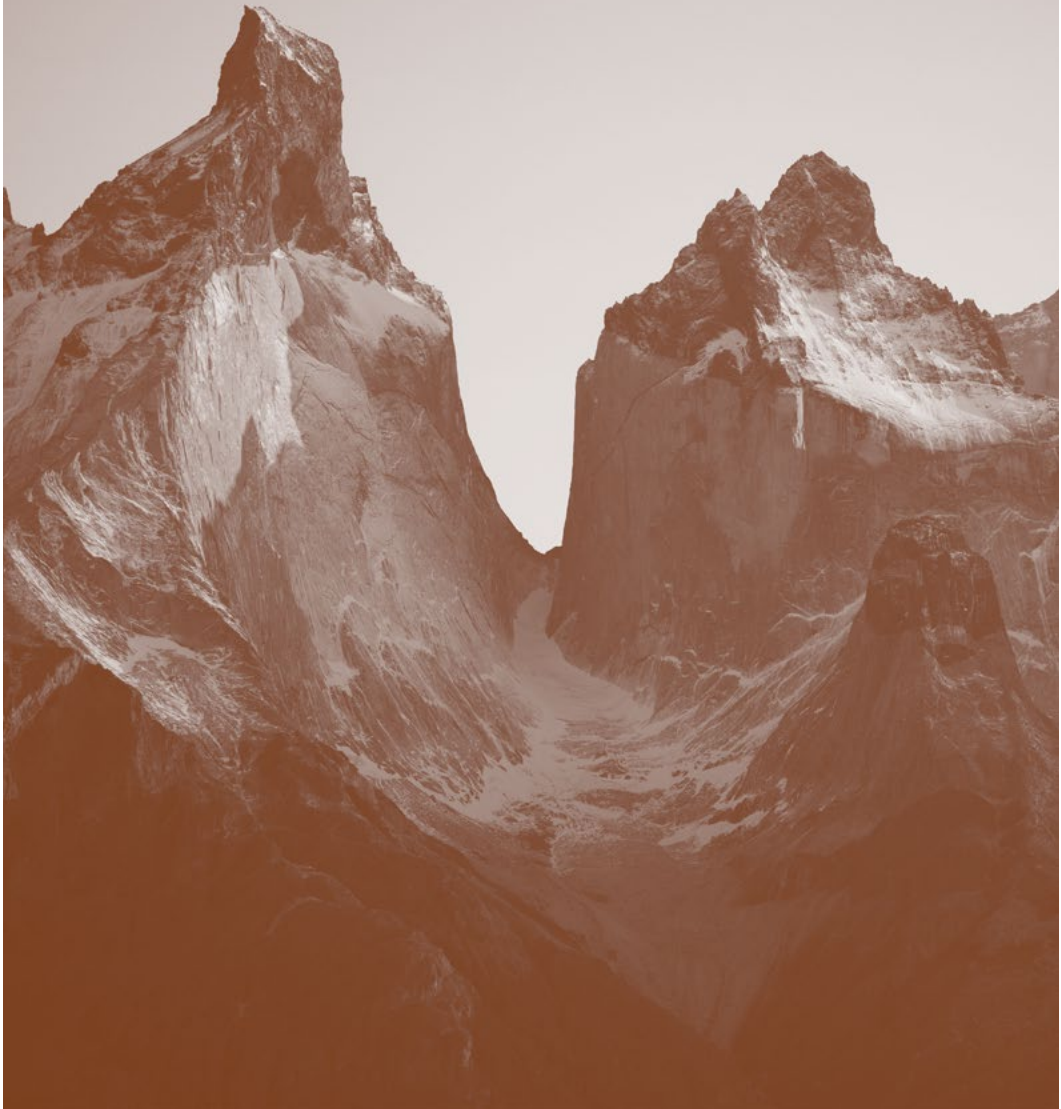
Kevin DeYoung

INDICATIVES, IMPERATIVES, AND
APPLICATIONS: REFLECTIONS ON
NATURAL, BIBLICAL, AND CULTURAL
COMPLEMENTARIANISM

Joe Rigney

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For the Family

Colin J. Smothers
Executive Editor

The theme for this issue of *Eikon* is human society's bedrock institution, the family. It doesn't take a Ph.D. to notice that the family is in crisis in the modern West — in fact, statistics show that if you don't have a Ph.D., you are more likely not only to feel the immediate effects of the family's disintegration, but you are also more readily able to recognize the forces contributing to its breakdown.

A few years back, I wrote a review in these pages of Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck's *The Christian Family*.¹ Bavinck wrote at the turn of last century out of concern for the rapid decline of the family in his day, a trend that has only accelerated since. One can only wonder what he would say today.

Bavinck recognized an important truth that had once been nearly universally acknowledged: the family is the foundation of all of civilized society. Nevertheless, the family has been consistently and (one cannot help but suspect) intentionally undermined by forces of modernity which have wreaked havoc on the unmitigated goods of fatherhood, motherhood, and child-rearing. With the rise of expressive individualism, identity and authenticity have unseated older virtues like duty, loyalty, and self-sacrifice that once knit kin together and promoted the common good. Opponents of the family, however, have refused to recognize — or perhaps their nihilistic impulses predispose them not to care — that they are hacking away at a branch they themselves are sitting on. Once they cut all the way through, there is nothing left but collapse.

The Bible teaches us that the family is a pre-political institution designed and ordained by God on which both the church and the state are predicated. To wit, we relate to one another in the church as brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, and we relate to one another in the state, our motherland, through a web of analogous relationships: patricians and matrons and founding fathers and brotherhoods. This is particularly evident when a nation is described in domestic terms, such as America: the "land of the free and *home* of the brave." Even aside from these analogues, a church is a community that joins natural sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, across bloodlines under a common purpose — so also the state. Most obviously, both depend on the fecundity of the family for generational perpetuity.

In other words, as goes the family, so goes human society. That fundamental reality is why we, the editors, have organized this issue of *Eikon* around the family. Christians should care about the family not only because God designed it and the Bible instructs us to honor it, but also out of a deep love for our neighbor. Research shows that the disintegration of the family means more poverty, more crime, and more depression. In our time, the family is not just declining, it is in free fall. The marriage rate for adults in the United States is just fifty percent, including those who are divorced and no longer married.² This means that half of US adults are not investing in family formation. To put this in perspective, Bavinck was concerned

when the marriage rate in his country was ninety-five percent. Perhaps even more alarming, almost forty percent of babies born in the US today are born to unmarried parents.³ These are children who will grow up, most likely, without a father in the home, and some without a mother. What does this portend? Bavinck helps us see: "The authority of the father, the love of the mother, and the obedience of the child form in their unity the threefold cord that binds together and sustains all relationships within human society."⁴ What will come of a civilization that is bent on undermining such bonds?

This issue of *Eikon* is a flag in the ground that I hope will accomplish two purposes. First, let history show that *Eikon* and its contributors did not stand idly by when the family was under severe attack. We stand unapologetically behind the natural family — father, mother, and children in a nurturing home bound by covenant marriage — which is not an idol, but God's very design for human flourishing. Secondly, we want Christians to rally to the flag. The family is good and true and beautiful, and these pages will, Lord willing, show you how and why you should make that case in your own home, in your own church, and in your own community.

We love the family because God loves the family. May God be glorified and the church edified through the upholding and strengthening of the family. ✕

²Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Nikki Graf, and Gretchen Livingston, "Marriage and Cohabitation in the U.S." *Pew Research Center*, November 6, 2019, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/11/06/marriage-and-cohabitation-in-the-u-s/>.

³Joyce A. Martin, et al., "Births: Final Data for 2018," *National Vital Statistics Reports* 68:13 (November 27, 2019), https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68_13-508.pdf.

⁴Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, ed. Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloostermany (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Press, 2012), 8.

¹Colin Smothers, "Recovering Bavinck's *The Christian Family*," *Eikon* 2.1 (Spring 2020), 8–15.

Living in the Family: Thoughts from William Gouge

"A Family is a little church and a little nation."

— William Gouge¹

There are few better examples of the beauty and glory of Christian living and of Reformed Christianity in action than the lives of the Puritans at home. Their views on marriage and family life were biblical, positive, and lavish. J. I. Packer writes that the Puritans were “the creators of the English Christian marriage, the English Christian family and the English Christian

home.”² For the Puritans, marriage was sacred because it was a covenant instituted by God himself (Mal. 2:14). Edmund Morgan summarizes their view:

Every proper marriage since the first was founded on a covenant to which the free and voluntary consent of both parties was necessary. . . . Since time began no man and woman had ever been allowed to fix the terms upon which they would agree to be husband and wife. God had established the rules of marriage when he solemnized the first one, and he had made no changes in

them since then. The covenant of marriage was a promise to obey those rules without conditions and without reservations.³

The Puritans have bequeathed to us the biblical concept of a well-ordered, happy Christian home, where love abounds between husband and wife, and parents and children. Their writings⁴ reveal this outlook, and many scholars have

confirmed it through the years.⁵ Their biblical vision for the home is sorely needed in our day of self-gratification and disrespect for authority, a day in which every man does that which is right in his own eyes.

No Puritan was more important for fostering a well-ordered Christian home than William Gouge (1575–1653). Among the scores of books written on marriage and family

¹William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home, Vol. 1, A Holy Vision for Family Life*, ed. Scott Brown and Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 20. Parts of this chapter are drawn from my *Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Reformation Trust, 2008), 317–48. Heartfelt thanks to Paul Smalley for his research assistance.

² J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994), 341–42.

³Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 30.

⁴Richard Adams, “What are the Duties of Parents and Children; and how are they to be Managed According to Scripture?” *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689* (Wheaton, Ill: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 2:303–58; Isaac Ambrose, *Works of Isaac Ambrose* (London: Thomas Tegg & Son, 1872); Richard Baxter, “The Poor Man's Family Book,” in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), 4:165–289; Paul Bayne, *An Entire Commentary upon the Whole Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866), 491–563; Robert Bolton, *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 262–281; Thomas Boston, “Duties of Husband and Wife; Sermon XXIII,” in *The Works of Thomas Boston*, ed. Samuel M'Millan (Wheaton, Ill: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), 4:209–18; John Bunyan, “Family Duty,” *Free Grace Broadcaster*, 170 (1999): 15–28; John Cotton, *A Meet Help: Or, a Wedding Sermon* (Boston: B. Green & J. Allen, 1699); John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Form of Household Government* (London: Thomas Man, 1598); Thomas Doolittle, “How May the Duty of Daily Family Prayer be Best Managed for the Spiritual Benefit of Every One in the Family?” in *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689*, 2:194–272; Thomas Gataker, “A Good Wife God's Gift,” “A Wife in Deed,” and “Marriage Duties,” in *Certain Sermons* (London: John Haviland, 1637); Thomas Gataker, *A Marriage Prayer* (London: John Haviland, 1624), 134–208; William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (Pensacola: Puritan Reprints, 2006); Matthew Griffith, *Bethel: or, a Form for Families* (London: Richard Badger, 1633); George Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship* (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria, 2005); Matthew Henry, “A Church in the House,” in *Complete Works of Matthew Henry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 1:248–67; William Perkins, “Christian Oeconomy,” in *The Works of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward (Appleford, England: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 416–39; John Robinson, *The Works of John Robinson*, vol. 3 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1851); Daniel Rogers, *Matrimonial Honour* (London: Th. Harper, 1642); Henry Scudder, *The Godly Man's Choice* (London: Matthew Simmons for Henry Overton, 1644); Henry Smith, “A Preparative to Marriage,” in *The Works of Henry Smith* (Stoke-on-Trent, England: Tentmaker Publications, 2002), 1:5–40; William Whately, *A Bride-Bush or A Wedding Sermon* (Norwood, N.J.: Walter J. Johnson, 1975); and William Whately, *A Care-Cloth or the Cumbers and Troubles of Marriage* (Norwood, N.J.: Walter J. Johnson, 1975).

⁵ J. Philip Arthur, “The Puritan Family,” *The Answer of a Good Conscience*, Westminster Conference, 1997 (London: n.p., 1998), 75–94; Lawrence J. Bilkes, “The Scriptural Puritan Marriage” (unpublished paper for Puritan theology class at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, 2002); E. Braund, “Daily Life Among the Puritans,” *The Puritan Papers: Vol. One*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2000), 155–66; Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (New York: St. Martin's Press, n.d.), 176–80; Catherine A. Brekus, “Children of Wrath, Children of Grace: Jonathan Edwards and the Puritan Culture of Child Rearing,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 300–28; Ezra Hoyt Byington, *The Puritan in England and New England* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1897), 221–77; J. T. Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry: The Great Puritan Families of Early Stuart England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 63–82; W. Gary Crampton, *What the Puritans Taught* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2003), 62–72; Gaius Davies, “The Puritan Teaching on Marriage and the Family,” *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 27, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 19–30; John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 82–106, 181–90; Daniel Doriani, “The Godly Household in Puritan Theology, 1560–1640” (PhD dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985); Christopher Durston, *The Family in the English Revolution* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Alice Morse Earle, *Customs and Fashions in Old New England* (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1990); “Form for the Confirmation of Marriage Before the Church,” in *Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999), 156–58; Philip J. Greven, “Family Structure in Andover,” *Puritanism in Early America*, ed. George M. Waller (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Co., 1973); William and Malleville Haller, “The Puritan Art of Love,” *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 5 (1942): 235–72; Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, “Ordering Their Private World: What the Puritans did to grow spiritually,” *Christian History*, 13, no. 1 (1994): 16–19; Graham Harrison, “Marriage and Divorce in Puritan Thinking,” *The Fire Divine*, Westminster Conference, 1996 (London: n.p., 1997), 27–51; Erroll Hulse, *Who are the Puritans: And What do they Teach?* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2000), 139–42; James Turner Johnson, *A Society Ordained by God: English Puritan Marriage Doctrine in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970); M. M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism: A Chapter in the History of Idealism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 451–66; Morgan, *The Puritan Family*; Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983); Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 259–73, 355–56; Neil Pronk, “Puritan Christianity: The Puritans at Home,” *The Messenger* (Sept. 1997): 3–6; Helen Ratner, “The Puritan Family,” *Child & Family*, 9, no. 1 (1970): 54–60; Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston: A Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630–1649* (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1972); Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 39–54, 73–88; Levin Ludwig Schucking, *The Puritan Family: A Social Study from the Literary Sources* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); Margo Todd, “Humanists, Puritans and the Spiritualized Household,” *Church History*, 49, no. 1 (1980): 18–34.

living by the Puritans, Gouge's popular *Of Domestical Duties* was the most common gift that a Puritan pastor gave to couples whose marriages he was privileged to officiate. This work has recently been edited for the modern reader by Scott Brown and me and republished in three volumes under the title *Building a Godly Home*.⁶

First published in 1622, this originally seven hundred-page, penetrating analysis of the godly household is divided into eight sections dealing with the duties of family life.⁷ In the first part, Gouge explains the foundation of family duties, based on Ephesians 5:21–6:9. The second part deals with the husband-wife relationship. The third focuses on the duties of wives and the fourth on the duties of husbands. The fifth examines the duties of children and the sixth the duties of parents. The final parts examine the relationships and duties of servants and their masters.⁸

While some of Gouge's material is outdated, his emphasis and advice are timeless on the whole. Brett Usher claims that Gouge is finally being "recognized as one of the subtlest of early modern writers to articulate the concept of 'companionable' marriage — his own was regarded as exemplary — and of considerate, rather than merely prescriptive, parenthood. His psychological insights into the nature of childhood and adolescence can be breathtaking in their modernity. He even touches on the question of child abuse, a

subject effectively taboo until the 1970s."⁹

Gouge's valuable work unveils a skilled expositor who draws practical applications from the Epistles and personal experience in instructing families how to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ. As a father of thirteen children (seven sons and six daughters), eight of whom reached maturity, Gouge knew what he was talking about. His experience as a parent was augmented the more when his wife died after bearing the thirteenth child, and by the fact that he never remarried.¹⁰

Most importantly, Gouge was a godly example of the matters he wrote about. His personal life was exemplary. Throughout his life, he maintained the habit of reading fifteen Bible chapters daily — five in the morning before breakfast, five after dinner, and five before going to bed. His biographer writes that his confessions of sin were accompanied with "much brokenness of heart, self-aborrancy, and justifying of God." In prayer, he was "pertinent, judicious, spiritual, seasonable, accompanied with faith and fervor, like a true Son of Jacob wrestling with tears and supplications." A contemporary wrote of Gouge: "He studied much to magnify Christ, and to debase himself." Gouge said of himself, "When I look upon myself, I see nothing but emptiness and weakness; but when I look upon Christ, I see nothing but fullness and sufficiency."

"Gouge's family saw in him, a loving husband and father, a devout leader of family worship, a hard worker, a cheerful philanthropist, a meek friend, a great peacemaker, and an earnest wrestler with God."

Gouge's family saw in him a loving husband and father, a devout leader of family worship, a hard worker, a cheerful philanthropist, a meek friend, a great peacemaker, and an earnest wrestler with God. He had such a meek disposition that his biographer wrote, "No one, his wife, nor children, nor servant with whom he lived and worked all those years ever observed an angry countenance, nor heard an angry word proceed from him toward any of them."

Gouge suffered from asthma and kidney stones in his later years. His faith held firm, however, through acute suffering until death. He would say, "[I am] a great sinner, but I comfort myself in a great Savior." Often he repeated Job's words: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not

receive evil?" (Job 2:10). When a friend tried to comfort him by pointing to the grace he had received or the works he had done, his response was: "I dare not think of any such things for comfort. Jesus Christ, and what He hath done and endured, is the only ground of my sure comfort." As he approached death, he said: "Death, next to Jesus Christ, you are my best friend. When I die, I am sure to be with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is my rejoicing." Gouge died December 12, 1653, aged seventy-eight.

In this essay, I aim to set forth Gouge's views on Christian living — first, on marriage, and second, on raising children, drawing practical lessons from both for the Christian home today.

⁶William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home, Vol. 1, A Holy Vision for Family Life*, ed. Scott Brown and Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013); *Building a Godly Home, Vol. 2, A Holy Vision for a Happy Marriage*, ed. Scott Brown and Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013); *Building a Godly Home, Vol. 3, A Holy Vision for Raising Children*, ed. Scott Brown and Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014).

⁷William Gouge, *Of Domestical Duties* (London: by John Haviland for William Bladen, 1622).

⁸The final section on masters and servants is not included in the recent three-volume modern reprint, but it is included in the 2006 edition referenced in note 4 above.

⁹Brett Usher, "William Gouge," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 23:38.

¹⁰Usher, "William Gouge," 23:37.

GOUGE ON A HAPPY MARRIAGE

Of course, the foundation of Puritan teaching on marriage was the Word of God. Packer says, “They went to Genesis for its institution, to Ephesians for its full meaning, to Leviticus for its hygiene, to Proverbs for its management, to several New Testament books for its ethic, and to Esther, Ruth and the Song of Songs for illustrations and exhibitions of the ideal.”¹¹ Volume 1 of *Building a Godly Home* contains Gouge’s basic exposition of Ephesians 5:21–6:9. In subsequent material in the second volume, however, he gives abundant applications of Paul’s teachings for wives and husbands. Let me offer you a sampling from Gouge about God’s biblical purposes and biblical principles for marriage.

God’s Purposes for Marriage

The medieval church’s view of marriage had largely degenerated into seeing marriage as a necessity for producing children. Serious Christians were encouraged to be celibate in marriage, or better still, to become monks or nuns. On the contrary, the Puritans agreed with the Reformers that Scripture sanctifies marriage and sanctions three purposes for marriage, all of which aim for the higher good of the glory of God and the furthering of God’s kingdom on earth. Gouge presented these three purposes in the same order as the Book of Common

Prayer: (1) “the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and praise of God,” (2) “a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication,” and (3) “mutual society, help, and comfort.”¹²

Rooted in the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28, the first purpose for marriage, Gouge wrote, is “that the world might be increased, and not simply increased, but with a legitimate brood, and distinct families, which are the [nurseries] of cities and commonwealths, also that the church might be preserved and propagated in the world by a holy seed (Mal. 2:15).”¹³ How little this is grasped in our day! Can you imagine yourself saying to your spouse, “Honey, let’s try to have another child for the sake of the church, our city, and our nation”?

The second purpose for marriage is “that men might avoid fornication and possess their vessels in holiness and honor (1 Cor. 7:2). Regarding that process which is in man’s corrupt nature to lust, this end adds much to the honor of marriage. It shows that marriage is a haven to those who are in jeopardy of their salvation through the gusts of temptations to lust.”¹⁴ How contemporary Gouge sounds!

The third purpose for marriage, Gouge said, is “that man and wife might be a mutual help one to another (Gen. 2:18), a help as for bringing forth, so for bringing

up children, and as for erecting, so for well governing their family. A help also for well ordering prosperity, and well bearing adversity. A help in health and sickness. . . . In this respect it is said ‘who so findeth a wife, findeth a good thing’ (Prov 18:22).”¹⁵

All three of these purposes are God’s gift to all mankind, including unbelievers. In their emphasis on the earthly purposes of marriage, however, the Puritans did not devalue its overarching spiritual purpose. Just as Paul set forth to the Ephesians, Gouge taught that marriage is a living depiction of Christ’s relationship with the church, his body (Eph 5:22–33). The husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church, while the wife is to show reverence and submission to her husband as the church does to Christ.

The husband’s headship over his wife parallels Christ’s headship over his church (Eph. 5:23). As Christ loves his church, the husband must exercise a “true, free, pure, exceeding, constant love” to his wife, nourishing and cherishing her as Christ does his gathered people.¹⁶ Since Christ’s love for his church is all-encompassing, a husband cannot love his wife adequately because, being a sinner, he always falls short of Christ’s perfect love (v. 25). But Christ’s love to his bride must be the husband’s pattern and goal.¹⁷ The husband must strive to love his wife absolutely (v. 25), purposely (v. 26), realistically (v. 27), and sacrificially (vv. 28–29). Mingled together, the husband’s love and the wife’s respect make for a savory marriage delightful to both. Gouge wrote: “*Love* is

as sugar to sweeten the duties of authority which pertain to a husband. *Respect* is as salt to season all the duties of subjection which pertain to a wife.”¹⁸

Given the modern caricatures of Puritanism, it is vital to note that Puritan husbands were rarely male chauvinists and tyrants. Modeling the husband’s headship on Christ’s headship of the church, the Puritans understood that male authority was more a charge to responsibility than a ticket to privilege. Headship was leadership based on love (1 Pet. 3:7). While the man had authority over the woman, Gouge said, “Though the man be as the head, yet is the woman as the heart.”¹⁹

Since the church humbly and unconditionally submits to Christ, the husband’s headship over his wife means that she should show reverence and yield voluntary submission to him in all things, except when her husband acts contrary to God and his commandments. For Gouge and the Puritans in general, submission was not so much a matter of hierarchy as of function. God assigns the role and duty of leadership to the husband not so he might lord over his wife, but simply to delegate authority to him and not to her. The husband is the head, but Gouge said that God appointed the wife to be “a joint governor” with her husband over their household.²⁰

Under the grand, creation-based, Christ-centered vision for the purposes of marriage, the Puritans explained the ethical principles that direct us for a God-honoring marriage.

¹¹Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 263.
¹²“The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony” (1549), in *The Book of Common Prayer*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 64, spelling modernized. These words and this order remained unchanged in the 1559 and 1662 editions (pp. 157, 435). Some early Puritan works on marriage maintained this order, but the Puritans gradually moved the third purpose to first place, as was codified in the 1640s by the Westminster divines in the Confession of Faith (24.2). Later Puritans focused more on the Genesis 2:18 mandate for marriage (“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him”) than on the Genesis 1:28 command to be fruitful and multiply. The Dutch Reformed liturgy of the late sixteenth century had already adopted the same order, though more descriptively: “The first reason is that each faithfully assist the other in all things that belong to this life and a better. Secondly, that they bring up the children which the Lord shall give them, in the true knowledge and fear of God, to His glory, and their salvation. Third, that each of them avoiding all uncleanness and evil lusts, may live with a good and quiet conscience” (*Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order*, 156). Cf. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 48.
¹³Ibid., 2:29.
¹⁴Ibid., 2:29.

¹⁵ Ibid., 2:30.
¹⁶ Ibid., 1:51.
¹⁷ Ibid., 1:51–52.
¹⁸ Ibid., 1:155–56, emphasis original.
¹⁹ Ibid., 2:102.
²⁰ Ibid., 2:82–84.



GOD'S PRINCIPLES FOR MARRIAGE

The Puritans often spoke of “duties,” and Gouge was no exception. By “duty” he did not mean something done out of mere obligation and without heartfelt joy. We must serve the Lord with gladness (Ps. 100:2). But the word *duty* does remind us that God’s will is not just a principle for successful living or personal fulfillment; it is God’s command and our responsibility. Like most Puritans, Gouge treated the duties of marriage in three sections: (i) mutual duties, (ii) the husband’s duties, and (iii) the wife’s duties. I will present four principles from the first section on mutual duties, then briefly summarize the particular duties of husbands and wives.

(i) *Mutual duties*

1. *Guard the oneness of your marriage.* The Author of marriage is God, and by his ordinance he makes two people into “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Gouge called this “matrimonial unity,” and said that “they two who are thereby made one, [are] constantly to remain one, and not to make themselves two again.” He quoted 1 Corinthians 7:10–11: “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.”²¹

Husbands and wives should stay together, not only in the legal bond in marriage, but actually sharing life as they dwell together (1 Pet. 3:7). At times, “weighty and urgent affairs” of church or state require absences, or one’s occupation takes one away on travels for a time. But such separations should be received with sadness, and the couple should quickly return to share the same home and the same bed. The first step to helping each other is being with each other.²²

2. *Enjoy the sexual purity of your marriage.* Gouge called this “matrimonial chastity,” for the Puritans regarded as chastity not only single people abstaining from sex, but also married people enjoying sexual intimacy with their spouses (1 Cor. 7:2–4; Heb. 13:4).²³ Adultery was a horrendous crime against the marital covenant, and Gouge condemned it in both men and women.²⁴ To avoid this, Gouge urged spouses to give each other “due benevolence,” which was a euphemism for sexual love. He wrote:

One of the best remedies that can be prescribed to married persons

(next to an awful fear of God, and a continual setting of Him before them, wherever they are) is, that husband and wife mutually delight each in each other, and maintain a pure and fervent love between themselves, yielding that due benevolence to one another which is warranted and sanctified by God’s word, and ordained of God for this particular end. This ‘due benevolence’ (as the apostle calls it [1 Cor 7:3]) is one of the most proper and essential acts of marriage: and necessary for the main and principal ends of it.²⁵

This teaching was revolutionary in its day. Marriage and especially sex had fallen under a dark cloud in the early church. Such notables as Tertullian, Ambrose, and Jerome believed that, even within marriage, intercourse necessarily involved sin.²⁶ This attitude inevitably led to the glorification of virginity and celibacy. By the fifth century, clerics were prohibited from marrying.²⁷ The archbishop of Canterbury wrote in the seventh century that a husband should

“The first step to helping each other is being with each other.”

²¹Ibid., 2:35.

²²Ibid., 2:56–57.

²³Ibid., 2:37.

²⁴Ibid., 2:39–40.

²⁵Ibid., 2:44.

²⁶Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 261.

²⁷Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 40.

never see his wife naked and that sex was forbidden on Sundays, for three days before taking Communion, and for forty days before Easter.²⁸ Tragically, romance became linked to mistresses and adultery, not marriage.²⁹

Puritan preachers taught that the Roman Catholic view was unbiblical, even satanic. They cited Paul, who said that the prohibition of marriage is a doctrine of devils (1 Tim. 4:1–3).³⁰

The Puritans viewed sexual intimacy within marriage as a gift of God and as an essential, enjoyable part of marriage. Gouge said that husbands and wives should make love “with good will and delight, willingly, readily, and cheerfully.”³¹ However, the couple’s sexual life should be tempered in measure and timing by proper concern for each other’s piety, weakness, or illness.³²

The ideal of marriage as romantic companionship was a far greater revolutionary concept in Puritan teaching than is often realized today. Herbert W. Richardson writes that “the rise of romantic marriage and its validation by the Puritans represents a major innovation within the Christian tradition.”³³ And C. S. Lewis says that we largely owe to the Puritans “the conversion of courtly love into romantic monogamous love.”³⁴

3. *Love your spouse and live in harmony.* This is commanded of husbands in Ephesians 5:25 and of wives in Titus 2:4. Gouge wrote: “A loving mutual affection must pass between husband and wife, or else no duty will be well performed. This is the ground of all the rest.”³⁵ Each should cherish the other as a special gift from God’s mercy.³⁶ Each should seek to maintain peace with the other so that they may live together in harmony (Heb. 12:14). To your spouse you should be like a haven in a storm-tossed world: “If the haven be calm, and free from storms and tempests, what a refreshing it will be to the mariner that has been tossed in the sea with winds and waves!”³⁷ But he warned, “Discord between man and wife in a house is as contention between the master and pilot in a ship” — extremely dangerous to both.³⁸

Gouge said that your spouse is your “companion.”³⁹ He wrote: “Neither friend, nor child, nor parent ought so to be loved as a wife. She is termed, ‘the wife of his bosom’ (Deut 13:6), to show that she ought to be as his heart in his bosom. . . . [She is] nearer than sister, mother, daughter, friend, or any other whoever.”⁴⁰

4. *Build up each other’s souls with prayer.* Spouses must seek the good of each other’s

souls.⁴¹ Gouge wrote, “Prayer is a mutual duty which one owes to the other, which Isaac performed for his wife” (Gen. 25:21). He counseled married couples to pray together in private, lifting up requests to God that they would be “one spirit” just as they are one flesh, “that their hearts may be as one, knit together by a true, spiritual, matrimonial love, always delighting one in another, ever helpful to one another, and ready with all willingness and cheerfulness to perform all those duties which they owe to one another.” They should pray for God to sanctify their sexual life, give them children, save their children, provide their family’s financial needs, and fill them with all the gifts and spiritual graces they need.⁴²

Gouge went on to give instructions about spouses helping each other to overcome temptation and grow spiritually. They must pray for one another, compliment one another, appreciate one another, and “keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace” with one another. They must not speak harshly to or provoke each other, but must show kindness to each other and overlook each other’s minor faults. They must cultivate true friendship and take an interest in each other. They must be sympathetic to each other in times of distress, sickness, and weakness. They must promote each other’s reputation, never speaking ill of each other in the presence of others. They must be confidential, not revealing each other’s secrets. Finally, Gouge exhorted them to care for each other’s physical needs, to manage their possessions well, to share their oversight

of the household, and to work together to serve others in hospitality and benevolence to the poor.⁴³

And these are only the mutual duties — I have not even mentioned the specific duties of the wife and of the husband! In these areas, too, Gouge presents us with a number of striking thoughts. I shall be very brief in summarizing them.

(ii–iii) Duties of husbands and wives

Husbands should delight in their wives (Prov. 5:18–19), esteeming them, respecting them, and seeking to please them, even to the point that others consider it “doting.” Husbands should not allow blemishes in their wives to slacken their affection for them, either. Gouge said, “If a man have a wife, not very beautiful or proper, but having some deformity in her body, some imperfection in speech, sight, gesture, or any part of her body,” he ought yet be so affectionate to her, “and delight in her, as if she were the most beautiful and in every way the most perfect woman in the world.”⁴⁴

Then, too, a husband must provide for his wife in sickness and in health. He must particularly assist her when she is pregnant.⁴⁵ He must bestow favors, kindnesses, and gifts on her. He must never strike her or abuse her verbally or physically. At times, a husband might reprove his wife, but only in tender love and always to steer her away from sin. Reproofs, however, should be rare and administered in private with humility — never when his wife is

²⁸Theodore of Tarsus (602–690), cited in Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality From Earliest Times to 1700* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 43.
²⁹William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Harper, 1957), 122.
³⁰Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 42.
³¹Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:44.
³²*Ibid.*, 2:46.
³³Herbert W. Richardson, *Nun, Witch, Playmate: The Americanization of Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 69.
³⁴C. S. Lewis, “Donne and Love Poetry in the Seventeenth Century,” in *Seventeenth Century Studies Presented to Sir Herbert Grierson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 75.
³⁵Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:47.
³⁶*Ibid.*, 2:48–50.
³⁷*Ibid.*, 2:52.
³⁸*Ibid.*, 2:54.
³⁹*Ibid.*, 2:188.
⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 2:181.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 2:61.
⁴²*Ibid.*, 2:62.
⁴³*Ibid.*, 2:73–81.
⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 2:194.
⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 2:241–42.

angry.⁴⁶ Finally, a husband must accept the functions that his wife performs. He must show his acceptance by his gratitude, by not demanding too much from her, and by giving her freedom to manage the affairs of the home. He must do all this cheerfully and tenderly.⁴⁷

In addition to showing submission and reverence to her husband and fulfilling mutual marital duties, a wife has numerous unique responsibilities. She should be content with her husband's work, social standing, and financial status. Her conversations with him should also show respect, and she should be willing to move to "dwell where her husband will have her dwell."

Then, too, she should manage the affairs of the household effectively (Proverbs 31). As a helpmeet for her husband (Gen. 2:18), she should assist him in a variety of ways, showing wise leadership skills in the home, understanding clearly in what areas she should dialogue with her husband and ask for his consent and in what areas she has liberty to manage on her own. Such management includes helping her husband establish Christ's kingdom in their home as a little church; being thrifty without being miserly; consistently persevering in completing her duties; and handling herself with sobriety, mildness, courtesy, obeisance, and modesty, as the Bible commands.⁴⁸

In summary, Gouge presented a remarkably insightful treatment of the beauty and glory of Christian marriage. His vision for matrimony was holistic and practical, yet very much centered around the Lord.

Husbands and wives have different roles, but do not live on separate levels. Instead they live together as companions and coworkers for the glory of God, for the good of each other, and for the good of others, especially their children.

GOUGE ON THE BEAUTY AND GLORY OF RAISING CHILDREN

The Christian's relationship with his family is inseparable from personal sanctification, according to the Puritans. The Scriptures set forth the ways in which we are to live righteously, and since the Bible takes great pains to teach how parents and children should relate to one another, these relationships are an index of sanctification. So it is of primary importance that Christians recognize that holiness and the beauty of Christian living begin at home and then extend to all of life.

While most Puritans believed that the primary purpose of marriage was companionship, they also believed that having children was an expected consequence of marital love. Children were seen as blessings of the Lord. And apparently they were blessings that the Lord bestowed frequently and abundantly. Puritan families were large, with an average of seven or eight children. The infant mortality rate was also very high, however. Typically, of all the children born in a family, only half reached adulthood.

The Puritans were keenly aware that children were a tremendous responsibility, viewing their families as nurseries for church and

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society. Parents were expected to do everything possible to make sure their children conformed to biblical norms and precepts, especially the commandment to obey their parents.

The taproot of Puritan teaching on parents and children was the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12), which Paul quotes in his instructions to households in Ephesians 6:1–4: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

In Gouge's application of Paul's words to the Ephesians, he devoted well over

a hundred pages in volume three to the relationships between children and parents. Let me give you a taste of his teaching by addressing the spirit of parenting and the tasks of parenting.

THE SPIRIT OF PARENTING: AUTHORITY AND LOVE

Gouge traced out the essence of parenting in terms of authority and love. He taught that parents must raise their children with a mixture of “authority and affection,” which moves children to respond with childlike “fear” and “love.” He compared it to cooking with both sugar and salt: both are needed for a tasty meal lest it be too sweet or bitter.⁴⁹ A child's love is a response to his parent's affection for him; like the

⁴⁶Ibid., 2:215–24.
⁴⁷Ibid., 2:196–236.
⁴⁸Ibid., 2:98–179.

⁴⁹Ibid., 3:3*. The * indicates the page number is from the partially edited Word document, not the edited and typeset edition, which is not yet published.

sun shining on a stone, “so the hot beams of parents’ love” shining constantly should warm their children to reflect love back.⁵⁰ By fear, he did not mean dread or terror that drives a child away, but a high esteem with a sincere desire to please the parents and hatred of offending them.⁵¹

God calls both the father and the mother to this noble task, and invests both parents with proper authority to exercise it. The father has first place in the family, both in “dignity” and “duty,” because he is the head of the household (Eph. 5:23).⁵² But that does not make the wife into a servant in the home. Gouge noted that the fifth commandment requires honoring both “father and mother,” and taught that children owe “equal respect” to both parents.⁵³ He wrote, “Though there is a difference between father and mother in relation of one to another, in relation to their children they are both as one, and have a like authority over them.”⁵⁴

This reverent respect should lead children to restrain their own talking around their parents (Job 29:9–10) and to listen patiently when their parents speak (Job 29:21). They must not be insolent, complain, or slink away before their parents have finished speaking.⁵⁵ Gouge noted that the Greek word for “obey” in Ephesians 6:1 means “to listen with humble submission.”⁵⁶ When children speak to their parents, they should use respectful titles such as “Father” and

“Mother”; speak humbly, briefly, and with their parents’ permission; not interrupt their parents’ work or conversations; and give a ready answer when their parents ask a question.⁵⁷ Honoring their father and their mother also means speaking respectfully about them when they are not present and not slandering them.⁵⁸

The Puritans understood that Christian obedience must come from the heart, but they also understood that the “disposition of the heart” shows itself in “action.” So Gouge expected children to honor their parents in posture, gestures, and facial expressions.⁵⁹ They must not be rude to their father and mother.⁶⁰ Of course, Ephesians 6:1 requires children to obey their parents, and Gouge spent more than twenty pages discussing how they should not do what their parents have not given them permission to do, and how they should listen to what their parents command.⁶¹

All their obedience is governed by the phrase “in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1), which “puts forth a limitation, direction, and motivation”: limiting children’s obedience by the laws of Christ, directing them to obey their parents with “an eye to Christ,” and motivating them by the fact that their parents exercise authority as those who “bear the image of Christ.”⁶²

Parents do not merely rule; they serve God. Fathers and mothers must likewise remember that they “are as well bound to duty as children.” Gouge explained, “Though parents are over their children and cannot be commanded by them, they are under God.”⁶³ Someone might object that the fifth commandment addresses only children and lays no duties on parents when it says, “Honor thy father and thy mother.” Gouge replied that the law implies obligation on the parents by “good and necessary consequence,” for “they who have honor must carry themselves worthy of honor.”⁶⁴

Though parental authority is the skeleton and backbone that structures the raising of children, the living flesh and blood of parenting is love. Gouge said that the “fountain” or source of all that parents should do must be “love.” Titus 2:4 urges that young women be trained “to love their children.” The Lord said to Abraham, “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, *whom thou lovest*” (Gen. 22:2, emphasis added). The work of a father and mother costs them much labor, money, and care, but if they love their children, nothing seems too much. God has planted love for children in parents by nature, and Christians should fan this fire into flame.⁶⁵ Out of the fountain of parental love flow many streams, and this brings us to consider the tasks of parenting.

THE TASKS OF PARENTING: PROVIDENT CARE OF BODY AND SOUL

Paul commands fathers to “bring up” their children (Eph. 6:4), which Gouge pointed out means “to feed or nourish with everything needed.” Yet the apostle immediately qualifies this with the words “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,” showing “that nurture and instruction are as necessary and profitable as food and clothing.”⁶⁶ Gouge placed the entire spectrum of a father’s and mother’s duties under the heading of “provident care for their children’s good.”⁶⁷ By “provident care,” he meant that parents not only meet the immediate needs of their children, but also look ahead and prepare them for their future both on earth and in eternity.⁶⁸

Out of the wealth of teaching Gouge offered, let me cull twelve tasks for parents.

1. *Pray for your children.* Gouge said that prayer “is the first and it is the last duty which parents ought to perform to their children.”⁶⁹ There is nothing parents can do for their children that does them more good than prayer. They should pray before their children are born (Gen. 25:21; 1 Sam. 1:10) and all their lives (Job 1:5), for children are conceived in sin, but the Lord is a covenant-keeping God who loves to bless the children of believers.⁷⁰

⁵⁰Ibid., 3:4*.

⁵¹Ibid., 3:4*.

⁵²Ibid., 1:33.

⁵³Ibid., 3:51*.

⁵⁴Ibid., 3:52*.

⁵⁵Ibid., 3:6*.

⁵⁶Ibid., 1:161.

⁵⁷Ibid., 3:7–8*.

⁵⁸Ibid., 3:9*.

⁵⁹Ibid., 3:10*.

⁶⁰Ibid., 3:12*.

⁶¹Ibid., 3:15–37*.

⁶²Ibid., 1:162.

⁶³Ibid., 1:185.

⁶⁴Ibid., 1:185–86.

⁶⁵Ibid., 3:64*.

⁶⁶Ibid., 1:189–90.

⁶⁷Ibid., 3:69*.

⁶⁸Ibid., 1:180.

⁶⁹Ibid., 3:66*.

⁷⁰Ibid., 3:66*.

“Gouge said that prayer ‘is the first and it is the last duty which parents ought to perform to their children.’ There is nothing parents can do for their children that does them more good than prayer.”

2. *Walk in godliness for God’s blessing on your children.* Gouge noted that part of God’s reward to righteous people is a blessing on their children. Psalm 112:2 says, “His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed.” We cannot save our children by our faith, but many blessings, earthly and spiritual, come to the offspring of the righteous.⁷¹

3. *Care for your children in the womb.* Gouge urged the pregnant woman to “have

a special care” for her child as soon as she knows that she is pregnant. Fathers “must be tender over their wives, and helpful to them in all things needful” when they are with child. He warned that those who intentionally kill a child in the womb are “guilty of blood, even of willful murder,” for that child has a “soul formed in it by God.”⁷²

4. *Nurture your children in infancy.* Here Gouge admitted, “What the particulars are women better know than I can express.”⁷³

⁷¹Ibid., 3:67*.

⁷²Ibid., 3:70*.

⁷³Ibid., 3:71*.



Interestingly, he made an extended argument that mothers should breastfeed their own children rather than give them to others to nurse.⁷⁴

5. *Have your children baptized.* Gouge did not believe that baptism had any inherent power to save sinners.⁷⁵ But he believed that God’s command that the men of Abraham’s household should circumcise their sons implied that Christians should have their children baptized (Gen. 17:10). Parents should see that their child is rightly baptized by a minister of the Word (Matt. 28:19).⁷⁶ In baptism, Christian parents assume covenant responsibilities on behalf of their children. God, therefore, claims

these children as his own; parents are stewards of their children on God’s behalf.

6. *Provide your children with necessities for health.* He specifically mentioned food, clothing, medical care, and recreation — the last of which is notable because some people think the Puritans were against all kinds of fun. On the contrary, Gouge noted that the prophet Zechariah rejoices over a vision of “boys and girls playing” (8:5).⁷⁷ However, Gouge also noted Proverbs 27:7, “The full soul loatheth an honeycomb,” and warned that too much food, fancy clothing, pampering, or play time weakens both body and mind, and traps children in immaturity.⁷⁸

⁷⁴Ibid., 3:72*.

⁷⁵Ibid., 1:69–79.

⁷⁶Ibid., 3:82–83*.

⁷⁷Ibid., 3:88*.

⁷⁸Ibid., 3:89*.

7. *Give your children a good moral education.* He wrote, “Learning would much sharpen their wits. . . . Good education is better than a great portion.”⁷⁹ By education, he meant training a child how to order the whole course of his life. Part of this is training in “good manners,” the outward beauty of a well-ordered life. Gouge had no illusions that good manners could save a person or substitute for inward grace. But he also believed that rudeness and a lack of courtesy and kindness were not consistent with grace.⁸⁰

8. *Give your children a good vocational education.* Another part of education for Gouge was preparing a child for “a good calling,” that is, a vocation or honest means to support himself and his family, help the poor, serve his society, and avoid a wasted life.⁸¹ This requires education in fundamentals such as reading and writing, and preparation for a kind of work approved by the general principles of God’s Word. Here parents must find the calling for which their child is best equipped in body and mind — not just to make a lot of money, but to glorify God.⁸²

9. *Train your children in godliness.* Gouge said that Ephesians 6:4 mandates training in “true piety” with the words “in the . . . admonition of the Lord.” He wrote, “Learning, civility, calling, portion, are all nothing without piety.”⁸³ Fathers have a

special responsibility to maintain family devotions so that the family prays, sings psalms, and reads the Word together. They are to teach the Bible with “forceful and frequent” applications “to fix and settle them in the mind of their children.”⁸⁴ Children are not born Christians, but with hearts already totally inclined to evil (Gen. 6:5; Job 11:12). Parents should not say, “That is the minister’s job,” because God explicitly commands them in Deuteronomy 6:7, “thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children.” The parent is “a king, a priest, and a prophet” for children in the home, and who knows children better than their own parents?⁸⁵ Teach them with daily catechism, real life, and your example.⁸⁶

10. *Discipline your children with rebuke and the rod.* This, Gouge pointed out, is what the word *nurture* in Ephesians 6:4 means: correction with instruction. Discipline must be neither too strict nor too slack, for, he said, “slackness will make children careless of all duty to God and parent; rigor will make them despair.”⁸⁷ If verbal reproof is ineffective, the rod must be used as “a means appointed by God,” Gouge said, “to help good nurture and education of children. It is the last remedy that a parent can use: a remedy which may do good when nothing else can.”⁸⁸ Spanking of young children must be measured according to the offense

committed, however, and must be done in a timely manner, with love, compassion, prayer, and self-control.⁸⁹ Love in no way contradicts the parents’ calling to exercise authority over their children. The opposite is true: parents do good to their children by training them to obey, for God promises to bless obedient children (Eph. 6:3).⁹⁰

11. *Provide your children with the means to get started in their vocations and families.* Parents should save up for their children (2 Cor. 12:14) so that when they become young adults, they can give them help to launch out into life (Gen. 25:5–6).⁹¹

12. *Help your children find good spouses.* Though our present culture would make marriage a matter primarily of individual romance, Gouge reminded us that in Scripture parents bear a responsibility for the marriages of their children (Gen. 24:4; Jer. 29:6). They must help them find spouses well-suited for them (Gen. 2:18). He did not believe that children should marry without their parents’ blessing, but also did not think parents should force a child to marry someone. Marriage requires “a mutual liking” so that “the parties may willingly with mutual consent join themselves together.”⁹²

Christian parents were to help their young people select a suitable mate for life by considering five major criteria: (1) Would the proposed spouse walk with their son or daughter with wisdom and genuine godliness in marriage? Such qualities were necessary for the marriage to be “in the

Lord.” (2) Would the proposed spouse fit the biblical description of what a marriage partner is to be? Did the proposed husband have good leadership skills and a loving demeanor? Did the proposed wife show submission and reverence to her own father? A biblical mindset about marriage and a character that reflected that mindset was of utmost importance. (3) Was the proposed spouse mature and properly motivated for entering into marriage? It was necessary to avoid marrying out of wrong motivations, such as the love of money or power. (4) Was the proposed spouse fairly equal to their son or daughter in terms of class and financial resources? It was necessary to avoid being “unequally yoked” culturally and socially, because people did not change classes often or easily three centuries ago. (5) Was the proposed spouse somewhat attractive in the eyes of their son or daughter? It was felt that there should be at least some romantic spark to begin with, though the Puritans taught that most romance would develop after marriage. Note that appearance was the last and least matter to be concerned about; marriages were to be built more on character than on appearance.

CONCLUSION

Though the Puritans did not worship the family, they recognized the central place of the family in God’s plans for his glory and for the beauty and glory of Christian living. Gouge said, “A family is a little church and a little nation”; in the family are trained the Christians, citizens, officers, and officials of the future.⁹³ Though we should

⁷⁹Ibid., 3:90*.

⁸⁰Ibid., 3:91–93*.

⁸¹Ibid., 3:93–94*.

⁸²Ibid., 3:95–96*.

⁸³Ibid., 3:97*.

⁸⁴Ibid., 1:191.

⁸⁵Ibid., 3:97–98*. For practical tips on parenting under the offices of Christ, see Joel R. Beeke, *Parenting by God’s Promises: How to Raise Children in the Covenant of Grace* (Orlando, Fla.: Reformation Trust, 2011), chaps. 6–14.

⁸⁶Ibid., 3:99–101*.

⁸⁷Ibid., 1:190–91.

⁸⁸Ibid., 3:195*.

⁸⁹Ibid., 3:107–116*.

⁹⁰Ibid., 1:180.

⁹¹Ibid., 3:122*.

⁹²Ibid., 3:119–20*.

⁹³Ibid., 1:20.



“the Bible’s call to build a godly home also comes to us as gospel — good news.”

not follow them slavishly, the Puritans can help us regain the biblical vision for a godly home. In a demonized culture, they help us to see the essential goodness of all that God has created (1 Tim. 4:1–4). In a secularized culture, their words call us to sanctify our marriages and family life by filling them with thanksgiving, the Word of God, and prayer (1 Tim. 4:4–5). In a hyper-sexualized culture, they help us to rebuild the structures of marital sexuality and gender differences so that men and women can flourish in masculinity and femininity. In an anti-authoritarian culture, the Puritans show how authority enables love and honors God.

In many ways, the biblical vision for marriage and raising children comes to us as law. It reveals our sins, uncovers the rebellion of our hearts, humbles us for our wickedness, and displays the justice of God, who rightly condemns those who reject his beautiful, righteous ways.

However, the Bible’s call to build a godly home also comes to us as gospel — good news. The best of husbands is but a shadow of Jesus Christ, who loved his people in their uncleanness and gave himself to wash away their guilt and to purify their

lives. The most submissive of wives is but an instance of the great beauty of the true church, which humbly trusts and obeys Jesus as her Lord and Savior. The wisest of parents is a tiny image of the Father in heaven, who adopts sinners into his family and trains them with Word and suffering for eternal life in glory.

You see, the biblical family is ultimately about God’s grace for sinners. It calls us to trust in a gracious Savior and to turn from all that has controlled us to follow him. You cannot build a godly family merely by scriptural teaching plus human willpower. You can walk in this path only by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone, and for the glory of God alone. As Gouge said so beautifully, “Sanctification is not a cause, but an effect of Christ’s love, and follows after His love.”⁹⁴ May the love of Christ penetrate your soul, fill your whole being, and transform all your relationships — including those in your own home — so that the beauty and glory of Christian living may shine in your marriage and your family to God’s superlative glory. ✕

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⁹⁴Ibid., 1:63.

Indicatives, Imperatives, and Applications: Reflections on Natural, Biblical, and Cultural Complementarianism

As complementarians, we believe that both men and women are made in God’s image, and that God has designed us in distinct and complementary ways for his glory and our good. My aim in this article is to provide a framework for conceiving, celebrating, and expressing our complementarian convictions that weaves together nature, Scripture, and culture; or indicatives (statements of fact), imperatives (commands and exhortations about duties and responsibilities), and applications (wise extensions of biblical principles into new circumstances).

In offering this framework, I will make reference to a number of relevant passages in the Scriptures. I do not, however, intend

to offer extended exegesis of these passages; that important work has been done elsewhere. Instead, my goal is to set forth a basic framework for linking together God’s world, God’s word, and our place within it as men and women.

The framework consists of three basic statements.

1. God’s acts establish basic facts (indicative).
2. God’s commands fit those facts (imperative).
3. Our applications ought to fit those facts and those commands (application).

I. GOD’S ACTS ESTABLISH BASIC FACTS.

Here we see the indicatives. Indicatives are statements of fact, statements about what *is*. And I have three kinds of facts in mind: facts of creation, facts of nature, and facts of redemption.

By facts of creation, I have in mind certain facts about humanity, established by God when he created Adam and Eve, revealed in Genesis 1–3, and echoed throughout the Bible. These are primal and original facts. One example of a primal fact of creation is male headship.

Many biblical scholars have noted that the early chapters of Genesis teach that men are the head of their homes. This teaching is revealed through the several primal facts of creation that are picked up, echoed, and appealed to throughout the

Bible. Here are some examples:

1. Adam was created first;
2. Adam is the name of the human race;
3. Woman is created from Adam’s side as a helper
4. Adam names the woman;
5. God gives Adam the moral design for the garden prior to Eve’s creation, implying that he was to instruct her;
6. God holds Adam fundamentally responsible for the first transgression.

I’m calling these facts of creation. And God’s acts in creation establish these facts of creation.

By “facts of nature,” I have in mind those recurring aspects of humanity that are



evident by means of general or natural revelation. We often refer to this simply as “nature,” or natural law, or divine design. Facts of creation are things that we learn from the Bible about God’s original creation of the world. Facts of nature are things that we learn from the world around us; nature refers to God’s design and purpose embedded in his creatures and evident to all people. Nature includes two elements: 1) the fundamental facts about what we are, as well as 2) the built-in tendencies and traits that emerge from and serve those fundamental facts.

Both of these are important. The latter refer to the various physical, psychological, and social traits and tendencies of men and women. Things like, “Men, in general, are taller and stronger than women;” or “Women, in general, are more people-oriented, whereas men, in general, are more thing- or task-oriented;” or “Men are typically more aggressive and competitive than women;” or “Women typically tend to excel in verbal and linguistic skills, whereas men typically tend to excel in mathematical and spatial skills,” all of which are relative to each other.

Now these sexually differentiated traits and tendencies are important and are part of what I mean by “nature.” But when it comes to rooting complementarianism in these traits and tendencies, we run into what I call “the bell curve problem.” Put simply, while these tendencies are real as traits and tendencies, they are not universally true for all men and women. Some women are taller than most men. Some men are as people- and relationally-oriented as any woman. There are excellent male poets and excellent female mathematicians. In other words, while natural, gendered traits and tendencies are

real, especially if we look at men and women as groups, they are not universally true of every individual man or woman.

Thus, while these tendencies are useful as a guide and do help us understand the rationale beneath some biblical commands, when we use the word “nature,” we need to refer to something more basic and objective than merely these traits and tendencies. That’s what I mean by the fundamental facts about what we are as human beings. Here are some of the fundamental facts I have in mind:

Each human being is either male or female, a man or woman made in God’s image and for his purposes.

Concurrent with this fundamental identity as one of God’s creatures, each of us is the son or daughter of human parents (with the exception of Adam and Eve).

To be a son is to be a potential father. To be a daughter is to be a potential mother. This potency is present and real, regardless of biological irregularities and regardless of whether we actually beget or bear biological children. As a man, I am designed, directed, and ordered to the end or *telos* of fatherhood. That’s what it means to be a man.

These fundamental, perennial facts about human beings are the foundation of the natural family. We carry our identity as sexually differentiated men and women into every relationship within the natural family (and beyond).

“To summarize these perennial facts of nature, our identity as human beings is indelibly relational.”

POSSIBLE MALE RELATIONSHIPS	POSSIBLE FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS
Husband to wife	Wife to husband
Father to son	Mother to son
Father to daughter	Mother to daughter
Son to father	Daughter to father
Son to mother	Daughter to mother
Brother to brother	Sister to brother
Brother to sister	Sister to sister

Crucially, our sexual differentiation makes a real but somewhat elusive difference in these various relationships. A father relates to a son differently than he does to a daughter. A sister relates to a sister differently than she does to a brother. And so on.

To summarize these perennial facts of nature, our identity as human beings is indelibly relational. In relation to God, each of us is a creature. In relation to the rest of creation, each of us is human, an embodied image bearer of our Maker. As his creatures, each of us is male or female, a man or a woman. In relation to our parents, each of us is a son or daughter. As a son or daughter, each of us is a potential father or potential mother, a potential brother or potential sister. These are fundamental, objective, and unchanging facts about each of us as human beings. And the sexually-differentiated traits and tendencies, clustered along a bell curve, emerge from and serve these more basic, perennial facts about us as humans.

Finally, by facts of redemption, I simply mean the gospel of Jesus Christ by which we are saved and which is revealed to us in the Scriptures. For example, God's redemptive act in Christ establishes a relation between Christ and his people which functions as a pattern for certain human relationships (husband-wife).

Thus, again, God's acts establish basic facts — facts of creation, facts of nature, and facts of redemption.

II. GOD'S COMMANDS FIT THESE FACTS.

Divine imperatives fit these divine indicatives — the primal, the perennial, and the redemptive. Introducing the notion of fitness communicates that we are not dealing with "bare" facts, but with facts as a fixed pattern or reality to which God's commands and our behavior can conform. What we do ought to fit what we are. Since we are dealing with biblical commands, we are talking about moral fitness. God's commands conform to the pattern that he has established in creation, nature, and redemption.

Consider 1 Timothy 2:11–12. "I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."

Paul's prohibition of a woman teaching and exercising authority in the assembly is rooted in two primal facts: Adam was created first, and Eve was deceived (not Adam). That prohibition fits those facts. There are reasons beneath the rules.

Now in this article, I do not have time to

unpack that logic; that is your homework. I am simply drawing attention to the framework and structure of that passage.

Or we can think of Paul in Colossians 3, where he says, "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." There is a harmony and fitness between a wife's submission and who she is as a woman in Christ.

I believe this fitness is unpacked for us in the parallel passage in Ephesians 5:22–25:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Here we have both facts and commands, indicatives and imperatives. The husband is the head of his wife. The wife is the body of her husband. Christ is the head of the church, his body, which acts as a redemptive pattern to which we conform. These are facts. Then, wives are called to submit to their husbands; husbands are called to love their wives. These are commands. And the commands fit the facts. The imperatives fit the indicatives.

Allow me to underscore this point: Paul regards a husband's headship as a fact, an indicative, not an imperative. Let me say it again: male headship is an indicative, not an imperative. This is why we ought not exhort husbands to *be* the head of their wives. Instead, we ought to stress that

they *are* the head of their wives, whether they want to be or not. I stress this in every wedding homily that I do: "God is not calling you to be the head; you are the head. The only question is whether you will be an unfaithful head, like Adam, or faithful head, like Christ." Headship is a given. It may be a domineering headship; it may be an absentee headship. It may be a strong, sacrificial headship. But one way or another, the husband is the head.

This leads me to a parenthetical note: I do not think we should summarize the biblical teaching on marriage under the banner of "headship and submission." As we see here, that is a category confusion, combining the husband's indicative and the wife's imperative. Instead, I think we would do well to distinguish the indicatives and imperatives, and link them appropriately. The husband is the head; the wife is the body. Or, if we want to draw in 1 Corinthians 11: he is her head; she is his glory. Headship and Gloryhood (to coin a term): these are basic facts, specially revealed in the Bible, from which flow the appropriate imperatives: love like Christ; submit like the church. Cherish like Christ; honor and respect like the church.

Speaking of 1 Corinthians 11, that passage is filled with an interplay between primal facts of creation and perennial facts of nature, on the one hand, and certain fitting actions and behaviors in corporate worship on the other. Specifically, Paul first highlights a fundamental order in reality: "I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor 11:3). This sacred order, or hierarchy, is not reversible.

Christ is not the head of God. Man is not the head of Christ. A wife is not the head of her husband.

Second, Paul recalls the language of Genesis 1–2 when he says that man "is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man" (1 Cor 11:7). Paul explains the last phrase by highlighting two primal facts of creation about woman in Genesis 2. Woman was made out of man, and woman was made for man. She was built from man's side, and she was built to be man's helper.

These two primal facts mean that he is her head and she is his glory. This does not mean that she is lesser or deficient; she too is made in God's image, and as the glory of the man, she is the glory of the glory. In biblical thinking, the fact that woman is man's glory does not diminish her, any more than the fact that Christ is the radiance of God's glory diminishes him (Heb 1:3). Nevertheless, because Eve was built from Adam's side and as a helper for Adam in his call to work and keep the garden, woman is man's glory, and she should reflect this fundamental fact of nature in how she worships in public.

Third, man's headship and woman's gloryhood entail a mutual dependence upon each other. It is not good for man to be alone. It is not good for woman to be alone. Our differences are not merely differences *from* each other, but they are actually differences *for* each other. The sacred order of man and woman includes a profound interdependence.

Paul demonstrates this mutual dependence by juxtaposing woman's primal origin (from Gen 2) with man's perennial origin

"Again, God's acts establish basic facts (of creation, nature, and redemption), and God's commands fit those facts."

as born from a woman: "As woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman" (1 Cor 11:12). The original woman was built from the side of the first man. Since then, every man has come into this world through a woman. These two basic facts — one primal fact of creation and one perennial fact of nature — are loaded with symbolic significance that highlights our mutual need for each other.

So 1 Corinthians teaches these facts of nature: (1) There is a sacred order in reality, stretching from God to Christ to man to woman. (2) Man is head, and woman is glory since she was made from man and for man. (3) As head and glory, there is a mutual dependence between men and women, witnessed in Scripture's account of our origins and testified to in every birth. (4) These facts of creation and nature ought to guide and direct us as we seek to offer acceptable worship to God.

I highlight the issue of fitness because it is a significant discussion in our day, even among self-professed complementarians. Some complementarians say things like, "We do not know why God says that husbands are the head of their home, and wives should submit, and only men are able

to be pastors. But the Bible says it, so we will do it." Now, obedience is better than disobedience. But obeying because God says so without understanding the reasons beneath the rules is an immature obedience. And that sort of immature obedience can begin to regard God's commands as arbitrary and perhaps even irrational, and thus that kind of obedience is difficult to sustain. And so mature obedience is better than immature obedience. Mature obedience recognizes that the commands of God are not arbitrary; they are fitting. There are reasons beneath the rules, and we should know and love the reasons beneath the rules so that we can joyfully and gladly and perseveringly obey the Lord Jesus.

Again, God's acts establish basic facts (of creation, nature, and redemption), and God's commands fit those facts.

III. OUR APPLICATIONS OUGHT TO FIT THOSE FACTS AND THOSE COMMANDS.

In the same way that God's commands fit the basic facts that he established in creation, in nature, and in redemption, our own efforts to apply God's word in our own day should fit God's facts and

God's commands, his indicatives and his imperatives. Together, God's indicatives and imperatives, revealed in nature and Scripture, act as the pattern for our own application. Thus, here we are talking about culture.

Culture is the expression of nature (and for Christians, also of Scripture) in a particular time and place. It includes customs and traditions that testify to the basic facts and natural tendencies of our nature. As Steven Wedgworth notes, a custom is a prudential application of a natural law principle in a concrete setting.¹⁶ Thus, we use wisdom and prudence to steward our natural tendencies in a fitting and proper way as guided by God's inerrant word.

And this introduces another helpful distinction. Earlier we spoke of moral fitness between divine commands and the facts of creation, nature, and redemption beneath them. Here I think we should talk about prudential fitness between God's design as revealed in nature and Scripture and our own attempts to apply them in our context. Prudential fitness, as a category, allows for variation of form within a divinely defined range. It is why we can recognize a diversity of faithful expressions of nature and Scripture that differ based on cultural, historical, and ecclesiological context.

This is perhaps how we can understand the use of head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11. In the first century, head coverings were a culturally appropriate way (i.e. prudential fitness) of expressing the divine command for wives to honor their husbands, which itself fits the basic primal, perennial, and redemptive facts about

men and women as established by God. Or again, the head covering was a culturally appropriate way of maintaining and celebrating the goodness of God's design in nature and Scripture. So also we ought to find culturally recognizable ways of maintaining and celebrating the goodness of God's design in nature and Scripture.

What is more, prudential fitness is a way of conceiving of our attempts to apply our complementarian convictions beyond the home and the church. It allows for us to embody and express the basic primal, perennial, and redemptive facts about who we are as men and women, as governed, guided, and corrected by Scripture, in such a way that also takes into account other prudential factors — our history and traditions, the complexities and temptations of our modern technocratic society, and the particulars of our situation.

And this is especially difficult in the modern world. We struggle with the relative authority of customs and culture. For example, because we clearly see different customs and cultural expressions, we conclude that they are completely arbitrary. "Who is to say which is the correct way to salute, or the proper form of address, or whether we should wear hats indoors?" Because we rightly recognize the difference between nature and Scripture on the one hand, and culture on the other, we assume (wrongly) that culture is just relative and does not have any binding force upon us. We want clear and absolute laws in the Bible, or we want total individual freedom. We think that if something is culturally conditioned, anything goes. In other words, when it comes to customs, traditions, and culture, Americans are highly individualistic and

“Our aim as complementarians should be that we celebrate the harmony and fitness between nature, Scripture, and culture; between indicatives, imperatives, and applications”

relativistic. We substitute fashion (which is an individual choice rooted in market transactions) for custom (a communal practice or habit that endures over time). A second factor that makes it difficult for us to rightly understand customs and culture is the simple fact of mobility. Customs require stable communities — communities where people are born, grow up, live, and die, passing on the customs of their people from generation to generation. And modern communities are anything but stable.

Prudential fitness thus allows us to see the natural law principle beneath the biblical command (the reasons beneath the rules) so that we do not treat them as arbitrary, as well as to distinguish the natural or biblical principle at work, from the various cultural expressions that those principles might take (so that we do not make cultural applications into divine laws). It allows us to acknowledge the cultural dimension of our complementarian applications, while still insisting that these applications are rooted in God’s design in nature and Scripture.

CONCLUSION

- To conclude,
- I. God’s acts establish basic facts.
 - II. God’s commands fit those facts.
 - III. Our applications ought to fit those facts and those commands.

Our aim as complementarians should be that we celebrate the harmony and fitness between nature, Scripture, and culture; between indicatives, imperatives, and applications; between basic facts, divine commands, and cultural forms; so that the one voice of God in nature and Scripture is beautifully expressed in the harmonious and varied voices of wise and faithful cultural expressions. ✕

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The Power of the Two-Parent Home

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THE POWER OF THE TWO-PARENT HOME

Humanly speaking, there is nothing more important for personal well-being, positive social behavior, and general success in life than being raised by one's biological parents committed to each other in a stable marriage. Over the past forty years, a vast body of research has demonstrated conclusively that children are deeply affected by family structure and that married parents are best for children. Any efforts — whether governmental, educational, or ecclesiastical — that mean to encourage human flourishing must take this reality into account as both an explanation for many societal ills and as a means to the end of hoped-for societal health and vitality.

NOT A MYTH

Family life in America has changed dramatically in a relatively short period of time. In 1960, 73% of children lived with two parents in their first marriage. By 2014, less than half (46%) of children were living in this type of family. Conversely, the percentage of children living with a single parent rose from 9% in 1960 to 26% in 2014. An additional 7% of children now live with cohabiting parents. Moreover, the increase in non-traditional family arrangements has coincided with the decoupling of marriage and childbearing. In 1960, just 5% of all births occurred outside of marriage. By 2000, around 40% of all births occurred outside of marriage (a percentage that has held steady over the last twenty years). As of 2014, 29% of births to white women, 53% of births to Hispanic women, and 71% of births to black women were out-of-wedlock. In the span of only 60 years, what were once considered exceptional family circumstances have become the norm.¹

Given the changing portrait of the American family, it is not surprising that many people believe — or, given the uncomfortable prospect of implicitly judging others, feel compelled to say they believe — that there is no difference between one parent or two parents when it comes to raising children. According to one online survey, “more than 70% of participants believed that a single parent can do just as good a job as two parents.” Further, 60% of women “agreed that children do best with multiple adults invested and helping, but that two married parents are not necessary.”² Christina Cross, writing in the *New York Times*, went so far as to decry “The Myth of the Two-Parent Home,” citing evidence that black children in two-parent families still fare worse than white children in two-parent families.³ But Cross's argument fails to take into account how much better all children do in two-parent families

¹These figures were taken from Pew Research Center, December 17, 2015, “Parenting in America: Outlook, worries, aspirations are strongly linked to financial situation.”

²Cited in Alysse ElHage, “When it Comes to Child Well-Being, Is One Parent the Same as Two?” *Institute for Family Studies* (September 7, 2017).

³Christina Cross, “The Myth of the Two Parent Home,” *New York Times* (December 9, 2019).

compared to one-parent families of the same race. The percentage of white children living in poverty goes from 31% in families with only a mother, to 17% in families with only a father, all the way down to 5% in families with a married couple. The same percentages for black children go from 45% (mother-only), to 36% (father-only), to 12% (married couple). We can lament that black children in two-parent families are still 2.4 times more likely to be in poverty than white children (12% v. 5%), but we should also observe that white children raised by only a mother are 2.6 times as likely to be in poverty as black children raised by two parents (31% v. 12%). While there are still advantages to being white in this country, the much bigger advantage is being raised by two parents. It is better in America to be a black child raised by two parents than to be a white child in a one-parent home. The breakdown of the family is not a black problem; it is a problem wherever two-parent families decline and single-parent households become normalized.⁴

FAMILY STRUCTURE AND CHILD WELL-BEING

The conclusion that children raised by their biological, married parents do better, by almost every measure, has been proven in hundreds of studies over the last several decades.⁵

One of the best and most concise summaries of the academic literature comes from a policy brief published in 2003 by the

⁴These figures and this rebuttal to Cross come from Ian Rowe, "The Power of the Two-Parent Home Is Not a Myth," *Flypaper* (January 8, 2020). Rowe notes that the percentage of births to unmarried women has grown most rapidly in recent years among white women.

⁵The term "biological" is used to distinguish between adoptive parents and step-parents. Citing testimony from Nicholas Zill in 1995, the article referenced below from the Center for Law and Social Policy claims that "Adopted children have very similar outcomes to children raised by both biological parents" (n1). A new study, however, authored by Nicholas Zill and W. Bradford Wilcox concludes that adopted children, despite being placed with highly educated parents who have above-average incomes, exhibit more academic, behavioral, and mental health problems than children raised by their married biological parents. The last paragraph from the study is worth quoting in full: "There is little question that adopted children are better off than they would be in long-term foster or institutional care. At the same time, the survey data reveal the complex challenges adopted children face in overcoming the effects of early stress, deprivation, and the loss of the biological family. It is vital that current and potential adoptive parents be aware of the challenges they may face, as well as the eventual benefits that will accrue to them and the child as a result of the love and resources they provide and the struggles they endure." Nicholas Zill and W. Bradford Wilcox, "The Adoptive Difference: New Evidence on How Adopted Children Perform in School," *Institute for Family Studies* (March 26, 2018).

Center for Law and Social Policy.⁶ Citing a 1994 study by Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, the 2003 brief notes that children who do not live with both biological parents were roughly twice as likely to be poor, to have birth outside of marriage, to have behavioral and psychological problems, and to not graduate from high school.⁷ Another study found that children in single-parent homes were more likely to experience health problems, such as accidents, injuries, and poisonings.⁸ Other research found that children living with single mothers were five times as likely to be poor.⁹

⁶Mary Parke, "Are Married Parents Really Better for Children?" *Center for Law and Social Policy* (May 2003).
⁷*Ibid.*, 2–3.
⁸*Ibid.*, 3.
⁹*Ibid.*, 7.
¹⁰*Ibid.*, 3.
¹¹*Ibid.*, 4.
¹²*Ibid.*, 5–6.

“The conclusion that children raised by their biological, married parents do better, by almost every measure, has been proven in hundreds of studies over the last several decades.”

Importantly, not all types of single-parent households fare the same. Children of widowed parents, for example, do better than children in families with divorced or cohabiting parents.¹⁰ Children of divorce are two-and-a-half times as likely to have serious social, emotional, or psychological problems as children from intact families.¹¹ Likewise, children in cohabiting families are at a higher risk of poor outcomes in a host of economic and emotional categories. Critically, these poor outcomes are not erased when the single-parent family is better off financially.¹² Marriage is the issue, not economics. In short,

Research indicates that, on average, children who grow up in families with both their biological parents in a low-conflict marriage are better off in a number of ways than children who grow up in single-, step- or cohabiting-parent households. Compared to children who are raised by their married parents, children in other family types are more likely to achieve lower levels of education, to become teen parents, and to experience health, behavior, and mental health problems. And children in single- and cohabiting-parent families are more likely to be poor.¹³

An updated analysis comes from the Fall 2015 issue of the journal *The Future of Children*.¹⁴ In their introduction to the issue, Sara McLanahan and Isabel Sawhill take it as a given that “most scholars now agree that children raised by two biological parents in a stable marriage do better than children in other family forms across a wide range of outcomes.”¹⁵ Even with this consensus, there is still disagreement about *why* marriage is so important. In his article in the same journal, David Ribar analyzes a number of possible mechanisms that make marriage so effective: economic resources, specialization, father involvement, parents’ physical and mental health, parenting quality and skills, social support, health insurance, home ownership, parental relationships, bargaining power, family stability, net wealth, borrowing constraints, informal social networks, and the efficiencies of married life. Ribar concludes that while these factors often play a role in the benefits of marriage, the advantages of marriage are hard to replicate by augmenting these factors alone. In other words, “the advantages of marriage for children appear to be the sum of many, many parts” and as such the best policy interventions are “those that bolster marriages themselves.”¹⁶

More recently, Katy Faust and Stacy Manning have summarized much of the primary source research in their 2021 book *Them Before Us: Why We Need a Global Children’s*

Rights Movement. Again, we find that children reared in intact homes do best on educational achievement, emotional health, familial and sexual development, and delinquency and incarceration.¹⁷ Children living with a mother’s boyfriend are about eleven times more likely to be sexually, physically, or emotionally abused than children living with their married biological parents.¹⁸ And children separated from one or both of their biological parents are 1.5 times as likely to experience financial difficulty, six times as likely to have witnessed neighborhood violence, fifteen times as likely to have witnessed caregiver or parent violence, eleven times as likely to have lived with a caregiver or parent with a drug or alcohol problem, and seventeen times as likely to have had a caregiver or parent in jail.¹⁹ In short, there is virtually no measurement of well-being in which it is not a significant — indeed, often life altering — advantage to be raised by one’s biological (and married) father and mother.

IN SUPPORT OF CHILDREN (AND THE FUTURE)

As Christians, of course, our ultimate confidence does not rest in the findings of social science research. We know from the Bible that God created one man and one woman to enter into the covenant of marriage (Gen 2:18–25), and that from this conjugal union God desires children to be produced (Mal 2:15), and that these children are a blessing to their parents (Ps 127:3) and ought to be brought up by their mother and father in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:1–4). Scientific research is valuable insofar as it can reinforce the truths of the Bible and principles of natural law; namely, that when we observe the way the world works (and does not work), it becomes abundantly clear that marriage matters for human flourishing almost more than anything else.

So what can we do to strengthen marriages and promote the well-being of children? Let me close with four brief suggestions.

¹³Ibid., 8.

¹⁴“Marriage and Child Wellbeing Revisited” *The Future of Children*, 25:2 (Fall 2015).

¹⁵Sara McLanahan and Isabel Sawhill, “Marriage and Child Wellbeing Revisited: Introducing the Issue,” *The Future of Children*, 25:2 (Fall 2015), 4.

¹⁶David C. Ribar, “Why Marriage Matters for Child Wellbeing,” *The Future of Children*, 25:2 (Fall 2015), 23.

¹⁷Katy Faust and Stacy Manning, *Them Before Us: Why We Need a Global Children’s Rights Movement* (New York: Post Hill Press, 2021), 31 (citing Ryan T. Anderson).

¹⁸Ibid., 37 (citing W. Bradford Wilcox).

¹⁹Ibid., 43 (citing a 2011–2012 study conducted by the CDC).

First, pastors, Christian educators, parents, and church leaders need to do more to teach on this subject. I do not mean pre-marital counseling and marriage retreats, as important as those are. I mean we must teach more broadly about the crucial importance of marriage as both a personal and public good. Our culture promotes the message that every family arrangement is as good as another. That is simply not true. We need to help our people understand the reality and see what is at stake.

Second, we ought to encourage public policies that make pro-child marriages more attractive and less healthy family arrangements more difficult. So, for example, we should not penalize marriage by tying welfare benefits to singleness. We should make divorce harder, not easier (e.g., legislation that requires counseling before divorce can be finalized). We should consider tax benefits that reward marriage and childbearing. And we must dare to talk about fatherlessness as a leading factor (if not *the* leading factor) in the deterioration of cultural and family health among all races and ethnicities.

Third, we should consider how we have normalized behavior that harms children and does not lead to human flourishing. It may not be possible to change the wider culture in such a profound way, but we can start by looking at our own church culture. This may sound unloving at first, but we must re-stigmatize fornication and promiscuity, cohabitation, and no-fault divorce. Social approval for behaviors that used to be considered sinful (or at least inappropriate and unwise) has been a powerful force in changing the state of marriage in the West. Stigma often speaks louder than dogma. As Christians, we must find ways to lovingly help and forgive those who make mistakes, and especially those who suffer from the mistakes that others have made. I am not suggesting we stigmatize *people*, but we should stigmatize *sinful behaviors*. Everyone in the church today has been touched by divorce, sex before marriage, or out-of-wedlock births.²⁰ These are difficult subjects to talk

²⁰Strictly speaking, Christians ought to stigmatize the *behavior* that leads to out-of-wedlock births (i.e., fornication, promiscuity), not the birth itself. When a woman becomes pregnant outside of marriage, the decision to have the child should be celebrated and encouraged.

about, but we must not bemoan the culture out there — with its sin-enticing, righteousness-denying, worldliness-normalizing ethos — while we are unwilling to deal with compromises in our own midst.

Fourth, unless called to singleness for kingdom purposes, we must encourage Christians to get married, have children, stay married, and raise those children in a stable two-parent family. Obviously, the ideal is not always possible. Divorce is not always our choice. Spouses sometimes die young.

"After the gospel, there is no bigger gift you can give to the world than your children and no better gift you can give your children than to be raised by a mom and dad who love them and love each other."

Marriage does not always come. Children do not always follow. That is why we believe in adoption, and second chances, and in God's good plan in all things. But insofar as most people in the church will marry and have children, they need to hear that getting married, staying married, and raising children in the Lord is no small thing. In fact, it is one of the biggest and best things we can do — for the church, for the nation, and for the kingdom. After the gospel, there is no bigger gift you can give to the world than your children and no better gift you can give your children than to be raised by a mom and dad who love them and love each other. ✕

The Ancient Paths

Praying together as a family: Corporate prayer in Philemon

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“The family that prays together stays together.” This very catchy phrase was created as a motto in 1947 for the Roman Catholic Family Rosary Crusade, which was led by an Irish priest named Patrick Peyton (1909–1992). Inspired by the fact that prior to the world-changing naval Battle of Lepanto (1571), soldiers and sailors of the Holy League — a coalition of Roman Catholic states — had prayed to the Virgin Mary through the rosary for victory over the Muslim fleet of the Ottoman Empire, Peyton came up with the idea of praying the rosary as a way of combatting Communism. An advertising copywriter by the name of Al Scalpone (1913–2000), later a successful television executive, is actually credited with the creation of the motto.

Despite these interesting origins, the phrase does capture an element of the New Testament’s theology of prayer, namely the importance of praying together. Think about Paul’s letter to Philemon in this regard. In the main, it appears to be a private letter, in which the Apostle Paul takes up the subject of Philemon’s runaway slave Onesimus with discretion and tact. The opening of the letter teems with familial terms. The letter is being written by Paul and his “brother” Timothy to Philemon, whom they consider a “beloved co-worker” (v 1), as well

as to “the sister Apphia, and Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church in your house.” In his commentary on this verse, John Gill (1697–1771) plausibly suggested that Apphia was the wife of Philemon. As for Archippus — was he their son? Archippus is also mentioned in Colossians 4:17, where Paul urges him to “Pay attention to the ministry you have received in the Lord, so that you can accomplish it.”

After this salutation and initial benediction, Paul addresses himself in the body of the letter to Philemon. Thus, underlying all of the words translated by the English “you” or “your” from verse 4 to 22a is either a Greek verb in the second person singular or a form of the possessive adjective or personal pronoun in the second person singular. But, without warning, in the middle of verse 22 there is a sudden shift from the second person singular. Paul asks Philemon to prepare a guest room for him. The Apostle then goes on to give the reason for this request: “I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.” Paul suddenly switches over to using second person plural forms of the personal pronoun. This shift, hidden in nearly all modern English translations of the verse, is not a fortuitous one nor one that is done merely for stylistic effect. Behind it obviously lies a profound appreciation of corporate prayer.


Although the body of the letter is directed to Philemon, since Paul is dealing with a personal matter which primarily concerns him, Paul never forgets the fact that Philemon also belongs to a circle of believers who meet in his family home as a house-church (v 2). And we know the names of four members of this extended family: Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and now, Onesimus. By the way, notice Paul uses familial terms with regard to

Onesimus: he is Paul’s spiritual “child” (v 10) and, as such, he is a “beloved brother” (v 16).

At the conclusion of the letter, Paul informs Philemon of his intention to visit him and his assurance that the believers who comprise the house-church which meets in Philemon’s home are regularly remembering him in prayer (v 22): “prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.” The communal context of this letter, reflected in verses 1 and 2, now suddenly re-emerges.

As Paul thinks of Philemon praying for his release from prison and his forthcoming visit to his home, he cannot isolate Philemon’s prayers from those of his “family” of fellow believers in Colossae. Paul’s reliance on other believers in his ministry is here patent as he mentions his assurance that not only Philemon, but also his entire house-church is remembering him in prayer.

Furthermore, the context for these prayers should not be regarded as limited to these believers’ personal times of prayer. Paul’s language envisages the house-church in Philemon’s home praying as a whole and together for his release. As the eighteenth-century Baptist commentator John Gill put it: “the prayer of a righteous man availeth much with God, and is very prevalent with him, and much more the prayers of a whole church.”

Let us pray — both privately and together and as brothers and sisters in the family of God! 

The State of Our Unions:

An Interview with W. Bradford Wilcox

1. WHAT IS THE STATE OF MARRIAGE AND FERTILITY IN AMERICA IN 2022?

There is bad news and good news to report about marriage and fertility in America. The bad news is that the marriage rate and the fertility rate have never been so low as they were in 2022. Too many Americans have neither the means nor the motivation to form a family today. For instance, more than a quarter of young adults today will never have children, and more than one third will never marry. These trends will leave millions of Americans kinless as they head into middle and late age.

The good news is that the increasingly selective character of marriage and childbearing means that marriage is getting more stable and the children who are being born today are more likely to be raised by

their own stably married parents. So the kids being born today, especially to married parents, will be more likely to enjoy a stable family life in the coming years than their fellow citizens born a while ago.

2. YOU RECENTLY COMPLETED AN IN-DEPTH REPORT CALLED “THE DIVIDED STATE OF OUR UNIONS” FOR THE INSTITUTE FOR FAMILY STUDIES. THIS REPORT DETAILS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, SHOCKING DISPARITIES IN FAMILY FORMATION ALONG THE LINES OF CLASS, RELIGION, AND EVEN POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATION. WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE BEST ACCOUNTS FOR THESE DISPARITIES?

We found that COVID supercharged polarization in America. As COVID wanes, America looks more divided than ever in



terms of income, religion, and politics. As I wrote in *Newsweek*, for instance, interest in marriage and childbearing varied a great deal by these three factors:

The rich, the religious and Republicans reported the greatest overall increase in the ‘desire to marry’ while the poor, secular Americans and Democrats reported less or no increase in marriage interest, according to a new YouGov survey of men and women aged 18-55 by the Institute for Family Studies (IFS) and the Wheatley Institution.

At the same time, 18-to-55-year-old Americans’ post-pandemic interest in childbearing fell seven percentage points since last year. But the “desire

to have a child” tanked much more among poor, secular and Democratic Americans than it did among their more affluent, religious and conservative fellow citizens.²

What we seem to be seeing is that family formation depends more than ever on “means” and “motivation.” Those with the means to marry and have kids more readily — the affluent — are today more likely to be emerging from COVID with a desire to form a family. But it is not just money.

It is also the case that those with the “motivation” — those who hold a more familistic view, one that prioritizes marriage and family life, are also more likely to be open to forming a family as COVID recedes.

²Brad Wilcox and Isabel Sawhill, “Bridging America’s Growing Family Divide,” *Newsweek* (October 27, 2021).

So the religious and Republicans are more family oriented as we go forward. This suggests growing polarization in who has families in America along the lines of class, religion, and political identity.

3. HOW ARE CHRISTIAN FAMILIES FARING IN THE MIDST OF SUCH A PRECIPITOUS DECLINE IN MARRIAGE AND FERTILITY RATES OVER THE PAST DECADES?

Christians are doing relatively better in forming families and in maintaining their families than non-religious Americans. They marry at higher rates, enjoy greater marital quality, and are less likely to land in divorce court. And, again, their relative advantage seems to be heightened by COVID.

Churchgoing Americans seem to be about 40 percent less likely to end up getting divorced, compared to their peers who don't marry, according to Professor Tyler VanderWeele at Harvard.² So faith is a force for stronger families, on average.

But, at the same time, churchgoing young adults are less likely to marry and have children than would have been the case a half century ago. So the church needs to be thinking about ways to make marriage and family more appealing and accessible to today's young adults.

4. WHAT ROLE, IF ANY, HAS COVID-19 AND OTHER FACTORS PLAYED IN THE NARROWING DIVIDE BETWEEN THE RICH AND POOR IN TERMS OF CHILDBEARING?

Historically, poor women have had more

children than middle- and upper-class women. But in our recent YouGov survey, we saw interest in childbearing decline more among poor Americans. This raises the possibility that fertility may fall more among poor and working-class Americans than among affluent Americans. It is too early to tell if this attitudinal trend will show up in actual birth trends. But my colleagues at the Institute for Family Studies are going to be tracking this possibility.

If it comes to pass that poor women start seeing a dramatic decline in their fertility, it will be a tragic scenario. It will result in bad news because right now marriage is already falling dramatically among poor and working class Americans. If childbearing also falls among this group, that means a large share of poor or working class Americans would have no kin. And being kinless in middle age and older age is extraordinarily difficult, both emotionally and financially.

5. YOUR RECENT IFS REPORT POSITS THAT AMERICA IS HEADING TOWARD WHAT YOU TERM THE "FAMILY POLIZATION SCENARIO." WHAT ASPECTS OF AMERICAN LIFE WOULD NEED TO CHANGE IN ORDER FOR IT TO TREND IN THE DIRECTION OF A "RENAISSANCE SCENARIO"? CAN YOU BRIEFLY DEFINE THESE TERMS?

What we mean by family polarization is that only rich, religious, and Republican Americans marry and have children in large numbers; whereas poor, secular, and Democratic Americans end up being

much less likely to form families. I think this is where we are headed.

But a renaissance scenario would be one where marriage and childbearing are rising across the board, without differences by class or culture. That would be a much better scenario for our country. But right now, it seems unlikely.

6. AS A ROMAN CATHOLIC SPEAKING TO PROTESTANT EVANGELICALS, WHAT DO YOU SEE THAT EVANGELICALS COULD BE DOING TO BETTER SUPPORT AND PROMOTE MARRIAGE AND FAMILY FORMATION?

Evangelicals, especially evangelical elites, pay too much attention to what the secular culture is preaching, teaching, and promoting. They do not adequately appreciate that the secular culture is dying, demographically and otherwise, and that it has very little to offer them. This is especially true when it comes to gender, marriage, and family life.

Evangelicals need to be more confident regarding the value of their own heritage when it comes to dating, marriage, and family life. That does not mean we are going back to 1955 or even 955. But it means that they can and should recover wisdom from their own traditions when it

comes to marriage and family.

They need to understand, for instance, the social science that tells us that men, women, and children who are embedded in married families and are churchgoing are much more likely to be flourishing — financially, socially, and psychologically — than those who are single and childless. And this makes sense, of course, because, as Aristotle taught us, we are social animals. We are more likely to flourish when we are throwing ourselves into in-person communities — communities of faith, family, and in our localities. This is especially true in a world where so many people are falling for the simulacra of community, the virtual world, which is also a dead end. So, evangelicals need to be bolder about calling men and women to the vocation of marriage and family life and the need to participate in person in your local church community.

This means more preaching, teaching, and ministry related to dating, marriage, and family life; more social opportunities for unmarried young adults; more sermons on fidelity and forgiveness in marriage and family life; more retreats for married couples, and so on. Here, ministries like *Communio* and *Focus on the Family* offer a range of constructive programs.

"evangelicals need to be bolder about calling men and women to the vocation of marriage and family life and the need to participate in person in your local church community"

²Tyler J. VanderWeele, "Religious Service Attendance, Marriage, and Health," *Institute for Family Studies* (November 20, 2016), <https://ifstudies.org/blog/religious-service-attendance-marriage-and-health>.

*"It also means that
must specifically
ministries for men*

*evangelical churches
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It also means that evangelical churches must specifically improve their ministries for men and women. For instance, many young men today tell me they have not been given any clear advice about what it means to be a man. And many of the young women I speak to express frustration with the ways in which many of the young men in their life are unfocused, incapable of commitment, and lacking drive. Evangelical men's ministries should take decisive steps to give men the skills and the vision they need to thrive as men in the family, the workplace, and the church.

Steps like these will help strengthen and deepen the stability and quality of evangelical family life. And make for happier and more faithful evangelicals, as well." ✕

³Brad Wilcox, Wendy Wang, Jason Carroll, and Lyman Stone, "The Divided State of Our Unions: Family Formation in (Post-) Covid-19 America," *Institute for Family Studies* (October 2021), <https://ifstudies.org/reports/the-divided-state-of-our-unions/2021/executive-summary>.



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The Christian Family and the Burkean Body Politic

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THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY AND THE BURKEAN BODY POLITIC

Aristotle identified the fundamental political unit differently than would most people today. While we tend to look to the individual as the source of our politics, Aristotle began with the procreative pair, the man and the woman. Without the man and the woman together, a political community has no ability to project itself into the future. In his *Politics*, Aristotle (referred to by Aquinas simply as “the philosopher”) draws out the way the family develops into an extended family, then a village, a city, and so on. One might consider that the word “king” contains “kin” within it. The king is the chief of the kin. The state, composed of several villages, represents a kind of final community.¹ (Considering society as a kind of grand structure built on a foundation of families might lead one to experience a bit of unease when we consider the weak

¹Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book I, Section ii.

ties that characterize many families today.)

Edmund Burke, the intellectual grandfather of philosophical conservatism (as opposed to a kind of retail political conservatism), likewise attached great importance to the small associations in society of which the family is the most organic. The quotation that is perhaps most often pulled from his logorrheic *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and which went through a period of frequent usage by American politicians was his invocation of the “little platoon”:

To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind.²

Now, Burke was not writing primarily to emphasize the importance of the family, but to reject the radical, society-wide designs of the French Revolution. He mentioned the “little platoon” not so much to defend an institution (the family) that did not at that time need much protecting, but rather to encourage a tighter focus on small things where much of life actually happens and is enjoyed rather than on large, macro-revolutions.

Nevertheless, that much-mentioned short quote contains an important idea that extends well beyond the immediate context of criticizing and refuting the French revolutionaries. The use of the quote by American politicians during, say, the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first was intended to mitigate against big government. Conservative intellectuals (and fellow travelers), such as Richard Neuhaus, Peter Berger, and others, became enamored of the idea of developing public policy in such a way as to move social improvement away from government and down toward “mediating institutions.”³ Thus, there

²Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, [1790], 39–40. There is a very useful online version of the text at: <https://socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/burke/revfrance.pdf>

³For a good example of this discourse, see Peter L. Berger and Richard J. Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy*, (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1977).

was much talk of the “little platoons.” The attempt to make government and public policy more accommodative of the work of religious non-profits was a prime example of this kind of thinking. Another example was the attempt to bring more attention to the need for more intact families in the underclass. That movement largely disappeared from the scene when September 11 and the War on Terror blanketed domestic policy like an avalanche.

AMBIGUOUS ANDROGYNY

Burke’s focus on the small and the local is increasingly counterintuitive in American society today. While it is the case that more and more Americans are interested in organic foods sourced from local producers, that same desire does not seem to characterize our view of the family. Instead, we see a renewed drumbeat for universal pre-K premised on the idea that getting more mothers into the workplace is a highly desirable outcome and a formula for economic growth and greater equality. The dual workings of a social scissors with one blade marked “the economic machine” and the other “changing cultural expectations” acts to move more and more families away from traditional arrangements. We have largely taken the stance that a traditional family structure is nothing more than a socially constructed entity that can be just as easily constituted in a variety of different ways.

Popular culture reflects the change. A laundry detergent commercial shows a slight man with curly hair, a baggy t-shirt, and a drooping cardigan using a special formula for his daughter’s sensitive skin. We don’t see a mother or know if there is one. A high prestige science fiction show features an android couple with largely reversed sex roles. The more feminine “mother” is far more physically powerful than the “father” who is more focused on his feelings. The cultural atmosphere is very much oriented toward revising a structure that has been stable for millennia.

Our version of the little platoon no longer requires a man (or a woman). It does not require married people. It could even be run by two people, neither of whom assume a clear gender identity. Whomever the persons involved are have

massive incentives to be working in a commercial, non-profit, or government enterprise lest they be significantly disadvantaged in their role as consumers.

EXTENDED FAMILY PLATOONS

When Russell Kirk (the greatest of Burke’s American disciples) contemplated the idea of the little platoon, he thought of family in a rich, multi-generational, and spiritual sense. It contains husband, wife, children, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, grandchildren, and all the people who come into a family as informal relatives through friendships and church ties. It has a clear organic and spiritual center. While those sorts of little platoons may continue to exist with some strength in immigrant communities, they are becoming increasingly foreign to the American experience.⁴

Today, both parents work and have far fewer children than in the past. Some may style themselves parents by virtue of pet ownership (being Mom and Dad to Fluffy or Rex as opposed to having children). No one really has time to coordinate the big gatherings of the traditional “little platoon” for Sunday dinners and weekend celebrations. I grew up in the South in the 1970’s and recall the frequent special night and weekend events that were multi-generational and cross-generational. We cooked out, played horseshoes, ran relay races, cranked out homemade ice cream, and sat and listened to memories older family members shared.

That experience is nearly gone. Family members move all over the country in search of the next better economic opportunity. There are fewer stay-at-home mothers to serve as the glue that holds the generations together. Christmas is the best chance to get everyone together, but even that is increasingly uncertain. The pandemic, of course, accelerated family atomization.

FAMILY MATTERS

But does it matter? It could be that we look at the situation, feel some nostalgia for a time and a way of life that is past,

⁴Russell Kirk, “The Little Platoon We Belong to in Society,” *Imprimis*, (November, 1977). Currently located online at: <https://imprimis.hilldale.edu/the-little-platoon-we-belong-to-in-society-november-1977/>



and just move on. Pets indeed seem to be becoming the children of choice for many millennials and Gen-Zers. No matter how we embellish the idea it means a far lower level of commitment and, of course, develops no capacities for human beings. Families are not only less integrated with other generations than before, but may also struggle to unite a mother and father in the same home. Children increasingly have to live with a person who is not related to them by blood and who may really only be there for the other adult and merely tolerates their existence. Does it matter?

We can look again at Burke's famed reference. The "little platoon" is the "germ" of "our public affections." It is not a germ like a disease, but a germ in the sense of being a seed, a beginning. "It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind." Just as Aristotle saw the family as the basis of society because of its status as the biological building block and the natural foundation, Burke recognized that the family nurtures something critically important in human beings. By living in the nursery of the nuclear family and then the tribe of the extended family, we develop our affections. We learn to love, to trust, to cooperate, to follow, to lead, to worship, to pray, and to develop loyalties. The "little platoon" sets the stage for a

rich experience of knowing and being known as a rich tapestry of social life is woven.

Back in the 1970's, Russell Kirk wrote about his concerns that other parts of the culture, such as public schools, were reducing the strength of the little platoon, the family.⁵ That basic dynamic has expanded by leaps and bounds, with many parents feeling that they have lost influence over their children's lives and worldviews due to social media influencers, entertainment, news organizations, and eventually, an individually targeted metaverse experience through virtual reality and augmented reality.

Kirk believed the alternative to "the vigorous family" was "the universal orphanage." He saw two primary alternatives to the family. The first was atomic individualism. But human beings do not thrive when reduced to their own social and spiritual resources. According to Kirk, atomic individualism would yield to compulsory collectivism, in which the state becomes the primary source of connection. The family, to the extent it continued to exist, would be "tolerated." Children would be seen primarily as wards of the state.⁶ One can get a sense of something like the soft approach to this attitude by observing the now semi-infamous "Life of

⁵Russell Kirk, "The Little Platoon We Belong to in Society," *Imprimis*, (November, 1977), <https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/the-little-platoon-we-belong-to-in-society-november-1977>.

⁶*Ibid.*

Julia” set forth by the Obama administration as it sought to maximize the vote of unmarried women. Each critical moment of a woman’s life presented an opportunity for the federal government to play a starring role as a kind of over-parent that is always there to lend a guiding hand. The Life of Julia is a vision for society in which the little platoon no longer exists. Needs will not be met by church and family, so the government will extend its role.⁷

This soft authoritarian approach to governing is both a response to and perhaps cause of the deterioration of the nuclear family and its extended form. When parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins aren’t there or aren’t involved in one’s life, then one will naturally look up to a government moving the relevant economic levers. That same government will, as it increasingly does, also communicate a worldview to its citizens with increasing effect.

LITTLE PLATOONS OR BIG GOVERNMENT

Two things stand out immediately, though there are surely many others we could draw forth. First, Burke sees the little platoon as the place where we form the affections that will extend into a broader love of our fellow citizens and of our country. From the little platoon, we get the beginnings of patriotism and public-spiritedness. Without the little platoon at the base, how strong will be the ties that bind us together in the broader society? Second, the atrophied little platoon with the universal orphanage that accompanies it is likely to have additional bad effects. Big government has a tendency to develop passive, weak people who rely on an ever more muscular government to care for them and lead them.

If the little platoon fails, it is essentially certain that the government will grow in scope and power. What is more, we will crave it as so many seem to do. Without a renewal of the family, a paternalistic (or maternalistic) government will present itself as a nearly automatic solution. We have to ask hard questions about that developing dynamic.

⁷The Obama campaign’s original site is no longer available on the internet, but the slides from Julia’s simulated life can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqBjXP8RKho>.



The thought of Jacques Maritain comes immediately to mind. Maritain, a French Catholic philosopher who was deeply engaged in opposing twentieth century totalitarianism of both the fascistic and communistic types, wrote about “the body politic.” He was at pains to distinguish this body politic from the state. The state is not the body politic. The body politic is all of us, together. The state is merely a thin layer of the overall body politic. It has tasks regarding law and order, but it is emphatically not everything. It is not meant to be comprehensive (thus blasphemously assuming the place of God). How, Maritain asked, do we avoid the fate of those who live in totalitarian and/or authoritarian societies? We must build up the body politic. What is the body politic? It is families,

schools, sporting teams, museums, voluntary societies, churches, neighborhoods, universities, charitable organizations. Surely, the most important of those, other than the church, would be families.⁸ If we allow the little platoons to become so weak that they essentially fail, the odds grow that we will eventually live under an outsized, monster kind of government.

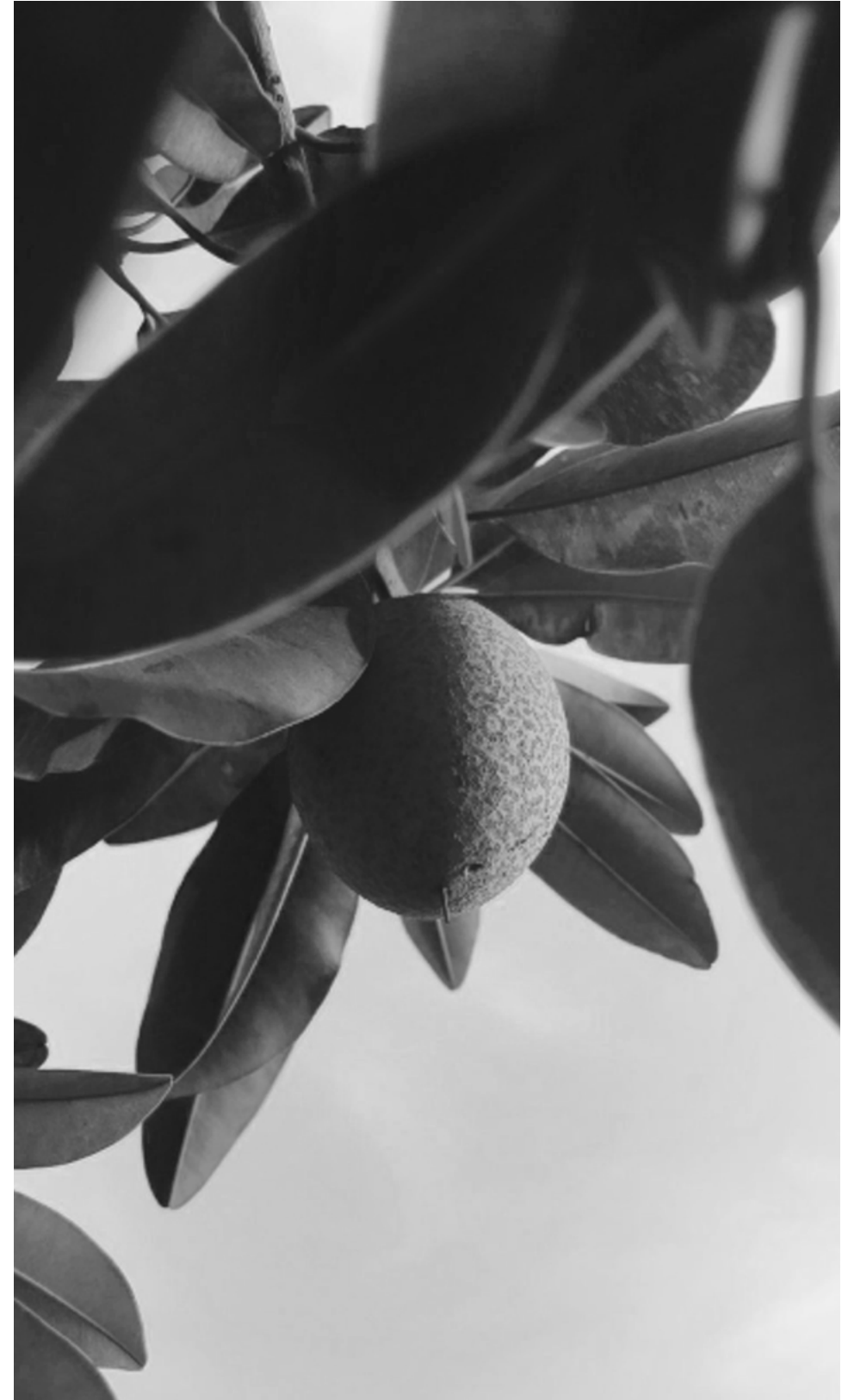
And then we will be left with something out of the world of dystopia. The course of history seems to suggest that for those of us in the west, that dystopia would not be the brutal, force-fed propaganda machine proposed by George Orwell in *1984*, but more likely the hedonistic, consumeristic, pharmaceutical, and pornographic civilization of Huxley's *Brave New World*. Even twenty years ago, Huxley's world seemed far distant. Today, it appears increasingly plausible.

More important, though, is the fundamental point that the little platoon is the seed of our affections for one another. The Genesis account explains that Eve is given to Adam because it is not good for a man to be alone. He is not given another man — someone like himself — but a woman (a wife) who has a somewhat different nature. She is a complement. In that complementarity comes the solution to loneliness through a procreative union by which other human beings join the family and ultimately constitute the great families of nations. Over against that organic and, at its best, delightful portrait of human connection, we have something far diluted. One might think of Plato's guardians with their wives and children held in common.⁹ Aristotle complained that a son held in common would be something less even than a real cousin.¹⁰ We need to regain our emphasis upon building the little platoon because it is there that we may find something durable and which relates to our natures in a God-given way. ✕

⁸Maritain fleshes this concept out in *Man and the State*, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1998), 1–27.

⁹Plato, *Republic*, Book IV, 423e.

¹⁰Aristotle, Book II, Section iii.



Pastoral Accommodation of Same-Sex Relationships: A Critique in Light of 1 Corinthians 5–6

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INTRODUCTION

With increasing pressure from the culture to revise the traditional moral disapproval of same-sex relations, evangelicals are wrestling with how the church ought to treat same-sex attracted Christians. A shift toward greater openness is taking place among some evangelical churches committed to the authority of Scripture as the only infallible rule of doctrine and life. A small but growing number of evangelical pastors and congregations have shifted from holding that same-sex activity is irreconcilable with commitment to Christ to allowing committed same-sex relationships within their membership.¹

It remains to be seen how these evangelicals will answer further questions, such as whether same-sex relationships can be

blessed as a “marriage” by the church and whether such individuals are eligible for ordained office in the church. Progressive evangelical churches could accept them as members, but hold the line there and reject gay ordination and same-sex wedding ceremonies. Presumably, if they wish to remain Bible-believing evangelicals, they would still want to maintain that same-sex relationships fall short of God’s creation ideal for sexuality and cannot be called “marriage” as the Bible defines it — a male-female one-flesh union. They would thus be pastorally accommodating same-sex relationships rather than treating them as true marriages fully blessed by God and endorsed by the church.

The best example of an evangelical holding this position is Lewis B. Smedes (1921–2002), who was a minister in the Christian

¹Jonathan Merritt, “A large Colorado congregation just became LGBT-inclusive. Here’s why it matters,” *Religion News Service* (January 26, 2017). <https://religionnews.com/2017/01/26/colorado-congregation-joins-growing-list-of-lgbt-affirming-evangelical-churches>

Reformed Church and a professor of ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary. In *Sex for Christians* (1976), Smedes outlined a three-step discernment process for the same-sex attracted Christian. Step one is self-knowledge, meaning that the homosexual person must face the abnormality of having a same-sex orientation and refuse to blame themselves for this unchosen condition. Step two is hope — they should believe that change (from being homosexual to being heterosexual) is possible and seek it. But for those who have sought change and could not find it, there is a third step, which Smedes labels “accommodation.” The third step has two sub-steps. Step 3a is to consider whether the homosexual person is called to celibacy. For those who cannot manage celibacy, we come finally to Step 3b, and that is what Smedes calls “optimum homosexual morality,” which he describes as follows:

What morality is left for the homosexual who finally . . . can manage neither change nor celibacy? He ought, in this tragic situation, to develop the best ethical conditions in which to live out his sexual life To develop a morality for the homosexual life is *not* to accept homosexual practices as morally commendable. It is, however, to recognize that the optimum moral life within a deplorable situation is preferable to a life of sexual chaos Here, as in few other situations, the church is called on to set creative compassion in the vanguard of moral law It cannot fulfill its ministry simply by demanding chastity The

agonizing question that faces pastors of homosexual people comes when the homosexual has found it impossible to be celibate. What does the church do? Does it drop its compassionate embrace and send him on his reprobate way? Or does it, in the face of a life unacceptable to the church, quietly urge the optimum moral life *within* his sexually abnormal practice?²

Smedes recognizes that each church community will have to answer these questions for itself, but he himself leans toward urging the optimum moral life within sexually abnormal practice. He is more explicit in “Second Thoughts” in the 1994 revised edition of *Sex for Christians*. While continuing to affirm that “the Creator intended the human family to flourish through heterosexual love,” Smedes nonetheless believes that “God prefers homosexual people to live in committed and faithful monogamous relationships when they cannot change their condition and do not have the gift to be celibate.”³

This is the pastoral accommodation approach to homosexuality. Accommodation is not affirmation. Those adopting this position do not endorse homosexuality as positively good and intended by the Creator. They acknowledge that homosexuality is a result of the fall. They also generally refrain from speaking of “same-sex marriage.” They want the church to uphold the creation ordinance of opposite-sex marriage and the church’s traditional sexual ethic. But they also want the church to be pastorally sensitive, adopting a compassionate

embrace rather than driving such people away from the church.

As attractive as such an approach may be to some, it runs up against a major hurdle: the apparent teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, *nor men who practice homosexuality*, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (ESV, emphasis added)⁴

Verses 9–10 are in the literary form of a vice list,⁵ and one of the vices is the practice of homosexuality. Paul’s teaching seems fairly clear: those who persistently practice these vices, including the practice of homosexuality, are the unrighteous, and the unrighteous are excluded from the kingdom of God. Paul states that among the membership of the church of Corinth there were those who had formerly been such sexually immoral people, but he says they are not such any more. They had repented and received cleansing and forgiveness in Christ. The implication is that such people would be excluded as long as they do not repent. This would seem to rule out pastoral

accommodation of same-sex relationships. The purpose of this article is to engage in a careful exegesis of this paragraph and its immediate context (1 Cor 5–6) to see if that is in fact Paul’s teaching.

The Context: 1 Corinthians 1–6

Paul begins his first letter to the Corinthians by addressing factionalism (chs. 1–4). The church was divided based on different understandings of “wisdom” (σοφία). David Garland convincingly argues that some of the Corinthians had imbibed values from the surrounding culture that were antithetical to the message of the cross — striving for power, honor, prestige, status, and fleshly wisdom. In response, Paul shows how the wisdom of the cross annihilates all pride and leaves no room for factions based on following one supposed wise man over another.⁶

Then in chapters 5–6, Paul turns to the topic of church discipline and rebukes the Corinthian Christians for their failure to act as wise men who judge those inside the church. They claim to be wise and yet their toleration of grave immorality in their midst shows the hollowness of their claim. Already in 1 Corinthians 4, Paul sees the Corinthians as being “puffed up” with spiritual pride (4:6, 18–19). When he turns to the discussion of the church’s toleration of an egregious case of incest (a Christian man in a sexual relationship with his father’s wife), Paul uses this obvious moral failure on the part of the church to puncture their pride, “And you are arrogant (πεφυσιωμένοι)! Ought you not

²Lewis B. Smedes, *Sex for Christians: The Limits and Liberties of Sexual Living* (Rev. Ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 57–58.

³Smedes, *Sex for Christians*, 239.

⁴Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (2016 text edition).

⁵Some see 1 Cor 6:9–10 as a standardized list from a “dead” pre-formed tradition, but others have made a good argument for seeing each of the sins identified by Paul as of “live” concern vis-à-vis the situation at Corinth: B. J. Oropeza, “Situational Immorality: Paul’s ‘Vice Lists’ at Corinth,” *ExpTim* 110.1 (1998): 9–10; Peter S. Zaas, “Catalogues and Context: 1 Corinthians 5 and 6,” *NTS* 34.4 (1988): 622–29.

⁶David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 13–14.

rather to mourn?” (5:2), and then again a few verses later, “Your boasting (*καύχημα*) is not good” (5:6).

First Corinthians 5:1–6:20 forms a unit that can be subdivided as follows:

- a. 5:1–13: Call to exercise church discipline in a case of incest
- b. 6:1–8: Rebuke of brothers taking each other to court
- c. 6:9–11: Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit?
- d. 6:12–20: Flee from sexual immorality

The theme of sexual immorality is clearly found in sections a, c, and d. Commentators have puzzled over how section b (Paul’s rebuke of brothers suing each other in the secular courts) fits in the surrounding context. Some have suggested that the lawsuits had to do with sexual offenses, perhaps related directly to the incest case of the previous chapter. But this is unlikely, given that Paul thinks those bringing the lawsuits should simply accept being wronged (6:7), counsel he would be unlikely to give if the lawsuits concerned sexual offenses. How, then, does this section on lawsuits fit in? Garland argues that in these two chapters Paul cites three appalling moral failures — the church’s toleration of an egregious case of incest; brothers taking each other to court; and Christians visiting prostitutes — to puncture the Corinthians’ pride in their supposed wisdom and spiritual superiority.⁷

LEXICAL SEMANTICS OF SELECT ITEMS
IN THE VICE LIST (1 COR 6:9–10)

We have looked briefly at the context. We now turn to examine select items in the vice list. The vice list contains ten sins, but most of them (idolaters, adulterers, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, swindlers) are not very controversial and not directly relevant for this article. However, the lexical semantics of three of the sin words — *πόρνοι*, *μαλακοί*, and *ἀρσενοκοῖται* — demands particular attention if we are to answer the theological question motivating this article.

1. *πόρνοι* | “the sexually immoral”

πόρνος, ὁ: one who practices sexual immorality, fornicator⁸

It is believed that the words in the *πορν*-group were derived from the verb *πέρνημι*, which means “to sell, to traffic,” and which was particularly used in reference to slaves, both male and female, who were often sold to be used for sex.⁹ In extra-biblical Greek, this word-group had a narrow application: a *πόρνη* was a female prostitute, *πορνεύω* was the verb for prostituting oneself, the abstract noun *πορνεία* denoted the practice of prostitution, a *πορνεῖον* was a brothel, *πορνογενής* meant to be born of a prostitute, and so on.¹⁰

In the Septuagint, *πορν*- terms were used to render the Hebrew verb *נָהַ* (“have



illicit intercourse”) and its cognates, *זוֹנָה* (“prostitute”), *תְּזוּנוֹת* (“prostitution, promiscuity”), *זְנוּנִים* (“prostitution”), and *זְנוּת* (“prostitution”). In addition to the use of such terms to refer to sexual immorality and prostitution, the terms were applied metaphorically to Israel’s spiritual unfaithfulness, which the prophets deemed a whoring after gods other than Israel’s true spiritual husband, YHWH. Kyle Harper makes an important observation about how this metaphorical application influenced the gender dynamics of the term:

The metaphorical sense of *זנה* as idolatry would decisively influence the development of Greek *πορνεία*. The metaphorical meaning allowed spiritual fornication to be used with acts of male commission. This semantic extension reversed the gender dynamics that are inherent in the primary sense of *זנה*. In Hosea we

first see men committing fornication, albeit of the religious variety (Hos 4:18; cf. Num 25:1; Jer 13:27; Ezek 43:7–9). In Second Temple Judaism, this reversal would feed back into the sexual sense of the term, so that sexual fornication became an act that men could commit.¹¹

As a rule, the LXX used *πορν*- words to render the Hebrew *זנה* words. Although in extra-biblical Greek, *πορν*- referred to prostitution and therefore as primarily a female sin, in the LXX and in subsequent Greek-speaking Hellenistic Jewish literature the *πορν*- word-group underwent semantic expansion to cover all forms of sexual immorality (although *πόρνη* retained its original meaning, “prostitute”).¹² There are different kinds of *πορνεία*. This is supported by two locutions in the nearby context of our passage: “sexual immorality of such a kind (*τοιαύτη πορνεία*)” (1 Cor 5:1), implying that there are other kinds; and “because of sexual

⁷Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 152–53, 198.
⁸Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000) (= BDAG), s.v. *πόρνος*.
⁹Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (= NIDNTTE) (2nd Ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 4.109.
¹⁰Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (= BrillDAG) (ed. Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder; Leiden: Brill, 2015), s.v. *πόρνη*, *πορνεύω*, *πορνεία*, *πορνεῖον*, *πορνογενής*.

¹¹Kyle Harper, “*Porneia*: The Making of a Christian Sexual Norm,” *JBL* 131.2 (2011): 370.
¹²Silva, *NIDNTTE*, 4.111.

immoralities (διὰ τὰς πορνείας)” (1 Cor 7:2), which implies either multiple instances or multiple kinds of sexual immorality. In Greek-speaking Hellenistic Judaism, πορνεία is any sex outside of marriage. The term πορνεία was not restricted to heterosexual activity between two unmarried people (what we would call “fornication” today), although it certainly included it.¹³ Any sexual encounter or relationship that does not occur within the holy bond of marriage can be called πορνεία, including incest (*T. Reuben* 1:6),¹⁴ adultery (*Sirach* 23:22–23; *T. Reuben* 4:8; *T. Joseph* 3:8; cf. *Matt* 5:32; 19:9),¹⁵ and same-sex relations (*T. Benj.* 9:1).

Focusing on Paul’s usage in 1 Corinthians 6:9, πόρνοι means those who engage in sexual immorality. It is indisputable that πορνεία in Paul does not mean “prostitution” but sexual immorality, specifically incest (5:1). A few verses later (5:9–11), Paul uses the cognate word πόρνος three times: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with πόρνοι — not at all meaning the πόρνοι of this world.” Paul’s usage of πόρνος is consistent with its meaning in all of its occurrences in the NT, where it uniformly means “sexually immoral person.”¹⁶ The main lexica of New Testament Greek gloss πόρνος as “one who practices or engages in sexual immorality.”¹⁷ This is reflected in several modern English versions, which render πόρνοι in 1 Corinthians 6:9

as “the sexually immoral” (NIV, ESV) or “sexually immoral people” (CSB).

Words based on the πορν- stem (πόρνος, πορνεία, and πορνεύω) have undergone semantic expansion in Greek-speaking Hellenistic Judaism from their narrow extra-biblical usage in secular Greek, where the words had to do with prostitution, to a much broader meaning, sexual immorality in general.¹⁸ The term πορνεία means any illicit sex, that is, sex outside of marriage, and embraces a number of specific types of immorality.¹⁹

2. μαλακοί and ἀρσενοκοῖται | “men who have sex with men”

μαλακός: pertaining to being passive in a same-sex relationship
ἀρσενοκοίτης, ὁ: a male who engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex²⁰

These two words have understandably been the subject of much debate. Revisionists have put forward several alternative interpretations, arguing that the terms denote any number of things other than same-sex practice, such as “masturbation,” “male prostitution,” “economic exploitation using sex,” or “non-mutual, abusive pederasty.” All these revisionist theories

have been refuted by scholars like David F. Wright and Robert Gagnon.²¹ The most authoritative lexicon, BDAG, supports taking the terms as straightforward references to same-sex activity and gives no support to revisionist readings.

The adjective μαλακός has a semantic range that begins with non-sexual meanings such as “soft” in the literal sense (e.g., soft clothing, soft pillows, soft skin). Extending beyond the literal usage, the term can also mean “effeminate,” and then even beyond that “passive in same-sex relations.” In this last case, it refers to a man who by dress and makeup seeks to present as a female for the purpose of functioning as the passive partner in same-sex relations. In extra-biblical Greek, the term and its cognates refer specifically to the passive partner in a male-male sexual relationship.²² That is clearly what Paul intends here.

The noun ἀρσενοκοίτης is of particular importance. It is transparently formed from two Greek words, ἄρσεν (“male”) and κοίτη (“bed, sexual relations”), a combination that is also found in the Septuagint:

LXX Leviticus 18:22: καὶ μετὰ ἄρσενος οὐ κοιμηθήσῃ κοίτην γυναικός, “And you shall not have sexual relations with a male as with a woman” (author’s translation).

LXX Leviticus 20:13: καὶ ὃς ἂν κοιμηθῇ μετὰ ἄρσενος κοίτην γυναικός βδέλυγμα ἐποίησαν. “And whoever has sexual

relations with a male as with a woman, both have committed an abomination” (author’s translation).

The rabbinic literature picks up on these two verses in Leviticus and uses the Hebrew phrases *mishkav zakur* (“lying of a male”) or *mishkav bzakur* (“lying with a male”) to refer to men having sex with men. It is thought that these rabbinic phrases influenced Greek-speaking Hellenistic Judaism which coined the term ἀρσενοκοίτης as a literal Greek rendering of the rabbinic term. Most scholars recognize that Paul almost certainly has these Leviticus verses in mind when he uses the term.²³

In view of these strong exegetical considerations, the English Standard Version takes the terms μαλακοί and ἀρσενοκοῖται together and renders them with the phrase, “men who practice homosexuality.” The New International Version (2011) has “men who have sex with men,” and the Christian Standard Bible has “males who have sex with males.” All three versions also have a footnote explaining that the terms refer to the passive (μαλακοί) and active (ἀρσενοκοῖται) partners in homosexual acts.²⁴

It may be asked if Paul’s teaching in our text is intended to condemn only male homosexual practice, e.g., leaving women who have sex with women in the clear. There are two compelling reasons to answer negatively. First, in our text,

¹³Joseph Jensen, “Does *Porneia* Mean Fornication? A Critique of Bruce Malina,” *NovT* 20.3 (1978): 161–84.

¹⁴The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* is a writing of Hellenistic Judaism dated during the Hasmonean period (167 BC–63 BC).

¹⁵The Matthean exception clause only makes sense if the term πορνεία is broad enough to refer to adultery. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33A; Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 125; Harper, “*Porneia*,” 375–76.

¹⁶Paul uses πόρνος six times (1 Cor 5:9, 10, 11; 6:9; Eph 5:5; 1 Tim 1:10). The word occurs in other parts of the NT four times (Heb 12:16; 13:4; Rev 21:8; 22:15).

¹⁷Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich (BDAG), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. πόρνος; Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, Rondal B. Smith, and Karen A. Munson, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 Vols. (2nd Ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), s.v. πόρνος (§88.274).

¹⁸However, the feminine form, πόρνη, still means “female prostitute” in the NT (12x).

¹⁹James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 690; E. P. Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle’s Life, Letters, and Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 365–66.

²⁰BDAG s.v. μαλακός, ἀρσενοκοίτης.

²¹David F. Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of ΑΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10),” *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 125–53; Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 303–39.

²²Plutarch, *Erōtikos* [*Amatorius*] 751D; Philo, *Spec.* 3:37–40; *Abr.* 135–36.

²³Sanders, *Paul*, 367; Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 83, 86, 108; Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes?”

²⁴Sanders, *Paul*, 366–68.

Paul begins with “the sexually immoral” (πόρνοι) as a broad category of those excluded from the kingdom, and as we have seen, this includes any sex outside of marriage. After giving the broad category, “the sexually immoral,” he adds two specific types of sexually immoral persons — adulterers and men who have sex with men.²⁵ These are representative but not exhaustive. Second, in Romans 1:26–27, the apostle makes clear that same-sex relations are “dishonorable passions” (πάθη ἀτιμίας), whether they are of the male or the female variety.

“DO NOT BE DECEIVED”

Taking Paul’s words at face value, it would seem that those who engage in the practice of homosexuality will not inherit the kingdom. To reinforce the point, Paul adds a solemn warning, “Do not be deceived” (μὴ πλανᾶσθε). There were voices in the church seeking to deceive the Christians in Corinth on this very point. This can be detected in the libertine slogan, “All things are lawful” (6:12; 10:23), that Paul quotes and then refutes with the claims of the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 10:1–4, Paul warns them again, pointing to the example of the Israelites in the wilderness. They too had their version of the Christian sacraments. They too were baptized into Moses and ate spiritual food and drank spiritual drink. “Nevertheless,” Paul says, “with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness” (10:5), and he goes on to warn the Corinthians against the same sins of sexual immorality and idolatry. He adds,

“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (10:12). These warnings are not meant to imply that someone who is elect and savingly united to Christ can lose their elect status and fall out of union with Christ. They are meant to challenge those who profess faith in Christ, are members of the visible church, and partakers of the church’s sacraments not to presume on God’s grace and think they are going to be saved eschatologically even if they continue in unrepentant sexual immorality and idolatry.

The warning, “Do not be deceived,” is found two other times in Paul’s letters in contexts of the same literary form, that is, vice lists followed by warnings that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom (Gal. 5:19–21 + 6:7–8; Eph. 5:5–7). This suggests that Paul’s strong “will not inherit” judgment applies even to professing Christians who continue in these sins without repenting. These are real sins that those who profess the name of Christ can commit. And if they persist in them without repentance, they will not inherit the kingdom of God.

FROM THE OLD LIFE TO THE NEW CREATION

Paul has issued his solemn warning. He has said that those living an unrepentant life of immorality, idolatry, etc., will not inherit the kingdom of God. But in verse 11 he applies the gospel and assures the Christians in the church of Corinth that, though they were these things, they are such no longer: “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were

“In other words, some of you used to live this way, but you don’t live that way any longer because you have become a new creation in Christ and have turned from the old life of sin.”

justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

“*Such were some of you*” (καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε). The neuter plural ταῦτα (“such”) summarizes the preceding vices listed in verses 9–10 as more than incidental actions (e.g., one sexual misdeed) but repeated actions that have hardened into a person’s character (“the sexually immoral”). The imperfect verb ἦτε implies “continuous habituation.”²⁶ The sins listed in verses 9–10 were ongoing habits of life that defined who many of the Corinthians were. But the past tense, “were,” implies that they are no longer living that way. Thus, while the term “repentance” is not used here, the concept is implied by the statement, “such were some of you.” In other words, some of you used to live this way, but you don’t live that way any longer because you have become a new creation in Christ and have turned from the old life of sin.

“*But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified*” (ἀλλ’ ἀπελούσασθε, ἀλλ’ ἡγιασθητε, ἀλλ’ ἐδικαιώθητε). The repetition of the strong adversative “but” has a powerful rhetorical effect. It further highlights the strong “before conversion”

vs. “after conversion” temporal transition that has occurred in the life of these former pagans. They “were” these things. Their lives as pagans, before coming to Christ, were once characterized by these sinful patterns. But they have undergone a radical change. They have been converted by a monergistic act of God on the basis of Christ’s merit and through the applicatory work of the Spirit washing, definitively sanctifying, and justifying them.

The three verbs, “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified,” are not given in any particular order, as if Paul is here laying down a technical *ordo salutis*.²⁷ We should not suppose that justification comes after washing and definitive sanctification. Instead, the three terms, like those in 1 Corinthians 1:30 (“righteousness, sanctification, redemption”), are thrown together to highlight the full-orbed nature of the gospel as including not only the forensic but also the transformative dimensions. It is a full salvation that we have in Christ. We are not only justified (deemed righteous); we are also washed, set free from the dominion of sin, and set apart as holy to God.

^{25a}The list starts with *pornoi* in the sense of ‘the sexually immoral,’ followed by the other main gentile sin, idolatry, followed by specific kinds of sexual immorality” (Sanders, *Paul*, 365). Cf. 1 Tim 1:10 where “the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality” (πόρνοι, ἀρσενοκοῖται) are juxtaposed.

²⁶Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 453.

^{27a}The order of the verbs . . . has no theological significance.” Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 216.

As already noted, there are two parallel passages where Paul makes the same “will not inherit” judgment (Gal 5:19–21; Eph 5:5). These two passages are just as strong as our text, and yet both of these are found in letters where Paul explicitly and emphatically teaches salvation by grace alone. Paul evidently did not see any inconsistency or tension between these two things: (1) we are saved, not by our own good works, or by being good and living righteously, but by faith in Christ (Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8–9), and yet (2) anyone who claims to be a Christian but who persists in defiant sexual immorality is not going to inherit the kingdom (Gal 5:19–21; Eph 5:5).

Paul teaches that progressive sanctification is not an optional extra in the Christian life, but an absolute necessity. He says, “If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Rom 8:13). Charles Hodge comments on this verse: “The necessity of holiness . . . is absolute. No matter what professions we may make, or what hopes we may indulge, justification, or the manifestation of the divine favour, is never separated from sanctification.”²⁸ The inseparability of justification and sanctification in Paul’s thought is implied in our very text: “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified” (v 11). This presupposition stands behind the solemn warning (vv 9–10), and that is why the warning is not inconsistent with Paul’s doctrine of salvation by grace alone.²⁹

CHURCH DISCIPLINE (1 COR 5:1-13)

We have seen the theological implication — those who continue impenitently in these sins will not inherit the kingdom. There is also an ecclesial implication — such sin must not be tolerated in the church. This ecclesial implication derives from reading 6:9–11 in light of the previous chapter, where Paul chastises the Corinthian church for failing to exercise proper church discipline in the case of a man who was sleeping with his father’s wife (1 Cor 5:1). He rebukes the Corinthians for becoming arrogant, when they ought to have mourned instead. He calls them to take decisive action: “Let him who has done this be removed from among you” (v 2). He calls on them to “cleanse out the old leaven” (v 7) by exercising church discipline. Paul then clarifies that he did not mean not to associate with the sexually immoral of this world, but with those who profess to be Christians:

“No matter what professions we may make, or what hopes we may indulge, justification, or the manifestation of the divine favour, is never separated from sanctification.”

²⁸Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Rev. Ed.; Philadelphia: James S. Claxton, 1864), 415 (p. 264 in The Banner of Truth edition).
²⁹Calvin similarly argues that the twin blessings of salvation (justification and sanctification) are inseparable. *Institutes* 3:16:1.

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of *sexual immorality* or *greed*, or is an *idolater*, *reviler*, *drunkard*, or *swindler*—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” (1 Cor 5:11–13)

There is a high degree of overlap between the vice list in 5:11 and the vice list in 6:9–10. The word order is broadly similar, with two changes (“greedy, idolater” switched, and “reviler, drunkard” switched). Another difference is that 5:11 has the sins in the singular, while 6:9–10 has them in the plural. Also, several new sins (italicized) are inserted by Paul in the second list:

1 CORINTHIANS 5:11	1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-10
Sexually immoral (πόρνος)	Sexually immoral (πόρνοι)
Greedy (πλεονέκτης)	Idolaters (εἰδωλολάτραι)
Idolater (εἰδωλολάτρης)	<i>Adulterers</i> (μοιχοί)
.	<i>Men who have sex with men</i>
.	(μαλακοί + ἀρσενοκοῖται)
.	<i>Thieves</i> (κλέπται)
Reviler (λοιδορός)	Greedy (πλεονέκται)
Drunkard (μέθυσος)	Drunkards (μέθυσοι)
Swindler (ἄρπαξ)	Revilers (λοιδοροί)
	Swindlers (ἄρπαγες)

The two lists lead off with the same sin (“sexually immoral”) and end with the same sin (“swindlers”). The two lists are so similar, both in terms of the lexemes chosen and the way they are ordered, it is difficult to resist the inference that the second list intentionally links back to the first. By implication, the discussion of church discipline that surrounds the first list colors the second list. Paul’s injunction, “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality,” etc. (5:11), implicitly calls the church to remove from its fellowship anyone living impenitently in the sins mentioned in 6:9–10.

THE DIVORCE-AND-REMARRIAGE CHALLENGE

Evangelical pastors and churches, out of reverence for Scripture, acknowledge that same-sex relations are not in line with God’s

creation design for human sexuality. And yet they may wish to adopt a compassionate and pastoral stance toward the same-sex attracted Christian who struggles to manage romantic and sexual desires in chaste singleness. “Optimum homosexual morality” (Smedes) suggests that for such a person, it would be better to enter a committed same-sex relationship. On such a pastoral approach, the argument goes, the church could tolerate or accommodate committed same-sex relationships without fully endorsing them.

As we have seen, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 presents a major hurdle for this reasoning. But evangelical accommodationists like Smedes attempt to overcome that hurdle by challenging the church with an apparent inconsistency in its application of this text. According to Jesus, second marriages are adulterous: “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery” (Matt 19:9; cf. 5:32; Mark 10:11–12). Is the church really prepared to be consistent and exclude from the kingdom those who remarry after an unbiblical divorce? Accommodationists would point out that 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 explicitly mentions “adulterers” as among those unrighteous persons who are excluded from the kingdom. Jesus seems to be saying that those who have divorced for reasons other than unfaithfulness and subsequently remarried are living in adultery. Yet how many evangelical churches would bring church discipline against those who have remarried after an unbiblical divorce? By

and large, evangelicals have already adopted a pastorally accommodating approach to some matters related to sex and marriage, recognizing that we live in a messy, fallen world, without denying the biblical ideal of marriage as a life-long union. Therefore, the argument goes, it would be inconsistent of the church to adopt a pastoral approach to the divorced-and-remarried but not to extend the same grace to those in same-sex relationships.³⁰

How should we respond to the divorce-and-remarriage challenge? I would suggest that the words of Jesus need not be taken to imply that a second marriage after an unbiblical divorce is *continuously* adulterous. They need only be taken as implying that the inception of the second marriage is an adulterous act. If a divorce for a reason other than sexual immorality takes place, Jesus’ teaching mandates that those so divorced must remain single and not remarry. We can get at this issue from another direction by inquiring about the moral status of a second marriage. The key ethical question that must be addressed is this: When a person remarries after an unbiblical divorce, is the second marriage a valid marriage in the eyes of God? John Murray argues that it is:

Though illegitimate, it is a real marriage and should be regarded as such. It has the effect of dissolving the first marriage On this interpretation the second marriage should not be dissolved. Though contracted and consummated illegitimately and adulterously, it nevertheless *de facto*

exists and the parties to it should prove faithful to each other.³¹

Murray’s language of a marriage “contracted and consummated illegitimately and adulterously” provides a helpful gloss of the words of Jesus. A man who divorces his wife for a reason other than unfaithfulness and marries another woman “commits adultery” (μοιχᾶται) in the sense that he contracts and consummates the second marriage illegitimately and adulterously. The present tense μοιχᾶται need not be taken in a continuous sense but as a gnomic present expressing a fact that always obtains whenever the conditions are met.³² The adultery Jesus speaks of would then be limited to the initial conjugal act when the second marriage was consummated, not to every conjugal act thereafter. Since the divorce was on grounds other than adultery, the previous marriage was still in force in God’s eyes up to the moment of the initial conjugal act consummating the second marriage. But as Murray argued, the consummation of the second marriage “has the effect of dissolving the first marriage.” For those who have sinfully remarried, they ought not to compound their sin by getting divorced again, but rather to repent of their sin of getting remarried after an unbiblical divorce and to seek to remain faithful to the second marriage, even though it was sinfully contracted.

To be sure, impenitent adulterers are excluded from the kingdom (1 Cor 6:9–11), and the church must not tolerate those living in adulterous or sexually immoral relationships (1 Cor 5:1–13). But those who are penitent over their sin of contracting

and consummating a second marriage after an unbiblical divorce are not living in a sexually immoral relationship. On this reading of Matthew 19:9 (and parallels), then, the divorce-and-remarriage challenge fails because the church is not in fact tolerating sexual immorality in the case of the divorced-and-remarried.

A THEOLOGICALLY UNSTABLE POSITION

Marriage is a one-flesh union between one man and one woman, as revealed in the creation narrative (Gen 1:27; 2:24) and affirmed by Jesus himself (Matt 19:4–6). Crucially, Scripture assumes this definition of marriage and defines sexual immorality (πορνεία) as all sex outside of marriage (see the word study on πορνεία above; cf. Matt 19:3–9; 1 Cor 7:1–9; Heb 13:4). Since a same-sex relationship is not a real marriage in accordance with the word of God, same-sex relations within such a relationship constitute sexual immorality, and it doesn’t matter if the relationship is committed and exclusive. But this creates a problem for pastoral accommodation. For while accommodationists recognize that same-sex activity falls short of God’s ideal for sexuality, they cannot agree that same-sex activity within a committed relationship constitutes sexual immorality. They must argue that a committed same-sex relationship makes same-sex sex holy and not immoral, in the same way that real marriage makes heterosexual sex holy and not immoral. But this dramatically redraws the boundary between moral sex and immoral sex. That boundary, according to Scripture and the church’s traditional sexual ethic, is marriage. Sex within biblical marriage is moral. Sex

³⁰The divorce-and-remarriage challenge is raised by Smedes in “Like the Wideness of the Sea?” *Perspectives* 12 (May 1999): 8–12. Reformed Church in America minister and NT professor, James V. Brownson, picks up Smedes’s argument in “Gay Unions: Consistent Witness or Pastoral Accommodation? An Evangelical Pastoral Dilemma and the Unity of the Church,” *Reformed Review* 591 (2005): 3–18.

³¹John Murray, *Divorce* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1961), 111.

³²Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 523.



outside of it is immoral. But those who hold the pastoral accommodation view end up creating a new category: moral sex outside of biblical marriage.

The new category of moral sex outside of marriage is theologically unstable. Accommodationists at heart want to be pastoral — and that is commendable. But in order to be pastoral, accommodationists will necessarily need to treat same-sex unions as practically identical to, or at least analogous to, real marriages. The same-sex couple will be called to physical and emotional faithfulness to one another. The church will need to hold them accountable to their vows of faithfulness. Partners who break their vows will have to be disciplined by the church as if they had committed adultery. Questions as to the legitimate grounds for divorce will have to be addressed. In churches that practice infant baptism, children will

be brought to the church for baptism. The entire apparatus of the church's pastoral care of and accountability toward real marriages will have to be extended to same-sex unions. If it is not, the accommodationist church would be admitting that the unions in question constitute sexual immorality in its eyes — a grave sin that, without repentance, requires church discipline. But church discipline is what pastoral accommodation is, by definition, seeking to sidestep. Thus, if the church does not want to treat same-sex relationships as sexually immoral, then it must treat those unions as if they were, for all practical purposes, tantamount to real marriages.

Churches and pastors that have adopted a policy of pastoral accommodation rarely remain there, eventually transitioning to full LGBT-inclusion and affirmation. For example, in 1978, the United Presbyterian

Church in the USA acknowledged that homosexuality fell short of God's design for human sexuality, yet advocated a compassionate, pastoral, and gradual approach, recognizing that the church is not a citadel of the morally perfect but a hospital for sinners.³³ Practicing homosexuals who confessed Jesus as Lord were not to be excluded from membership. The line was drawn at ordained office; homosexuals were eligible for ordination only if they experienced orientation change or remained celibate. But the line could not hold. If practicing homosexuals were welcomed as members, on what grounds could they be barred from ordination? Eventually accommodation became full affirmation. In 2011, the PC(USA) changed its standards so that persons in same-sex relationships are no longer ineligible for ordination.³⁴ In 2015, it changed the definition of marriage to include same-sex marriage.³⁵

The evolution of the PC(USA) is a cautionary tale at the denominational level. An example at the individual level is the case of Reformed Church in America minister and professor, James Brownson. A few years after defending pastoral accommodation as a legitimate option,³⁶ he shifted further to the left and now defines marriage as a "one-flesh kinship bond" between two persons without regard to gender.³⁷

Pastoral accommodation appears to be an unstable halfway house. It cannot last long. The logical endpoint is an affirming stance that views these unions as equivalent to real marriage, that is, as bestowing a mantle of moral legitimacy on same-sex relations

just as real marriage does on opposite-sex relations. Pastoral accommodation, in spite of its claim to be an evangelical position that respects Scripture, recasts the traditional sexual ethic and inevitably redefines marriage itself.

CONCLUSION

In 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, Paul teaches that the salvation that is ours in Christ not only includes a judicial verdict of justification but also includes a radical transformation wherein our old way of life is changed and our lives are no longer dominated by sin. The dominion of the sins of the old, pre-Christian way of life, particularly sins pertaining to sexual immorality, is broken, and we are washed, set apart as holy, and set free to a new life in Christ. Those who profess the name of Christ but who persist without repentance in these sins are excluded from the kingdom. One of the sins that excludes from the kingdom is persistent same-sex practice. Pressure from the surrounding culture may push some evangelicals to seek to accommodate professing Christians in same-sex relationships as members of the body of Christ. Yet the explicit teaching of this text, penned by the inspired Apostle Paul, closes the door to pastoral accommodation. Same-sex relationships are sexually immoral (1 Cor 6:9–11). Sexual immorality cannot be tolerated in the church (1 Cor 5:1–13). Therefore, same-sex relationships cannot be tolerated or accommodated in the church. ✕

³³"The Church and Homosexuality," Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1978, https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/_resolutions/church-and-homosexuality.pdf.

³⁴Jerry Van Marter, "PC(USA) relaxes constitutional prohibition of gay and lesbian ordination," Presbyterian Church USA (May 11, 2011), <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2011/5/11/pcusa-relaxes-constitutional-prohibition-gay-and-l>.

³⁵Patrick D. Heery, "What same-sex marriage means to presbyterians," Presbyterian Church USA (March 20, 2015), <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2015/3/20/what-same-sex-marriage-means-presbyterians>.

³⁶See note 30 above.

³⁷James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 85–109.

Do Men Owe Women a Special Kind of Care?



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DO MEN OWE WOMEN A SPECIAL KIND OF CARE?

Egalitarianism tends to obscure the deeper differences between manhood and womanhood.¹ This has not served us well in the last fifty years. It has instead confused millions and muted a crucial summons for a distinctly masculine care.

UNANSWERED QUESTION

What average man or woman today could answer a little boy's question: *Daddy, what does it mean to grow up and be a man and not a woman?* Or a little girl's question: *Mommy, what does it mean to grow up and be a woman and not a man?*

Who could answer these questions without diminishing manhood and womanhood into anatomical structures and biological functions? Who could articulate the profound meanings of manhood and womanhood woven differently into a common personhood created differently and equally in the image of God?

How many articles have been written about the meaning of being a “real woman” or “real man” that leave us saying, “But all of those wonderful things apply just as well to the other sex — maturity, wisdom, courage, sacrifice, humility, patience, kindness, strength, self-control, purity, faith, hope, love, etc.”? By all means, these mark true womanhood. *And* they mark true manhood. So, they do not answer the little boy's question: What does it mean to grow up and be a man and *not a woman*? Or the little girl's question: What does it mean to grow up and be a woman and *not a man*?

For decades, Christian and non-Christian egalitarians have argued, assumed, and modeled that roles among men and women in the home, in the church, and in the wider culture should emerge solely from competencies rather than deeper realities rooted in how we differ as men and women. This means that, from the side of egalitarianism, very little attention has been given to the questions of our little girl and boy. Apart from physiological and anatomical

¹This essay was originally written for [desiringGod.org](https://www.desiringGod.org) (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-men-owe-women-a-special-kind-of-care>); republished with permission.

features, the questions seem to have no answers. And today, even those features are pliable.

WHEN NATURE WON'T YIELD

Way back in 1975, Paul Jewett, who taught me systematic theology at Fuller Seminary, conceded as an egalitarian his uncertainty about “what it means to be a man in distinction to a woman or a woman in distinction to a man.”² He did not mean the anatomy was ambiguous. He meant that, whatever deeper differences there are, he didn’t think we could know them.

Egalitarians seem not to have been alarmed by this confession of ignorance. Instead, it seems they have been confirmed and emboldened by it. It fits the half-century-old gender-leveling current of the culture. But *current* is too weak a word. *Torrent* or *avalanche* would be more accurate. One need only sample the movies and TV shows of recent years to see the increasing passion with which women are portrayed as being just as physically strong, harsh, impudent, violent, arrogant, vulgar, two-timing, and sexually aggressive as any macho male hero.

One wonders if this passion for the portrayal of *Annie Get Your Gun* on steroids is perhaps owing to the rising sense that there is something in nature that won’t adapt to our egalitarian portrayal. The stubbornness of God-given nature, then, creates the need for the egalitarian message to be more forceful, even preternatural (Wonder Woman, Catwoman, Superwoman). Such are the trials of those who try to recreate what God made otherwise.

ALARMING SEXUAL AGNOSTICISM

But it really is astonishing that Paul Jewett was unable to identify the deeper meaning of manhood and womanhood. The reason it should astonish us is that he confessed,

Sexuality permeates one's individual being to its very depth; it conditions every facet of one's life as a person. As the self is always aware of itself as

²Paul Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 178.

an ‘I,’ so this ‘I’ is always aware of itself as *himself* or *herself*. Our self-knowledge is indissolubly bound up not simply with our *human* being but with our *sexual* being. At the human level there is no ‘I and thou’ per se, but only the ‘I’ who is male or female confronting the ‘thou,’ the ‘other,’ who is also male or female.³

He cites Swiss theologian, Emil Brunner (d. 1966), to the same effect,

Our sexuality penetrates to the deepest metaphysical ground of our personality. As a result, the physical differences between the man and the woman are a parable of psychical and spiritual differences of a more ultimate nature.⁴

After reading these amazing statements concerning how essential manhood and womanhood are to our personhood and how sexuality “conditions every facet of one’s life,” it is all the more stunning to read Jewett’s agnosticism about the meaning of manhood and womanhood,

Some, at least, among contemporary theologians are not so sure that they know what it means to be a man in distinction to a woman or a woman in distinction to a man. It is because the writer [Jewett himself] shares this uncertainty that he has skirted the question of ontology [what actually is] in this study.⁵

All human activity reflects a qualitative distinction which is sexual in nature. But in my opinion, such an observation offers no clue to the ultimate meaning of that distinction. It may be that we shall never know what that distinction ultimately means.⁶

Surely this is a great sadness — and an important clue to how we got where we are today. It is not a great leap from Jewett’s agnosticism about what manhood and womanhood are to the belief that those differences (unknowable as they seem to him) have no God-given, normative status in the nature of things, but only a social status chosen by individuals.

³Ibid., 172.
⁴Ibid., 173.
⁵Ibid., 178.
⁶Ibid., 187.

FROM UNANSWERABLE TO UNASKABLE

The decades-long disinclination to ask the question (using Brunner's terms), *What are the "psychical and spiritual differences of a more ultimate nature" between manhood and womanhood?* has morphed from Jewett's agnosticism into today's antagonism. The question is not only unanswerable; it is unaskable.

But not asking the question about the essence of male and female personhood confuses everyone, especially our children. And this confusion hurts people. It is not a small thing. Its effects are vast.

When manhood and womanhood, for example, are confused at home, the consequences are deeper than may show up in a generation. There are dynamics in the home that form the children's concept of manhood and womanhood, and shape significantly their sexual preferences. Especially powerful in forming sexual identity is a father's strong and loving affirmation of a son's masculinity and daughter's femininity. But how can this kind of strong, fatherly affirmation be cultivated in an atmosphere where deeper differences between masculinity and femininity are constantly denied or diminished for the sake of gender-leveling and sex-blindness?

"There are dynamics in the home that form the children's concept of manhood and womanhood, and shape significantly their sexual preferences."

SUPPRESSING A NEEDED SUMMONS

Under pressure to shun the question about deeper and differing inclinations that may define the God-given natures of manhood and womanhood, mainstream Western culture has suppressed one of the realities that God put in place for the flourishing of both sexes. While affirming the importance of mutual love, respect, honor, and encouragement between men and women, there is in our day a resistance against the biblical summons for men to show a peculiar care for women that's different than they would for men — and a strong disincentive to women to feel glad about this.

But in Colossians 3:19, the apostle Paul told husbands, "Love your wives, and do not be harsh with them." That is not the same as saying, "Neither of you should be harsh." We can tell from Ephesians 5:22–33 and 1 Peter 3:7 that this admonition to men is owing to a peculiarly male temptation to be rough — even cruel — and to a peculiarly female vulnerability to that violence, on the one hand, and to a natural female gladness, on the other hand, to be honored with caring protection and strong tenderness.

COMPLEMENTARIAN CLAIM

This is where biblical complementarians step in to say that something beautiful and vital is lost, when the *only* summons to men, in relation to women, is the same as the summons given to women, in relation to men. Calls like: be respectful, be kind, keep the Golden Rule.

No, say complementarians. God requires more of men in relation to women than he does women in relation to men. God requires that men feel a peculiar responsibility for protecting and caring for women. As a complementarian, I do not say that this calling is to the exclusion of women protecting and caring for men in their own way. I am saying that men bear a *peculiar* burden of responsibility that is laid on them in a way that is not laid on women.

IRREVERSIBLE, PECULIAR RESPONSIBILITY

Modeling the peculiar summons to the man in marriage, Christ dies for his bride to save her, beautify her, nourish her, and cherish her (Eph 5:25–30). In Paul's way of thinking, this peculiar calling of manhood is no more reversible with the calling of womanhood than the work of Christ is reversible with the work of the church.

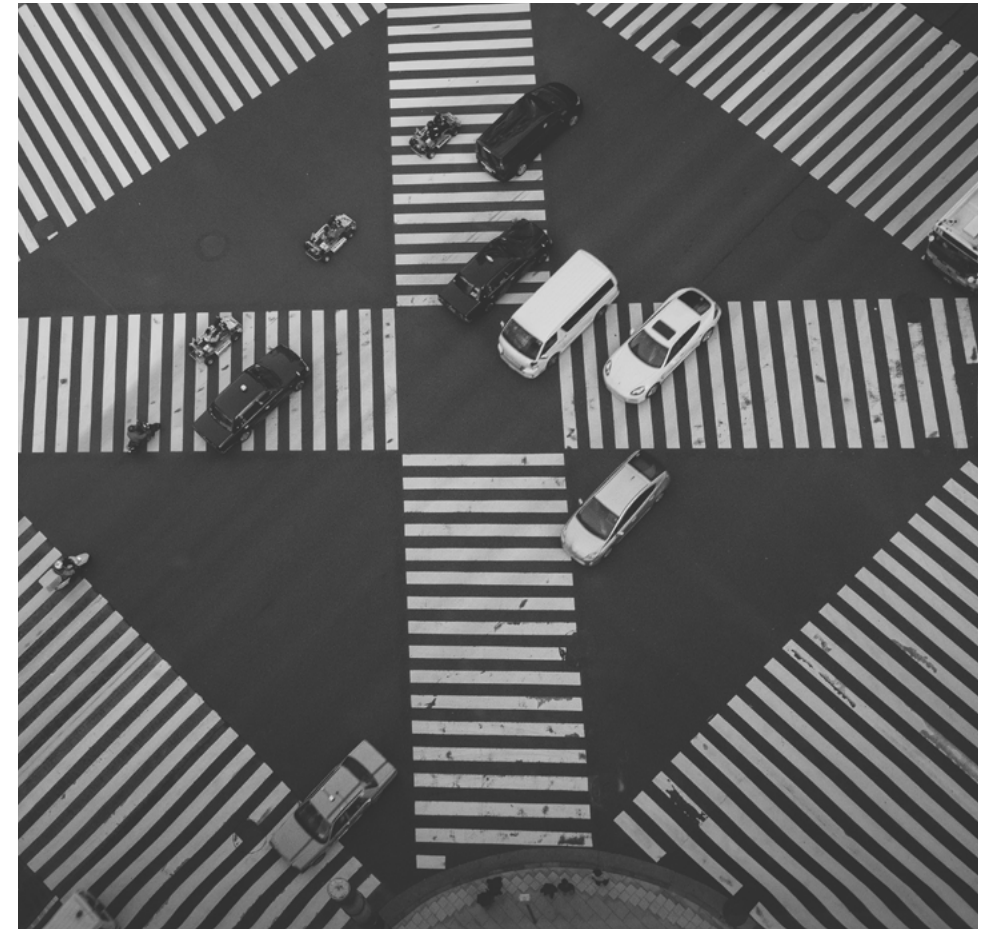
And since this calling is rooted, not in asexual competencies, but in the nature of manhood itself, its implications for life are not limited to marriage. To be sure, a husband bears unique responsibilities to his wife. But this deeper meaning of manhood does not lose its significance when he walks out of the door of his home. Men, as men, everywhere, all the time, bear a burden, under God, to care for the well-being of women, which is not identical to the care women owe men.

"this peculiar calling of manhood is no more reversible with the calling of womanhood than the work of Christ is reversible with the work of the church."

This message, at the heart of complementarianism, has been all but muted in our culture. Many would rather sacrifice this peculiar biblical mandate, given for the good of women, than betray any hint of compromise with egalitarian assumptions. Thus, I am arguing, we have forfeited both a great, God-ordained restraint upon male vice, and a great, God-ordained incentive for male valor.

HUMAN DOES NOT REPLACE MASCULINE

We have developed a theology and a cultural bias that continually communicates to men: You bear no different responsibility for women than they bear for you. Or to put it differently, we have created a Bible-contradicting,



nature-denying myth that men should feel no different responsibility to protect women than women feel to protect men. Many have put their hope in the myth that the summons to generic human virtue, with no attention to the peculiar virtues required of manhood and womanhood, would be sufficient to create a beautiful society of mutual respect. It isn't working.

Perhaps the disillusionment of these days will give us pause. Perhaps we will consider that we have lost something very important. Perhaps many will wake up to the possibility that it is not noble, but tragic, when a whole culture refuses to tell men that their manhood includes a peculiar kind of care for women. ✕

Insular Thinking about the American Nuclear Family



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“The Nuclear Family was a Mistake.” So reads the provocative title of a relatively recent essay published by David Brooks in *The Atlantic*.¹ The attention-grabbing headline was perhaps overshadowed by other, more immediately pressing headlines at that time (ironically, Brooks’s essay was published in the same month that the whole Western world suddenly began to lock itself up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic). Yet while pandemics (and wars) come and go, the secular West’s continual spiritual decline has proceeded apace, ever more rapidly accelerating in the decades since the sexual revolution.

David Brooks is certainly not alone in his assessment of the “nuclear family,” a

term which has now become an epithet of opprobrium in our culture. One thinks of certain sitcoms, such as *Married with Children*, which mock the dysfunctional nuclear families they depict with a kind of bemused apathy (or by turns even a concealed hatred). The academy as well has worked diligently to stereotype this family model as a historical novelty, deeply tied to social conservative ideals in North American society.

Yet what is most surprising, perhaps, is the degree to which the American church in many quarters has thrown in its lot with the culture in criticizing the emphasis that earlier generations of evangelicals placed on *family*. Note, as well, that this critique is by no means

exclusive to left-leaning evangelicalism. Indeed, both the left and the right increasingly have framed their critiques of “purity culture,” and the preoccupation with marriage and procreation, as distractions — even a form of subtle idolatry — that too often sidetracks from the gospel.

There have been numerous recent re-examinations of the virtues of evangelical mainstays such as *Focus on the Family* and *The Promise Keepers*. There has also been a reconsideration, to some degree, of the traditional evangelical emphasis on young people avoiding secular dating practices, and instead marrying early and seeking to form a family unit as soon as possible. Significantly, some of the major players in a bygone era of evangelicalism have renounced their previously held views (such as Joshua Harris, author of the wildly popular 90s classic

I Kissed Dating Goodbye), or else proven themselves to have been deeply morally compromised (such as Ravi Zacharias or Josh Duggar). These factors (as well as others) have, in one way or another, recently served to slam the brakes on the traditional evangelical emphasis on the family in the context of Christian discipleship. Just as the 1950s were for the broader American culture, the 1990s are increasingly viewed, in the popular imagination of much of contemporary evangelicalism, as a kind of idealistic, unrealistic, imbalanced high-water mark of the “nuclear family.”

COUNTERVAILING ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE FAMILY

The trends described above have coincided with some new opposing emphases in American evangelicalism. In reaction to

¹David Brooks, “The Nuclear Family Was a Mistake,” *The Atlantic* (March 2020), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/03/the-nuclear-family-was-a-mistake/605536/>.

a perceived overemphasis on the family unit, there has been growth in recognizing singleness as a gift from God and as something to be aspired to. Especially significant here is the rise of “Side B” Christianity and the encouragement, even celebration of, celibacy for same-sex attracted Christians (in place of marriage, which is sometimes viewed as “inauthentic” for such persons). As such, one potent strategy in the effort to equalize the perceived unfairness between married Christians and other Christians struggling with homosexuality is to downplay the importance of marriage and procreation in the Christian life itself. Some have gone even further than this. The founder and president of the *Revoice* movement, Nate Collins, asked openly in a 2018 conference address: “Is it possible that gay people today are being sent by God, like Jeremiah, to find God’s words for the church . . . [and] shed light on contemporary false teachings and even idolatries?” This he characterized as a “prophetic call to the church to abandon idolatrous attitudes toward the nuclear family.”

Rather surprisingly and counterintuitively, the nuclear family is now subtly associated with the modern American preoccupation with individualism and materialism. Advocacy for traditional families is even stigmatized (though usually not overtly) as a selfish undertaking that tends to cannibalize other equally legitimate extended and non-traditional familial bonds. The family, consisting of a husband, a wife, and their children, is thus effectively stereotyped as being the privilege of well-to-do white middle class families.

The argument in Brooks’s essay is illustrative of this. His piece does not

necessarily read in the way one might expect (to judge by its attention-grabbing title). It is not a screed that directly assaults biblical marriage or ridicules procreation. Rather, his critique of the nuclear family is couched more in terms that present this family model as a somewhat utopian ideal which only flourished for around a decade or so in the 1950s and 1960s thanks to a constellation of chance historical circumstances (what Brooks terms “The Short, Happy Life of the Nuclear Family”).

For Brooks, the 1950s American nuclear family (as an autonomous unit) was a mistake because it set into motion the fragmentation and disintegration of old extended family structures that had existed prior to the industrial revolution. Citing numerous statistics about broken families in America today, he characterizes this system as fundamentally “brittle” and concludes:

Today, only a minority of American households are traditional two-parent nuclear families and only one-third of American individuals live in this kind of family. That 1950–65 window was not normal. It was a freakish historical moment when all of society conspired, wittingly and not, to obscure the *essential fragility* of the nuclear family [emphasis added].

Brooks claims that the success or failure of nuclear family units is almost entirely determined by one’s social class and economic well-being. The nuclear family simultaneously “liberates the rich and ravages the working-class and the poor.” Why the disparity in outcomes? In essence, he argues that “babysitting, professional child care, tutoring, coaching, therapy, expensive after-school programs,” and

various other “expensive tools and services” make up for the lack of extended family structures that used to exist in an earlier era. These supposedly account for the reduction in stress, divorce, and other societal ills enjoyed by the wealthy. Ultimately, then, it would seem that economic well-being is the main driver of positive social outcomes in American society.

AN IGNORANCE OF THE LARGER CONTEXT

Yet at the same time, Brooks unwittingly cites evidence in the same essay that cuts in the opposite direction (in terms of causal chains). Data produced by the Brookings Institution indicates the following, according to David Brooks: “[I]f you are born into poverty and raised by your married parents, you have an 80 percent chance of climbing out of it. If you are born into poverty and raised by an unmarried mother, you have a 50 percent chance of remaining stuck.” It turns out that the “golden age” of the nuclear family in the 1950s was not the exclusive domain of wealthy white individuals, but indeed was common to the society as a whole. A much more plausible and reasonable assessment of the evidence therefore points to *values* as the driver of economic success, not the other way around.

At the end of the day, both kinds of societal construals — whether it is the 1950s American nuclear family or the trappings of evangelical culture from the 1990s — turn out to be rather myopic fixations from a global and historical perspective. It only makes sense that the specific categories mapped onto the American story do not necessarily translate to other contexts. As such, it is unreasonable for American Christians (or indeed the broader American

society) to make ultimate judgments about the family and its virtues as a reaction to its recent, rather narrow context.

The challenges and extra-biblical distortions of the family take different shapes wherever one looks in the world. In Latin America, for example, centuries of Roman Catholicism have deeply shaped a culture in directions that are seemingly diametrically opposed to one another. On the one hand, society may be characterized as being largely matriarchal in many ways, yet on the other hand, a culture of “machismo” pervades many Latin American societies, emphasizing traits and actions that generally have little to do with biblical masculinity. Here again, one ought not make judgments about the roles of men and women purely as a reaction to a particular unique context.

In Asia, communist China is now beginning to bear the full consequences of its destructive one-child policy. This is something completely foreign to the American experience, yet Americans very wisely ought to be taking it into account if they wish to make societal pronouncements about the value or need of procreation (beyond condescending quips about “white picket fences and 2.5 kids”). All kinds of knock-on effects from this policy are now creating serious and lasting problems in China’s society. One of these effects is an extreme gender imbalance in the population, due to the horrific practice of aborting baby girls, in keeping with government restrictions on multiple children.

In fact, Communist political theory had long ago singled out the nuclear family as a fundamental threat to its power and ambitions. The *bourgeoisie* stereotype of the

*“Though distorted
by fallen mankind,
has persisted through
mainstay of natural*

family, far from originating in an affluent post-war America, was indeed the subject of vitriolic scorn from leading nineteenth-century communists and other leftists. A central component in their political theory was the view that economics and the nuclear family are somehow inextricably linked, as seen, for example in Friedrich Engels’ monograph *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. The family was seen as tied to the development of private property, and the alleged “subjugation” of women and children — both of these hated by the communists. The end goal was therefore the elimination of all hierarchical relationships, including those of religion and the family.

NO ALTERNATIVE BUT THE FAMILY

For all his castigation of the nuclear family (complicit, according to Brooks, in the many modern American societal ills that he catalogs), he offers no real alternative means for achieving the goal he desires —

complex and deep networks of individuals in extended families supporting each other. Though distorted in numerous ways by fallen mankind, the nuclear family has persisted through the ages as a mainstay of natural law. Far from being a parochial innovation of twentieth-century conservative America, the nuclear family is in fact the universal building block of every known society. The late American anthropologist George Peter Murdock began one of his major works, *Social Structure*, by defining the “nuclear family” (a term dating back to the early twentieth century, according to *Merriam-Webster* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*):

The nuclear family is a universal human social grouping. Either as the sole prevailing form of the family or as the basic unit from which more complex familial forms are compounded, it exists as a distinct and strongly functional group in every known society. No example,

*in numerous ways
the nuclear family
the ages as a
law.”*

at least, has come to light in the 250 representative cultures surveyed for the present study.²

One wonders how the basic biblical unit of a man, a wife, and their children could ever have come to be viewed as problematic in the modern American evangelical consciousness. How indeed could Christian singleness and individual discipleship be pitted against the human relationships that God created from the dawn of time itself? Whence comes the idea that the church as the spiritual family of God somehow subsumes (or even eliminates) the natural family unit? Certainly not from Scripture. A superficial, flat reading of Paul’s view of singleness in 1 Corinthians 7, or Christ’s view of familial relationships in Matthew 12, is frankly inexcusable.

When early Christians placed a high value on marriage, abhorred infanticide, shunned devious sexual practices, and elevated the status of women in their societies, the unbelieving pagan Roman world took notice. The Christian concept of the family has always been the most noble and beautiful of all, because it aligns with what God intended and how he created mankind to be. Now, even more than ever, the evangelical church in America urgently needs to stop washing its hands of the “culture wars” and once again stand for a fully orbbed biblical worldview. It must fearlessly call American society — a society locked in a death spiral — back to a gospel-shaped biblical vision of the family. ✕

²George Peter Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York: MacMillan, 1965), 2.

A Pastoral Strategy for Cultivating Complementarity in the Congregation

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A PASTORAL STRATEGY FOR CULTIVATING COMPLEMENTARITY IN THE CONGREGATION

I have recently completed my twenty-first year as the teaching pastor at the Master's Community Church. As I look to the next twenty, I want to be more strategic about cultivating complementarity. I am concerned not just for the health of families in my church, though complementarity establishes a framework for that, nor am I concerned only with men and women living according

to Scripture's teaching on gender roles. I am concerned for the place of Scripture in the life of the local church. In 2008, Mark Dever observed that complementarity is a watershed doctrine by which one can see if an individual or organization accommodates Scripture to culture or culture to Scripture.¹ Dever's observation holds today, evidenced by evangelical feminists like Beth Allison Barr's recent reluctance to publicly subscribe to the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy when given the opportunity.²

¹See Mark Dever, "Young vs. Old Complementarians," *JBW* 13, no. 1 (2008): 24.

²Denny Burk, "Complementarianism as a Second Order Doctrine," January 24, 2022, <https://www.dennyburk.com/complementarianism-as-a-second-order-doctrine/>

³For recent expressions, see Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids: BrazosPress, 2021), and Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020).

Since the founding of CBMW, evangelical feminism has not subsided,³ and gender confusion in society has exploded. As noted by Kevin DeYoung in *Men and Women in the Church*,⁴ today, as much as ever, those concerned for biblical complementarity need to lead with conviction and clarity. Here, I list six action steps pastors might take as they cultivate a culture of complementarity in the local church.

STABLE CHURCH MINISTRY AND COMPLEMENTARITY

First, I call pastors to maintain their posts. In a culture of relational fluidity, the longterm pastorate provides depth to the relational roots necessary for a church to adopt and sustain complementarity despite the cultural pressure to compromise and go with the flow. An "I'm-Still-Here" mentality stabilizes a ministry in many ways — including how a congregation views gender roles and

family. I recently visited with a pastor friend who has also been at his church for close to two decades. We walked down memory lane and shook our heads at how much Western culture has changed in such a short time (though, as Carl Trueman notes, the philosophical foundation was being poured already in the mid-eighteenth century).⁵ What has not changed is us. Sunday by Sunday, we have consistently held out the Word to our congregations. Our congregations have seen our lives. As a result, we have a platform from which we can expositionally and personally lead our congregations as they endure the hyper-speed shifts of gender norms in our society. Believers facing the onslaught of wrong-made-legal-made-laudable need encouragement and direction from someone they know. The long pastorate can provide stability for weary believers; a three or five year stint will spawn one more change to a life that enjoys precious few pillars.

⁴Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021).

⁵Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, Crossway: 2020).



COMPLEMENTARITY IN GENDERS AND GENERATIONS

Second, I urge pastors to implement an intergenerational leadership structure in their churches. Having multiple generations of men and women fulfilling their ministries — edifying and being edified — makes complementarity attractive in the eyes of impressionable children and teens. We want younger people to think, “Men and women must have always acted like this in my church.” Youth groups and college ministries sprinkled with smiling sixty-somethings of both genders foreshadow the happy destination that complementarity offers for those walking its narrow pathway.

And this ministry paradigm is rooted in Scripture. Paul exhorts Timothy to set an example of godliness in the church so that, despite Timothy’s youth, he will be respected and positioned to fulfill his ministry in Ephesus (1 Tim 4:11–16). Paul is concerned about how Timothy will lead the various generations of men and women in the church. This is a practical matter. Likely, some elders, deacons, and their wives who were serving in Ephesus (1 Tim 3:1–13) were older than Timothy. Paul thus directs Timothy to treat older men as fathers, older women as mothers, younger men as brothers, and younger women as sisters (1 Tim 5:1–2). As ministry leaders of various generations fulfill their roles in mutually beneficial ways, they set an atmosphere of complementarity for the male and female relationships of the church body.

THE MINISTRIES OF WOMEN AND THE LIFE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Third, pastors should call attention to the unique contributions women make through their gifted service in the church. Regrettably, the ways women serve the local church, such as instructing and counseling other women, cooking, and caring, can go unnoticed. Writing to Timothy and Titus, Paul notes women’s unique contributions to local church ministry (1 Tim 5:3–16; Titus 2:3–5). Though conversations about complementarianism and egalitarianism often revolve around 1 Timothy 2:9–15, I suggest that 1 Timothy 5:3–16 should receive no less attention. If women commonly fulfilled ministries of preaching and teaching to a mixed-gender audience of the gathered church body in Paul’s day, one would expect Paul to mention such ministries as evidence of faithfulness for widows seeking financial assistance from the church.

But that is not the case. What ministries does Paul cite as evidence that a widow has been faithful to Christ and thus qualifies for the church’s financial support?⁶ Faithful widows are those who hope in God, are known to toil in prayer, and demonstrate contentment in their life situations (1 Tim 5:5–6). For Paul, a widow is to be recognized for church support if she has been faithful to her husband and known for good works like bringing up her children, caring for strangers, serving the saints, and assisting those in need (1 Tim. 5:9–10). What commends a widow for church

support is not that she preached or fulfilled pastoral roles, but that she is known to be faithful in ministries God has called her to, especially those focused on solidifying relationships in the home and the church.⁷

The substance of what Paul states in 1 Timothy 5:3–16 is also found in Titus 2:3–5. It should be noted that Paul has different goals in 1 Timothy and Titus. When Paul leaves Ephesus toward the close of his third journey, he predicts that some savage leaders would arise from within the church (Acts 20:28–31). Paul’s prophecy came true, and in 1 Timothy, Paul charges Timothy with the task of correcting heresy that is rooted inside the church, promulgated by some elders who had strayed from the truth (1 Tim 1:3–7, 18–20; 4:1–5; 5:19–23).⁸ However, the churches on the island of Crete are less developed, and Titus must set the initial team of elders in place and encourage the church toward good works consistent with sound doctrine (Titus 1:5, 16; 2:14; 3:1, 8, 14).

Despite the differences in Ephesus and Crete, Paul writes common instructions to Timothy and Titus regarding the vital roles women are to play in the church. Older women are to demonstrate reverent character and temperance to model the lifestyle that testifies to sound doctrine (Titus 2:1, 3). The revenant character of older women provides them a platform for ministry as they labor to solidify relationships in the home and the church: encouraging the younger women to love their husbands and children (Titus 2:4). The fruit

of the older women’s lives is to be seen in the pure character of the younger women as they care for the relationships and needs in their homes and submit to their husbands (Titus 2:5a). As older women and younger women fulfill Paul’s ministry directives, they defend Christian doctrine from those who oppose the faith (Titus 2:5b). Though often unseen, women’s domestic ministry contributes to the church’s experience of God and its reputation in the world.

But the ministry contributions of many women are public⁹ — and need to be publicized so the church can celebrate women’s contributions to church life and mission. Newsletters and social media can be used to spotlight these ministries.

‘TIL DEATH DO US PART

Fourth, pastors should prioritize comprehensive premarital and newlywed counseling. Each couple whose vows reflect complementarity — and who keep those vows decade after decade — becomes a wall of defense protecting the church from the gender agenda of the progressive left. Though premarital counseling might be just one more to-do in the already full pastoral ministry routine, it is a warehouse for building complementarity billboards. Young couples soon become young families that soon become church leaders, homeowners, business leaders, and school board and city council members. Couples happily displaying complementarity in the

⁶It is likely that Paul has in view widows who minister in the church in a quasi-vocational sense, remunerated by the church for their service (Denny Burk, “1 Timothy,” in *ESV Expository Commentary XI*, eds. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., Jay Sklar [Wheaton: Crossway, 2018], 430). George W. Knight counters the argument that each church must have an organized ministry of widows, writing that Paul envisions churches supporting widows only if (a) the widow’s family is not able, and (b) widows without family support meet the qualifications Paul lists. In such a case the church may ask widows to serve in specific ministries but would still support widows even if they would not be able to serve (*The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 222–23).

⁷Douglas J. Moo argues, “It is difficult to explain everything Paul says about gender roles as culture-bound. An assumption that women have a particular responsibility for the raising of children and management of the home is hard to avoid” (*A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, BTNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021], 332).

⁸Though, as Robert W. Yarbrough notes, Paul’s references to the false teachers are vague and may thus include other figures (*The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D.A. Carson, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018], 103).

⁹Kevin DeYoung (*Men and Women in the Church*, 94–95) echoes John Piper’s list of ways women serve in the life of the local church, even though they are not exercising authority over men or preaching to the gathered congregation (John Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem [Wheaton: Crossway, 2006], 58).

church and society advertise the greatness of God’s design for men and women.

I require couples to memorize and recite Ephesians 5:22–33 or 1 Peter 2:21–3:7 as a part of our counseling, knowing that God’s word will shape their thinking for decades to come. Recently at a men’s gathering at my church, a man who fifteen years ago memorized 1 Peter 2:21–3:7 as a part of premarital counseling I required stood and recited it spontaneously for the group. The room was silent for a few moments.

COMPLEMENTARITY AND THE COMPREHENSIVE NATURE OF SCRIPTURE

Fifth, pastors need to preach Scripture as God’s authoritative word in all subjects it addresses. Helping the congregation grasp gender roles in the redemptive-historical grid of Scripture provides the congregation the best rationale for complementarity: the fulfillment and joy and courage discovered by those participating in God’s plan to glorify himself in the world through the Great Commission efforts of local churches. In *Men and Women in the Church*, Kevin DeYoung gives a chapter to surveying the differing gender roles of men and women in the Old Testament. This chapter could serve as a rubric for a topical sermon series on the foundations of complementarity in Israel’s Scriptures. At times our churches need this kind of direct instruction on the roles of men and women.

Nevertheless, a word of caution is in order. It is possible to appear more concerned about gender roles than God’s revelation

of himself and his purposes in the world. The key to preventing this is to be careful to exposit these patterns of complementarity in their broader redemptive-historical and theological contexts.

COMPLEMENTARITY IN PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

Finally, pastors and women’s ministry leaders should advocate for complementarity as they mentor the next generation of church leaders. Many churches have formal internship or residency programs for younger men who have sensed a call to church leadership. But what structure does your church have for developing the next generation of women? We need to establish women’s mentoring programs that include complementarity so that younger women can see older women loving their husbands and children, using their gifts for the church, reading their Bibles, praying, rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep.¹⁰

Reading resources in *Eikon* or books by authors writing on theological anthropology will help younger men and women in the church to think biblically about the roles God has designed for his image bearers. As male and female ministry leaders invite younger men and women to walk with them, those younger believers will see how leaders carry out their unique roles. In 2022, our churches would do well to evaluate the structures we have in place for fostering complementarity in personal discipleship in both genders. ✕

¹⁰See Bev Berrus, “Developing a Culture of Women Discipling Women,” 9Marks, December 10, 2019, <https://www.9marks.org/article/developing-a-culture-of-women-discipling-women/>; Kandi Gallaty, *Disciple Her: Using the Word, Work, & Wonder of God to Invest in Women* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2019); Dana Yeakley, *The Gentle Art of Discipling Women: Nurturing Authentic Faith in Ourselves and Others* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016); Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus*, 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Crossway, 2016); and, Dana Yeakley, *A Woman’s Guide to Discipling: Inspiration, Advice, and Practical Tools for Helping Others Grow* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010).



Parental Rights: A Christian Natural Law Primer

The next frontier of the sexual revolution is parental rights. That might initially sound hyperbolic. Governments are not, after all, removing children from their homes in any sort of systematic way.

The problem, banal as it may seem, is that the intellectual superstructure is already in place to chip away at parental authority over children's lives. This may not result in the immediate removal of children from Christian homes, but instead the denial of Christian parents to oversee the development and upbringing of their children as they see fit. Instances throughout the culture exist that, though

not frequent, should be enough to cause Christians to shudder about the prospects threatening parental rights.

In Ohio, a child was removed from a home (and placed with grandparents) where Christian parents did not affirm the child's gender transition.¹ Harvard Law professor Elizabeth Bartholet caused a national uproar for suggesting there ought to be a "presumptive ban" on homeschooling, a popular educational option that shelters children from state-sponsored secular progressivism.² In 2013, MSNBC journalist Melissa Harris-Perry set out the bald assertion that it is a mistake that

American society has thought of children as the exclusive province of parents. She declared: "We have to break through our kind of private idea that kids belong to their parents, or kids belong to their families, and recognize that kids belong to whole communities."³ As of this writing, a national controversy has erupted where celebrities and intellectuals across the nation are defending the rights of Florida public school teachers to indoctrinate students ages Kindergarten through third grade on issues of sexuality and gender.⁴

I would be remiss not to mention the Supreme Court's 2015 *Obergefell* ruling. Though focused on same-sex marriage, as Christian philosopher John Milbank has observed, the logic of same-sex marriage's legality is to blur the distinction between the *legal* and *natural* definitions of family, thus handing significant power to the state to define the boundaries and make-up of family life. Same-sex marriage, according to Milbank, is

a strategic move in the modern state's drive to assume direct control over the reproduction of the population, bypassing our interpersonal encounters. This is not about natural justice, but the desire on the part of biopolitical tyranny to destroy marriage and the family as the most fundamental mediating social

institution. Heterosexual exchange and reproduction has always been the very "grammar" of social relating as such. The abandonment of this grammar would thus imply a society no longer primarily constituted by extended kinship, but rather by state control and merely monetary exchange and reproduction.⁵

As Milbank envisages, the threat posed by same-sex marriage is not so much that homosexuals may enter "marriage," but that the *redefinition* of marriage to include same-sex couples reconfigures the nature of family life apart from any sort of biological foundation, thus ceding to the state control over what defines the very bonds of family to begin with.

If culture continues to secularize as many expect it to, we should assume that episodes that call into question the primacy of the natural family and the authority of its bonds will repeat and escalate. It will require Christians to articulate that which has long been tacitly assumed: A doctrine of parental rights as a pre-political, indissoluble bond between parents and child that upholds the rights of parents to oversee the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development of their children.

The fundamental question of parental rights, put forward by Melissa Moschella

¹Jen Christensen, "Judge Gives Grandparents Custody of Ohio Transgender Teen," CNN, February 16, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/16/health/ohio-transgender-teen-hearing-judge-decision/index.html>.

²Erin O'Donnell, "The Risks of Homeschooling," Harvard Magazine, April 10, 2020, <https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2020/05/right-now-risks-homeschooling>.

³David Martosko, "Sarah Palin and Glenn Beck Slam MSNBC Promo as Anchor Melissa Harris-Perry Says Children 'belong to Communities,'" Daily Mail, April 8, 2013, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2305991/Sarah-Palin-Glenn-Beck-slam-MSNBC-promo-anchor-Melissa-Harris-Perry-says-children-belong-communities.html>.

⁴John Milbank, "The Impossibility of Gay Marriage and the Threat of Biopolitical Control," ABC Religion & Ethics (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), April 23, 2013, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/the-impossibility-of-gay-marriage-and-the-threat-of-biopolitical/10099888>.

⁵John Milbank, "The Impossibility of Gay Marriage and the Threat of Biopolitical Control," ABC Religion & Ethics (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), April 23, 2013, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/the-impossibility-of-gay-marriage-and-the-threat-of-biopolitical/10099888>. John Milbank, "The Impossibility of Gay Marriage and the Threat of Biopolitical Control," ABC Religion & Ethics (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), April 23, 2013, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/the-impossibility-of-gay-marriage-and-the-threat-of-biopolitical/10099888>.

of The Catholic University of America, presents as rather obvious: “To whom do children belong?”⁶ Common sense would tell us that the biological progenitors are the individuals most aptly suited to care for the child without third party intervention.⁷ Hence, political philosophers have argued that the natural family is the “least restrictive means” to see children cared for without the state first needing to resolve these matters artificially. But a more fulsome answer requires incorporating and harmonizing both Scripture and natural law theory as mutually reinforcing categories. As Christians, we would answer that children belong, ultimately, to the Lord (Ps 127:3). God graciously bestows children to husband and wife as an embodied expression of their covenantal union. The act that unites man and woman as one flesh is the same act capable of bringing forth sons and daughters — populations that make possible the exercising of dominion over creation (Gen 1:26-28). The God who gives children to parents bestows on parents the earthly responsibility to care for them (1 Tim 5:8). As the Fifth Commandment instructs, children are to obey their parents (Deut 5:16). The entire pattern of family life established in Scripture recognizes parents as the authority figures over their children.

But what does it mean, exactly, for children to *belong* to their parents? Because husband and wife bear biological responsibility for their child’s existence (cause), they bear a unique personal responsibility for

their care (effect). While we are prone to think of “rights” as primarily possessive in nature, rights as they are conceived within the communion of parent and child entails responsibility for the child’s welfare. Children are not “ours” in any selfish sense, but “ours” in the sense of bearing unique relationship and responsibility. Said differently, there are other children I care for in a general sense (in wishing them no harm and even seeking their protection in an emergency) but there are other children — my own children — who I care for in an even deeper sense. These are the biological offspring of my wife and me, persons for whom our intimate knowledge breeds a deep familial bond unlike that of other children. The “right” I have to my children extends in proportion to the type of bond my wife and I have with them.

The relationship of parent and child is unlike any other type of biological or social relationship that could potentially lay claim to the status of being the child’s guardian. As Moschella argues, parents have a unique competence that allows children “to gain important insights about their own identity through their interactions with their biological family, and, perhaps most importantly, benefit profoundly from experiencing the secure and unconditional love of those who brought them into being.”⁸ Offspring of a husband and wife are in a unique position to give to their children the full gamut of their origin — their ethnicity, their ancestry, and the knowledge of their

“because the state has no natural authority over fertility, it lacks the mandate, jurisdiction, and competency to interrupt the parent-child bond”

genetic make-up (were genetic disorders a known concern). Parents are, simply put, the most natural and well-suited persons to care for their children.

What the reverse side of this reality represents is a heinous violation of the natural law: The denying, disrupting, or thwarting of the natural parent-child bond. Nothing would seem so gravely unjust than the taking of a child from the loving bond of his or her own parents. As Thomas Aquinas writes, “it would be contrary to natural justice, if a child, before coming to the use of reason, were to be taken away from its parents’ custody, or anything done to it against its parents’ wish.”⁹ Aquinas’s explanation hardly needs further elaboration. His point is clear: Parents have a natural right to the children they bring forth. Episodes we know of where children were forcibly taken from parents strike observers as some of the most callous and vicious expressions of human evil.

The parent-child relationship arises spontaneously outside the direct auspices of the state. In other words, because the state has no natural authority over fertility, it lacks the mandate, jurisdiction, and competency to interrupt the parent-child bond. The state ought to remediate

a situation of parental breakdown where abuse, divorce, death, or any other similar privation occurs — and even here, it should look to the next of biological kin to safeguard any children. The state’s role in recognizing the parent-child bond is to afford it a sacrosanct bond of unbending deference.

It is unlikely, as of this writing, for children to be forcibly taken from the home of Christian parents simply because the parents are Christian. Even still, it is the deference I speak of above that stands as the true test of our future. Christian parents must remain vigilant to defend the primacy of their relationship to their child, insisting that the state’s role is limited to safeguarding children only in the event of familial breakdown, not ideological disagreement. ✕

⁶Melissa Moschella, *To Whom Do Children Belong?: Parental Rights, Civic Education, and Children’s Autonomy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁷I would like to note that this essay speaks only to the context and scope of the natural biological family. Questions of adoption, though important, are outside the scope of this essay.

⁸Melissa Moschella, “The Fundamental Case for Parental Rights,” *Public Discourse*, October 6, 2014, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2014/10/13635/>.

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Sexual Ethics and the Sanctity of Human Life: How Biblical Sexual Morality Dignifies Women and Children

Sexual ethics and the sanctity of human life are two inseparable moral issues. Unbiblical views of sexual ethics go hand in hand with devaluing human life, particularly women and children. If one treats sex cheaply, then one will treat other people cheaply,¹ and when sexual ethics are cheapened, women and children become the victims of males' unrestrained sexual appetites.

In the sexual revolution, the demand for sexual freedom preceded the loosening of abortion laws. Because the "free love" generation divorced sexual activity from ethical responsibility, it is no coincidence that the so-called "Summer of Love" in 1967 was followed a few years later in 1973 by legalized abortion. Liberalizing abortion laws is the logical conclusion to the abandonment of sexual restraint.

The sexual revolution claimed to liberate

women from what feminists considered the oppressive confines of marriage. But unrestrained sexual ethics actually serve to devalue women as mere objects for sensual gratification, and this contributes to disregard for children. Sexual permissiveness has conditioned our culture, particularly men, to think of children as a bothersome intrusion instead of a gift to be received. The moral issues of sexual ethics and the sanctity of human life are intricately connected, and biblical sexual morality dignifies both women and children. To demonstrate this thesis, five propositions will be presented: First, various forms of unbiblical sexual ethics devalue both women and children by viewing pregnancy as an undesirable outcome of sexual intercourse; second, biblical sexual morality properly connects sexual ethics to the sanctity of human life by teaching that pregnancy is a welcome outcome to sexual intercourse; third, when pregnancy is a welcome outcome to

¹I am borrowing here from Adrian Rogers.



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sexual intercourse, women are dignified as being more than merely objects for sexual gratification; fourth, when pregnancy is a welcome outcome to sexual intercourse, not only are women dignified, but young children are honored as welcome additions to a family; and finally, biblical sexual morality creates a culture which is safer for women and children as they are honored as co-bearers of the image of God.

I. VARIOUS NON-CHRISTIAN FORMS OF SEXUAL ETHICS

To demonstrate the connection between sexual ethics and the sanctity of human life, first we must see how various unbiblical forms of sexual ethics devalue both women and children by viewing pregnancy as an undesirable outcome of sexual intercourse. Daniel Heimbach’s *True Sexual Morality* suggests four counterfeit views of sexual morality: Romantic, Playboy, Therapeutic, and Pagan sexual moralities. Each of these views are various expressions of an unrestrained view of sexual ethics, and each of them though different in focus share an emphasis on hedonism and moral autonomy. In none of these views is pregnancy viewed positively.

Romantic Morality

The first unbiblical view is Romantic Morality, which says all that is necessary for sex to be moral is for the participants to be “in love.” In this case, love is an amorphous feeling of affection for another person, and affection is expressed as sexual

attraction. Heimbach explains, “Romantic sexual morality so glorifies the importance of sentimental affection in sexual relationships that sex is justified based on feelings alone. It says couples have only to decide if they are *in love*, and if they are, then sex is moral whatever else might be the case.”² From this perspective, marriage may or may not be an intended goal. Just because someone professes love for a sexual partner does not necessarily mean he or she intends to marry the person.

Since the Romantic view is based in ephemeral feelings of attraction, pregnancy interferes with the excitement of romance. As sex is occurs outside of marriage, conception is undesired and children are usually not wanted. In many cases, a man will insist his professed love for his sexual partner does not include love for any children conceived between the two of them. Tragically, Romantic sexual morality destroys the affection it promises. As Heimbach observes, “God designed sex to create a total union between persons at all levels at once, but romantic morality tells individuals to avoid unconditional commitments and hinders partners from pursuing total union.”³

Because Romantic Morality destroys the affection it promises, it contributes to the devaluing of human life. The love in mind is divorced from a covenant, and instead is grounded in fleeting emotions which may or not remain present if pregnancy ensues. And here we see the connection between Romantic Morality and abortion. While

there are usually a complex set of reasons which contribute to a decision to abort, a 2013 survey of abortive women found that 31% of respondents gave partner-related reasons as influential in the decision.⁴ To be clear, only 6% mentioned the father of the child as the *only* reason for aborting. But one wonders how the variable of an unsupportive father amplified the perceived reality of other stressors, such as finances or an inopportune time for having a baby. All this to say, not only does Romantic Morality destroy the affection it promises, it destroys the children resulting from this purported “love.”

Playboy Morality

While the Romantic view is founded in vague feelings of love, Playboy Morality builds an entire system based pleasure. As the Feinbergs explain, “This view [the Playboy morality] says sex is a natural human impulse or instinct. . . . Greater human happiness is attained if people can take whatever pleasure they can get from sex without the burden of moral guilt, as long as they do not satisfy their sexual urges by using a partner involuntarily, hurtfully or deceitfully.”⁵ Heimbach adds, “Playboy sexual morality begins with the physical pleasure associated with sexual experience and proceeds to construct an entire framework of moral thinking based on it.”⁶ Quite simply, this approach to sexual ethics says any natural impulse that produces pleasure is good and should be allowed free expression.

This Playboy Morality is reflected in many popular songs. One example from the era of the sexual revolution is Foghat’s 1972 version of Willie Dixon’s *I Just Want to Make Love To You*, which says:

I don’t want you, wash my clothes
I don’t want you, keep a home
I don’t want you to be true
I just want to make love to you

In this song, sex is completely divorced from any sense of marriage — “I don’t want you, keep a home” — or fidelity — “I don’t want you to be true.” Instead, the woman is merely seen as a target of opportunity for sexual gratification with no commitment beyond the sexual encounter itself. Pregnancy is not a desired outcome and children are not wanted. All that is wanted is sexual pleasure.

Playboy Morality exhibits the danger of the hedonic paradox — the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake does not result in pleasure, but frustration.⁷ For example, Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 describes the hedonistic pursuit of wine, accumulation of wealth, aesthetically pleasing surroundings, and sexual encounters, only to conclude by saying, “And behold all was vanity and striving after the wind and there was no profit under the sun.” (Eccl 2:11) Pleasure, especially sensual pleasure, is an insufficient starting point for ethics. The danger of the hedonic paradox was recognized by Aristotle who was critical of using *pleasure* to determine morality and said, “It appears to be pleasure that misleads the mass of mankind; for it seems to them to

²Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 255.
³Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 265.
⁴M. Antonia Biggs, Heather Gould and Diana Greene Foster, “Understanding Why Women Seek Abortions in the US,” *BMC Women’s Health* 13 (July 5, 2013): 6.

⁵John Feinberg and Paul Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 274.
⁶Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 270.
⁷Arthur F. Holmes, *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions*, 2nd ed.(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 37.
⁸Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *The Loeb Classical Library*, H. Rackham, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934; reprint 1990), 143 (III.iv.5–6).

be a good, though it is not, so they choose what is pleasant as good and shun pain as evil.”⁸ Indeed, when physical pleasure is seen as the *telos* of life in and of itself, one is deceived about the true value of other people and other humans become a means to achieve the ends of one’s own pleasure.

Therapeutic Morality

The third unbiblical view is Therapeutic Morality, an ethic of which sees sex as a means to human fulfillment and personal growth. Though not denying the vague form of love in Romantic Morality or the pleasure associated with Playboy Morality, advocates of Therapeutic Morality contend that limiting sex to marriage denies the single person of something essential to his or her personhood. Heimbach says: “Therapeutic sexual morality justifies sex based on ideas about human psychology. Sex is regarded as moral or immoral depending on how it relates to things such as mental health, personal development, or social success. . . . No sexual behavior is right or wrong in itself because what matters is a person’s inner sense of satisfaction.”⁹

Planned Parenthood best fits in the category of Therapeutic Morality because they see sex as a part of any well-rounded person’s life, married or unmarried, adult or teenager. For them, emotional wellbeing assumes one is having sex. In answering the teenage question, “What should I do if I think I’m ready for sex?” they suggest the teenager ask himself or herself questions such as: “Do I have a healthy relationship? Can I talk with my partner about things that are bothering

me?,” as well as asking, “How would I deal with an STD or unintended pregnancy?”¹⁰ Setting aside obvious questions about how a teenager only a couple years removed from cartoons and toys is supposed to “deal with an STD or unintended pregnancy,” Planned Parenthood assumes it is normal and healthy for teenagers to have sex. The idea that one would wait until marriage is barely even suggested, though the group glibly adds, “And some people choose to never have sex — that’s totally okay too.”¹¹ And in case teenagers do get pregnant, Planned Parenthood offers abortion as a coping mechanism. In this way, both young men and women are conditioned to see each other as objects of sexual pleasure and children as a bothersome obstacle to human fulfillment.

Pagan Morality

The final unbiblical view is Pagan sexual morality. This moral stance can encompass vague notions of love (Romantic Morality), pleasure-based ethics (Playboy Morality), and vacuous concepts of human fulfillment (Therapeutic Morality), but combines all of these ideas into using sex as a vehicle to connect with the divine. Pagan sexual morality emerges from the monistic worldview integral to paganism: “All is one and all is God.” Based on this premise, all humans are seen as partially divine or having some form of divine spark. Such religious language serves as a camouflage for radical autonomy, and as Heimbach says, “Indulging sexual desires is therefore good no matter what form it takes.”¹²

Pagan sexual morality and fertility cults



associated with it are clearly seen in the Roman god Mutunus Tutinus and his Greek parallel, Priapus. In Rome, Mutunus Tutinus was a phallic image deity with a shrine on the Velian Hill. The god was embodied in a sacred phallus on which the bride was required to sit before the consummation of marriage.¹³ But while the pagan gods were invoked for fertility within marriage, the diminutive deities of the pagan pantheon engaged in sexual promiscuity and there was no moral rule against the common practice of exposing unwanted children.

Modern neopaganism has revived the sexual ethics of ancient polytheism.

Neopagan author Amber Laine Fisher proclaims the goodness of sex without moral boundaries and says, “Goddess religion and goddess spirituality endeavor to release us from the taboos of sex and sexuality, to untie our hands, freeing us from certain paradigms or ideals that we are taught to accept as normal.”¹⁴ And Pagan sexual morality devalues human life. For example, California-based psychologist Ginette Paris grounds pro-abortion arguments in a pagan worldview. In her 1992 work *The Sacrament of Abortion*, Paris urges women to abandon a Christian worldview and instead worship Artemis, and she considers abortion a sacrifice to Artemis.

⁸Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 284.
⁹Planned Parenthood, “What Should I Do If I Think I’m Ready to Have Sex?,” <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/sex/all-about-sex/what-should-i-do-if-i-think-im-ready-have-sex>.
¹⁰Planned Parenthood, “Virginity,” <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/sex/virginity>.
¹²Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 300.

¹³See Karen K. Hersch, *The Roman Wedding: Ritual and Meaning in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 269 – 270. See also, Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, vol. 2, The Loeb Classical Library, William M. Green, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 48n1.
¹⁴Amber Laine Fisher, *The Philosophy of Wicca* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2002), 185.

Each of these views share the one purported rule of mutual consent. Both parties are supposed to be willing participants in the sexual encounter. But the tenuous restraint of the canon of consent is seen in the salacious revelations about Hollywood movie mogul Harvey Weinstein. One of the most powerful men in the entertainment industry, for years Weinstein forced himself upon women. A serial sexual predator and rapist, Weinstein was convicted of rape and sexual assault and sentenced to twenty-three years in prison on March 11, 2020. Christians grieve with and for the women violated by this evil man. But our grief is heightened when we see an entertainment industry which repeatedly sexualizes women in song and film, and catechizes young people into a culture of unrestrained sexual desires. And yet, this industry which communicates such unholy messages is surprised when a man objectifies and abuses women. When sex is divorced from a restrained view of ethics and separated from marriage, other people are valued only objects of sexual gratification. Women in particular become vulnerable targets of opportunity for predatory males. And for such men, children are undesired outcomes from sex.

II. BIBLICAL SEXUAL MORALITY AND THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

Biblical sexual morality properly connects sexual ethics to the sanctity of human life by teaching that pregnancy is a welcome outcome to sexual intercourse, and in this

way is profoundly different from non-Christian views. C. S. Lewis best describes Christian sexual ethics when he says, “Chastity is the most unpopular of the Christian virtues. There is no getting away from it: the old Christian rule is, ‘Either marriage with complete faithfulness to your partner, or else total abstinence.’”¹⁵ The rule limiting sex to marriage dignifies women and protects children.

Christian sexual ethics are profoundly grounded in the image of God. Genesis 1:26 teaches that all humans are made in the image of God, and Genesis 1:27 amplifies this by emphasizing that both males and females are equally made in the image of God. The image of God is not a function, but it is a status entailed to each human. The inherent value of humans as the only image-bearing creature is derived from the one whom humans represent, God himself. C. Ben Mitchell says, “The *imago Dei* is not what humans *do* but who humans are.”¹⁶ An innate dignity attaches to each person apart from his or her ability to please someone else sexually.

The image of God is also connected to procreation, as Genesis 1:28 says, “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” Children are an expected part of marriage,¹⁷ and the birth of new generations allows humans to exercise dominion over

the Earth. Children, like their parents, also share in the image of God.

A word needs to be said here about contraception, sexual ethics, and the sanctity of human life. My focus is the connection between sexual promiscuity and the devaluing of human life, especially sexual exploitation of women and aborting children. In *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II goes further and urges the opinion that contraception contributes to a mindset favorable to abortion, saying, “It may be that many people use contraception with a view to excluding the subsequent temptation of abortion. But the negative values inherent in the ‘contraceptive mentality’ . . . are such that they in fact strengthen this temptation when an unwanted life is conceived.”¹⁸ Without engaging in an extensive discussion of the differences between the author and the Catholic Church on contraception, let me only summarize by saying I believe it is possible for a couple to practice contraception within the marriage covenant in a manner that is consistent with Christian sexual ethics. And yet, children should be an expected part of any Christian marriage — painful cases of infertility compassionately noted. But we should acknowledge that widespread availability of contraception has transformed the way our culture views children, so much so that children are now viewed as the result of failed contraception as opposed to a natural and anticipated part of marriage.

Heterosexual and monogamous marriage establishes safe moral parameters for sex

and provides a protected environment for children. Genesis 2:24–25 gives an important structure for sexual ethics and says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and not ashamed.” The Hebrew words translated *leave* and *hold fast* are covenant terms and are commonly used elsewhere in the OT in the context of God’s covenant with Israel, indicating covenant breach or fidelity.¹⁹ Sex is safe because it is a gift uniquely shared by the two partners in the covenant. And within the covenant of marriage, children are cherished and protected from harm and exploitation.

It is after the establishing of a covenant that the husband and wife are “naked and not ashamed” (Gen 2:25). Sexual intimacy follows the covenant, and does not precede it. Victor Hamilton notes that with the exception of Genesis 2:25, *nakedness* in the OT is always connected with some form of humiliation, but here it is used in a positive way.²⁰ This contrast makes the tender gift of sex and shameless intimacy between a husband and wife more vivid and compelling. The nakedness a husband and wife share is an image of openness and trust,²¹ as they say to each other, “I can be completely vulnerable to you.” In almost every situation in life, to be found naked is embarrassing and shameful. But when a husband and wife are alone, there is no shamefulness associated with their nudity, only loving tenderness. The loving, tender embrace of sexual intimacy in marriage validates the children conceived

¹⁵C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan, 1952), 89.
¹⁶C. Ben Mitchell and D. Joy Riley, *Christian Bioethics: A Guide for Pastors, Health Care Professionals, and Families* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2014), 55.
¹⁷It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the pain of infertility. But to be clear, infertility is one consequence of living in a fallen world and not a sign that God is angry at the couple. Pastoral sensitivity for couples struggling with infertility calls for the deepest compassion and kindness.

¹⁸John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 13, March 25, 1995. Papal Archive, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.
¹⁹Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary, vol. 1a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 222.
²⁰Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 1 – 17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 181.
²¹Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 90.

in the relationship. Within marriage, children are expected and welcome. When sex is first defined by the moral parameters of a covenant, the natural result of sex — children — are protected by the same moral parameters.

The sexual ethics emerging from the upheaval of morality in the 1960s inverts and distorts God’s order. God’s order is inverted when couples begin by having sex and then hope a marriage may possibly result. The purposes of sex are distorted when sex is divorced from marriage, and becomes just a human instinct to be fulfilled like eating or drinking. And these vital moral precepts are central to the convictions of the authors of the Danvers Statement when they expressed deep concern about “the widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women.”²² If sex is no more than an appetite to be satiated, motherhood is seen as less valuable than the secular ideal of the overly sexualized woman and children are an intrusion on sexual appetites.

III. BIBLICAL SEXUAL ETHICS DIGNIFIES WOMEN

When pregnancy is a welcome outcome to sexual intercourse, women are dignified as more than being merely objects for sexual gratification. While the modern mindset shapes the moral thinking of men to see

a pregnant woman as a sort of broken sexual object in need of repair, within a Christian marriage, a different mandate prevails: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” The verb “love” in Ephesians 5:25 is the present imperative of ἀγαπάω, the present imperative enforcing the idea that the husband’s love for the wife is to be an ongoing process.²³ Just as there is never a time when Jesus does not love us, there should never be a time when a husband does not love his wife in attitude, action, word, and deed, *especially when she is pregnant or serving in her God-ordained role as a mother*. Ephesians 5:28 stresses the high honor husbands are to give to wives and says, “In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”

One of the ironies of the sexual revolution is the moral revolt which was supposed to liberate women has served to increase poverty among them. The number of children in the US living in a single-parent household has doubled since the sexual revolution, from 13% in 1968 to 32% in 2017, and the vast majority of single-parent households are led by single mothers.²⁴ The trend is so disturbing that it is now common to talk about the “feminization of poverty,” the disturbing trend that women who support themselves and their families have become the most glaring subset among the poor.²⁵ Now, the US has the highest rate of children living in single parent families of any country in

the world.²⁶ Many men are conditioned to think of pregnancy as a woman’s problem and thus abandon the mothers of their children to survive as best they can. It is then no wonder financial concerns are the most common reasons given for considering abortion.²⁷

The sexual restraint inherent in Christian sexual ethics dignifies women because it dignifies sex, and the vivid contours of Biblical injunctions create a safe environment for women. For example, Romans 13:13 forbids extramarital sex and says, “Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.” The word translated *orgies* is κώμοις, a plural form of κῶμος, the use of the plural probably indicating frequency.²⁸ The terms “sexual immorality” (κοίταις) and “sensuality” (ἀσελγείαις) are joined together to describe sexual sin in general. Paul’s intention here is to stress that those who live in darkness are in bondage to sexual sins.²⁹ In both Roman and Greek contexts, lavish parties characterized by drunkenness and sex were not uncommon. The sexual use of dining couches is widely portrayed on pottery from throughout ancient Greece. Many of these depictions show food on nearby dining tables, perhaps indicating that people may have commonly combined sexual activity with dining.³⁰

As Romans 13:13 connects sexual

irresponsibility with drunkenness, so modern libertine sexual ethics are frequently joined with substance abuse, creating a dangerous environment for women. This danger was demonstrated by 2004 study published in *The Journal of General Psychology* titled “Sexual Experiences Associated With Participation in Drinking Games.” The research demonstrated how collegiate men use binge drinking games as a method to find young women who become targets of opportunity for sexual assault. The authors concluded, “Some men may view drinking games as a way to target others for sex, and many men who admit to having been perpetrators report multiple instances of such perpetration.”³¹ Young men were using parties and alcohol as ways to engage in sexual manipulation. Again, it is difficult to maintain the canon of consent if one does not see women as made in the image of God and sex is primarily about one’s own personal pleasure.

IV. BIBLICAL SEXUAL ETHICS DIGNIFIES CHILDREN

When pregnancy is a welcome outcome to sexual intercourse, not only are women dignified, but young children are honored as welcome additions to a family. Ephesians 6:4 characterizes the kindness expected of a father to his children and says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” The idea in Ephesians 6:4 is

²²Council On Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “The Danvers Statement,” Rationale 4, <https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>. +
²³Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 747.
²⁴Gretchen Livingston, “About One-Third of US Children are Living With an Unmarried Parent,” Pew Research Center April 27, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/27/about-one-third-of-u-s-children-are-living-with-an-unmarried-parent/>.
²⁵The term “feminization of poverty” was first coined by sociologist Diana Pearce in 1979. See Diana Pearce, “The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work, and Welfare,” *The Urban and Social Change Review* 11:1 – 2 (1978): 28 – 36.

²⁶Stephanie Kramer, “U.S. Has World’s Highest Rate of Children Living in Single-Parent Households,” Pew Research Center, December 12, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/12/u-s-children-more-likely-than-children-in-other-countries-to-live-with-just-one-parent/>.
²⁷M. Antonia Biggs, Heather Gould and Diana Greene Foster, “Understanding Why Women Seek Abortions in the US,” 5.
²⁸James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38b, *Romans 9 – 16* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 789.
²⁹Thomas Schreiner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 6, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 699.
³⁰John McRay, *Archeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991), 317.
³¹Thomas J. Johnson and Courtney Stahl, “Sexual Experiences Associated With Participation in Drinking Games,” *Journal of General Psychology* 131.3 (2004): 304. DeRicco and DeJong also note that connecting with potential sexual partners is a common motive for pre-game drinking. DeRicco and DeJong, “Pregaming,” 14. 32 Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., Frederick William Danker, rev. and ed.(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 780.

effective nurture through praise rather than threats.³² But the important point is that children are welcomed, cherished, loved, and nurtured by their fathers.

The moral force of Ephesians 6:4 is lost unless one considers the cheap way children were often viewed by fathers in Roman culture. In ancient Rome, pre-born and newborn children were afforded very little protection. In the early Roman Republic, the powers of the father were theoretically unbounded and the oldest living male in a family had immense power. A *paterfamilias* (male head of household with no living father or grandfather) held *paterpotestas*, powers of life and death over all family

members, including his slaves and most of his freedmen. Though these powers were limited later in the Roman Empire, the *paterfamilias* retained the key right to accept or occasionally reject every newborn child laid at his feet.³³ If the *paterfamilias* accepted the new baby, he raised it aloft and named it.³⁴ If not, the child was usually abandoned.

The low value attributed to children in the Roman Empire is seen in one of the more chilling discoveries from antiquity. In an ancient letter discovered at Oxyrhynchus and dated to 1 BC, a husband tells his pregnant wife to allow her unborn child to live if it is a boy, but to commit infanticide via exposure if it is a girl.³⁵ The husband says

“If perhaps you give birth, then if it is a male, let it be; if it is a female, throw it out.”³⁶ The verb translated “throw it out” is a form of the verb *ἐμβαλλω*, a term usually used with strong overtones of contempt, and when used in contexts like this it means to expose children.³⁷ But Christian fathers were different as they taught the church never to “throw out” children, but to nurture and care for them.

Thinking about the callous attitude of the ancients can lead to a sort of easy moral condemnation. But what about today? Since 1973 millions upon millions abortions have occurred in the United States. While each abortion has its own story, a common theme is men who want sex, but do not want the children that result from sex. And this should not be a surprise: If the goal is to divorce sex from both marriage and childrearing, then a pregnancy is an unintended consequence of failed contraception. As such abortion becomes a coping mechanism for lack of sexual restraint and failed contraception.

V. BIBLICAL SEXUAL ETHICS AND SAFETY FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Biblical sexual morality creates a culture which is safer for women and children because they are honored as co-bearers of the image of God. Sex is dignified as a tender gift between a husband and wife and children are born into a previously existing covenant relationship, and the moral parameters of that covenant embrace the child as well. In this way, biblical sexual ethics is intricately bound to the sanctity of human life, a message that has resonated throughout church history.

Christian author Justin Martyr (beheaded 165 AD) provides an example of the ancient connection between sexual ethics and the sanctity of human life. In his *First Apology* written circa 155 AD, he addressed the evil practice of child abandonment, and grieves the many infants abandoned in the Roman Empire who were raised to be exploited in prostitution. In antiquity, children abandoned by their parents would often be picked up by unscrupulous people who in modern days would be called “sex traffickers,” taking unprotected children and raising them to be abused in sexual commerce and prostitution. Justin Martyr decries this practice and says “some [males] are openly mutilated for the purpose of sodomy.”³⁸ The Greek word translated *sodomy* is *κίναδος* and in this context it specifically refers to a *catamite*, meaning a boy kept for

³²Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., Frederick William Danker, rev. and ed.(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 780.
³³Nigel Rodgers, *The Roman World: People and Places* (London: Lorenz Books, 2005), 218. This power was later limited during the reign of Hadrian. Carey Fleiner, *A Writer's Guide to Ancient Rome*, 17.
³⁴Fleiner, *A Writer's Guide to Ancient Rome*, 26.
³⁵For the date of P. Oxy 744, see <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;4;744>.



³⁶P. Oxy. 744. Translation from Paul McKechnie, “An Errant Husband and a Rare Idiom,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 127 (1999): 157–58.
³⁷Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, Madeleine Goh & Chad Schroeder, English eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 624. The reference to contempt is my own summary of the various usages listed herein.
³⁸Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, in *The Writings of Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*, Marcus Dods, George Reith, and B.P. Pratten, trans. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1909), 30.

the sexual pleasures of adult male.³⁹ But Justin Martyr is even more explicit and says these are boys who have been *mutilated*, and he uses the Greek verb ἀποκόπτω meaning “to cut away,” which is related to the noun ἀποκοπή meaning *amputation*.⁴⁰ He is referring to boys who have either been castrated or had a complete penectomy for the purpose of being sexually abused by older men. The apparent reason for the amputation is to give the boys a more feminine appearance to meet the twisted pleasures of their abusers. Justin Martyr ends on a note of disgust by saying to his fellow Roman citizens, “These things you do openly and with applause.”⁴¹ The twisted sexual practices of the second century were enabled by the abandonment of children.

In our own day, the abuse of both women and children for sexual purposes is seen in the horrid practice of pornography. Sex is supposed to occur within the sacred relationship of a husband and wife in marriage, but pornography divorces sex from any sense of relationship. As Trueman observes, “[Pornography] repudiates any notion that sex has significance beyond the act itself, and therefore it rejects any notion that it [sex] is emblematic of a sacred order.”⁴² By distorting sex, pornography denigrates the image of God in women and children. Pornography distorts the image of God in women by promoting the notion of *trophyism*, the idea that women are things to be collected in a misguided attempt at male validation. When sexual hedonism objectifies women, it is only a short leap to objectifying children. Child pornography is so prevalent that the Department of Justice has a project dedicated

to its prosecution: Project Safe Childhood is led by United States Attorney’s offices and the Criminal Division’s Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section.

Christians sometimes see pornography, sex trafficking, abortion, and abandoning marriage as separate, isolated moral issues. But the point here is to emphasize that sexual ethics and the sanctity of human life are two moral issues that are welded together. Unbiblical notions of sexual permissiveness expand the categories of expendable people who can be snatched up, used, exploited, and then cast aside.

The Colorado Statement on Biblical Sexual Morality offers a trenchant warning, “We believe that no sexual act can be moral if driven by desires that run contrary to the best interests of another human being.”⁴³ The sexual ethics emerging from the sexual revolution are contrary to the best interests of other human beings. When sex is divorced from the covenant of marriage, men are encouraged to treat women as objects existing only for sexual gratification. When women are treated as sex objects, the children which result from sex are treated as disposable objects. But biblical sexual ethics advocates a morality of restraint in which the best interests of both women and children are affirmed. Biblical sexual ethics entails the sanctity of human life because when the act of sex is treated as a gift from God to be celebrated within God’s moral parameters, then children conceived via sex are also treated as gifts from God. ✕

³⁹Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, 3rd ed., Madeleine Goh & Chad Schroeder, eds. (Boston: Brill, 2013), 1130.

⁴⁰Ibid., 254, 253.

⁴¹Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, 31.

⁴²Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 99.

⁴³Council on Biblical Sexual Ethics, “Colorado Statement on Biblical Sexual Morality (Full Statement),” in Daniel Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 365.

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R. Albert Mohler, Jr.
General Editor

Ten Resources That Have Helped Me Make Sense of Our Current Culture and How Christians Are Responding to It

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"[Worldliness] makes sin look normal and righteousness seem strange."

—DAVID WELLS¹

"World is the bad part of culture."

—JOHN FRAME²

Our culture is rapidly making sin look normal and righteousness seem strange. The bad part of our culture seems to be getting worse so quickly that it is hard to keep up. Even a socially liberal tennis champion such as Martina Navratilova can shine brightly one moment (she is a lesbian who promotes homosexuality) and flame out the next because she has not kept up with the leftward march (she believes that males who identify as “trans women” should not compete in women’s sports). J. K. Rowling, author of the best-selling Harry Potter series, was a cutting-edge voice for feminism one moment but now is canceled because her old-fashioned feminism doesn’t embrace every aspect of transgenderism.

What is happening in our culture? I approach that question not as a culture expert but as a pastor and theologian. My main burden is to do what Titus 1:9 says that an elder must do: “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and

¹Worldliness is “that system of values, in any given age, which has at its center our fallen human perspective, which displaces God and his truth from the world, and which makes sin look normal and righteousness seem strange. It thus gives great plausibility to what is morally wrong and, for that reason, makes what is wrong seem normal.” David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4.

²John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 866. Cf. Andrew David Naselli, “Do Not Love the World: Breaking the Evil Enchantment of Worldliness (A Sermon on 1 John 2:15–17),” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22.1 (2018): 111–25.

also to rebuke those who contradict it.” As an elder or pastor, I must not only be able to teach sound doctrine, I also must be able to rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine. That is part of shepherding. That is why over the past several years I have been attempting to better understand our current culture and how Christians are responding to it.

The speed at which our culture is changing in a progressive direction is astonishing. To better understand our current culture, I have prioritized reading *books* that summarize and reflect on the bigger picture. If you try to make sense of our current culture primarily by watching the news or following news stories on social media, it may be challenging to step back and evaluate the big picture.³

I would like to share with you ten resources that have helped me make sense of our current culture and make sense of how Christians are responding to it. The first five resources are books by non-Christians (I), and the second five resources are by Christians (II).

Caveat: The following ten resources have helped me better understand troubling aspects of our current culture *primarily from the left*. There are problems from the right, such as bizarre conspiracy theories⁴ and “the syncretistic blending of Christianity and Americana.”⁵ However, as George Yancey demonstrates, “Progressive Christians stress political values more than conservative Christians.”⁶ Those moving to the left seem markedly aggressive and intolerant. My pastoral sense is that in our culture at this time problems from the left are a

bigger danger than problems from the right — at least for the church I help shepherd and for churches similar to ours.⁷

I. FIVE BOOKS BY NON-CHRISTIANS

1. *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting up a Generation for Failure*⁸

Greg Lukianoff is an attorney who specializes in free speech, and Jonathan Haidt is a social psychologist at New York University who previously taught psychology for sixteen years at the University of Virginia. Their book argues against what they call “three Great Untruths” that have become culturally common:

1. The Untruth of Fragility: What doesn’t kill you makes you weaker.
2. The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: Always trust your feelings.
3. The Untruth of Us Versus Them: Life is a battle between good people and evil people.

Here are two excerpts from their book that were “aha” moments for me when I read them. The first excerpt explains how some people now use the word *trauma* in a broader way:

Take the word “trauma.” In the early versions of the primary manual of psychiatry, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), psychiatrists used the word “trauma” only to describe a physical agent causing physical damage, as in the case of what we now call traumatic brain injury. In the 1980 revision, however, the manual (DSM III) recognized “post-traumatic stress disorder” as a mental disorder—the first type of traumatic injury that isn’t physical. PTSD is caused by an extraordinary and terrifying experience, and the criteria for a traumatic event that warrants a diagnosis of PTSD were (and are) strict: to qualify, an event would have to “evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone” and be “outside the range of usual human experience.” The DSM III emphasized that the event was not

³For what it is worth, here are some ways I attempt to keep up with the news day-to-day: (1) I listen to two podcasts on weekday mornings: “The World and Everything in It” (the same organization as *WORLD* magazine) and “The Briefing” by Al Mohler. (2) I read the headlines and some stories from various news organizations. Those include *The Babylon Bee* and *Not the Bee*. The first is satire, and the second is news; but sometimes it is hard to distinguish the two! (3) I listen to reasonable voices online such as Megan Basham, Voddie Baucham, Kevin Bauder, Denny Burk, Abigail Dodds, Dave Doran, Mark Dever, Kevin DeYoung, Abigail Dodds, Phil Johnson, Jonathan Leeman, John MacArthur, Al Mohler, John Piper, Joe Rigney, David Schrock, Neil Shenvi, Colin Smothers, Owen Strachan, Justin Taylor, Carl Trueman, Andrew Walker, and Doug Wilson. I gratefully learn from them, even while they don’t always share the same convictions and instincts. (They are mostly 3s and 4s in Kevin DeYoung’s taxonomy—see below.) (4) I correspond confidentially with trusted and courageous friends. Face-to-face conversations, email exchanges, and text-message threads are far better than public exchanges on social media. (5) I intentionally do not watch the news since what drives that content and delivery is what gets higher ratings: anger, fear, and salaciousness.

⁴E.g., Joe Carter, “The FAQs: What Christians Should Know about QAnon,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 20 May 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-faqs-what-christians-should-know-about-qanon/>.

⁵Kevin DeYoung, “What to Do with Christian Nationalism,” *WORLD Opinions*, 18 November 2021, <https://wng.org/opinions/what-to-do-with-christian-nationalism-1637239282>. That is why my fellow Bethlehem Baptist Church elders recently stated, “We reject any attempt to fuse together one’s national/political identity with one’s Christian identity in a way that equates or conflates allegiance to country with allegiance to God.” Bethlehem Baptist Church Elders, “Ethnic Harmony Affirmations and Denials,” 6 February 2021, <https://bethlehem.church/ethnic-harmony-affirmations-and-denials/>.

⁶George Yancey, “Who’s More Political: Progressive or Conservative Christians?” *The Gospel Coalition*, 29 April 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/political-progressive-conservative-christians/>. See George A. Yancey and Ashlee Quosigk, *One Faith No Longer: The Transformation of Christianity in Red and Blue America* (New York: New York University Press, 2021).

⁷I originally prepared this article as a presentation for the Young Adult Ministry (ages 18–29) of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mounds Views, Minnesota, on June 29, 2021.

⁸Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting up a Generation for Failure* (New York: Penguin, 2018). See also Neil Shenvi, “Villains, Victims, and Visionaries: Three Books for Understanding Our Culture,” *Neil Shenvi—Apologetics*, 1 June 2021, <https://shenviapologetics.com/villains-victims-and-visionaries-three-books-for-understanding-our-culture/>.

based on a *subjective standard*. It had to be something that would cause most people to have a severe reaction. War, rape, and torture were included in this category. Divorce and simple bereavement (as in the death of a spouse due to natural causes), on the other hand, were not, because they are normal parts of life, even if unexpected. These experiences are sad and painful, but pain is not the same thing as trauma. People in these situations that don't fall into the "trauma" category might benefit from counseling, but they generally recover from such losses without any therapeutic interventions. In fact, even most people who do have traumatic experiences recover completely without intervention.

By the early 2000s, however, the concept of "trauma" within parts of the therapeutic community had crept down so far that it included anything "experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful . . . with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being." The subjective experience of "harm" became definitional in assessing trauma. As a result, the word "trauma" became much more widely used, not just by mental health professionals but by their clients and patients—including an increasing number of college students.

As with trauma, a key change for most of the concepts Haslam examined was the shift to a *subjective standard*. It was not for anyone else to decide what counted as trauma, bullying, or abuse; if it felt like that to you, trust your feelings. If a person reported that an event was traumatic (or bullying or abusive), his or her subjective assessment was increasingly taken as sufficient evidence. And if a rapidly growing number of students have been diagnosed with a mental disorder (as we'll see in chapter 7), then there is a rapidly growing need for the campus community to protect them.⁹

Lukianoff and Haidt are drawing on an insightful article by Nick Haslam called "Concept Creep."¹⁰ The idea is that the definition of certain concepts — like *trauma* and *abuse* — expand. It used

to be that someone might have trauma from being bombed in a foxhole during a battle; now a student may claim to have trauma because the teacher disagreed with the student's opinion. This insight helps me because many people in our culture (including some Christians) are claiming to be victims of "trauma" and "abuse" in line with these new definitions.¹¹

The second excerpt critiques what the authors call an "absurd" regulation of speech on American college campuses:

Vague and Overbroad Speech Codes: The code that epitomized the vagueness and breadth of the first wave of modern PC speech codes (roughly, the late 1980s to the mid-1990s) was the University of Connecticut's ban on "inappropriately directed laughter." The school was sued. It dropped the code as part of a settlement in 1990, but the same code, verbatim, was in effect at Drexel University in Philadelphia fifteen years later. That code was eventually repealed after being named one of FIRE's "Speech Codes of the Month." Along similar lines, a speech code at Alabama's Jacksonville State University provided that "no student shall offend anyone on University property," and the University of West Alabama's code prohibited "harsh text messages or emails." These codes teach students to use an overbroad and entirely subjective standard for determining wrongdoing. They also exemplify the Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: *Always trust your feelings. If you feel offended, then a punishable offense must have occurred.* Speech codes like these teach the Untruth of Fragility as well. They communicate that offensive speech or inappropriate laughter might be so damaging that administrators must step in to protect vulnerable and fragile students. And they empower college administrators to ensure that authority figures are always available to "resolve" verbal conflicts.¹²

This insight helps me because many people in our culture (including some Christians) are essentially arguing, "I'm hurt; therefore, you are unjust." Or to use the theological category of sin, "I'm hurt; therefore, you sinned."

⁹Lukianoff and Haidt, *Coddling of the American Mind*, 25–26 (bold emphasis added).

¹⁰Nick Haslam, "Concept Creep: Psychology's Expanding Concepts of Harm and Pathology," *Psychological Inquiry: An International Journal for the Advancement of Psychological Theory* 27 (2016): 1–17.

¹¹We should all oppose *abuse* if that refers to the biblical category *oppression*—that is, sinfully treating someone in a cruel and violent way. For example, Pharaoh oppresses God's people at the beginning of Exodus (Exod 1:12; 3:9). My concern is that *trauma* and *abuse* have become what I call "Gumby" words—words that people can stretch to encompass so many circumstances that the words become unhelpfully flexible, vague, and subjective.

¹²Lukianoff and Haidt, *Coddling of the American Mind*, 202 (bold emphasis added).



2. *The Rise of Victimhood Culture: Microaggressions, Safe Spaces, and the New Culture Wars*¹³

Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning are both professors of sociology (Campbell at California State University in Los Angeles and Manning at West Virginia University). Their book builds on an article they wrote in 2014 — an article that gained attention after Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt highlighted it in their work on the coddling of the American mind.

Microaggressions are small slights and insults, sometimes invisible to the person perpetuating them, such as one person asking another, “Where are you from?” Some people oppose “the microaggression program” because “microaggression complaints violate many longstanding social norms, such as those encouraging people to have thick skin, brush off slights, and charitably interpret the intentions of others.”¹⁴ In other words, those who oppose the microaggression program argue that “someone’s interpretation of another person’s action” should not matter “more than the intention of the actor.”¹⁵

Campbell and Manning explain,

Microaggression complaints arise from a culture of victimhood in which individuals and groups display a high sensitivity to slight, have a tendency to handle conflicts through complaints to authorities and other third parties,

and seek to cultivate an image of being victims who deserve assistance. This new moral culture, we shall see, differs sharply from other moral cultures—such as cultures of honor, where people are sensitive to slight but handle their conflicts aggressively, and cultures of dignity, where people ignore slights and insults. The current debate about microaggressions arises from a clash between dignity culture and the newer culture of victimhood. The debate is polarized because the moral assumptions of each side are so different.¹⁶

Complaints about microaggressions combine the sensitivity to slight that we see in honor cultures with the willingness to appeal to authorities and other third parties that we see in dignity cultures. And victimhood culture differs from both honor and dignity cultures in highlighting rather than downplaying the complainants’ victimhood.¹⁷

This victimhood culture permeates universities and corporations, which now commonly train people to avoid microaggressions that trigger victims (e.g., mansplaining, whitesplaining, straightsplaining, slut shaming, fat shaming, body shaming, cultural appropriation, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, misgendering, cissexism, transphobia, toxic masculinity).¹⁸

Microaggression complaints are similar to and different from other ways of handling conflict. First of all, they involve the public airing of grievances—complaining to outsiders. In this way microaggression complaints belong to a larger class of conflict tactics in which people who have grievances appeal to third parties. Second, microaggression complaints are attempts to demonstrate a pattern of injustice, and in this way they belong to a class of tactics by which people persuade reluctant third parties that their cause is just and they badly need help. And third, microaggression complaints are complaints about the domination and oppression of cultural minorities.¹⁹

It is not uncommon for self-identified victims to make false accusations against individuals and groups. Sometimes such

¹³Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, *The Rise of Victimhood Culture: Microaggressions, Safe Spaces, and the New Culture Wars* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). See also Shenvi, “Villains, Victims, and Visionaries.”

¹⁴Campbell and Manning, *The Rise of Victimhood Culture*, 3.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 87–88.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 40 (pp. 40–65 unpack this).

"Greater victimhood can mean greater power:"

hoaxes start a moral panic that weakens the due process that should protect the accused.²⁰ (This makes it more difficult to care for genuine victims.)

Greater victimhood can mean greater power: “Those who combine many victim identities will claim and be accorded greater moral status than those with only a few.”²¹ A primary way to obtain victim status is to claim that others have harmed you with their words: “Some campus activists have even begun to argue that speech that harms the powerless is actually violence, or something akin to it.”²²

These insights about victimhood culture help me because many people in our culture (including some Christians) have embraced this victim mindset.²³ For some there’s an allure to being a victim because it gives you more social capital and power. (This is one reason among others that some white people identify as transgender. They think it turns them from an oppressor into an oppressed minority.)

3. *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Identity, Morality*²⁴

Douglas Murray is a gay British journalist. Warning: His language is salty and sometimes explicit. His book has four chapters: “Gay,” “Women,” “Race,” and “Trans.” As Murray addresses these controversial topics, he does not fit the “politically correct” mold at all. He repeatedly highlights how mainstream culture is hypocritical, illogical, and intolerant as it views society as a system of power relations in line with Michel Foucault’s philosophy.²⁵ Here is an excerpt from each chapter:

Chapter 1, “Gay”: “Gay stories are crow-barred into any and all areas of news.”²⁶

Chapter 2, “Women”: Even though science proves that men and women are significantly different, “Our societies have

doubled-down on the delusion that biological difference — including aptitude differences — can be pushed away, denied or ignored.”²⁷

Chapter 3, “Race”: Martin Luther King Jr. “dreamed his children should ‘one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.’” But now, “Skin colour is everything,” Robin DeAngelo, author of *White Fragility*, tells audiences “how white people who see people as individuals rather than by their skin colour are in fact ‘dangerous’ Meaning that it took only half a century for Martin Luther King’s vision to be exactly inverted.”²⁸

Chapter 4, “Trans”: “The women who have tripped on the trans tripwire over recent years have a number of things in common, but one is that they have all been at the forefront of every women’s issue. And this makes perfect sense. For if a significant amount of modern rights campaigning is based on people wishing to prove that their cause is a hardware issue, then trans forces other movements to go in precisely the opposite direction. Trans campaigners intent on arguing that trans is hardware can only win their argument if they persuade people that being a woman is a matter of software. And not all feminists are willing to concede that one.”²⁹

Murray’s insights helped me better understand our culture’s groundswell and activism for LGBT, Critical Theory, and Critical Race Theory. What Murray calls “the madness of crowds” has contributed to rapidly changing our culture, a change that has been influencing how some Christians view the world now.

4. *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody*³⁰

Helen Pluckrose is editor-in-chief of *Areo Magazine*, and James Lindsay is a mathematician and political commentator.

²⁰Ibid., 105–34.

²¹Ibid., 167–68. Cf. Rosaria Butterfield, “Intersectionality and the Church,” *Tabletalk*, 1 March 2020, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/intersectionality-and-the-church-2020-02/>.

²²Campbell and Manning, *The Rise of Victimhood Culture*, 225.

²³Cf. Akos Balogh, “Beware the Dangers of a Victim Mentality,” *The Gospel Coalition | Australia*, 8 December 2020, <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/beware-the-dangers-of-a-victim-mentality/>. Even *The New Yorker* finds “the trauma plot” tiring: Parul Sehgal, “The Case against the Trauma Plot,” *The New Yorker*, 27 December 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/01/03/the-case-against-the-trauma-plot>.

²⁴Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Identity, Morality* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019). See also the review by Neil Shenvi, 23 May 2020, <https://shenviapolitics.com/madness-and-its-discontents-a-short-review-of-murrays-madness-of-crowds/>.

²⁵Cf. Kevin DeYoung, “We Live in Confusing Times: The Progressives Can’t Keep Their Story Straight on Sex and Gender,” *WORLD Opinions*, 22 February 2022, <https://wng.org/opinions/the-manly-virtue-of-magnanimity-1645529342>.

²⁶Murray, *The Madness of Crowds*, 20.

²⁷Ibid., 64.

²⁸Ibid., 121, 173.

²⁹Ibid., 210.

³⁰Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020). See also Shenvi, “Villains, Victims, and Visionaries.” Shenvi also reviewed *Cynical Theories* for *Themelios* in April 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/cynical-theories-how-activist-scholarship-made-everything-about-race-gender-and-identity-and-why-this-harms-everybody/>. See also the review by Tim Challies, 26 August 2020, <https://www.challies.com/book-reviews/how-everything-became-about-race-gender-and-identity/>.

“It (intersectionality) does the same thing over and over again: look for the power imbalances, bigotry, and biases that it assumes must be present and pick at them.”

They are philosophically liberal and support liberal feminism and LGBT equality for “sexual minorities,” and they oppose what they call the “Social Justice Movement” or “wokeism.”

They trace how influential people have applied postmodernism to postcolonial theory, queer theory, critical race theory and intersectionality, feminism and gender studies, and disability and fat studies. And they show how all that connects to the Social Justice Movement.

There is nothing complex about the overarching idea of intersectionality, or the Theories upon which it is built. Nothing could be simpler. It does the same thing over and over again: look for the power imbalances, bigotry, and biases that it assumes must be present and pick at them. It reduces everything to one single variable, one single topic of conversation, one single focus and interpretation: prejudice, as understood under the power dynamics asserted by Theory. Thus, for example, disparate outcomes can have one, and only one, explanation, and it is prejudicial bigotry. The question is just identifying how it manifests in the given situation. Thus, it always assumes that, in every situation, some form of Theoretical prejudice exists and we must find a way to show evidence of it. In that sense, it is a tool—a “practice”—designed to flatten all complexity and nuance so that it can promote identity politics, in accordance with its vision.³¹

We now have Social Justice texts—forming a kind of Gospel of Social Justice—that express, with absolute certainty, that all white people are racist, all men are sexist, racism and sexism are systems that can exist and oppress absent even a single person with racist or sexist intentions or beliefs (in the

usual sense of the terms), sex is not biological and exists on a spectrum, language can be literal violence, denial of gender identity is killing people, the wish to remedy disability and obesity is hateful, and everything needs to be decolonized. That is the reification of the postmodern political principle. ... Social Justice scholarship has become a kind of Theory of Everything, a set of unquestionable Truths with a capital T, whose central tenets were taken from the original postmodernists and solidified within the derived Theories.³²

They summarize “Critical Race Theory” and intersectionality as “ending racism by seeing it everywhere.”³³

Social Justice Theorists have created a new religion, a tradition of faith that is actively hostile to reason, falsification, disconfirmation, and disagreement of any kind. Indeed, the whole postmodernist project now seems, in retrospect, like an unwitting attempt to have deconstructed the old metanarratives of Western thought—science and reason along with religion and capitalist economic systems—to make room for a wholly new religion, a postmodern faith based on a dead God, which sees mysterious worldly forces in systems of power and privilege and which sanctifies victimhood. This, increasingly, is the fundamentalist religion of the nominally secular left.³⁴

I first read this book in early September 2020 — after three months of rapid cultural change following George Floyd’s death on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis (while I was living in the Minneapolis area). As the ideologies of Robin DiAngelo and Ibram X. Kendi became how-to manuals in mainstream culture,³⁵ the insights in this book helped me better make sense of what has happened in secular culture as well as parts of conservative, Reformed evangelicalism.

5. *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*³⁶

Edwin Friedman was an ordained Jewish rabbi and practicing

³²Ibid., 183.

³³Ibid., 111; cf. 133–34.

³⁴Ibid., 210–11.

³⁵See Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s so Hard to Talk to White People about Racism* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2018); Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: Random House, 2019).

³⁶Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, ed. Margaret M. Treadwell and Edward W. Beal, 2nd ed. (New York: Church, 2017). Cf. this 75-page PDF: Alastair J. Roberts, *Self and Leadership: A Summary of and Engagement with Edwin Friedman’s A Failure of Nerve*, 2016, <https://alastairadversaria.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/self-and-leadership.pdf>.

³¹Pluckrose and Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, 128.

family therapist who died in 1996. When I recently read his book, I was astounded with his common-grace insights about leadership that directly apply to parents, pastors, and professors. (Friedman doesn't even give a hint that he is a theist; to the contrary, naturalistic evolution is foundational to his therapeutic framework.)

Many Christians right now are attempting to highlight the danger that *strong* leaders can hurt people.³⁷ Friedman highlights the insidious danger that *weak* leaders can hurt people. Weak leaders can fail in two crucial areas:

1. A failure of *discernment* (especially because of untethered empathy or enmeshment that hinders how others grow by affirming their low pain threshold)³⁸
2. A failure of *nerve* (especially by fearing to take stands at the risk of displeasing people)

People in our culture can be highly reactive and anxious and combustible—like a gas leak that can explode with just a spark. Or to change the metaphor, people in our culture can be like a body with a weak immune system that is defenseless against all kinds of diseases. Friedman argues, “Leaders function as the immune systems of their institutions.”³⁹ Good leaders are stable and sober-minded. Good leaders do not anxiously react to highly reactive people by herding the whole group to adapt to the least mature members of the group. Good leaders don't let criticism ruin them but recognize that criticism comes with the territory of good leadership.

II. FIVE RESOURCES BY CHRISTIANS

The following five resources by Christians have also helped me make sense of our current culture and make sense of how Christians are responding to it.

³⁷E.g., “The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill” podcast by Mike Cospoer for Christianity Today, June 21–December 4, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/>. Cf. Brian J. Tabb, “What Makes a ‘Good’ Church? Reflections on A Church Called Tov,” *Them* 46 (2021): 483–93.

³⁸See the section “Joe Rigney on Untethered Empathy” below.

³⁹Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 19.

“Leaders function as the immune systems of their institutions.”

1. Neil Shenvi on Critical Theory and Social Justice⁴⁰

Neil Shenvi earned a PhD in theoretical chemistry from the University of California, Berkeley, and in 2015 — after five years of working at Duke University — he began focusing on home-schooling his four children. He is a member of the Summit Church, pastored by J. D. Greear.

Shenvi has become a specialist on Critical Theory by painstakingly reading primary sources and interacting with scholars and others on the issue. He explains that Critical Theory has four central premises:

1. *Social binary*: “Society is divided into oppressed and oppressor groups.” Shenvi often highlights the below table from a book by New York Times Bestselling author Robin DiAngelo that presents Critical Theory as the truth.
2. *Oppression through ideology*: “The dominant group maintains power by imposing their ideology on everyone.”
3. *Lived experience*: “‘Lived experience’ gives oppressed groups privileged access to truths.”
4. *Social justice*: Society needs “social justice” — that is, “the elimination of all forms of social oppression” (i.e., not just race and ethnicity but also gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability, mental ability, economic class, etc.).⁴¹

These four premises help make sense of tables like the one below, “Group Identities Across Relations of Power.”⁴²

⁴⁰Neil Shenvi—Apologetics,” <https://shenviapologetics.com/>.

⁴¹Neil Shenvi, “Social Justice, Critical Theory, and Christianity: Are They Compatible?—Part 2,” *Neil Shenvi—Apologetics*, 5 January 2020, <https://shenviapologetics.com/social-justice-critical-theory-and-christianity-are-they-compatible-part-2-2/>.

⁴²This table is from Özlem Sensoy and Robin J. DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*, 2nd ed., Multicultural Education Series (New York: Teachers College, 2017), 64.

Minority/Target Group	Oppression	Dominant/ Agent Group
Peoples of Color	Racism	White
Poor; Working Class; Middle Class	Classism	Owning Class
Women; Transgender; Genderqueer	Sexism	(cis)Men
Gays; Lesbians; Bisexuals; Two Spirit	Heterosexism	Heterosexuals
Muslims; Buddhists; Jews; Hindus; and other non-Christian groups	Religions Oppression; Anti-Semitism	Christians
People with Disabilities	Ableism	Able-bodied
Immigrants (perceived)	Nationalism	Citizens (perceived)
Indigenous Peoples	Colonialism	White Settlers

The book reviews and articles on Shenvi’s website have been enormously helpful to me.⁴³ He has also teamed up for several articles with Pat Sawyer, a college professor with a PhD in education and cultural studies.⁴⁴ Shenvi is characteristically fair, clear, penetrating, discerning, reasonable, and kind.

Shenvi’s work has been an incredibly helpful resource for me over the past several years as I have tried to better understand the Critical Social Justice cultural revolution. But Shenvi is not the only Christian who is helpfully addressing

Critical Theory. Others include Thaddeus Williams,⁴⁵ Voddie Baucham,⁴⁶ and Owen Strachan.⁴⁷ I have also attempted to address the issue of ethnic harmony.⁴⁸

2. Joe Rigney on Untethered Empathy⁴⁹

Joe Rigney is president of Bethlehem College & Seminary, a pastor of Cities Church in St. Paul, and a teacher at Desiring God. Most people assume that empathy is always virtuous. Rigney (and others) explain how empathy can be sinful.

In an insightful interview with Doug Wilson that draws on insights from Edwin Friedman’s *A Failure of Nerve* (see above), Joe Rigney distinguishes between sympathy and empathy. He defines *sympathy* as showing compassion, and he defines (untethered) *empathy* as joining people in their darkness and distress and refusing to make any judgments. He uses the analogy of how to help someone who is sinking in quicksand: you could show sympathy by attempting to help him get out of the pit (e.g., by holding firmly to a branch with one hand while reaching into the pit with the other), or you could show (untethered) empathy by jumping into the pit with him.⁵⁰ Rigney is criticizing what C. S. Lewis calls “blackmail.” Lewis describes how a child “sulked in the attic” instead of apologizing in order to provoke others to give in and apologize to the sulking child.⁵¹

⁴³For Shenvi’s book reviews, see <https://shenviapologetics.com/book-reviews/>. For a sampling of his articles, see “Intro to Critical Theory,” 20 March 2019, <https://shenviapologetics.com/intro-to-critical-theory/>; “An Antiracism Glossary,” 5 September 2018, <https://shenviapologetics.com/an-antiracism-glossary/>; “Social Justice, Critical Theory, and Christianity: Are They Compatible?,” 5 January 2020, <https://shenviapologetics.com/social-justice-critical-theory-and-christianity-are-they-compatible-part-1-2/>.

⁴⁴See Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, *Engaging Critical Theory and the Social Justice Movement* (Merrillville, IN: Ratio Christi, 2019); Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, “Gender, Intersectionality, and Critical Theory,” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1.2 (2019): 75–81; Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, “Critical Theory and the Social Justice Movement,” *Journal of Christian Legal Thought* 10.1 (2020): 10–13; Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, “Do Whites Need Corporate Repentance for Historical Racial Sins?,” *Neil Shenvi—Apologetics*, 5 August 2020, <https://shenviapologetics.com/do-whites-need-corporate-repentance-for-historical-sins/>; Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, “Facing Woke Religion, the Gospel Is Still Good News,” *The American Conservative*, 4 May 2021, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/facing-woke-religion-the-gospel-is-still-good-news/>.

⁴⁵Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020). See the review by Neil Shenvi, 8 April 2021, <https://shenviapologetics.com/whose-justice-a-short-review-of-williams-confronting-injustice-without-compromising-truth/>. This is the most winsome book I am aware of to share with someone who tends to be sympathetic with “wokeness.” See also Thaddeus Williams, “Is Critical Race Theory a Helpful Tool? Or Is It a Broken Ideology That Glosses Over True Injustices?” *WORLD Opinions*, 22 March 2022, <https://wng.org/opinions/is-critical-race-theory-a-helpful-tool-1647945468>.

⁴⁶Voddie Baucham, *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism’s Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, D.C.: Salem, 2021). Baucham is courageous and valiant for truth, even if that means disappointing friends and losing elements of his platform. And his personal story is so powerful: a black American man who descended from African slaves, grows up with a non-Christian single mother in gang-infested Los Angeles, becomes a Christian in college, studies sociology and theology, earns a master’s degree and doctoral degree, adopts seven (!) black children, pastors predominantly black churches in Texas and then predominantly white churches in Texas and then moves to Zambia, etc. Baucham is a Thomas Sowell or Clarence Thomas of conservative evangelicalism. It is helpful to distinguish between those who (1) are knowing advocates of Critical Social Justice, (2) are sympathetic to it, or (3) have unwillingly taken on aspects of it. There is a messy middle here. Many good people are either not well-informed or misinformed on Critical Theory, and then they get out over their skis in public forums. In this book Baucham targets that first group and flags the second and third. It is wise to show some latitude for those who are still working these things out in their own contexts, even as we are seeing the “camps” progressively gain clarity on these issues. Baucham helps us do that, though I disagree with how he negatively portrays some faithful and reasonable brothers such as Jonathan Leeman and John Piper.

⁴⁷Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement Is Hijacking the Gospel* (Washington, D.C.: Salem, 2021). This book is similar to Voddie Baucham’s, but it does not call out specific conservative evangelicals the way Baucham’s book does.

⁴⁸Andrew David Naselli, “What the Bible Teaches about Ethnic Harmony,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 19.2 (2020): 14–57. See also Kevin DeYoung, *Faith Seeking Understanding: Thinking Theologically about Racial Tensions* (Matthews, NC: The Gospel Coalition, 2020), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/thinking-theologically-about-racial-tensions-series/>.

⁴⁹See Andrew David Naselli, “How Empathy Can Be Sinful,” *Andy Naselli*, 2 May 2020, <https://andynaselli.com/how-empathy-can-be-sinful>.

⁵⁰This contrast is similar to what Jordan Peterson calls “genuine empathy” (good) and “counterproductive sentimentality” (harmful). Jordan Peterson, “Life at the Bottom | Theodore Dalrymple,” *Jordan B. Peterson Podcast*, Season 4: Episode 23, 20 May 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ET7banSeN0.

⁵¹C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce: A Dream* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 131–32.

In Rigney's interview, he gives some people the impression that he is inclined to disbelieve women who claim to have experienced abuse. That is not what Rigney intended to communicate. Rather, his point is that when someone comes to a pastor with an allegation, for example, the pastor should communicate that he is *for* that person but not necessarily that he is unconditionally committed to taking that person's view on the matter. After Rigney's interview, he wrote seven insightful articles that clarify his intention and advance the discussion.⁵²

3. *Carl Trueman on the Road to Sexual Revolution*⁵³

Carl Trueman is professor of biblical and religious studies at Grove City College in Pennsylvania. In this 425-page academic treatise, Trueman attempts to answer this question:

How has the current highly individualistic, iconoclastic, sexually obsessed, and materialistic mindset come to triumph in the West? Or, to put the question in a more pressing and specific fashion . . . Why does the sentence "I am a woman trapped in a man's body" make sense not simply to those who have sat in poststructuralist and queer-theory seminars but to my neighbors, to people I pass on the street, to coworkers who have no particular political ax to grind and who are blissfully unaware of the rebarbative jargon and arcane concepts of Michel Foucault and his myriad epigones and incomprehensible imitators?⁵⁴

Trueman methodically and dispassionately dissects and traces ideas and influences to show how we got from there to here. He explains the influential ideologies of Rousseau, Wordsworth,

"It's all connected. In our culture people tend to see identity as a matter of psychological and sexual choice."

Shelley, Blake, Nietzsche, Marx, Darwin, and Freud. Then Trueman shows how the revolution has triumphed with eroticism in art and pop culture; with expressive individualism in law, ethics, and education; and with transgenderism in the politics of the sexual revolution. It's all connected. In our culture people tend to see identity as a matter of psychological and sexual choice.⁵⁵

4. *Kevin DeYoung on the Splintering of Reformed Evangelicalism*⁵⁶

Kevin DeYoung is senior pastor of Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina, and associate professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte.

DeYoung's article "Why Reformed Evangelicalism Has Splintered: Four Approaches to Race, Politics, and Gender" is descriptive, not prescriptive. He is trying to make sense of the splintering we have experienced in conservative, Reformed evangelicalism since about 2016. What happened? DeYoung observes,

It seems to me there are at least four different "teams" at present. Many of the old networks and alliances are falling apart and being re-formed along new lines. These new lines are not doctrinal in the classic sense. Rather, they often capture a cultural mood, a political instinct, or a personal sensibility. You could label each team by what it sees as the central need of the hour, by what it assesses as the most urgent work of the church in this cultural moment. Let's give each group an adjective corresponding to this assessment.

⁵²Joe Rigney, "Killing Them Softly: Compassion That Warms Satan's Heart," *Desiring God*, 24 May 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/killing-them-softly>; Joe Rigney, "The Enticing Sin of Empathy: How Satan Corrupts through Compassion," *Desiring God*, 31 May 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-enticing-sin-of-empathy>; Joe Rigney, "Dangerous Compassion: How to Make Any Love a Demon," *Desiring God*, 18 January 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/dangerous-compassion>; Joe Rigney, "Do You Feel My Pain? Empathy, Sympathy, and Dangerous Virtues," *Desiring God*, 2 May 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-you-feel-my-pain>; Joe Rigney, "Where Do We Disagree? Golden Rule Reading and the Call for Empathy," *Desiring God*, 12 April 2021, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/where-do-we-disagree>; Joe Rigney, "On Empathy, Once More: A Response to Critics (Part 1)," *Medium*, 14 October 2021, <https://medium.com/@joe.rigney/on-empathy-once-more-a-response-to-critics-part-1-ef87b28e5363>; Joe Rigney, "On Empathy, Once More: A Response to Critics (Part 2)," *Medium*, 14 October 2021, <https://medium.com/@joe.rigney/on-empathy-once-more-a-response-to-critics-part-2-d09070e0dbd2>.

⁵³Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020); Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022). *Rise and Triumph* is 425 pages; *Strange New World* abridges the first book to 204 pages. See also reviews of the unabridged book by Neil Shenvi, 11 January 2021, <https://shenviapoletics.com/liquid-souls-a-brief-review-of-truemans-rise-and-triumph-of-the-modern-self/>; Andrew Walker, 18 November 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/rise-triumph-modern-self-carl-trueman/>; and Tim Challies, 18 November 2020, <https://www.challies.com/book-reviews/the-rise-and-triumph-of-the-modern-self/>.

⁵⁴Trueman, *Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 36.

⁵⁵Cf. Carl R. Trueman, "Evangelicals and Race Theory," *First Things*, February 2021, <https://www.firstthings.com/articale/2021/02/evangelicals-and-race-theory>; Carl R. Trueman, "How Expressive Individualism Threatens Civil Society," *Background* 3615 (2021): 1–14. See also the *9Marks Journal* for March 2022 on "Expressive Individualism in the Church" — an issue devoted to showing how Trueman's *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* is so helpful and relevant for pastors and churches (<https://www.9marks.org/journal/expressive-individualism-in-the-church/>).

⁵⁶Kevin DeYoung, "Why Reformed Evangelicalism Has Splintered: Four Approaches to Race, Politics, and Gender," *The Gospel Coalition*, 9 March 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/why-reformed-evangelicalism-has-splintered-four-approaches-to-race-politics-and-gender/>.



1. Contrite: “Look at the church’s complicity in past and present evils. We have been blind to injustice, prejudice, racism, sexism, and abuse. What the world needs is to see a church owning its sins and working, in brokenness, to make up for them and overcome them.”

2. Compassionate: “Look at the many people hurting and grieving in our midst and in the world. Now is the time to listen and learn. Now is the time to weep with those who weep. What the world needs is a church that demonstrates the love of Christ.”

3. Careful: “Look at the moral confusion and intellectual carelessness that marks our time. Let’s pay attention to our language and our definitions. What the world needs is a church that will draw upon the best of its theological tradition and lead the way in understanding the challenges of our day.”

4. Courageous: “Look at the church’s compromise with (if not outright capitulation to) the spirit of the age. Now is the time for a trumpet blast, not for backing down. What the world needs is a church that will admonish the wayward, warn against danger, and stand as a bulwark for truth, no matter how unpopular.”

DeYoung is trying to present each view in a positive light and in a way that adherents of each view would agree to. Here’s how he maps out those four views on a series of contemporary issues:⁵⁷

⁵⁷It is remarkable how so many seemingly unrelated issues line up on this scale. It reminds me of Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic, 2007). See Justin Taylor’s excerpts and summary: “A Conflict of Visions: or, Why Can’t We All Get Along?,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 9 February 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/a-conflict-of-visions-or-why-cant-we-all-get-along/>.

Table 1. Race

	White Supremacy	Systemic Racism	Police Shootings	Critical Race Theory	Black Lives Matter
1. Contrite	Essential to American history, Whites must repent	Rampant— disparities imply discrimination	Evidence of continuing racism and injustice	Full of good insights	Say it, wave it, wear it
2. Compassionate	More prevalent than we think, Whites should lament	Not the only explanation, but should be seen and called out	First step is to weep with those who weep	Chew on the meat, spit out the bones	Support the slogan, not the organization
3. Careful	A sad part of American history but not the whole story, we should all celebrate what is good and reject what is bad	Open to the category, but racial disparities exist for many reasons	Let’s get the evidence first before jumping on social media	Core concepts are deeply at odds with Christian conviction, but let’s not throw around labels willy-nilly	Black lives are made in the image of God, but given the aims of the larger movement, using the phrase in an unqualified way is unwise
4. Courageous	Sadly, a part of our past, but lumping all Whites together as racists is anti-gospel	A Marxist category we must reject	The real problem is Black-on-Black crime	The church’s path toward liberalism	What about Blue lives? Unborn lives? All lives?

Table 2. Politics and Gender

	Trump	Christian Nationalism	Wearing Masks	Sexual Abuse	Gender Roles
1. Contrite	No! The church’s allegiance to Trump is the clearest sign of its spiritual bankruptcy.	One of the biggest problems in our day, a dangerous ideology at home in most conservative white churches	I feel unsafe and uncared for when masks aren’t worn—besides Covid affects minority communities worse than others	It’s about time the church owned this scandal, believes victims, and calls out perpetrators and their friends	The problem is toxic masculinity and unbiblical stereotypes
2. Compassionate	A matter of Christian liberty, but there are good reasons to criticize Trump	Too many Christians are letting their politics shape their religion	It’s one small but important way to love your neighbor	Sympathize with victims, vow to do better	Traditional views are good, but many dangers come from our own mistakes
3. Careful	A matter of Christian liberty, but there are good reasons someone might have voted for Trump	Christian symbols and rhetoric supporting insurrection is bad, but the term itself needs more definition.	Probably overblown and a bit frustrating, but let’s just get through this	Each case and each accusation should be looked at on its own merits	We need a strong, joyful celebration of biblical manhood and womanhood
4. Courageous	Yes! He’s not perfect, but he stood up to the anti-God agenda of the left.	A new label meant to smear Christians who want to see our country adhere to biblical principles	A sign of the government encroaching on our liberties	A real tragedy, but so is demonizing good people	The problem is feminism and emasculated men

Doug Wilson calls DeYoung's article a "fine descriptive piece."⁵⁸ (I agree.) Wilson agrees with all of it, except for these two sentences by DeYoung:

The loudest voices tend to be 1s and 4s, which makes sense because they tend to see many of these issues in the starkest terms and often collide with each other in ways that makes a lot of online noise. The 1s and 4s can also be the most separatist, with some voices (among the 1s) encouraging an exodus from white evangelical spaces and some voices (among the 4s) encouraging the woke to be excommunicated.

DeYoung is a 3, and Wilson is a 4. Wilson thinks that 3s can be separatists by not associating with 4s in order to win the approval of 1s and 2s. I think DeYoung is correct that in general 1s and 4s are loudest and most separatist, and I also agree with Wilson that *any* of those positions can be separatist; in other words, being a 1 or a 4 does not necessarily make one inherently more separatist than the others.

For example, some 3s are vigilant not to recommend resources by 4s or associate with 4s (e.g., by intentionally not speaking together at conferences) while simultaneously recommending resources by 1s and 2s and closely associating with 1s and 2s. I think that reflects a common tendency to "punch right and coddle left"—to care more about what people to your left think about you and to label anyone to your right as a "fundamentalist."⁵⁹ (I don't mean to pick on the 3s. In DeYoung's taxonomy, I'm about a 3 myself! But I'm more sympathetic to 4s than 1s and 2s.)

Speaking of fundamentalism, it is ironic that many left-leaning people who despise fundamentalism participate in cancel culture more zealously than fundamentalists practice second-degree separation. John Woodbridge explains what second-degree separation is:

⁵⁸Douglas Wilson, "Kevin DeYoung and the Taxonomy of Conflict," *Blog and Mablog*, 21 June 2021, <https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/kevin-deyoung-and-the-taxonomy-of-conflict.html>.

⁵⁹On fundamentalism, cf. Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen, eds., *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011). Here is one of my conclusions: "Few people consider themselves extreme. People commonly frame issues in a reductionistic way slanted in favor of their argument: (1) there are twits on the left and (2) wackos on the right, but (3) unlike those extremes, there's my reasonable middle way. Lyrics from a 1973 Stealers Wheel song come to mind: 'Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right, here I am, stuck in the middle with you.' And when defending your view on the spectrum of evangelicalism, there will always be someone to both the left and right of you." Andrew David Naselli, "Conclusion," in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 215.



Second-degree separation means that if you find someone whom you think is theologically or ethically compromised, you must separate from that person [e.g., don't have Christian partnership with a theological liberal], as well as from other people who have not separated from the first individual [e.g., Billy Graham]. These post-1957 fundamentalists separated from evangelical Christians who accepted the principle of cooperative evangelism [particularly Billy Graham's method of platforming Roman Catholics and theological liberals in his evangelistic meetings and then giving those leaders information cards filled out by converts], which vexed fundamentalists.⁶⁰

Cancel culture today is worse than hyper-fundamentalism.⁶¹

5. Jonathan Leeman on Authority and Deconstruction⁶²

Jonathan Leeman is an elder of Cheverly Baptist Church in suburban Washington, D.C. and editorial director for 9Marks.

It has become increasingly common for people to have this mindset toward authorities: "If you are in a position of power and if you disagree with me in a way I don't like, then you are

⁶⁰John D. Woodbridge, "The 'Fundamentalist' Label: An Interview with John Woodbridge," *Trinity Magazine* (2009): 9. PDF at https://andynaselli.com/wp-content/uploads/2009_fundamentalist_label.pdf.

⁶¹On hyper-fundamentalism, see Kevin T. Bauder, "Fundamentalism," in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 43–45.

⁶²Jonathan Leeman, *Don't Fire Your Church Members: The Case for Congregationalism* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 131–52; Jonathan Leeman, "The Blessing of (Good) Authority: Lessons from a King's Final Words (2 Sam. 23:3–4)," *The Gospel Coalition*, 27 September 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/king-david-final-words-godly-authority-2-samuel-23/>; Jonathan Leeman, "Defending Sound Doctrine against the Deconstruction of American Evangelicalism," *9Marks Journal* (2021): 7–33; Jonathan Leeman, "An Ecclesiological Take on 'The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill,'" *9Marks*, 14 March 2022, <https://www.9marks.org/article/an-ecclesiological-take-on-the-rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/>. This work is culminating in a forthcoming book: Jonathan Leeman, *Authority: How Good Leadership Protects the Vulnerable, Makes Society Flourish, and Saves the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, forthcoming in 2023).

abusive and domineering.” Consequently, others are rightly concerned that “abuse is becoming a totalizing category and that even the accusation of abuse takes down everyone and everything in its path.”⁶³

Leeman argues that God designed authority as a gift to bless others (see 2 Sam 23:3–4). But sinners can misuse authority in a way that does not bless but destroys (e.g., Pharaoh oppressed the Israelites). Authority itself is not sinful. But it is dangerous when sinners misuse it.

“Anti-authority sentiments are in the cultural air, and some professing Christians are taking it to another level by deconstructing Christianity”

Leeman distinguishes between the “authority to command” and the “authority of counsel.”⁶⁴ The *authority to command* is the right to enforce what you say, and the *authority of counsel* does not have that right but must rely on the persuasive power of the truth. Those who have the authority to command include parents (disciplining young children with the rod), the government (punishing lawbreakers, including executing with the sword), and the whole church (excommunicating by using the keys of the kingdom). The relationship between pastors and other church members is not like a parent and young children but more like a parent with *adult* children. Pastors do not have the authority to command but the authority of counsel by shepherding (which includes preaching and teaching).

Anti-authority sentiments are in the cultural air, and some professing Christians are taking it to another level by deconstructing Christianity.⁶⁵ Leeman highlights three books (among others):⁶⁶

[1] *Jesus and John Wayne*, by Kristen Kobes Du Mez, argues that white evangelicalism is characterized by patriarchy, toxic masculinity, authoritarianism, nationalism, anti-gay sentiment, Islamophobia and indifference to Black people’s lives and rights.⁶⁷

[2] *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*, by Beth Allison Barr, argues that the teaching of female subordination is a historical construct rather than the “clear biblical teaching” her opponents claim that it is.⁶⁸

[3] *The Color of Compromise*, by Jemar Tisby, traces the long history of how white racism and evangelical Christianity have been fully intertwined in U.S. history, and how every effort to challenge white supremacy has been opposed—*theologically, politically, morally*—by white evangelicals.⁶⁹

The critiques that these books offer are not exegetical and theological, but historical, sociological, personal, and emotional. Leeman warns against making your story more authoritative than the Bible.⁷⁰

⁶⁷For reviews, see Neil Shenvi, “Cowboy Christianity: A Short Review of Du Mez’s *Jesus and John Wayne*,” *Shenvi Apologetics* (March 15, 2021), <https://shenviapologetics.com/cowboy-christianity-a-short-review-of-du-mezs-jesus-and-john-wayne/>; Anne Kennedy “Jesus and John Wayne: A Fair Portrait of Evangelicalism?” *CBMW.org* (April 5, 2021), <https://cbmw.org/2021/04/05/jesus-and-john-wayne-a-fair-portrait-of-evangelicalism/>; Stephen Wolfe, “Upper-Class Christianity,” *First Things* (August 2021), <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/08/upper-class-christianity>; John D. Wisley, “Jesus and John Wayne: A Review,” *Ad Fontes Journal* (February 9, 2022), <https://adfontesjournal.com/book-review/jesus-and-john-wayne-a-review/>; and Michael Young, “Jesus and John Wayne Among the Deplorables,” *American Reformer* (March 11, 2022), <https://americanreformer.org/jesus-and-john-wayne-among-the-deplorables>. See also Denny Burk, “Crucial Questions with Kristin Kobes Du Mez,” *DennyBurk.com* (November 29, 2021), <https://www.dennyburk.com/crucial-questions-with-kristin-kobes-du-mez>.

⁶⁸For reviews, see Kevin DeYoung, “The Making of Biblical Womanhood: A Review” *The Gospel Coalition* (July 2021), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelos/article/the-making-of-biblical-womanhood-a-review/>; Neil Shenvi, “Unmaking the Patriarchy: A Brief Review of Barr’s *Making of Biblical Womanhood*” *Shenvi Apologetics* (November 9, 2021), <https://shenviapologetics.com/unmaking-the-patriarchy-a-brief-review-of-barrs-making-of-biblical-womanhood/>; Timothy E. Miller, “The Making of Biblical Womanhood” *JBTW* 2/1 (Fall 2021), https://seminary.bju.edu/files/2021/11/JBTW2.1_Article05_TheMakingofBiblicalWomanhood_Miller.pdf; and Jordan Steffaniak, “The Making of Biblical Womanhood,” *The London Lyceum* (December 20, 2021), <https://www.thelondonlyceum.com/book-review-the-making-of-biblical-womanhood/> (20 December 2021).

⁶⁹For reviews, see Samuel Sey, “The Color of Compromise,” *Slow to Write* (January 22, 2019), <https://slowtowrite.com/the-color-of-compromise/>; Daniel K. Williams, “The Color of Compromise,” *The Gospel Coalition* (January 23, 2019), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/color-compromise/>; S. Donald Fortson III, “The Color of Incomplete History,” *Reformed Faith & Practice: The Journal of Reformed Theological Seminary* 4/1 (May 2019), <https://journal.rts.edu/article/the-color-of-incomplete-history/>; Neil Shenvi, “Compromised? A Long Review of Tisby’s *Color of Compromise*,” *Shenvi Apologetics* (December 4, 2019), <https://shenviapologetics.com/compromised-a-long-review-of-tisbys-color-of-compromise>.

⁷⁰Similarly, we must beware of giving our own opinions unwarranted authority. Trevin Wax recounts, “Not long ago, I sat down with a professor I’ve long admired, a man who has trained future pastors and church leaders for decades. Curious to get his take on culture shifts and the next generation, I asked him how an incoming class of 20-somethings today differed from 15 or 20 years ago. What’s the difference between older millennials preparing for ministry (my generation) and Gen Z? I asked him. He paused for a moment and then offered three general impressions. *Pornography, gender confusion, and the weight given to one’s opinion.* . . . The third difference is one I attribute to the rise and influence of social media. Many young people today have grown up in an environment where broadcasting their opinions is expected. Any one person’s opinion carries as much weight or validity as another’s. The classroom gets interesting when so many students enter the room already convinced their assumptions regarding theology, preaching, ministry practice, and the like are correct, chafing against the expectation they’d accept an expert’s authority, no matter how time-tested or experienced the person in authority might be. Yes, everyone is entitled to an opinion, but social media has distorted the weight we assign these viewpoints so that nearly everyone assumes their perspective is just as valid as someone else’s. This is a sign of the ‘death of expertise.’” Trevin Wax, “Gen Z Enters the Ministry: 3 Big Challenges,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 10 March 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/gen-z-ministry-challenges/>.

⁶³Kevin DeYoung, “Toward a Better Discussion about Abuse,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 24 January 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/toward-a-better-discussion-about-abuse/>.

⁶⁴Leeman, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members*, 138, 140. See also the fourth lesson in Leeman, “An Ecclesiological Take on ‘The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill’”

⁶⁵See also Neil Shenvi, “Sociology as Theology: The Deconstruction of Power in (Post)Evangelical Scholarship,” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 3.2 (2021): 46–51; Alisa Childers, “Why We Should Not Redeem ‘Deconstruction,’” *The Gospel Coalition*, 18 February 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/redeem-reconstruction/>.

⁶⁶Leeman, “Defending Sound Doctrine,” 9.

CONCLUSION

These ten resources (five by non-Christians and five by Christians) have helped me make sense of our current culture and make sense of how Christians are responding to it—particularly churches and Christian schools and other institutions in conservative evangelicalism.

“You don’t need to be an expert in every new shade of doctrinal deviation, but you should be able to discern what is false if you know and love what is true.”

More importantly, these resources have helped me in this complicated world to be discerning as I endeavor to hate what is evil and to love what is good. God describes “the mature” as “those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:14). Maturing in our “powers of discernment” requires training. By God’s grace I want to be discerning so that I can better obey these commands from God:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good” (Rom 12:9).

“Do not love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15a).⁷¹

One final note: As helpful as the above resources are, I don’t want to imply that you need to read them (and others like them) to be a faithful Christian. The most helpful resource by far is the Bible.



There is nothing new under the sun. You need to be saturated with the Bible for other resources to be helpful. You don’t need to be an expert in every new shade of doctrinal deviation, but you should be able to discern what is false if you know and love what is true. The Bible must be your bedrock underneath all other resources, the lens through which you view reality and put this complicated world in focus, the truth that identifies falsehood.

The Bible is the only book that is God-breathed, entirely true, our final authority, sufficient, necessary, and powerful. It’s the only “must read” book. It’s a book that we must believe, love, submit to and obey, be grateful for, read humbly, read carefully and prayerfully, and read routinely.⁷² ✕

⁷¹Cf. Naselli, “Do Not Love the World.”

⁷²Cf. Andrew David Naselli, “What Is the Bible, and How Should We Treat It?” a sermon preached to Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mounds View, MN, January 10, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/499637314>.

Pastoral Fatherhood: Understanding the Pastor as a Paternal Example

¹This is not to argue that the magisterial domains of church and home *only* overlap in the pastor. One may also consider the ways in which the church and home overlap in church members broadly, parents and children, husbands and wives, doctrinal catechesis, etc. Nevertheless, this essay submits that a proper pastoral theology serves as a compass for these other areas of focus. For a broader look at the *familial* nature of the church and various ways in which the church and home overlap, see the following: Vern Sheridan Poythress, “The Church as Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in the Church,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, Revised. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 307–328; David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles*, SBL Dissertation Series (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983); Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder, eds., *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010); Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “Οἶκος Θεού: A Theologically Neglected but Important Ecclesiological Metaphor,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 2.1 (Fall 2003), 53–65.

INTRODUCTION

In 1999, evolutionary paleontologist and Harvard University professor Dr. Stephen Jay Gould coined the phrase “non-overlapping magisteria” to describe the relationship between science and religion. He aimed to show that science and religion are miles apart because they deal with different realms or, “domains of magisterial (teaching) authority.” This article will not debate Gould’s thesis, but will use his taxonomy of magisterial domains as an analogy. The *home* and the *church* are two primary domains of *spiritual teaching authority* in the Scriptures. As such, one must ask, “Do these magisteria overlap? And if so, how?” The definitive answer of this essay, of complementarian theology, and of the Bible, is “absolutely.”

This essay will argue that the magisterial domains of the church and home overlap uniquely in the pastoral office, such that a pastor functions as a paternal example for the people of God.¹ To make this argument, key biblical texts will be explored that depict the pastor in paternal terms, with one “problem text” discussed along the way. After surveying the biblical data, a theological sketch will be given to underpin an evangelical understanding of pastoral fatherhood in the church family. Finally, the practical impact of pastoral fatherhood will be discussed, demonstrating both the positive and negative implications.²

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Throughout the Old Testament, various leaders are given for God’s people. Prophets, priests, kings, sages, and community elders all exercise authoritative roles in the history of Israel, and each of these ministries are depicted in *fatherly terms*.³ These paternal patterns in the OT then develop into a motif in the New Testament. Jesus Christ comes as the *Son* from the *Father*. His apostolic disciples, on whose testimony the church is built, are twelve *men*. These men plant churches, who appoint *male elders* to exercise oversight. But, perhaps the most vivid *ecclesial* representations of this motif are found in Paul’s ministry and teachings.

First, Paul regularly describes himself as father to individuals — to Timothy (1 Cor 4:7, Phil 2:22, 1 Tim 1:2, 2 Tim 1:2), to Titus (Titus 1:4), and to Onesimus (Philem 12).⁴ Lest one surmise this is only an individual-to-individual phenomenon, Paul also describes himself as a father figure to entire churches (1 Cor 4:14–17 and 1 Thess 2:7–12 are the most direct references).⁵ This last reference is of particular import because, in this instance, we see that it is not only an apostolic ministry of Paul’s; co-writers Silvanus and Timothy are also included in the collective “we” who related to the Thessalonian church as parents to children. Thus, in the apostolic ministry of Paul and the delegated ministry of his followers, parenthood was a regular metaphor for church leadership.

Second, this example from Paul is only deepened with his teachings on pastoral ministry in the Pastoral Epistles, specifically in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. One of the key qualifications for a pastor is that he “manage his household well . . .for [if not] . . . how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim 3:4–5). This sentiment is repeated in Titus 1, where the children of overseers are not to be insubordinate (Titus

²This article serves as a distillation of my doctoral dissertation. Camden Pulliam, “Paternal Pastors: An Evangelical Approach” (Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020).

³For prophets, see 2 Kgs 2:12; 13:14; for priests, see Exod 12:1–28 or Jdg 17:10; 18:19; for kings, see Deut 17:14–20 and the similarities with parental responsibilities in Deut 6:1–9; for sages, see Prov 1:1; 4:1; for elders, see Num 11:1–30, in addition to the inherent nature of community eldership. For a fuller treatment of each OT ministry, see Pulliam, “Paternal Pastors,” 44–70.

⁴Peter also describes himself as a father to Mark (1 Pet. 5:13).

⁵See also 1 Cor 3:1–3; Gal 4:18–19; 1 John 2–4; 2 John 1, 4, 13; 3 John 4; 2 Cor 6:11–12, 12:14–15. More could also be said about 1 Thess 2, since Paul and his apostolic delegation are depicted in both paternal (vs. 11–12) and maternal terms (vs. 7). It cannot be missed, however, that both parental metaphors are assigned to *men*. Some may view this text as a challenge to complementarian theology. In this author’s perspective, it instead bolsters the belief that male pastors (or in Paul’s case, the apostle and his delegates) serve as parental — not merely paternal — examples.



1:6). The logic of these qualifications is straightforward: If a man cannot parent at home, he cannot “parent” at church. The work is similar in both magisterial domains.⁶ By linking the pastor’s qualification for church office to his parenthood in the home, Paul overlaps the magisterial domains of the church and home directly in the office of the pastor.

How does this relate to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 23:9, “Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven?”

Various interpretations of Matthew 23:9 have been suggested. The verse could be taken as a direct and wooden prohibition, wherein Jesus’ disciples should not treat any other man as a father, period. The problem with this interpretation is the Bible’s blessing elsewhere of natural fatherhood. Jesus’ other teachings in texts like Luke 11:11–13, where Jesus recognizes natural father-child relationships, give a common-sense rebuttal to this wooden and literal interpretation. Some commentators argue instead that Matthew 23:9 is hyperbolic. Jesus does not, in fact, prohibit the language of fatherhood categorically, but he means to caution against the spiritual elevation of human figures to divine-like status.

⁶ How a pastor addresses an adult congregant is quite different than how he would address a toddler in the home. Yet, the underlying parental will and work of each is the same, even if the way they are expressed is different. A pastor’s desire for his congregants should be no less than those for his children, and his work to present them blameless before the judgment throne should be no less taxing than the toil at home.

Some perceive this view to accommodate Roman Catholic practice, wherein priests are regarded as “fathers” and the Pope is appointed Father of the Church.⁷ Another interpretive option suggests that Jesus restricts *spiritual fatherhood* but not natural fatherhood. In other words, what Jesus means is to say is something like, “Call no man your *spiritual* father on earth, for you have one *spiritual* Father, who is in heaven.” This interpretation aligns well with the context, which cautions against spiritual elitism, and it seems to be the dominant position for many evangelical interpreters.⁸ But for those who prefer this view, we are still left with what to do about Paul’s paternal emphasis for the pastorate. On this issue, many evangelicals have no theologically grounded answer.

THEOLOGICAL SKETCH

Throughout the Pastoral Epistles, Paul uses the metaphor of household stewardship to describe the pastoral office.⁹

⁷ See Pablo Gadenz, “The Priest as Spiritual Father,” in *Catholic for a Reason: Scripture and the Mystery of the Family of God*, ed. Scott Hahn and Leon J. Suprenant (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 1998), 216. The hypocrisy of this Catholic interpretation and practice should not be lost on evangelicals. Even if Jesus’ teaching is hyperbolic, it is difficult to imagine a worse violation of the *spirit of the text* than the elevated authority and status of the Pope, the Vicar of Christ. For, Catholic doctrine states the Pope has “full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 882.

⁸ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr, *Matthew 19–28*, 3 vols., International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 3:277; David W. Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry: Biblical Images for Leaders and Followers*, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 83; R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: Eerdmans, 1985), 328–29; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 577; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 927–28; John Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait: Five New Testament Word Studies* (Eerdmans, 1961), 82–83.

This is most obvious in Titus 1:7, where the pastor is described as an “overseer” and “God’s steward.” But this emphasis is seen in numerous other places as well. Paul is “entrusted” with the gospel of the glory of God (1 Tim 1:11). The gospel is a “good deposit” worthy to be “guarded” (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14). The church is the “household of God” (1 Tim 3:15). And directly pertaining to pastoral qualifications, in 1 Timothy 3:4–5 a pastor is described as “managing” his home and “caring” for the church.¹⁰ The language behind each of these verses stems from Greco-Roman household stewardship. The Pauline picture of the church presents a Greco-Roman household where the *paterfamilias* is away from the homestead, and a “household steward” stands in oversight of his affairs until he returns.¹¹ In this metaphor, God is the *paterfamilias*, the church is the entire household, and the pastor is the household steward who stands and acts in the Father’s place. In this office, the pastor is a steward who will give an account for his guidance over the household in physical protection, spiritual guidance, relational trust, emotional care, and even financial guardianship.¹²

This Greco-Roman backdrop creates a theological category for an evangelical understanding of pastoral fatherhood. Is a pastor the father of the church family? No. God alone is Father (Matt 23:9). But is a pastor fatherly? Yes. He stands in the place of the Father, acting as his representative. Within this theological perspective, Matthew 23:9 would allow for spiritual father figures, but these figures should never supplant the Father himself.

This evangelical sketch positions the pastor as a father figure for the church family, with delegated authority to give fatherly provision (“feed my sheep,” John 21:17), protection (“guard the good deposit,” 1 Tim 6:20),

“Indeed, healthy families blossom in the culture of a healthy church, and a healthy church blossoms under healthy church fathers”

⁹ For a more extensive analysis of stewardship language in the Pastoral Epistles, see F. Alan Tomlinson, “The Purpose and Stewardship Theme in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 52–83.

¹⁰ See Abraham J. Malherbe, “Overseers as Household Managers in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Text, Image, and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World: A Festschrift in Honor of David Lee Balch*, ed. Aliou Cissé Niang and Carolyn Osiek (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 78.

¹¹ Tomlinson, “The Purpose and Stewardship Theme within the Pastoral Epistles,” 69–70.

¹² The “representative” pastoral fatherhood described here must be distinguished from “ontological” fatherhood, as described by the Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Catechism states that a priest, upon ordination, is conferred an “indelible spiritual character” and becomes an *icon* of the Father as a representative of Christ. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1582. While the Catechism also affirms a form of representation and instrumentality (1581), the priest’s ontological change of character is an essential distinction. The representative fatherhood presented in this essay maintains that an ordained pastor serves as a father-figure instrumentally, but he is not changed ontologically.

leadership (“set the believers an example,” 1 Tim. 4:12), and love (“Pursue . . . love, steadfastness, gentleness,” 1 Tim 6:11). Such fatherly stewardship means that the pastor stands in a unique position between the home and church. His office inhabits the intersection of two overlapping magisteria. His pastorate is dependent on the quality of his home, and the church is dependent on the quality of his pastorate.¹³

PRACTICAL IMPACT

The practical benefits of pastoral fatherhood are impossible to quantify. But for the purpose of this article, one essential benefit should be mentioned. Pastors should be model parents.¹⁴ Their service in the home should be commendable, and their service in the church should be godly, for they are meant to represent God. Natural fathers should be able to watch a pastor with his children and follow his example. Parents should also be able to watch a pastor’s care for the flock and model his pastoring.

Churches should ask of their pastoral candidates, “Do we want our parents to look like him?” “Do we want to treat our children the way he treats us?” “Does he treat church members the way God treats us?” These are sobering questions for pastoral candidates, but they are less sobering than the consequences of unfaithfulness.

Indeed, the consequences of unfaithfulness are devastating. Just as good fathers have an incalculable impact on the health and wellbeing of their children, so also the impact bad fathers have is disastrous. A church with healthy and godly pastoral fathers will soon have a whole and healthy church family. A church with unhealthy and ungodly pastoral fathers will soon have a broken and unhealthy church family. Just because a pastor executes his office

poorly does not mean he is not a father-figure. He is a father-figure, and he brings consequential impact with him. The question is not if a pastor will father his church, but how?

The practical significance of pastoral fathers should be clear. Pastors must be men of the highest character. If they are to lead the church, they must be “family men,” able to “set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12).

CONCLUSION

The domains of the church and home overlap uniquely in the pastoral office, such that a pastor functions as a paternal example for the people of God. When the OT themes of fatherly leadership are sustained through Paul’s emphasis on pastoral fatherhood (yet cautioned with Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 23), it becomes clear that the pastor is a representative father figure in the church family. As such, he demonstrates for God’s people what parenthood ought to be, both in his home and in the church. Indeed, the magisterial domains of home and church overlap in this one office.

Accordingly, there is both delight and danger. As parents steer the course of the home, so pastors steer the course of the church, for good or for ill. Indeed, healthy families blossom in the culture of a healthy church, and a healthy church blossoms under healthy church fathers. May God the Father grant more pastoral father figures to represent him well, for his glory and the good of our families and churches.



¹³ Pastoral paternity should not eliminate the possibility of an unmarried pastor. But the assumed norm of the biblical text is a married pastor. See R. Albert Mohler, “Must a Pastor Be Married? The New York Times Asks the Question,” *Albert Mohler*, March 25, 2011, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://albertmohler.com/2011/03/25/must-a-pastor-be-married-the-new-york-times-asks-the-question/>.

¹⁴ The variegated ways that the Bible uses family imagery cannot be explored here. Let it be stated, though, that the pastor is not the *only* parental example in the church. Of course, women should learn how to mother from other women, and men should learn how to father from older men in the church (Titus 2:1–8). What’s more, pastors should also learn from their congregants, treating older women as mothers and older men as fathers (1 Tim 5:1–2). The Bible’s economy of parental help is vast and complex, for the task of parenting is very vast, and very complex. Nonetheless, the pastor is the primary model of God’s parenthood for his people.

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BOOK

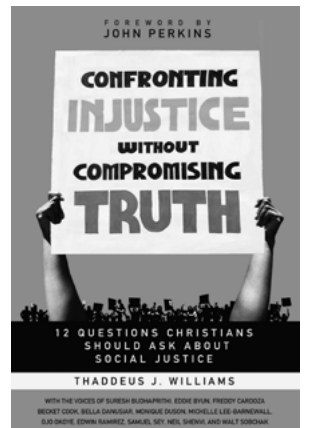
REVIEWS

REVIEWED BY GRANT CASTLEBERRY

Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask About Social Justice

Over the past ten years, many neo-Marxist ideas have been smuggled into the church under the cover of the Trojan horse of “social justice.” Of course, Christians should care about justice and walk humbly before God, living righteously in the world (Mic. 6:8). Furthermore, we are to “love our neighbor as ourselves” (Matt. 22:39). But we must be careful to do this with biblical discernment and the “mind of Christ” and not with the methods of the world that oppose God’s Word. This is the crux of the issue and why so much of the church is struggling with “social justice.” Enter Thaddeus Williams’ *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth*, which tackles all the major justice issues of the day from a biblical worldview.

Let me say at the outset that this is truly a fantastic book. Williams has probably written



Thaddeus J. Williams. *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020.

the best introductory primer that covers all the major justice issues of the day. With a biblical framework and careful use of logic, he demonstrates how to approach issues of justice with godly discernment. Williams makes an important point when he says that we “take the Bible’s commands to be discerning just as seriously as we take its commands to do justice” (192). The neglect of this point has been the failure of the modern church and is exactly why this book deserves a wide reading amongst evangelicals.

Williams tackles head-on the justice issues of sexuality, intersectionality, critical theory, socialism, identity politics, personal vindication, propaganda, abortion, and racism. And he does so by contrasting what he calls “Side A,” which is the biblical perspective on a justice issue with “Side B,” which is the world’s perspective on a justice issue. For example, take the often used term “systemic injustice.” Williams rightly defines it biblically (Side A) as “*any system that either requires or encourages those within the system to break the moral laws God revealed for his creatures’ flourishing*” (79). Williams, however, says that the world (Side B) is largely operating with a definition that says systemic racism is any system that produces “disparities of outcome” amongst different groups. “Disparities” on Side B, then, are evidence that “discrimination” exists (80). Williams points out that this “Side B” definition is problematic because it first begs the question by concluding that “systems” are what produce disparities (81). Secondly, he argues that there are actually a number of variables that lead to disparities between groups, including everything from the location you were raised to your birth order amongst your siblings

(83). The problem is that the “Side B” definition is divorced from the law of God and produces answers to disparities that are far from accurate. “Systems,” which perceived oppressor groups knowingly or even unknowingly participate in, are attributed with creating the disparities. These inaccurate assumptions are then used as bludgeoning sticks against those in perceived “oppressor” categories. As Williams notes, the normal tactic of progressive Christians in the church is then to “identify overthrowing that system as a ‘gospel issue’ and indict fellow believers for white supremacy or patriarchal oppression if they do not join us in the fight” (81).

Concluding each chapter are fascinating testimonials from someone who has experienced or fought against actual injustice. I particularly appreciated Samuel Sey’s testimony on the issue of systemic injustice. Here is an excerpt of Sey’s testimony:

As a black man, I understand the temptation to ascribe racial disparities to racial discrimination, especially since racism did create vast disparities between black and white Americans through history. But things have changed and, while blaming today’s disparities on ongoing *systemic* racism may win us the applause of the main stream, it is no longer true or helpful. The Bible teaches me that I shouldn’t compare my blessings with those of my (white) neighbors. It teaches me that accusing white people of racism without evidence is slander. It teaches me that if I am grateful and faithful over the little blessings God gives me, God will bless me further.

“we should not compromise our integrity or take vengeance ourselves, but the culture war has found us and, regrettably, for most Christians there is no avoiding it.”

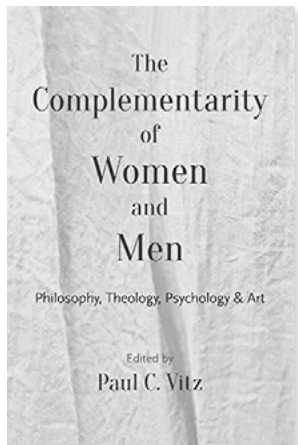
It teaches me that different trees bear different fruits. Disparities are often evidence of differences, not discrimination. God entrusts people with different blessings or privileges—because he values faithfulness not parity. We should do the same. We’re not instructed to pursue parity. We’re instructed to pursue faithfulness and biblical justice (90).

There is so much more that I could commend in this book. The appendix chapter critiquing socialism, for example, is outstanding. I have a few minor quibbles with one of the appendices on engaging in the “culture war,” because I think Williams makes some category errors between the mission of the church and the mission of individual Christians. Individual Christians should fight to reverse unjust laws and that often means confronting people who have turned their back on God. The Psalms are replete

with examples of places where David identified his enemies as “evil men” who stood “opposed to Yahweh.” We should not be afraid to do the same. Of course, we should not compromise our integrity or take vengeance ourselves, but the culture war has found us and, regrettably, for most Christians there is no avoiding it. This, however, is a minor disagreement in an ocean of truth that Williams has presented. When members of my congregation ask for a book regarding biblical justice, I will heartily recommend this one. ✕

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The Complementarity of Women and Men: Philosophy, Theology, Psychology, and Art



Paul C. Vitz, ed. *The Complementarity of Women and Men: Philosophy, Theology, Psychology & Art*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021.

In his encyclical *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II stated that there was a “natural complementarity that exists between man and woman.”¹ That idea was further developed in his sermons which were published as the *Theology of the Body*. This new collection of essays, edited by Paul Vitz, now comprises the most succinct, up to date, and intellectually robust defense of this idea of Roman Catholic “complementarity.” It is a view that is initially attractive to complementarians since it begins with this arresting insight: men and women are fundamentally equal, but they are not the same. Vitz writes, “The purpose of this book is to carry out what we see as the urgent task of exploring and elaborating the complementarity of the sexes from both a psychological and

¹Familiaris Consortio, 1981.

a theological point of view” (1). The collection seeks to accomplish this through a range of disciplines, including philosophy, theology, psychology, and art, all from a Roman Catholic perspective. These articles show the way that conservative Roman Catholics can be partners with Evangelicals on social issues, and even some theological issues, but that they have not determined how to fit the biblical idea of headship into their theology of the sexes. As a result, the Catholic complementarity view stands in need of further development.

Complementarians will find much to appreciate about the Catholic exploration of these ideas. This collection is uniformly interesting and insightful. The first article is written by UT-Austin philosopher J. Budziszewski, and is a reprint of Chapter 3 of his book *The Meaning of Sex*.² It remains a masterful-yet-accessible article, offering a wide-ranging account of manhood and womanhood in terms of potentialities. A man is a human being with the potential for fatherhood (physical and spiritual) and a woman is a human being with the potential for motherhood (physical and spiritual). These paternal and maternal capacities integrate the distinctive attributes of each sex.³ Readers not familiar with his previous work will hopefully be inspired to read further.

The second article is from Sister Prudence Allen, author of the magisterial three volume work *The Concept of Woman*, which traces ideas about women from Greek antiquity down to the present. This article rapidly

traces the rise of gender ideology in the twentieth century and the ensuing response by Catholic intellectuals. The chapter reads as a series of mini-biographies, interspersed with commentary and argument, and would serve to quickly familiarize students with key twentieth century figures and ideas in these debates. The key figures and ideas she discusses include: Alfred Kinsey, Margaret Mead, John Money, secular feminism, Marxist feminism, postmodern feminism, Dale O’Leary, Mary Ann Glendon, Marguerite A. Peeters, German phenomenology, Dietrich and Alice von Hildebrand, Edith Stein, French personalism, and Pope John Paul II. She also introduces the idea of Aristotelian *hylomorphism*, that the person is a soul-body unity and not merely a soul trapped in a body. The latter view she calls neo-Platonic, among other things. This soul-body unity means the body is relevant to the *personhood* of human beings. The body is the concrete realization of the life of the person. The distinction between man and woman is thus thought of as not merely bodily, but as affecting and shaping the whole person.⁴

Deborah Savage’s article examines gender in Genesis 1-2 and argues that Mary and Joseph provide models of femininity and masculinity. She discusses the Hebrew terms *adam*, *ish*, and *ishshah*, concluding “the truths about man revealed by sacred scripture affirms that men and women are both ‘equal’ and different” (106). As complementarians have done for some time, she notes how the modes of creation correspond to ongoing sex differences.

²For a recent review of this book from a Complementarian perspective see Bobby Jamieson’s on the 9Marks website. Available at <https://www.9marks.org/review/book-review-on-the-meaning-of-sex-by-j-budziszewski/>

³This idea derives from John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* and is utilized in several other places in the book, e.g. pages 86 and 111.

⁴This idea surfaces elsewhere in the book, for example on page 103.

Adam was created first, alone in the garden. His task of working and keeping the garden is a task focused on things, objects. This corresponds to “the well-documented observation that men appear to be more oriented toward things than toward people” (110). Correspondingly, Eve is created from her husband and in a more socially rich world:

since woman comes into existence after man, her first contact with reality is of a horizon that, *from the beginning*, includes man — that is, it includes persons...she has *never lived in a world uninhabited by persons*. This exegetical insight seems to provide a starting place in scripture for the equally well-documented phenomenon that women seem more naturally oriented toward persons (111).

She concludes with a provisional account of the “genius of man and woman” and the way in which Joseph and Mary lived this out. The genius of man is “his capacity to know and to use the good of the earth in the service of authentic human flourishing” (117). Likewise, the “genius of woman” is “to remind man that the gift of self can only be made to another person, to keep this fact constantly before us by affirming and expressing what she understands through her own genius: that all human activity must be ordered toward the good of persons” (125).

Her article is subtle, winsome, and regularly insightful. It is a generous treatment of these issues. However, her account has a number of flaws. In her analysis of Joseph, she argues that “fatherly protection” is evidence for her view. However, her earlier analysis did not pay any attention to the assertiveness and power of men, both physical and

psychological. Therefore, a discussion of protectiveness is surprising, suggesting there are whole aspects of mature manhood that have gone unexplored.

Further, she waffles when faced with evidence of hierarchy present in the original relationship between Adam and Eve. For example, she agrees that Adam being created prior to Eve establishes “there is an order to creation that places man in the position of primacy,” but rather than consider any hierarchical implications, she instead goes on to argue that Eve “can be seen as the pinnacle of creation, not as a creature whose place in the order is subservient or somehow less in stature than that of Adam” (101, 109). Her concern is to maintain clarity that “Eve is not to be his servant...but someone who can help him to live” (109). Later she notes how Adam names all the creatures, and recognizes that in this “he takes dominion over them” (116). Here she has a perfect opportunity to argue that Adam and Eve are equally human, equally persons, yet with a structural hierarchy from the very beginning. But she doesn’t do that. Her argument could be extended to show how 1) complementarity of person and 2) hierarchy of position are not merely compatible, they are essential to human social life. Just as man is socially united from the beginning, man also is ordered from the beginning.

Elizabeth Liv’s article is the sole article on art, examining the complementarity seen in Michaelangelo’s artwork in the Sistine Chapel. Images of men and women are examined and she argues, perhaps contrary to common opinion, that women are highly honored by the artist. The central image in the chapel is of the creation of Eve, and Liv argues that the artist intended for us to look forward from

“large numbers of people feel confused and even attacked by this overemphasis on the rare cases, the atypical, the unusual”

the first Eve to the second, Mary. Marian ideology is heavy in this chapter, including the idea of her immaculate conception, as it was Deborah Savage’s analysis.

The closing article, by Paul Vitz himself, is the sole article to focus on social science.⁵ His article provides a very good overview of the social scientific data about the differences between the sexes. He argues it supports a “Complementary Model” of the sexes, where he “accepts that men and women are often different in important respects” but also “posits that men and women are equal in dignity as well as in moral and social importance” (183). His survey of the data does not break any new ground, but very helpfully summarizes the available studies. Sex differences are broad and pervasive, ranging from physical differences like chromosomes and heart size (women’s hearts are about 2/3 the size of men’s hearts and they beat faster) to the psychological (men are more assertive, risk-taking, and abstract, etc). He acknowledges that each of these differences is based on averages and that there are exceptions and overlaps.

Nevertheless, the tendency to emphasize the exceptions is itself unhealthy:

our present culture greatly emphasizes the supposed importance of the exceptions. A consequence of this has been the erosion of understanding and social support for the usual or typical person. One result is that large numbers of people feel confused and even attacked by this overemphasis on the rare cases, the atypical, the unusual (184).

The differences between the sexes are a source of strength. When partnered together they produce a “synergy” whose effect is greater than the mere sum of the parts. The differences “balance and thus complement each other” (213). Neither man nor woman is “better,” they are different and thus uniquely able to support one another, gaining from the other’s strengths and shoring up the other’s weaknesses. Vitz’s article admirably draws out the main theme of the book: the sexes are complementary partners whose distinctive natures should work together

⁵Budziszewski does briefly discuss evidence from the hard and social sciences. See pages 11-13 and 17-22.

for the glory of God and the good of man. Instead of a “battle of the sexes” there is a “collaboration between the sexes” (1).

Vitz’s table of sex differences on page 214 could have benefited from further thinking about how these differences are *integrated*. For instance, the male distinctives of “assertiveness, risk-taking, and objective/problem solving” seem to integrate under the heading of “agentic,” the term used by Alice Eagly and others for the male orientation toward greater personal agency and activity.⁶ Likewise, the female distinctives of “nurturing, emotional responsiveness, focus on persons, and sensitive to others” could be integrated under the heading of “communal,” another term from Eagly and others that describes the female orientation toward personal relationships. In fact, these contrasting strengths seem to fit very well with the idea that men and women are destined for *fatherhood* and *motherhood*, on both the physical and spiritual planes. There is more integrative work to be done.

Still, he is to be applauded for plunging forward on an issue where many are hesitant to tread. The authors themselves seem at odds with one another on this issue. Prudence Allen resists entering into details of what male-female complementarity consists in. For example, she laments how Edith Stein “at times accepts stereotyped generalization about femininity and masculinity” (78). However, Vitz’s closing article is a tour-de-force demonstration that many of those stereotypes are not just in our heads, but have clear confirmation in today’s social science research. Allen’s

theological concern to maintain her “integral complementarity” in relation to older, hierarchical, ideas from history leads her to neglect clear teachings of contemporary social sciences.

Complementarians should read this book for how it can strengthen our understanding of complementarity. It can be a helpful *complement* to our own work. But, this book cannot serve as a full introduction to the issue since it fails to seriously grapple with the biblical teaching and sociological evidence of male headship. There is no exegetical analysis of Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, 1 Timothy 2, 1 Peter 3, and other passages that teach about the relationship between the sexes. The authors in fact seem to studiously avoid introducing the issue, despite the male-only nature of the Roman Catholic priesthood seeming to demand *some* explanation. If men and women bring different strengths to every task, why shouldn’t there be female priests to bring their feminine giftings to that task? Any analysis of the sexes that leaves aside hierarchy altogether will remain inevitably vulnerable on that point.

Budziszewski comes closest to acknowledging this reality at the end of his piece, where he considers discussing “that great activity that comes so much more readily to the woman and is slandered under the false name of passivity” (34) and immediately notes that “every last one of us, both man and woman, is feminine with respect to....” He leaves that sentence unfinished, without explicitly mentioning how all

“But, here we see the problem with this truncated presentation of complementarity: it fails to properly image the God who is our maker and our head. ‘Complementarity without hierarchy,’ fails to be true, Biblical complementarity.”

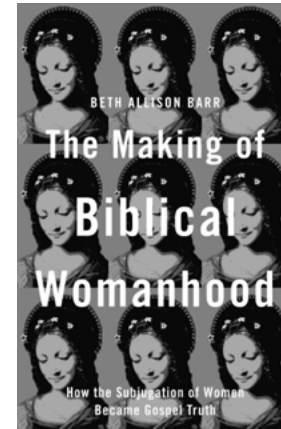
humans are to be submissive to God himself.⁷ But, here we see the problem with this truncated presentation of complementarity: it fails to properly image the God who is our maker and our head. “Complementarity without hierarchy,” fails to be true, biblical complementarity. It grasps the union of persons, but it fails to grasp the order. Man and woman in the union of their life together present an image of God and his people, Christ the bridegroom with the church, his bride. Their union points the way toward our ultimate destiny: “the dwelling place of God is with man” (Rev. 21). ✕

⁶For Eagly’s classic analysis see, *Sex Differences in Social Role Behavior: A Social-role Interpretation*, Psychology Press 1987, 2013.

⁷The book from which his article is reprinted is a natural law analysis of sex, so he attempts to “keep God out of it” until near the end of the book.

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The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth



Beth Allison Barr. *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021.

I was driving one day and turned on NPR. I was clearly tuning in part way through an interview. My ears perked up when I heard something about the Apostle Paul, then something about inerrancy. I thought, “what in the world is this?” Then I heard something about misogyny (or the like), and I thought, “Oh, okay.” I arrived at my destination, turned off the car, and headed in.

Subsequently, I worked out that the interview was with Beth Allison Barr, an Associate Professor of History and Associate Dean of the Graduate School at Baylor University. I am a Baylor alum (Ph.D., 2000), so I was intrigued. The interview was related to her book, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*.

The book is a mix between (1) an attempt at historical scholarship and (2) an impassioned personal narrative. While the book certainly *is* an impassioned personal narrative, I wonder if it succeeds as a work of historical scholarship. We might put these two emphases slightly differently and say that this book is more of (1) popular-level historical scholarship in the service of (2) an impassioned personal narrative. To be less charitable (perhaps), what we really have is a kind of emotionally-charged, high-octane attempt to write against complementarianism, with certain soundings in history.

The book is not subtle in its rather highly pitched rhetoric and denunciation of “patriarchy” and all things complementarian. Christians and non

Christians would have benefitted from a less-heated examination of how women have been treated in history, how the Church has attempted to apply a myriad of biblical passages, and how Christianity — across history — has succeeded or not succeeded in offering a vision of a truly Christian culture, including how women ought to be treated. But Barr has not written that book. So, we must review what was actually written.

To her credit, Barr is quite clear that at least part of *Making* is a kind of heart-driven reaction to personal experience (4–11; then wait for the closing chapter). She recounts being raised in a conservative evangelical church culture, and she recounts the painful firing of her husband from a church ministry position. In the introduction (ten pages) we quickly get a sense of what lies ahead in the book. We realize from the start that we should be on the lookout for an ideological ride. She speaks of her “upper-middle-class, white church,” a “hard-line complementarian speaker,” “hierarchies of power and oppression,” “misogyny and toxic masculinity,” and oppressive “gender hierarchies.”

SNAPSHOTS OF PATRIARCHY

It is, accordingly, difficult to review this book. In chapter one, “The Beginning of Patriarchy,” we are not really given a historical survey of “patriarchy,” or of the beginning of patriarchy. Rather, the chapter is essentially a series of generally journalistic snapshots of “patriarchy.” So, Russell Moore at least at one time thought the word “patriarchy” was worth retrieving. Others (Denny Burk) prefer “complementarianism.” Historian Judith

Bennet has a three-fold summary or definition of patriarchy. We see patriarchal themes in works of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Barr provides a few statistics to show that there is a (presumedly immoral) “wage gap” between men and women. The logic of part of this chapter is that “patriarchy” is self-evidently bad. For Barr, “patriarchy” is a more honest term than “complementarianism.” Complementarians should therefore own up to the fact that they are really simply advocates of patriarchy, which is a bad thing. Barr laments that while Christians should look different from the world (27–28), complementarianism amongst Christians is simply a mimicking or following of the world. But as I read this I thought: that is self-evidently false, is it not? The contemporary world is digging in its heels in defense of complementarianism? That seems patently false.

Barr (rightly) broaches Genesis 3:16: “To the woman he said, ‘I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.’” Good for Barr. Certainly, any scholarly exploration of complementarianism should engage meaningfully with such texts. But what we get is not really much of an argument, but an assertion: “Patriarchy is created by people, not ordained by God” (29). Unfortunately, Barr, in seeming to follow Gerda Lerner, moves rather abruptly to associate patriarchy/complementarianism with “militarism, hierarchy, and racism” (33). Indeed: “Isn’t it time we stop ignoring the historical reality that patriarchy is part of an interwoven system of oppression that includes racism?” (34).

PAULINE ANTI-PATRIARCHY

In the second chapter, “What if Biblical Womanhood Doesn’t Come from Paul?,” Barr argues that Paul himself is not, and would not be, an advocate of “Biblical Womanhood” (note: Barr uses “Biblical Womanhood” as shorthand throughout the book as the term of choice for “complementarianism”). Barr’s key question for complementarians is: “What if you are wrong? What if evangelicals have been understanding Paul through the lens of modern culture instead of the way Paul intended to be understood?” (41). This is actually a *wonderful* question, and the kind of question any thoughtful Christian would want to consider. Might I be wrong? (of course). Could I be interpreting Scripture wrong at some or many points (worth considering). Might one be open to an interpretive option which has eluded one’s best efforts (most certainly). But the reader quickly discerns that one will not be treated to a close analysis of biblical texts in an effort to try and query one’s own exegetical labors and interpretations. Rather, we quickly find ourselves in the realm of “gender discrimination,” and “hierarchy and power” (42), not in the realm of a close, reasoned, grappling with Holy Writ. Again, this is a difficult book to review. After a brief, three-page treatment of a few writers, including some medieval figures like Peter Abelard, Barr concludes: “I could say a lot more, but this is the point: despite the evangelical obsession with male headship, Christians past and present have been less sure” (45).

Barr in this chapter interestingly suggests, on looking at texts like Colossians 3:18–19 and Ephesians 5:21–33 that: “The Christian structure of the house church *resists* the patriarchal world of the Roman empire”

“Rather, we quickly find ourselves in the realm of ‘gender discrimination,’ and ‘hierarchy and power’ (42), not in the realm of a close, reasoned, grappling with Holy Writ.”

(49). This could have been a fascinating section of Barr’s book: What kind of social vision of the world does Scripture offer, when compared with the ancient Roman world? That would be a wonderful study. But unfortunately, since Barr is working in such a high-octane and highly-charged, anti-complementarian register, we do not get to see that kind of careful analysis. Rather, Barr asserts that “Paul’s Purpose Wasn’t to Emphasize Wifely Submission” (subheading, p. 45), and that “Paul’s Purpose Wasn’t to Emphasize Male Authority” (subheading, p. 49). I suppose a complementarian might say: “Fine. But does Scripture teach — even if it does not ‘emphasize’ — wifely submission and (some form of) male authority?” Or one might ask: “It sure *seems* like Paul argues for headship in the home in Colossians and Ephesians. I wonder where this is similar or dissimilar from first-century Roman understandings?” This is just one example of missed opportunities, missed because Barr’s work is more of an impassioned,

journalistic juggernaut, and not a closely and tightly reasoned argument.

Barr's treatment of Ephesians 5 (50–51) is underdeveloped and, frankly, a tad sensationalistic. Ephesians 5:22 is where Paul speaks of wives submitting to husbands. Barr rightly notes that in Ephesians 5:21 Paul speaks of Christians “submitting to one another.” But why would Barr write: “When this verse [i.e., v. 21] is read at the beginning of the Ephesians household codes, it changes everything” (50). This is odd. Everyone (virtually) who reads Ephesians 5 will of course read both v. 21 and v. 22. How does reading v. 21 change “everything”? Before becoming an academic I would have probably read Ephesians 5:21 and following and said something like: “Hmmm, okay. All Christians should submit to each other. I need to think through what that means. Ah, verse 22. Wives are to submit to husbands. Hmmm. I *really* better think through that. Why *would* Paul say something like that?” (thankfully, Paul explains his theo-logic quite plainly in what follows). I most certainly would *not* think: “Wow. Verse 21 changes *everything*.” Barr simply does not help the reader better grasp the meaning of Paul in Ephesians here. When Barr writes: “Yes, wives are to submit, but so are husbands,” there is an (intended?) ambiguity in what she says. Certainly, Christians are to submit to one another. And alongside that, or within that lifestyle of Christians submitting to one another, Paul also teaches wives to submit to husbands, as to the Lord.

Barr offers a certain interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, where Paul writes: “the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as

the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” Barr suggests that Paul is actually quoting something he *opposes*, in order to contradict it. On this reading, Paul is *opposed* to the prohibition on women speaking in church. Certainly Paul (or any writer) could engage in such activity (i.e., quoting a position the author wants to oppose). But unfortunately, Barr does not really argue for such an interpretation. She refers to several scholars who contend for such an interpretation (D.W. Odell-Scott, Charles Talbert, Lucy Peppiatt, and Marg Mowczko), but does not really make an argument (61–63). I did not see engagement here with scholars who do not affirm such an interpretation. But in a somewhat odd move Barr writes that even if she is wrong that Paul is quoting a viewpoint with which he disagrees — that women should be silent in the churches — “I would still argue that the directives Paul gave to Corinthian women are limited to their historical context” (63). Why is this? Because we must seek to interpret Paul here in relation to other things Paul says (and this is of course exactly right). Barr writes: “Paul is not making a blanket decree for women to be silent; he allows women to speak throughout his letters (1 Corinthians 11:1–6 is a case in point)” (63). I am unaware if Barr knows that this is almost exactly what the ESV Study Bible notes say. (And the ESV translation had earlier been castigated for being driven by a desire by “complementarian translators” to advance the “subjugation of women”; p. 51). For the ESV study notes on 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 read: “Since Paul seems to permit wives to pray and prophesy (11:5, 13) as long as they do not dishonor their husbands by the way they dress (11:5), it is difficult to see this

as an absolute prohibition (cf. Acts 2:17; 21:8–9). Paul is likely forbidding women to speak up and judge prophecies (this is the activity in the immediate context; cf. 1 Cor. 14:29), since such an activity would subvert male headship.”

Barr testifies that it “was Paul’s women in Romans 16 who finally changed my mind” (63). Apparently, Barr sees the mention of Phoebe in Romans 16:1, a “deacon” or “servant,” as particularly significant in Romans 16:1. Barr assumes the reasons some translators choose the translation “servant” instead of “deacon” when she writes, “We can guess the reason for the translation choice: it is because Phoebe was a woman, and so it is assumed that she could not have been a deacon” (66). But why “guess”? Why not just pick up a lexicon and dig around a bit? Baur, Arndt, Danker, Gingrich, in their *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (230) list two main headings/definitions for *diakonosa* word which can either be masculine or feminine — context and/or the definite article would help us to know which. The two options listed are: (1) “one who serves as an intermediary in a transaction, *agent, intermediary, courier*”; (2) “one who gets something done at the behest of a superior, *assistant*.” Another classic Greek lexicon, Liddell, Scott, and Jones, in their *Greek-English Lexicon*, list the following possible translations: “servant,” “messenger,” “attendant,” or “official.” Finally, the newer *Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (edited by Franco Montanari) lists the following options (when feminine): “servant,” “deaconess.” So, in three of the main lexica, there are a number of translation options, and one (Montanari’s *Brill Dictionary*), includes “deaconess.” So, it seems odd — and frankly unfair — to

attribute an ill motive to Bibles which have chosen “servant” in Romans 16:1. Finally, it is worth noting that the ESV study notes on Romans 16:1 are happy to say: “Scholars debate whether Phoebe is a servant in a general sense, or whether she served as a deacon, since the Greek word *diakonos* can mean either ‘servant’ (13:4; 15:8; 1 Cor. 3:5; 1 Tim. 4:6) or ‘deacon’ (referring to a church office; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12).”

But then Barr seems simply confused. As she recounts the lecture in which she was working through this material with students, she writes: “Here I was, walking my students through compelling historical evidence that the problem with women in leadership wasn’t Paul; the problem was with how we misunderstood and obscured Paul” (66). But almost *all* persons who have worked meaningfully through the New Testament, and tried to understand the terms “elder,” “bishop,” “pastor,” and “deacon” (including complementarians) do not see the role/position/office of *diakonos* as a “leadership” position in the first place. There is a slip here which I hope is just an oversight by Barr. Barr is sliding from (1) a discussion of *diakonos* in Romans 16:1 to (2) inferring something about Paul in “leadership.” Paul is not addressing “leadership” in Romans 16:1. I would hope Barr would be pleased to know that as Southern Baptists recovered biblical inerrancy and a heightened emphasis on expositional preaching there was a (fascinating) two-pronged development in certain quarters: (1) a principled commitment to complementarianism, and (2) an openness and even practice of female deacons.

Barr also expresses concern about Romans 16:7, and the translation of the Greek name *Iounia*. English translations sometimes translate this with the feminine *Junia* and

sometimes as the masculine *Junius*. Barr writes: “*Junia* became *Junias* because modern Christians assumed that only a man could be an apostle” (67). Now, it certainly *could* be the case that translators have been motivated by such a concern. But no evidence of such a motive is given. But all things are not quite how Barr summarizes. Indeed, twentieth-century translations seem quite divided on how best to translate *Iounia*, and have often chosen the feminine “Junia.” In fact, among the twelve English translations available on my Accordance Bible software, nine of the twelve translations feature “Junia” (and two of the three which feature “Junius” are virtually the same translation, the NAS in its 1977 and 1995 iterations). The chart below summarizes key data:

“Junius” (masculine)	“Junia” (feminine)
•NAS (1977)	•Common English Bible
•NAS (1995)	•CSB (2017)
•RSV	•ESV
	•KJV
	•NET
	•NIV (2011)
	•NLT
	•NKJV
	•NRSV

Please note the obvious: *many* contemporary translations have opted for “Junia,” including the ESV.

Near the end of this chapter, Barr notes what the ESV says about Junia, that Junia was “well known to the apostles,” rather than “prominent among the apostles.” This translation decision was, she claims, “a deliberate move to keep women out of leadership (Romans 16:7)” (69). Barr does not note from which translation she gets “prominent among the apostles” (but it is a common enough translation).

It is indeed the case that the ESV is different from a number of English translations at this point, which tend to render the Greek prepositional phrase as “among the Apostles.” Is it possible that “among the apostles” made the translators (or some of them) nervous? Certainly, that is possible. But why would a scholar state categorically that the ESV translators were making “a deliberate move to keep women out of leadership”? Barr may be right, but she has no way of knowing this, or at least has not told her readers how she knows this. She is simply asserting.

MEDIEVAL MODELS OF MINISTRY

In chapter three, “Our Selective Medieval Memory,” Barr turns to a number of medieval figures. This material is fascinating, and at times disturbing. Some of the (presumably?) role models “broke free from marriage to serve God, whose preaching brought thousands to salvation” (78). Saint Paula, “who abandoned her children for the higher purpose of following God’s call on her life,” is likewise held up as an exemplar (79). Margaret Kempe is held up as a role model, at least in part because she used her financial status to negotiate with her husband, in order to ensure she did not have to engage in sexual intimacy with her husband (75).

A somewhat odd argument Barr makes is: “If women couldn’t preach, then Mary Magdalene shouldn’t have preached” (86). And a few lines later: “Mary Magdalene carried the good news of the gospel to the disbelieving disciples” (87). To what is Barr referring? I assume she is referring to Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene, and Mary sharing this with others (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:9–10; Lk 24:10; Jn.20:14, 17–18). The fact that Mary saw Jesus

and told others is an argument for affirming women preachers today? The reason many Christians do not see these things clearly is, Barr asserts, because of “male clergy” who have “undermined the evidence” (87).

Even though there were a number of medieval women active in various acts of ministry, Barr laments that many medieval Christians “couldn’t accept female leadership as normative” (90). Why might this be? Rather than look at an array of texts, data, and evidence, Barr asserts: “Because the medieval world inherited the patriarchy of the Roman world” (90).

REFORMATION AND SUBORDINATION

Chapter four is titled, “The Cost of the Reformation for Evangelical Women.” This chapter starts with a simple thesis of sorts: The Reformation was bad (ultimately) for women. Barr writes: “Women have always been wives and mothers, but it wasn’t until the Protestant Reformation that being a wife and mother became the ‘ideological touchstone of holiness’ for women” (103). The chapter ends similarly: “While Paul’s writings about women were known consistently throughout church history, it wasn’t until the Reformation era that they began to be used systematically to keep women out of leadership roles” (127). Thus, as Barr sees it, the Reformation saw an increase in a misuse of Scripture (especially Paul). Barr appears to follow Lyndal Roper, who — in Barr’s words — “focuses on how the Reformation affected the lives of ordinary women” (104). Roper characterizes the story of the Reformation as one of “increased subordination rather than of liberation” (104). The Reformation “ushered in a ‘renewed patriarchy’” that placed married women firmly under the headship

of their husbands” (105). The Reformation witnessed “the increasing authority of men as heads of spiritual households” (107). Likewise, “the waning power of the Catholic priest was balanced by the waxing power of the Protestant household” (117).

I am unsure if the theological issues at stake in this chapter are clear to Barr. Perhaps they are. But here is one helpful point. Barr laments that in the medieval era, a woman who brewed ale was *known* as an “ale-wife.” That is, this woman’s *identity* was tied closely to being an “ale-wife.” But then the Reformation happened. And what was the consequence? “[I]n the early modern era, a Protestant wife who brewed was a good wife working alongside her husband (or taking over her deceased husband’s trade). Her primary identity was her marital status, and her job was secondary” (110–11). What does one *do* with such historical data (for now let us simply assume this is an accurate summary of the historical data)? For a complementarian, one will likely tend to read this development as a healthy thing, *generally*. Let us say that in the Reformation and post-Reformation era that there is an increase and development and flowering of biblical literacy, biblical preaching, biblical knowledge, and healthy application of all of Scripture to all of life. One could very well look at the kind of developments that Barr bemoans and interpret *the very same data* quite differently. One indeed might rejoice that a more biblical understanding of men, women, and marriage flowered due to certain Reformation emphases. But Barr looks at certain Reformation and post-Reformation developments and laments them. Ultimately, exegesis and a clear grasp of Scripture will be the only way to determine if — generally — one should

rejoice or lament over these Reformation and post-Reformation developments.

There are some odd and unsettling statements by Barr. For example, in praising Reformation-era Argula von Grumbach (a German Lutheran), Barr writes: “She knew the writings of Paul, but she did not believe they applied to her” (115). If von Grumbach simply believed there was some real contextual reason why Paul’s teaching did not apply to her, that is one thing. But if Barr is praising von Grumbach because she felt the freedom to brush off an apostolic command, that is sad indeed. It is hard to tell exactly what Barr is saying. In fairness to Barr, she mentions that von Grumbach felt free to speak because men were not doing so. That is an issue worth discussing (115).

Barr, unfortunately, makes a number of assertions which are simply unfair. For example, while she argues that much of medieval preaching did not particularly focus on the various Pauline texts often used to illustrate husband-wife relationships, or issues related to the preaching office, Reformation and post-Reformation preachers *did* more intentionally deal with such texts. And Barr writes that such “early modern preachers . . . preached Paul to enforce women’s subordinate role within the household” (120). But how does Barr know *that* is the reason early modern preachers preached these Pauline texts? Might these preachers have preached such texts because they were — how does one say it — in the text? It is striking that Barr feels the confidence to know the motives of such early modern preachers. Perhaps we could read Barr charitably, and interpret her as saying that early modern preachers so preached Paul that the *result* (but not

intent) is a number of sermons which emphasize such a “subordinate role”? Perhaps. And it is sad to see what Barr laments: “The family became not only the center of a woman’s world but her primary identity as a good Christian” (127).

CONTEXT IS KEY

Chapter five is titled, “Writing Women Out of the English Bible.” After a brief personal narrative, Barr broaches briefly the debate over the TNIV and its turn toward accepting “gender-inclusive” language. She then spends seven to eight pages on the medieval church and the Bible, before returning to the topic of “Gender-Inclusive Language before the TNIV” (139, sub-heading). Her attempt briefly to critique Vern Poythress’s concern about the TNIV decision to render *’adam* as “human beings” misfires. Poythress thought the translation decision to choose “human beings” instead of “mankind” for the Hebrew word *’adam* was misguided, and not acceptable (140). Barr’s response: “Except that it is.” She proceeds: “The Hebrew word *’adam* is a gender-inclusive word for ‘human.’ Indeed, the text of Genesis 1:27 explains this for us: God created *humans* in his image, both men and women” (140). Well, yes, and no. What the text says in Genesis 1:27 is:

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים
בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

I am only being a little cheeky in quoting the Hebrew here. Is the Hebrew word *’adam* “a gender-inclusive word for ‘human’” (140)? In fact, the Hebrew word *’adam* is a masculine singular noun. It in fact *may very often* denote both men and women. But context is key. In Genesis 1:27 there is a very basic structure. In the ESV it reads:

So God created *man* [*’adam*, a singular Hebrew noun] in his own image,

in the image of God he created *him* [singular masculine pronoun suffix used here];

male and female he created *them* [plural masculine pronoun suffix used here]

Note that the first part of Genesis 1:27 highlights a masculine, singular word (*’adam*) and a masculine, singular pronoun (“him”). The second half of Genesis 1:27 highlights “male and female,” and a masculine, plural pronoun (“them”).

I am quite confident Poythress happily affirms that “God created *humans* in his image, both men and women.” Indeed, the second half of Genesis 1:27 explicitly makes that point: “male and female he created them.” But that is a completely different question from whether in the *first* part of Genesis 1:27 “human beings” is a better translation choice than “mankind.” In Genesis 2:7 the exact Hebrew word (*’adam*) is used twice to refer to presumably a particular person, Adam. This term (*’adam*) is then used in Genesis 2:15, 16, 18, 19 (2x), 20 (2x), 21, 23, and 25 to clearly refer to a *particular male person*. Sadly, Barr simply does not deal with the actual issue at stake: how to engage in meaningful and faithful translation.

Barr ends this chapter with a brief section on Genesis 2 and the question of “wife” or “woman.” What has become clear by this point in the book is that Barr seems to be interrogating Scripture and church history through a feminist lens. Thus, as Barr sees it, when English Bibles use the English

word “wife” to translate the Hebrew word *’išāh*, some ill-motive is afoot. Indeed, when she looks at Genesis 2:22–24, Barr claims: “neither the word *marriage* nor the word *wife* appear in the Hebrew text” (150). As Barr knows, of course the English words “marriage” and “wife” do not appear in the Hebrew text. The *real* question would be: would “marriage” or “wife” be legitimate translations of the Hebrew word(s) in question. *Ad fontes!* Let us look at the Hebrew word *’išāh* (sometimes translated “wife,” and found multiple times in Genesis 2:22–24) in the standard Hebrew lexicons. In Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, the entry for *’išāh* is “women, wife, female” (61). In Koehler and Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, the entry includes “woman,” “wife,” “female,” and “each” (93). In David J. A. Clines, *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, the entry lists “wife,” “woman,” “each woman,” “female animal,” “each [female] animal” (34). In William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, the entry lists “woman,” “wife,” “female,” and “each (woman)” (29). In short, in standard Hebrew lexica one standard translation option (context would be key) for the Hebrew word *’išāh* most certainly is “wife.”

TRANSCENDING GENDER

Chapter six is titled, “Sanctifying Subordination.” Barr expresses concern over “purity culture” and encouraging teenage girls to dress modestly, bemoans “the cult of domesticity,” and appears to lament that “domesticity, for evangelical women, is sanctified” (the last two on this list come from p. 159). The last two are somewhat provocative, especially

given texts like Titus 2:3–5, which very much *does* appear to encourage a kind of domesticity.

Part of Barr's effort in this chapter is to trace the roots of a tendency to see men and women as fundamentally different, a difference which may even rightly apply to vocation and roles in life. A number of these sources are fascinating and worthy of study. After the Reformation and the early modern era, the next major eras to which Barr points as unfortunately encouraging "biblical womanhood" are the Enlightenment, then early Modern science, and then the Industrial Revolution.

Barr's lament over the "cult of domesticity" is both intriguing and sad. One of Barr's favorite medieval figures, Margery Kempe is praised because in her imagined Twitter profile Barr doubts if "Kempe would include any reference to her family or her husband" (168). Barr appears to endorse Catherine Brekus' contention that certain medieval women differ from the post-Reformation world: "Instead of justifying women's right to preach on the grounds that they had transcended their gender — they were neither male nor female," what has happened with "biblical womanhood" is the emergence of "a new ideology of female virtue," which grounds the authority of women "in their feminine distinctiveness." That is, whereas certain medieval women somehow "transcended their gender," biblical womanhood errs in encouraging women to emphasize their "feminine distinctiveness" (169).

BAPTIZING PATRIARCHY

Chapter seven is titled, "Making Biblical Womanhood Gospel Truth." The first nine

pages or so of this chapter lament that Evangelicals do not know their history — a history where there are numerous examples of women preaching. Doubtless Evangelicals need to mine our history to understand our past. But I suspect Barr would happily admit that history is not *ultimately* authoritative. It can inform our decisions, but ultimately, we must look to the heart of theological authority, Holy Writ, to develop our theological convictions about any issue, including questions of manhood, womanhood, and the nature of gospel ministry and teaching and preaching.

Barr contends that two key shifts occurred in the twentieth century that contributed to the development of "biblical womanhood," and which "helped seal biblical womanhood as gospel truth." These two are (1) biblical inerrancy and (2) the revival of Arianism ("Arianism" is Barr's code for the idea of the Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son) (p. 187 and following).

Regrettably, Barr has a tendency in this volume to engage in rather sweeping generalizations. For example: "the early twentieth-century emphasis on inerrancy went hand in hand with a wide-ranging attempt to build up the authority of male preachers at the expense of women" (189). A few lines later: "The concept of inerrancy made it increasingly difficult to argue against a 'plain and literal' interpretation of 'women be silent' and 'woman shall not teach.'" And Barr concludes: "And just like that, evangelicals baptized patriarchy" (190). Finally: "The evangelical fight for inerrancy was inextricably linked with gender from the beginning." Indeed: "Inerrancy wasn't important by itself in the late twentieth century; it became important because it provided a way to push women

out of the pulpit" (191). This is painting with a very broad brush, and seems to amount to scholarship by assertion.

Barr's second main concern here is so-called Arianism (again, shorthand for the doctrine known as the Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son). Although Barr may be a historian, her summary and discussion of Arianism and the position of those evangelicals who affirm the eternal functional subordination of the Son does not add clarity to these issues. First, when summarizing what she considers to be contemporary Arianism, Barr insists on speaking of "eternal subordination of the Son" multiple times (starting on p. 191), even though adherents like Bruce Ware and Wayne Grudem have repeatedly used terms like "eternal *functional* subordination of the Son." In summarizing Arianism, Barr writes: "In the fourth century, a priest in Alexandria, Egypt, began to preach that the Son was of a different substance from God the Father [so far, so good], which meant the Son had a subordinate role to God the Father [here is where the confusion begins]" (194). This is simply not an accurate summary of Arianism, and Barr should know better. The Arian notion that the Son and Father were of a different substance most certainly *is* Arian, but Arianism is not and has not been defined as: "the Son had a subordinate *role* to God the Father" (194; my emphasis). Certainly Barr must know this. But something is awry here. Barr has clearly summarized the position she is critiquing as the "eternal subordination of the Son" (multiple times on pp. 194–96), rather than the "eternal *functional* subordination of the Son" (the terminology used by actual adherents of this position). But *then*, when describing Arianism, she slides from (1) the notion that Son and Father were of a

different *substance* [and that *is* Arianism] to (2) the notion that the Son has a subordinate *role* when compared to the Father [which is not, traditionally considered, Arianism]. If Barr is unaware of her equivocation, that is unfortunate. If she *is* aware of the equivocation, she is essentially bearing false witness, which is (to put it mildly) regrettable.

A CALL TO ARMS

Chapter eight is titled, "Isn't it Time to Set Women Free?" We learn that Professor Barr has another story besides the firing of her husband and the emotional sadness of leaving a church one loves. Professor Barr was once in a bad relationship (she tactfully and understandably simply gives a muted history of that story). I am sad that that is indeed a part of her story. I have a daughter and would never wish abuse of any kind on any woman. Hearing a bit of Barr's story helped me to frame her book better.

This final chapter is something of a call to arms. Intentionally echoing the humorous skit featuring Bob Newhart, Barr calls her readers to "stop it!" (as in, abandon "biblical womanhood"/"patriarchy"). And the rhetoric heats up. She speaks of the overlap (as in a Venn diagram) of "reformed, complementarian, and misogynist," comparing this to a Venn diagram featuring an "overlap of patriarchy with militarism, hierarchy, and racism" (208). Indeed, "Patriarchy walks hand in hand with racism, and it always has" (208).

Sadly, the book ends with more sweeping generalizations. Barr issues a call to refuse "to let 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 drown out every other scriptural voice" (217). And: "Complementarianism is

patriarchy, and patriarchy is about power. Neither have been about Jesus” (218).

When I was a Ph.D. student at Baylor, I took a course with a visiting theologian. This gentleman was kind enough to take me to lunch. Even though we clearly had significant theological differences, he was a true gentleman, and we enjoyed a wonderful lunch of Mexican food. At some point in the discussion, he said (I am paraphrasing, some twenty-five years later): “You write with passion, but it is clearly passion in the service of truth. Don’t lose that.” Beth Allison Barr clearly writes with passion, and a passion which it seems has been born, at least in part, of suffering. The challenge of writing out of passion, and indeed out of suffering, is that it can be difficult to channel one’s passion in a proper direction. It seems to me that Barr’s passion too often gets the best of her. Her frustration with, and animus toward, what today is called “complementarianism” (and which she generally simply calls “biblical womanhood” or “patriarchy”) is so intense that I fear that this frustration and animus have been victorious over careful scholarship and a convincing treatment of the key issues.

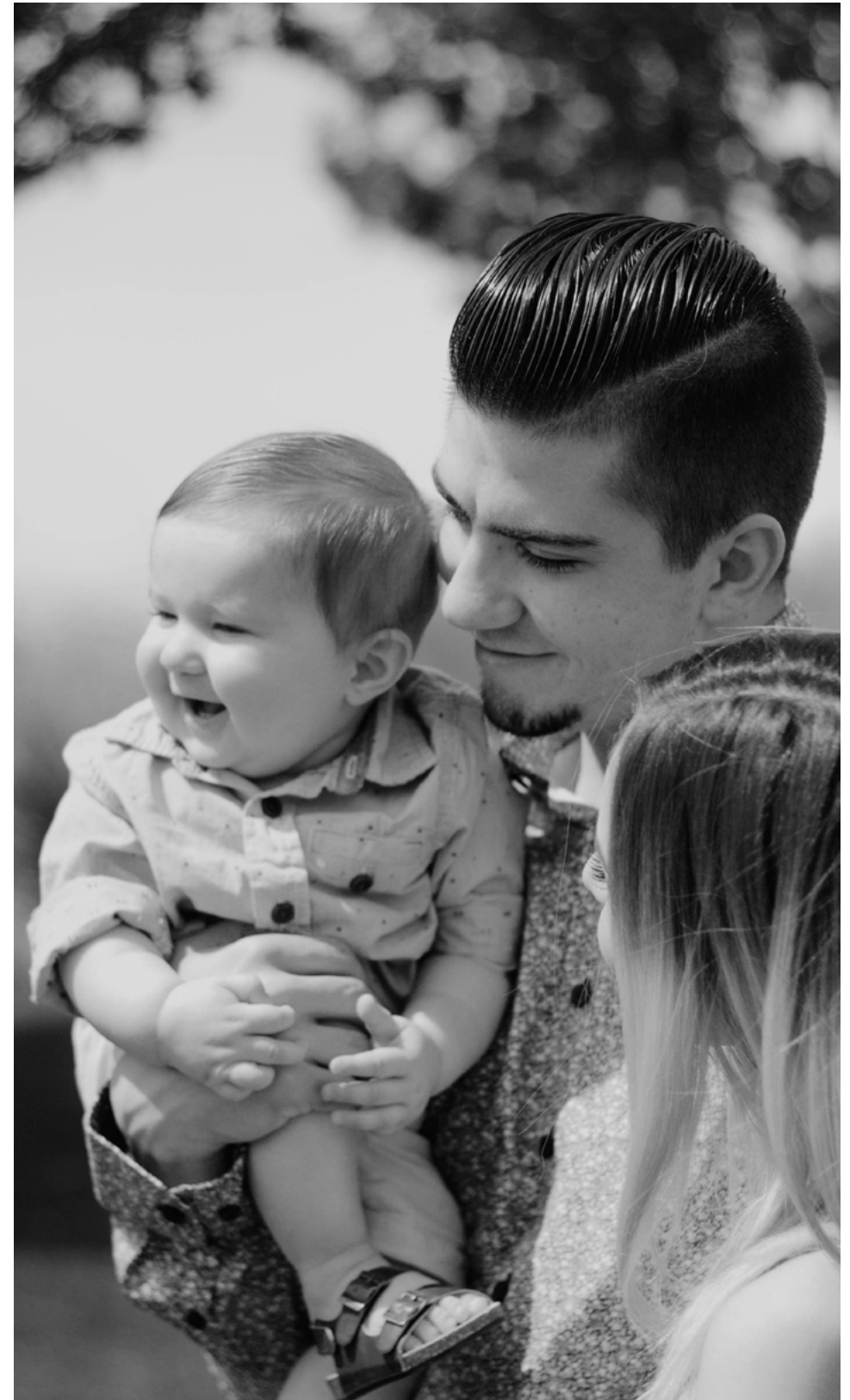
There were fascinating possibilities in this book: How *did* Reformation emphases encourage a certain way of thinking about women? Were there indeed certain strands or tendencies or elements of medieval piety and scholarship that have been eclipsed with the Reformation and post-Reformation eras? Do different Bible translation committees allow deep presuppositions to get the best of them? If that is so, what are good criteria to discern such? I suspect if Professor Barr and I were to sit down and discuss these things, we could agree on a good many questions along these lines which a book

“At the end of the day, all of us write and think out of a set of convictions which (generally) we have developed over a length of time”

might explore. But I also suspect our deep convictions on questions of men, women, and teaching authority in the Christian church differ. And *those* convictions have a way of influencing the way we think about many *other* issues. At the end of the day, all of us write and think out of a set of convictions which (generally) we have developed over a length of time (sometimes many, many years). It seems to me Barr’s deep animus toward complementarianism has caused her to read her opponents uncharitably and unfairly. That really is too bad.

The Christian Church needs good and careful scholars — whether men or women. I hope Barr’s next book will channel her passion into a work of careful scholarship, scholarship that might help readers and that might ultimately bring glory to God. ✕

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Abortion and the Law in America: Roe v. Wade to the Present

Laws are never neutral. Even the most mundane, benign regulations communicate values prized by a particular society. Speed-limit laws prioritize public safety on roadways over an individual's desire to more swiftly arrive at his or her destination. Tax-based incentives for charitable giving denotes a society attempting to inculcate a generous citizenry. Every law arises out of a desire to encourage and/or discourage a certain behavior, signaling the kind of worldview that is operative within a community.

Perhaps no topic in the present American context proves this point more than the issue of abortion. Indeed, consider the state of the debate: is abortion connected to a fundamental right of a woman to control her own healthcare or does it constitute the murder of an innocent baby? No gray room exists on this issue and the stark divergences between these two points redounds in our public square. At the time this review was written,

Oklahoma effectively banned all abortions while Colorado removed all restrictions to an abortion, even up to the point of birth.

Again, laws are never neutral, and the reason states are passing radically distinct laws regarding abortion stems from equally distinct worldviews undergirding those statutes.

Mary Ziegler's *Abortion and the Law in America: Roe v. Wade to the Present*, explains the fault lines over the abortion debate, providing an astute, well-researched, and carefully presented history of the unfolding legal drama that emerged after the landmark case in 1973 legalizing abortion in all fifty states.

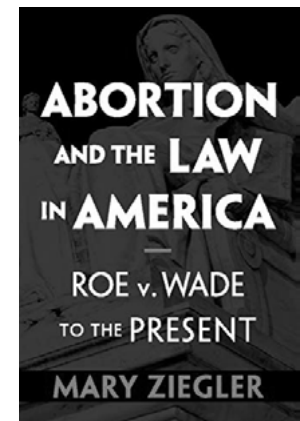
Christians interested in the complexities of the abortion debate will welcome Ziegler's book because of the necessary context her scholarship provides to the story of the abortion crisis in America. She helpfully explains that after the watershed *Roe*

"Laws are never neutral. Even the most mundane, benign regulations communicate values prized by a particular society."

v. Wade decision, followed by *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* in 1992, the debate over abortion only intensified in ways that historically situates the present divisiveness and polarity in America.

Her thesis states that *Roe* caused both sides in the debate to reassess their respective arguments and clarify their respective views regarding abortion. Specifically, she aptly contends that language began to shift away from "rights" talk — a right to an abortion vs. the right of the unborn child — to more pervasive, common good issues. The debate encompassed not only the issues of competing rights but included a competition between the social benefits or maladies caused by abortion.

The augmented nature of the battlelines, as Ziegler contended, necessarily followed *Roe* as pro-life advocates looked for ways to limit access to abortions. This primarily came through laws designed to incrementally chip away at *Roe*. As states



Mary Ziegler. *Abortion and the Law in America: Roe v. Wade to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.



considered passing increased restrictions to abortions, both the pro-life and pro-choice lobbies developed political strategies and intellectual arguments around the harm or benefit of abortions to a society. As Ziegler wrote, “Activists on either side primarily discussed not what the Constitution allowed but whether legal abortion was socially, culturally, personally, and medically desirable or justified” (2). Thus, “rights” based arguments were now accompanied by a host of positions about what was suitable for the common good, which had the net effect of making the abortion debate that much more divisive. There were not only disagreements about what the Constitution guaranteed, but public declarations about the virtue or vice of abortions in general.

Ziegler’s chronicle elucidates the burgeoning hostility and division in the abortion debate by historically highlighting the competing worldviews behind proposed legislation across the

country. She stated that “focusing on claims about the costs and benefits of abortion had not tempered the conflict. The abortion divide was deeper than ever. . . . The conflict about abortion goes far deeper than the idea of two irreconcilable rights that became prominent in constitutional litigation” (6).

The abortion debate, Ziegler demonstrates, connects to a broad canopy of other issues, including conversations about religious freedom. The Affordable Care Act’s contraception mandate, as one example, was integrally tethered to the discourse in America about abortion, only this time, for religious groups that did not want to provide contraceptive care that could end in abortions. Cases like *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, therefore, served as lightning rods for both pro-life and pro-choice advocacy groups who added stances regarding religious liberty to their respective metrics for gauging

whether a politician would be favorable or unfavorable to their cause.

The example of religious liberty was but one case that Ziegler covered in her book, revealing how the abortion issue expanded from a debate over constitutionality to the kind of America envisioned by pro-life and pro-choice parties. Thus, Ziegler rightly suggests that if the Supreme Court overturns *Roe*, it is doubtful that there will be a national cooling over the issue. If anything, the discourse will only become more heated. “We have only begun,” as Ziegler posited, “to understand what makes the abortion conflict so intractable” (210).

Why is it so? As Ziegler’s book reveals, laws are indeed never neutral. In the case

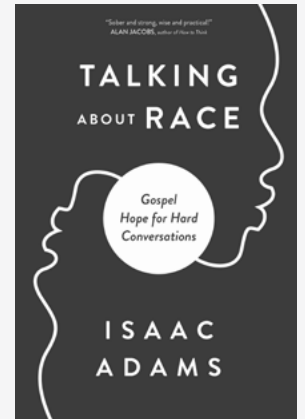
of abortion, comprehensive worldview divides exist that are, in fact, irreconcilable. Laws that allow for abortion prize autonomy and individual choice while simultaneously stating that the thing in the mother’s womb is morally inconsequential. Conversely, outlawing abortion establishes that unborn life is life, and thereby worthy of protection and care.

No gray room exists between those two claims — and those claims speak to broader legal and moral issues about the kind of nation Americans want to create.

Even after fifty years of *Roe*, it seems that the debates about abortion will only intensify. Ziegler’s book helps explain why. ✕

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Talking about Race: Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations



Isaac Adams. *Talking About Race: Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020.

Over the last couple of years, I've had conversations with quite a few pastors across the country, men desperately trying to walk their churches through our divisive and tribalistic times. None of the issues that divide Americans and, as a result, divide American Christians, is as fraught with peril as the conversation about race. I've listened as white pastors and pastors of color have shared how excruciating it is to lead their people.

Which is why many pastors, understandably so, are increasingly cautious if not quiet about the topic. They see no way to win. To pursue biblical, racial reconciliation is seen by some as being too woke and by others as being not woke enough. One pastor has seen these struggles up close and offers a pastoral word for the body of Christ. Adams is a church planter in Birmingham, AL and the founder of United We Pray, a ministry whose sole mission is to pray about racial strife in America.

Talking About Race: Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations is a unique book. Admittedly, in the opening pages, Adams doesn't pretend to offer detailed policy or political prescriptions for America's lingering racial problems, but he does offer guidance and pastoral wisdom on how to engage these conversations where perhaps they should begin: among the people of God. For weary pastors, this book might just be the respite and guide you've been looking for in your ministry.

Adams begins with this: "In this book I'm trying to speak pastorally, as I'm primarily writing this book as a pastor—not as a sociologist, psychologist, or historian . . . as a pastor I'm trying to address the mind, I'm also trying to address the heart and soul of the matter . . . All of this to say, stats shift; God's Word doesn't. As a pastor, I'm going to have that unchanging Word be the lamp for our feet and the light for our path as we journey through this book" (xxii).

It is this pastoral heart that frames the structure of the book, written addressing a fictional, predominately white congregation in the suburbs of Philadelphia, Lincoln Ridge Bible Church. The chapters address characters, who will look a lot like people we know, perhaps even ourselves as we read. There are two sisters, one who is passionate about racial justice, another who is passionate about addressing the excesses of the anti-racism movement. There is a black assistant pastor, weary of the burden of this conversation as a minority in a majority space. There is his friend, a white lay leader, who leans conservative and is often skeptical of the racial narrative. And there is Jane, an Asian-American Christian who has recently moved into the area. Oh, and there is the pastor, who wants to shepherd his church well. The book centers itself in the immediate aftermath of yet another officer-involved shooting, the killing of a black man in Chicago by a white police officer.

Adams writes chapters addressing each of these characters and their predictable reactions to this news story. He writes with pastoral sensitivity to each, finding areas to commend them, offering gentle areas of rebuke, and urging them to listen and learn from their fellow church members who might disagree. As I read through this book, I found myself listening, learning, and lamenting from Adam's wisdom to each person. Along the way he addresses both the hesitancy of some white Christians to acknowledge the ongoing issues of racial injustice while also resisting some of the well-meaning — but perhaps unbiblical — approaches to fighting racism. Adams' heart bleeds with desire to see God's church reconciled and unified, to see both justice and love prevail. He urges the people of God to love each other, to listen intently, and to avoid assigning bad motives to those with whom we disagree. And Adams is not offering a kind of fake unity that avoids hard questions. This is most evident when he talks about both diversity and unity.

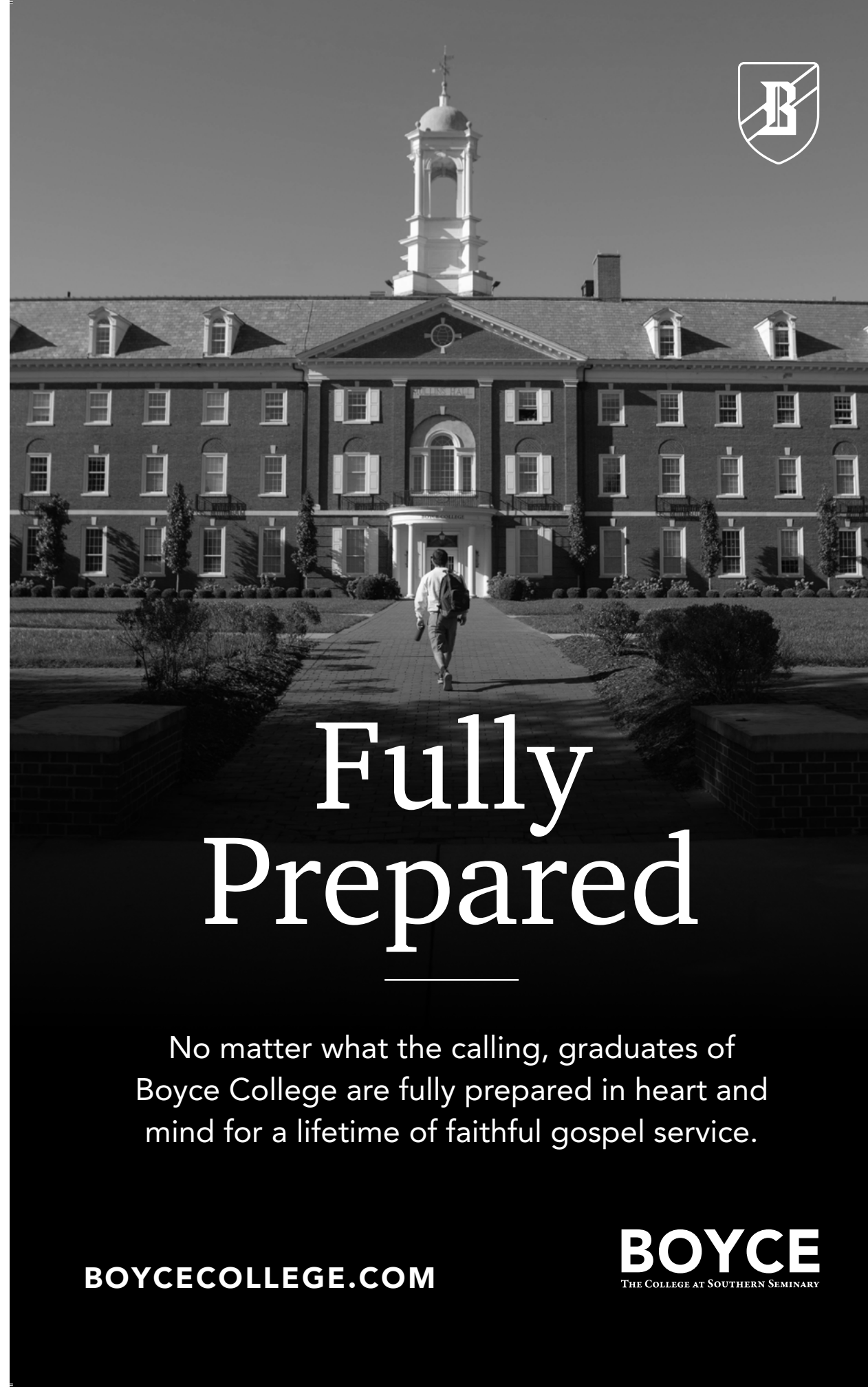
Adams agrees diversity should be a desire for local churches who wish to embody the image of ethnic reconciliation described in Ephesians 2:14–16 and pictured in Revelation 5 and 7, but also acknowledges the difficult reality in many areas around the country where historical patterns have created homogenous communities. Adams urges local

churches to work toward diversity but avoid making it an idol (101). He also issues this warning, that a false sense of peace that both abandons gospel truth or papers over hard conversations is not genuine unity (107). There is a way to seek peace at all costs instead of engaging in hard, loving conversations that might actually help brothers and sisters grow closer to each other and to Christ.

The book's brief treatment of theological triage is helpful as well, urging Christians to remain steadfast on the essentials of orthodoxy, but to also be willing to have a vision of unity that allows for disagreements on the best approaches to sensitive cultural issues. "It's much nicer," Adams writes, "to go to church with everyone who agrees with you on what you care about. The trouble is, that kind of unity doesn't really say much to the world about the value of Jesus as compared to those other things" (106). Amen.

If there is a weakness to *Talking About Race*, it is that Adams resists addressing cultural, historical, and statistical issues of race and justice in America, but it's a weakness by design. His mission is not to add one more book to the pile of books in our rhetorical wars, but to help the only institution designed by God to reflect his kingdom, the only one for whom Jesus died, the only bride Christ has chosen. This is a book for local churches and the pastors who lead them. As someone who cares deeply about the unity of the body of Christ and seeing God's people reflect, more and more, the reality of beautiful ethnic unity described in Heaven, I can hardly recommend a book more highly. ✕

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